Experiencing Buddhism

Ways of Wisdom and Compassion

Ruben L. F. Habito

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With gratitude
to David W. Chappell (1940–2004),
scholar and engaged Buddhist,
teacher and friend

Contents

Preface

Since the last century various forms of Buddhism have made inroads and have gained many adherents in the Western hemisphere. Having been a major influence in the cultures and societies throughout Asia for nearly two and one-half millennia, Buddhism is now playing a significant role in the formation of the spiritual and cultural landscape of the West, continuing to attract more and more adherents to its fold.

There are now many books on Buddhism available in Western languages, from introductory accounts to specialized academic treatises, covering historical backgrounds, doctrinal developments, and religious and cultural manifestations of this family of traditions called Buddhism. There are also numerous works by Buddhist teachers of different traditions offering spiritual advice and guidelines for practice from within those particular traditions. (See the list of recommended readings at the end at each chapter and the Bibliographical Essay at the end of this volume.)

In an academic conference on comparative religions, the late Harvard professor Masatoshi Nagatomi raised the question: What makes Buddhism *Buddhism*? Professor Nagatomi had in mind the varieties of manifestations that claim the label Buddhist, from saffron-robed celibate monks of Sri Lanka and Thailand, to Pure Land lay devotees in Latin America or the West Coast United States, people sitting with their legs crossed in silence facing a wall at a Zen hall in North America, or Nichiren priests at a peace march in some war-torn land on earth, beating their celestial drums and chanting the Japanese title of the Lotus Sutra.

This volume introduces Buddhism, first considering the "Root experience" that gave rise to this family of religious traditions, and then describing the variety of human experiences that have arisen out of this root. Our treatment will include accounts of historical, doctrinal, and practical elements. Its aim is to give the earnest reader or student fairly adequate knowledge of the key elements that make up this family of traditions, as well as an understanding of how these elements relate to one another. Keeping Professor Nagatomi's question in the foreground, our central focus will be on those experiences that make a Buddhist Buddhist, in the variety of ways this is manifested in history and in our day.

Acknowledgments

My encounter with Buddhism began in my early twenties as I received an assignment in 1970 as a Jesuit seminarian from the Philippines to study and work in Japan. Soon after having arrived, I was accepted as a Zen student of Yamada Koun, then head of the Sanbo Kyodan lineage, based in Kamakura, Japan, continuing under his guidance until his death in 1989. To my teacher, the late Yamada Koun Roshi, and to his wife, Mrs. Kazue Yamada, and the Zen community in Kamakura, I offer my deepest bows of gratitude.

In 1972, accepted into graduate studies in what is now called the Department of Indological and Buddhological Studies in Tokyo University, I was fortunate in having as my mentors several luminaries in the field of Buddhist studies, including Nakamura Hajime, Hirakawa Akira, Takasaki Jikido, and others, completing the doctoral program in 1978. I join my palms together in gratitude for their guidance. I also thank Hara Minoru, who initiated me into the intricacies of Sanskrit syntax, and Mayeda Sengaku, who taught me Indian philosophy and was also an advisor on matters academic and beyond. I am thankful to my contemporaries in graduate school, now in senior faculty positions in the same department or in other universities, for walking with me in this ongoing endeavor to understand Buddhism and for continuing to be friends through the years. Among them, Sueki Fumihiko, Okayama Hajime, Shimoda Masahiro, Matsumoto Shiro, Hakamaya Noriaki, and Kenneth Tanaka deserve special mention for keeping me updated on their work and sending me relevant material from time to time. Fr. Heinrich Dumoulin, S.J., and Fr. Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle, S.J., and Fr. Kakichi Kadowaki, S.J., were Jesuit mentors who, each in his own different way, had delved deeply into the Buddhist tradition and helped me in my studies. To them I offer my heartfelt thanks.

In Japan in the seventies and eighties, I had the privilege of meeting many Buddhists of different lineages who were engaged in the task of reexamining their respective traditions in the light of contemporary realities. In particular, I am deeply grateful to Maruyama Teruo, a Nichiren Buddhist priest and founder of Japan chapter of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, for inviting me into his circle of associates and friends. A student of seminal thinker and Nichiren devotee Uehara Senroku, Maruyama Sensei challenged younger clerics of his Nichiren lineage to recover the socio-political implications of the Buddhist teaching of their founder. Also under his guidance, a number of clerics of the Shin Buddhist communities both of Higashi Hongwanji and Nishi Hongwanji sought to reread Shinran's teachings in the light of the situation of oppressed peoples in Japan and in other Asian countries. I am grateful also to Ven. Tamamitsu

Junsho and his wife, Mrs. Katsuko Tamamitsu, who invited me several times to their temple to be with their Shinran study circle.

During this period of the seventies and eighties, while based in Japan, I also had the opportunity to make repeated visits to Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Burma, with the express purpose of learning about forms of Buddhist teaching and practice in those countries, interviewing monks and lay persons, seeking an understanding of their particular modes of being Buddhist. Among the highlights of these visits were trips, accompanied by associates of Achaan Sulak Sivaraksa, to rural villages in central Thailand, to meet and learn about the activities of the "development monks." Another was a visit to the countryside of Sri Lanka with the help and guidance of members of the Sarvodaya movement, through the good graces of its founder, Dr. Ariyaratne, and his family. Still another was the opportunity to practice *Vipassana* (Insight) Meditation and receive one-on-one guidance from Ven. U Pandita, the successor of Mahasi Sayadaw in the latter's meditation center in Rangoon (Yangon), Burma.

Numerous Buddhist adherents and practitioners of different traditions whom I have met through the years, in Asia as well as in the United States, have inspired as well as challenged me to delve deeper into this heritage of the Awakened One. These encounters have shaped what I am today, and this volume is offered as a tribute of gratitude to all of those who are part of this wondrous web of interconnections that has marked my journey so far.

To the members of Philippine Province and Japan Province of the Society of Jesus, I express my deepest gratitude for allowing me to be one of them for twenty-five years. It is to the Society of Jesus that I owe, among so many other things, this precious opportunity and gift of having been able to stay in Japan, where my encounter with Buddhism began.

I acknowledge my gratitude to colleagues and friends who helped me in the course of writing this volume. Special thanks go to Bill Burrows, managing editor of Orbis Books, for inviting me to write this book. Paul Knitter offered invaluable suggestions for revision, as did Donald Swearer, Kenneth Tanaka, Virginia Straus, Judith Simmer-Brown, Gene Reeves, David Loy, Michael Morgan, Michael Mason, John Keenan, Sharon Baker, Valerie Pettys, and Guy McCloskey. John Makransky helped me toward a better appreciation of Tibetan practice and tradition. I also thank Ven. Dhammananda (Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh), Virginia Straus, Judith Simmer-Brown, Kenneth Tanaka, and Jan Chozen Bays, each of whom wrote a personal essay on his or her experience of being a Buddhist in today's world (included in the chapters on Theravada, Lotus, Tibetan, Pure Land, and Zen Buddhism, respectively).

I thank my colleagues at Perkins School of Theology, especially Dean William B. Lawrence and Associate Dean Marjorie Procter-Smith, who provided me with a Perkins Outreach Award that gave great impetus for getting this book written. I also thank Derek Neve, Peter Jones, Robert Foster, and Seong Joon Park, participants of a Ph.D. seminar, who gave me feedback on an earlier draft they read for class.

Very special thanks to Helen Cortes for her invaluable help in technical matters, including the photographs used (and unused) in this book. My ongoing gratitude

goes to Maria Dorothea and our sons, Florian and Benjamin, who continue to bear with me and allow me the space to get my work done, and also provide the warmth and comfort and support of a caring family.

Texts, Translations, and Technicalities

For translations of texts from Buddhist scriptures, I consulted the following works: H. Saddhatissa, *The Sutta Nipata* (London: Curzon Press, 1985); Maurice Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom, 1987); Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom, 1995); Hajime Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha: A Biography Based on the Most Reliable Texts* (Tokyo: Kosei, 2000); E. A. Burtt, ed., *Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (New York: New American Library, 2000); and Pali Text Society edition translations. I have made some modifications of my own.

In rendering key Buddhist terms, for consistency I have generally used the Sanskrit form, such as *dharma* instead of the Pali *dhamma, nirvana* instead of *nibbana,* and *duhkha* instead of *dukkha*, with some exceptons indicated in the text. Unfortunately, due to technical considerations, diacritical marks could not be accommodated in the printed version. I have thus used spelling based on the pronunciation of terms without the diacritics: *Ashoka, shunyata,* and so on.

For rendering Chinese characters I have followed the Wade-Giles system. For Tibetan terms I have followed standard usage in books generally available in English.

The following abbreviations are used in identifying textual citations from scriptural sources:

AA	*Anguttara Nikaya Commentary* (by Buddhaghosa)
AN	*Anguttara Nikaya*
BC	*Buddhacarita (Acts of the Buddha)*
DN	*Digha Nikaya*
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
GB	*Gotama Buddha* (Hajime Nakamura)
LV	*Lalitavistara (Graceful Description)*
MM	*Mulamadhyamaka-karika (Stanzas on the Middle Way)*
MN	*Majjhima Nikaya*
Sn	*Sutta Nipata*
SN	*Samyutta Nikaya*
SSZ	*Shinran Shonin Zenshu (Complete Works of Shinran*, in Japanese)
T	*Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo* (Chinese Tripitaka)
TCB	*Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (E. A. Burtt, ed.)
VM	*Visuddhimagga (Path of Purification)*

Helen Cortes

Introduction

Varieties of Buddhist Experience

Buddhism began with an experience. This is the experience of one named Siddhartha Gautama, of the Shakya clan, who lived in the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent approximately five centuries before the common era.

Born in an affluent family, he is endowed with all the material benefits and social advantages possible in the society and culture of his day. At the age of twenty-nine, he leaves home and becomes a wandering ascetic. He enters into a life of rigorous discipline, seeking guidance from reputed sages and teachers of his day, but none of them is able to lead him to what he seeks. Having undergone six years of earnest spiritual practice, he settles down under a tree in silent meditation. It is here, as he is seated under a tree, that something momentous happens to him. This is the noted event of awakening, or enlightenment, enshrined in human history as the moment of origin of this religious tradition known as Buddhism. This experience brings with it great clarity, accompanied by deep inner peace and a quiet and imperturbable joy. This is the experience that transforms him into an Awakened One, a Buddha.

For the next forty-five years of his life, until his death at the age of eighty, he continues to live as a wandering sage, entirely devoted to helping others who come to him with questions about issues in their own life, seeking relief from their own dissatisfactory existence. He offers them guidance that they too may experience awakening, arrive at inner peace, and act compassionately toward all beings.

In the two and one-half millennia since, the life of the Buddha has served as an inspiration to countless numbers of people, and his teachings have been taken as a guide to human living by followers across geographical regions and cultures. The term *Buddhism* covers a wide spectrum of religious doctrines, values, beliefs, practices, and rituals, as well as social and cultural expressions arising out of the experiences of these followers, which in turn derive inspiration from the life and teachings of the Awakened One.

This volume is offered with the hope that the reader may gain an appreciation of the horizons of human experience opened to human beings in the family of traditions known as Buddhism. The term *experience* is a problematic one in the context of religious studies. Some scholars have pointed out self-contradictory, dubious, or at best ambiguous claims made about certain kinds of experiences

associated with religion. Without going in detail for now, we cede the point here that in the study of religion, talk about "mystical" or "pure" or "unmediated" experience can be unproductive, if not questionable.

In this volume our use of the term *experience* is based on its ordinary lexical meaning of *an event or series of events that one participates in, or lives through, which has cognitive implications for our understanding of ourselves and of the world we live in.* Of particular interest to us here are the experiences of those who accept certain notions or values, adopt certain viewpoints, or undertake certain practices related to "being Buddhist" in one or another of its historical or contemporary manifestations.

The pivotal event that occurred as Gautama sat in meditation under a tree can be called the "Root" of all the varieties of Buddhist experience that were opened to the followers of the Buddha through the ages. The enlightenment experience of Gautama, needless to say, is a past event that is inaccessible to us, and to anyone else for that matter. For one, scriptural accounts repeatedly emphasize the unfathomability, the indescribability, and the ineffable nature of this experience. And yet at the same time Buddhist followers through the centuries, and scholars of Buddhism as well, have never ceased from attempting to elucidate the nature and content of this experience, through its effects as manifested in the life, activities, and teachings of Gautama the Buddha as handed down to his followers. Second, from another, historico-critical angle, what we have are at best secondary, or tertiary accounts of "what the Buddha said," as recalled or reconstructed by disciples, handed down orally for several generations, until they were put down in writing at some later time. As such, our textual resources, not being direct first-person accounts from Gautama himself about his own experience and its contents, will not stand as indubitable evidence in a rigorous inquiry.

However, to inquire into this Root experience of Buddhism, though itself inaccessible and indescribable, is not thereby an entirely meaningless pursuit. This Root experience can serve as a reference point of discourse, a heuristic device that can open to us a more cohesive way of understanding the nature and significance of what are called the Three Treasures in Buddhism: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Buddha is *one who has experienced awakening*, which, as evinced by what happened in his life subsequent to it, was also an experience of "ultimate transformation." Dharma is *that which is experienced,* and subsequently articulated in various ways as the *teaching of the Awakened One.* Sangha is *the community of those who seek to live in the light of this awakening experience* as a path of ultimate transformation in their own lives. To take the analogy of a tree, while the root itself is beneath the ground and invisible, the trunk, the branches, and the leaves, flowers, and fruits are all before us to behold and appreciate. We liken the "trunk" to the outgrowth coming out of that Root experience, manifested in the Three Treasures. The branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits are the different forms and manifestations through the centuries up to our own day.

The term *ultimate transformation* used above is derived from a working definition of *religion* offered by the late Frederick J. Streng:

> An ultimate transformation is a fundamental change from being caught up in the troubles of common existence . . . to living in such a way that one can cope at the deepest level with those troubles. That capacity for living allows one to experience the most authentic or deepest reality—the ultimate.
>
> . . . In the context of religious awareness, ultimacy means the most comprehensive resource and deepest necessity of which a person can be aware. It is one's sense of superlative value that motivates and structures one's life.
>
> . . . Religion is a personal and social experience of an ultimate, dynamic process. The process of transformation may be activated by symbols, social relationships, feelings, and states of consciousness. (Streng 1985, 2–3)

Another angle might help elucidate our use of the term *experience* in this book. In the preface to a monumental work on capping phrases in Zen koans, those enigmatic anecdotes and sayings of Zen masters, Victor Sogen Hori offers the following observation about a certain kind of experience opened to those who practice with koans:

> The experience of realization in a koan is indescribable, but only in the very ordinary sense in which *all* immediate experience is basically indescribable. The resistance of the koan to words is no stronger than the resistance of the aroma of a cup of coffee to verbal expression . . . To know the sensation of hot and cold is one thing; to explain it to one who does not know it is another. The experience of the realization in a koan is not intrinsically indescribable, but only indescribable relative to the repertoire of experiences of the people conversing. When I speak of the aroma of a cup of coffee and the sensation of hot and cold, other people know what I am talking about because they, too, have smelled coffee and felt the sting of hot and cold. But if I should speak of the taste of the durian fruit, the Southeast Asian fruit with the nauseating smell and the wonderful taste, few Westerners will understand what I am talking about. (Hori 2003, 11)

To certain readers, describing varieties of Buddhist experience may be like describing the taste of this exotic durian fruit. In previous times, those who, hearing about the durian fruit from the descriptions of those who had tasted it, wanted to taste it likewise, would have had to travel to Southeast Asia to experience it for themselves. Nowadays, the global market economy has made the durian available in local Asian food stores in major cities in North America.

In a similar way, Buddhism is no longer a religion that one will find only in far-off Asia, but as is sometimes remarked, it is among the world's religious traditions that one may find in "one's own backyard" in many parts of the world today. There are Buddhist communities bound together by either ethnic identity or shared spiritual practice located in practically every major city in North America and Europe, not to mention Asia and other parts of the world as well. Buddhist

communities of teaching and practice can be readily located by checking the yellow pages of the local phone book or by an Internet search, and are thereby accessible to anyone who would care to look and explore the terrain.

This volume introducing Buddhism seeks to throw light on the varieties of Buddhist experience that came forth from the Root experience of Gautama Buddha's enlightenment. The first part examines the Three Treasures that arose from this Root experience, and the second part surveys the varieties of manifestations generated by this experience in their historical and contemporary settings. The Root experience, and the varieties of Buddhist experience that issue from it, can be understood and appreciated as ways of ultimate transformation, inviting those who ask fundamental questions of our human existence, to "come and see."

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Streng, Frederick J. 1985. *Understanding Religious Life*. 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

PART I

The Root Experience and the Three Treasures

1

Buddha

Paradigm and Religious Icon

Buddha is a Sanskrit noun that means "one who is awake." Around the sixth or fifth century BCE in India, a man named Siddhartha Gautama of the Shakya clan, who had renounced his social status and lived a homeless life, came to be referred to by this term. Around him gathered a group of followers who took his teaching as a guide toward leading an awakened life. This following grew in numbers and in time spread from India to other countries in Asia, and since the last century, to the Western hemisphere.

This in a nutshell is the historical background of this cluster of religious practices and beliefs that we call Buddhism. The Awakened One, his teaching, and the communities of followers that sought to live according to the teaching, then, are three key features to examine as clues toward understanding Buddhism. These correspond to the Three Jewels also upheld in this tradition as the Three Refuges: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In this first segment consisting of three chapters we consider each of these in turn, to shed light on the question of what makes Buddhism Buddhism.

THE BUDDHA OF THE STORY

Scholars agree that accounts of the Buddha's life, composed generations or some even centuries after his death, are not to be taken as historiographic descriptions. Rather, they are narratives that belong to the genre of sacred biography. These are reconstructions of the story of the Buddha's life by those who saw in him a paradigm of a perfected being, as well as an icon eliciting religious devotion. What the historical Gautama was like, as distinguished from the images of him projected by followers of later generations, is a question to which we may never arrive at a conclusive or satisfactory answer.

The scholarly quest for the Gautama of history can perhaps be compared with the quest for the historical Jesus, which scholars embarked upon in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the latter case, distinction was made between the "historical Jesus" and the "Christ of faith," that is, between the wandering Galilean

who inspired a small band of followers to a radically new vision of reality and a new way of life "as he was" in his actual, down-to-earth setting, on the one hand, and the glorified, divinized image that his devoted followers presented of him after his death, on the other. New Testament scholar and existentialist theologian Rudolf Bultmann articulated a position asserting that the Christ of faith alone mattered, and that the question of the historical Jesus was "methodologically impossible and theologically unnecessary" (Powell 1998, 18–19). This stance has found favor among many Christians and remains an influential one today.

However, the latter part of the twentieth century brought forth new waves of scholarly interest in the Jesus of history, looking into archeological, sociological, and extra-canonical sources for clues to the circumstances of his life. A group of New Testament scholars, working cooperatively since the 1990s to form what is now known as the Jesus Seminar, has come out with fresh perspectives in portraying the man Jesus in his historical, cultural, and religious setting, though not without controversy among Christian adherents. The methodological assumptions and the results of studies that include works of members of the Jesus Seminar as well as other approaches (among others, Chilton 2000; Dunn 2003) may yet open new avenues for scholars of Buddhism in approaching the historical figure of Gautama, who came to be known as the Buddha.

Currently, however, most scholars lean in the direction of setting aside the "Gautama of history" as inaccessible, given the nature of the sources available to us, and of simply taking "the Buddha of story" as presented in the sacred biographies (see Strong 2001).

In this chapter we consider the figure of Gautama Buddha, acknowledging the nature of our sources as sacred narrative, and thus as laden with religious significance more than historical content. But at the same time, as we peruse these accounts handed down to us, we continue to ponder the human face of Gautama, pursuing traces in his recorded discourses and actions, and reflecting on their possible significance for us humans today.

THE SETTING: INDIAN SOCIETY AND RELIGION

Excavations made in the early twentieth century in the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent provide evidence for the existence of a civilization as early as 3000 BCE around this area. These findings brought to light artifacts of religious import that appear to be precursors of elements that came to prominence later. However, this early civilization of the Indus valley was overwhelmed by a bigger wave, with the arrival of the Aryans around 1500 BCE. These Aryan invaders, descended from the same stock as the ancestors of many European peoples of today, conquered and gradually assimilated the Dravidians and other ethnic groups that had been living in the land before they came. In a process that took several centuries, this intermingling of Aryan and indigenous elements gave rise to what is now known as Hindu society and culture. The term *Hindu*, incidentally, comes from the Persian *Hind,* referring to the land around the Indus River.

The Indo-Aryans manifested a deeply religious sensibility that has left its imprint throughout subsequent history. Their sacred literature, the Vedas (from the Sanskrit word for "wisdom"), composed from around 1200 BCE and further amplified and edited through the centuries, accepted as revelatory and authoritative by the general populace, provide for us glimpses of their religious world view and rich spiritual sensitivity. They had names for particular manifestations of numinous powers in nature, as well as for spiritual entities they believed had control over human events. They put a premium on establishing good relations with these powers and divine entities *(devas* and *devis)*, and instituted rituals and observances that acknowledged these relations in their individual and social lives.

Their society came to be formed in a way that placed those entrusted with mediating with these divinities, the priestly class, at the top of the hierarchical structure. Next in order were the warriors, who exercised military and political power, and served to defend the people from external threat and internal troubles. Following these was the merchant class, whose main function was to distribute products and necessities for profit, and who thus exercised a power over others in the economic sphere. The infrastructure of society was held together by the fourth group, the working class, who toiled in agricultural areas, in the manufacture of needed products, or in the employ of the other classes. Beneath these groups in the social scale were those who found themselves excluded from the mainstream of society and were regarded as unclean and even less than human by the others. These were the so-called outcastes, also termed untouchables. Over the course of time, further subdivisions among the groups took place, bringing forth more than two thousand class differentiations, according to one estimate. This social structure, legitimized by religious narratives found in Vedic scriptures, held together for centuries.

Through this time there came to be articulated a view of the human situation as caught in a cycle of suffering and frustration, wherein one's deepest longings remain unfulfilled. Even death will not be a liberation, for as we live in this world of desires and perform actions propelled by self-directed intentions, we pile up results of these actions that accrue back upon us and bog us down, leading to another birth in the same finite cycle. This is the reality of the law of *karma* that runs through the universe.

The term *karma* is a noun form of the Sanskrit verb *kr*, which means "to do" or "to act." And whenever we act or do something about anything, our experience tells us that the action brings about some kind of effect on the way things are. A principle that underlies the Hindu view of reality, and our human condition as such, is this: beneficial action yields beneficial fruits, and harmful action yields harmful results that have a way of rebounding upon the doer of the action, as well as upon the rest of the world. And so the cycle goes on. This cycle of action-effect and effect-causing-further-action-effect is what is known by the Sanskrit term *samsara*. This refers to the cycle of birth-and-death in this world of phenomena, a cycle driven by our actions motivated by our human needs and desires, and the concomitant effects of these actions generating other actions leading to further effects, and so on.

Hindu tradition has enumerated four kinds of needs, or wants, that humans pursue as goals in life. One is pleasure *(kama)*. The pursuit of pleasure is undoubtedly a fundamental drive that we cannot deny exists in us, and this pursuit is affirmed as a legitimate one in Hindu culture. A well-known treatise on the pursuit of sexual pleasure is the Kama Sutra, offering detailed and graphic recommendations for maximizing the enjoyment of this aspect of human life. Another goal that humans pursue is worldly power and advantage *(artha)*. Objects of this pursuit include material wealth, fame and renown, political power, and so on. A treatise addressing this pursuit is the *Arthasastra,* often likened in intent to Machiavelli's *The Prince,* known for espousing the principle that "the end justifies the means."

A third kind of pursuit affirmed in Hindu tradition is the performance of duty *(dharma)*, the fulfillment of which gives a human being a kind of inner satisfaction. There are various kinds of duties that human beings in varying states of life and different social classes are meant to fulfill, and these are addressed in many writings in this tradition. A young person in the stage of life of a student, for example, would have duties concomitant with that stage of life. A householder would have corresponding duties, as would a wife and mother, and so on. With regard to the social classes, a member of the priestly class is expected to take on the responsibilities of that class. This includes studying the Vedic texts and learning the ritual requirements in different situations of life, as people ask for their religious services or priestly mediation. Members of the warrior class, the merchant class, and the working class all have their duties based on their status in society. The fulfillment of one's duties accrues merit upon oneself and ensures favorable conditions in subsequent rebirths.

Yet in all these three pursuits, ancient Indian wisdom suggests, there arises a voice from within, asking, "Is that all there is?" One can have one's fill of pleasure, of worldly power, and even the satisfaction of having done one's duty in life. Yet one can still hear a voice that echoes an unfulfilled longing from deep within. This is the voice that awakens a human being to a fourth kind of pursuit, that is, for *moksa*, or liberation from this cycle of birth-and-death and rebirth all over again. It is only in finding liberation from this self-contained circle of finite life that one realizes the fullness of being and truth *(sat)*, pure awareness *(cit)*, perfect bliss *(ananda)*.

In short, Indian tradition affirms that we humans cannot be truly satisfied with mere finite realities, as there is in us a dynamism that opens to the Infinite. The human heart is restless, that is, until it finds and rests on this Infinite, and herein find its true home. Hindu tradition as it developed through the centuries is thus an attestation of various ways human beings have pursued the spark of the Infinite that lies in the human heart. The quest for the Infinite is the strand that weaves through the entire tradition. This is what underlies the continuing appeal people throughout the ages and across cultures have found in various aspects of Hindu culture and religion.

During the period from the sixth to the fourth century BCE, changes in the social, economic, and political structures of society took place. A more thoroughgoing and radical questioning, leading to rejection of priestly as well as of Vedic authority, now came to be articulated from different quarters, by individuals

who placed the search for truth as the matter of prime importance in their lives. These were called the *sramanas*, literally, "those who strive." They are those who exerted effort in various modes of ascetical and spiritual practice to gain knowledge of the truth and the wisdom of living in its light. These were individuals who set themselves apart from their social class, from family, from the conventions of society, and took a radical choice to be an outsider, in pursuit of a goal they believed exceeded all worldly attainments. As wandering ascetics, they gave themselves wholly to the quest for liberation from the finite constraints of the human condition. They did so in a way that did not take anything for granted, refusing to accept any authority other than their own experience.

We learn about these *sramanas* who lived around the same period as Gautama, also from Buddhist sources compiled after the Buddha's time. These were the different teachers of the so-called sixty-two heretical doctrines, who each presented a version of a metaphysical or anti-metaphysical position regarding various questions. These questions include the existence or nonexistence of an ultimate reality called Brahman, the survival or non-survival of the soul after death, and questions as to whether the world had a beginning or not, whether it will continue on forever or will end at some given time, and so on. These are questions that Gautama, after his experience of awakening, refused to answer, on grounds that we will examine in the following chapter.

What is significant to note here is this surge of the human spirit toward new heights and new depths that occurred during this momentous period of history. Karl Jaspers coined the term "Axial Age" to describe the period in which certain civilizations or cultures in different parts of the world manifested this blossoming of the human spirit. We see this in the soul-searching questions and the insights arrived at through meditative practice by the sages whom we read about in the Upanishads, considered part of the sacred literature of Hindu tradition. This is also given expression in the various speculative explorations of the *sramanas,* who rejected Vedic authority and ventured to go where no one had yet gone, with a freedom of spirit, treading uncharted ways of thinking and of human living. They asked questions coming from the depths of the human heart and sought answers that they tested in their own experience, inviting others to do so.

The way was now prepared for one who was to tower above these figures described so far, and who, two and one half millennia later, continues to challenge and inspire people to follow the path he forged.

THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

A four-line verse with five Chinese characters in each line, chanted by Buddhist followers through the centuries, enumerates four main events in the life of Gautama, who came to be known as the Buddha, or Awakened One.

> The Buddha, born in Kapilavastu,
> Realized the Way in Magadha,
> Preached the Dharma at Sarnath,
> And entered Nirvana at Kusinara.

This verse is a bare outline of the Buddha's earthly life. It memorializes four locations, related to his birth, enlightenment experience, first preaching, and passing, respectively. These four locations were undoubtedly important pilgrimage sites that devotees continued to visit centuries after the Buddha's demise.

Kapilavastu: Birth and Early Life

Siddhartha Gautama was born into an aristocratic family sometime around the fifth century BCE.* His father, the lord of a fiefdom he was meant to inherit, provided the young Siddhartha with all the comforts and luxuries befitting his heir. The following passage gives us a glimpse of the affluent life of his youth:

> I was delicate, most delicate, supremely delicate. Lotus pools were made for me at my father's house solely for my use; in one blue lotuses flowered, in another white, and in another red. I used no sandalwood that was not from Benares. My turban, tunic, lower garments and cloak were all of Benares cloth. My white sunshade was held over me day and night so that I would not be troubled by cold or heat, dust or grit or dew. I had three palaces, one for the winter, one for the summer, and one for the rainy season.
>
> During the four months of rains, in the palace for the rainy season, entertained by all-female musicians, I did not descend from the palace. In the dwellings of other people, slaves and workers and servants are given broken rice together with sour gruel, but in my father's dwelling, slaves and workers were given white rice and meat. (AN, I, 145)

Following Indian tradition, upon coming of age, Siddhartha is ushered into an arranged marriage with a young woman of noble station, whom several accounts name as Yasodhara. Soon his wife bears him a son, and he takes on the responsibilities of a householder, albeit an extremely privileged and pampered one. His father had great expectations for him and, according to the narratives, had seen to it that he would have the best things that life could offer. Yet in spite of such privilege, or perhaps because of it, Siddhartha could experience no true inner satisfaction:

> Yet even while I possessed such fortune and luxury, I thought, "When an unthinking, ordinary person who is himself subject to aging, sickness and death, who is not beyond aging, sickness, and death, sees another who is old, sick, or dead, he is shocked, disturbed, disgusted, forgetting his own condition. I too am subject to aging, sickness, and death, not beyond aging,

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* Scholars offer differing views on the dates of the life of the Buddha, due to conflicting accounts in the sources. Two of the most plausible estimates based on different textual sources are roughly one hundred years apart. The first, based on chronicles preserved in Sri Lanka, reckon the dates to be from around 560 to 480 BCE, while the second, based on Indian and Chinese sources, places these dates from around 463 to 383 BCE.

> sickness and death, and that I should see another who is old, sick, or dead and be shocked, disturbed and disgusted—this is not fitting." As I reflected thus, the arrogance of youth, health and life entirely left me. (AN, I, 146)

This "arrogance of youth, health and life" form a threefold set of attitudes referred to in Buddhist scriptures that tend to overtake those of us at the peak of our powers and give us an undue sense of optimism about our own possibilities in life. Endowed with youth, health, and a vibrant spirit, one is given the impression that everything is within one's control and power, that one can accomplish all one's goals, that one can conquer the world.

Siddhartha, however, saw through all that. He was somehow able to see the other side of youth, that is, old age; of health, that is, illness; and of a vibrant spirit, that is, death. He also clearly saw the fact that all this was part of the package that came with one's birth into this fragile, earthly existence. This sensitivity thus prevented him from wallowing in the privilege that was his by birth and instead led him to ask fundamental questions about human existence.

This questioning of the very foundations of human existence right in the midst of a life of luxury and comfort has been repeatedly noted as a key feature in the biographical accounts of the Buddha. One factor perhaps contributing to this heightened sensitivity to the shadow side of life is that Siddhartha's biological mother died just seven days after his birth, as later accounts record. Sources describe how he was nursed and brought up by Mahaprajapati, his mother's younger sister. The experience of tragedy at a tender age inevitably leaves a definitive imprint on the human psyche, one that can draw an individual on to probe deeper into the mystery of human existence.

This sensitivity to the tragic side of life is a common strand we can find in the lives of many great philosophical and religious figures who have made their mark in the history of the human spirit. It is what leads individuals to ask fundamental questions: What is the point of it all? Why must human beings suffer? How can we live in a meaningful and satisfying way, in the face of our mortality?

Biographical accounts describe the events connected with such questioning in the story "The Excursion from the Four Gates." Having been kept inside the palace by his father to prevent him from seeing the realities of the world, notably the reality of suffering, Siddhartha one day ventures out, and, exiting from one of the four gates of the palace, first sees an old man, and comes back puzzled. He goes out again on successive days, and encounters a sick person, and then, a corpse. Thrown into a state of inner turmoil as he is confronted with the realities of old age, sickness, and death, Siddhartha goes out once more and meets a wandering ascetic. He sees a glimmer of light in the face and gait of this person, one on the path of freedom, who had set everything aside to place all of his energies in the search for ultimate truth and value.

Through this fourth encounter, Siddhartha is emboldened to take a firm step in his life. This is described as the Great Renunciation, the decision, at the age of twenty-nine, to leave home and family, and become a wandering ascetic himself, to devote himself entirely to the pursuit of the questions that had been vexing him since youth.

A short passage recounting words Gautama Buddha at the end of his life recalls this pivotal event: "When I was twenty-nine, Subhaddha, I left home to seek the greatest good. Now more than fifty years have passed, Subhaddha, since I renounced the world" (DN, XVI, 5:27).

There is another passage worth noting related to his decision to leave home, wherein Siddhartha is described as being moved by the sufferings of agricultural workers that he happens to observe along the way (GB, 99). This scene has become a topic of sculptures and frescoes, conveying Gautama's compassionate heart. This image broadens and deepens our picture of Siddhartha's questioning. We can thereby understand his inner struggle as not only pertaining to existential questions of individual meaning and mortality, but also as embracing the ethical dimension relating to issues of justice and social inequality. The account of this experience may also throw some light into his decision to leave the privileged state reserved to only a few like himself born into that social class. It was also a decision to place his lot among the multitudes of people who were vulnerable not just to old age, sickness, and death, but also to poverty, discrimination, displacement, and other vicissitudes of existence in a hierarchical society.

This event of leaving home has been given graphic dramatization in different written accounts of the Buddha's life. There are descriptions of how he was disgusted at the sight of women sleeping in disheveled postures after a night of dancing and carousing, leading him to resolve to abandon the pursuit of worldly pleasures. There are moving accounts of how he quietly approached his sleeping wife and infant son to bid goodbye silently before embarking on his journey. Yet Siddhartha's decision to leave wife and child behind to follow his own dreams has also been criticized as an irresponsible act. In the Hindu tradition, the Mimamsa school, which places a premium on the status of the householder and the lay life, looks with disdain upon Siddhartha for abandoning his family. Likewise, Confucianists in East Asian countries who value family life and solidarity among the most important virtues, as well as nativist scholars in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japan, following the Confucianists, criticize Siddhartha's act of leaving home. They point out that this made light of a basic human duty, that is, of upholding and maintaining the marriage bond and family values. From a contemporary perspective, one can also cite this as an act of abandonment of "basic family values."

In the Buddhist accounts, the negative sides of this pivotal act are mitigated on several counts. First, as noted above, there was already a tradition, with many precedents, of individuals leaving home and setting aside social obligations imposed by caste, to undertake spiritual pursuits, considered a higher goal in life. Second, living in the context of an extended family and endowed with ample means, Siddhartha knew that his wife and child would be provided for and not left in destitution. Third, in these accounts Siddhartha Gautama is described as going back home after he attained realization and became Buddha, to convey the Dharma to members of his own family. He succeeds in converting the whole household, and they all become his devoted followers. His father becomes a lay member of the *sangha,* his wife becomes a pillar in the order of female monastics

established upon the initiative of his aunt and stepmother, Mahaprajapati. His son, Rahula, likewise becomes a monastic and later assumes a leadership role.

Toward Magadha: The Quest

The next phase of his life following the Great Renunciation is the period of ascetic discipline and rigorous practice. This led, six years later, to his experience of enlightenment while sitting under the bodhi tree. In this phase he is first described as going from place to place seeking the guidance of various teachers. Two teachers noted in this regard were Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. After some time with the former, Siddhartha becomes dissatisfied: "This teaching does not lead me to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvana, but only to the attainment of the abode of nothingness. Not being satisfied with that teaching, I left" (MN, 26, 15). Regarding the latter, Siddhartha also arrives at a similar conclusion, namely, that his teaching leads "only to the attainment of the abode of neither perception nor nonperception," and not to the resolution of his doubts and the concomitant attainment of the supreme state of peace that he was earnestly seeking (MN, 26, 16).

Parting ways with these meditation teachers who could not lead him to what he was seeking, Siddhartha then embarks upon a path of rigorous discipline and self-mortification, together with a group of five Brahmin ascetics. He is said to have fasted to an extent that he lost weight and was reduced to skin and bones. There are well-known sculptures of him at this stage of his search, made in Gandhara, reproduced in a good number of books on Buddhism.

Due to the severity of his ascetic practice, Siddhartha Gautama comes to a point of near exhaustion, and at one point, wracked with intense pain, loses consciousness. Upon waking up again, he realizes that this extreme asceticism will only make him deteriorate all the more and will not lead him to a realization of his goal. According to popular lore, he is given some milk porridge by a village woman named Sujata, and he regains vigor and his senses. He thus takes on a "middle way" between simply giving in to one's desires and depriving oneself of even the very necessities of existence and, securely grounded on this path, embarks on the practice of yogic meditation.

Piling up some grass for a cushion and taking his seat beneath a tree, with his back to the trunk, he resolves to himself: "Let my skin, sinews and bones become dry and the flesh and blood of my body dry up, but I will not break the cross-legged position until I retain perfect and supreme enlightenment" (LV, 362).

It is at this point that various accounts describe how he is tempted by Mara, the Evil One, to dissuade him from his goal. Mara also brings in his daughters, Craving, Discomfort, and Pleasure, approaching the Seeker with their guiles, enticing him to give in. But Siddhartha repulses them, saying, "Vanish! Who are you looking at, to exert yourselves to? Try your ploys on one who has not severed himself from greed. The Tathagata (=Thus-gone to the other shore) is without greed, without hatred, without delusion" (GB, 189). At this, the daughters return

to their father, abandoning their attempts and leaving Siddhartha to accomplish his goal.

A significant moment noted in the process toward supreme enlightenment is when Siddhartha the Seeker recalls an instance in his youth, as described in the following passage:

> Then, Aggivessana, I thought: I remember that once when my father, the Sakka, was working (in the fields), I was sitting in the cool shadow of a Jambu tree. Separated from objects which awaken desire, separated from harmful elements (of desire, hatred and delusion), I reached a state of joy and happiness accompanied by contemplation and reflection, which is the first stage of dhyana, and remained in it for some time. Could this be, perhaps, the way to enlightenment? After this memory, Aggivessana, I thought: why should I be afraid of this happiness that has nothing to do with objects which awaken desire and nothing to do with harmful elements? Then, Aggivessana, I thought: I am not afraid of this happiness which has nothing to do with objects which awaken desire, and nothing to do with harmful elements. (MN, 36, I, 246)

This recollection of a moment in his early life, characterized by a "state of joy and happiness accompanied by contemplation and reflection," brings about once more that same state of joy and happiness, tasted anew in this present moment. This is the description of the first stage of *dhyana,* recovered by Siddhartha at this crucial stage of his path to supreme enlightenment. Going further into the night, Siddhartha advances deeper and deeper into the meditative states:

> With the stilling of the active and sustained thought, I entered upon and remained in the second dhyana . . . With the fading away as well of rapture . . . I entered upon and remained in the third dhyana . . . With the abandoning of pleasure and pain . . . I entered upon and remained in the fourth dhyana . . . But such pleasant feeling that arose in me did not invade my mind and remain. (MN, 36, I, 247)

The deepening stages of *dhyana* bring about insight and knowledge into the nature of things. These include first, the recollection of past lives; second, the knowledge of the passing away and the reappearance of things; and third, the knowledge of the destruction of the defilements (MN, 36, I, 249). And with the destruction of defilements, comes liberation:

> When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of defilements. I directly knew it as it actually is: "This is unsatisfactoriness *(duhkha).* This is the origin of unsatisfactoriness. This is the cessation of unsatisfactoriness. This is the way leading to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness . . . These are the defile-

ments . . . This is the origin of defilements . . . This is the cessation of defilements . . . This is the way leading to the cessation of defilements." . . .

When I know and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the defilement of sensual desire, from defilement of being, and from the defilement of ignorance. When it was liberated there came the knowledge: "It is liberated." I directly knew. "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more arising of any state of being." (MN, 36, I, 250)

The above is but one encapsulated account of what Buddhist followers understand took place during the period immediately preceding Gautama's experience of enlightenment. There are several key features that recur in the various accounts: the return to health of the emaciated Gautama with the help of the nourishment provided by Sujata; the resolution to sit it through until enlightenment is reached; the temptations by Mara and his daughters and cohorts; the progressive entry into the four stages of *dhyana,* the fourth of which ushers in liberation, perfect clarity, and ultimate realization.

The *Acts of the Buddha* describes this crucial moment as follows:

Thus he, the holy one, sitting there on his seat of grass at the root of the tree, meditating by his own efforts, attained at last perfect knowledge . . . He became the perfectly wise, the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the king of Dharma, the Thus-gone. He has attained knowledge of all forms, the Master of Wisdom. Having beheld all this, the devas standing in heaven spoke to one another, "strew flowers on this All-wise Monarch of Saints." (BC 66, 68, 69)

All these different epithets express homage to Siddhartha Gautama, who is now venerated by all sentient beings as the Awakened One, the Buddha.

What is the nature and content of this experience of enlightenment? This is the central question upon which hinges the understanding of the entire Buddhist tradition.

Realizing the Way: The Experience of Awakening

In a corner of the city of Bodhgaya, in the region of Magadha in northern India, stands a majestic pipal tree, a descendant of the original under which the Buddha sat in meditation. It is revered as a sacred place, and countless pilgrims visit daily and reverently walk around the precincts surrounding this tree, in commemoration of an event that happened two thousand five hundred years ago.

What did the Buddha experience in this momentous event? We will be pursuing this further in our next section on the Dharma, considering some key passages from scriptural sources. Here, let us first take a look at accounts describing how this experience affected and transformed the life of Siddhartha Gautama. Having attained supreme, perfect enlightenment, the Buddha is described as rapt

in ecstatic joy, remaining seated for seven days under the tree, now referred to as the bodhi tree, or tree of enlightenment (Jataka 1, 77–78). He is thus described as wanting to just stay there and continue relishing this indescribable bliss of enlightenment. The following passage offers a glimpse of that inner world of the Awakened One as he arrives at the Place of Peace:

> I truly exerted myself and made firm endeavor. In mindfulness I was secure and undistracted. My body was tranquil and not agitated. My mind was concentrated and fixed on one point. Detached from desires and detached from all that is unwholesome, but with initial thought and discursive thought, I attained the first stage of trance, which is full of the joy born of detachment. Then I became tranquil and concentrated of mind, owing to the cessation of both initial thought and discursive thought, and attained the second stage of trance, which is full of the joy born of concentration. Then because my joy was unstained, I dwelt in equanimity, mindfulness, and correct awareness, felt in my body joy and peace, and attained the third stage of trance, described by the sages as having equanimity, being mindful, and dwelling in joy and peace. Then because I discarded joy and discarded suffering, my former pleasures and sorrows ceased, and I attained the fourth stage of trance, which has neither suffering nor joy, which is purified by equanimity and mindfulness. (MN, 4, I, 21)

This state of mind ushers in the horizon of total freedom and perfect peace, characteristics of an awakened life. The term here translated as "equanimity," *upekkha* in Pali (*upeksa* in Sanskrit), is a compound made up of the verb *iks*, "to see," and the prefix *upa*, meaning "hither" or "toward" or "near," indicating an original sense of "seeing at close hand." This is "to see things as they truly are" *(yathabhutam)*. This capacity to see things as they truly are, that is, untainted by one's delusions and desires, and unaffected by one's prejudgments and expectations, is what securely grounds this total freedom and perfect peace. Having arrived at this point, he is now referred to as Buddha, and also called the World-honored One, Shakyamuni, the Sage of the Shakya clan, "the perfectly wise, the Blessed One (Bhagavat), the Worthy One (Arhat), the king of the Dharma, the Tathagata, who has attained the knowledge of all forms, the Lord of all science" (BC XIV, 68).

The stance of equanimity has been (mis)taken by some scholars to mean a kind of detachment that verges on indifference, as it is described as a state "which has neither suffering nor joy." However, as Harvey Aronson has convincingly shown in a thoughtful treatment of Pali sources (Aronson 1980), this state of mind is rather to be seen as an even-mindedness that characterizes a fully liberated being. This equanimity of a liberated one is presented in monastic commentaries as at the opposite end of three kinds of experiences: pleasure which comes with attachment, displeasure due to aversion, and an ignorant kind of indifference (AA iii.335, in Aronson 1980, 85). It is thus to be sharply distinguished from the last of these three.

Equanimity is described as present also in the three lower stages of trance, but this equanimity of a liberated one is distinguished by purity of mindfulness not yet fully manifest in the previous stages. Equanimity that is a mark of a liberated being is one of seven qualities associated with the attainment of *nirvana,* called the "seven limbs of enlightenment." The other six are mindfulness, discernment, energy, pleasurable interest, clarity, and single-mindedness (MN, 1, 42).

The term *nirvana* has been subject to a variety of interpretations by Buddhist scholars. In early scriptures it is used synonymously with a term that means "the place of peace" *(santam padam).* This is the place arrived at by the Buddha, the state of awakening itself. A well-known passage from early scriptures offers the following description of one who walks the way of peace:

> One who is skilled in doing good and seeks to arrive at the Place of Peace should comport oneself thus.
>
> That one should be able, upright, perfectly upright, compliant, gentle and humble.
>
> Contented, easily supported, with few duties, of simple livelihood, controlled in senses, discreet, not impudent, one should not be greedily attached to families.
>
> One should not commit any slight wrong such that wise ones might censure.
>
> One should then cultivate one's thoughts thus: May all beings be happy and secure. May their minds be contented.
>
> Whatever living beings there may be—weak or strong, tall, stout, medium, short, small, or large, seen or unseen, dwelling far or near, born or yet to be born—may all beings, without exception, be happy.
>
> Let no one deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place. In anger or ill will, let not one wish any harm to another.
>
> As a mother would protect her only child even at the risk of her own life, let one cultivate a boundless heart toward all beings.
>
> Let one's thoughts of boundless compassion pervade the whole world—above, below, and across—without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.
>
> Whether one stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as one is awake, one should maintain this mindfulness. This, it is said, is the Sublime State in this life.
>
> Not falling into wrong views, virtuous and endowed with Insight, one gives up attachment to sense desires. Verily, such a one does not return to enter a womb again. (Sn, 144–52)

This passage, widely known as the Metta Sutta, is often recited from memory in Pali not only by monastics, but also by lay followers, men, women, and children in countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand, where Theravada Buddhism has played a significant role in their respective histories and cultures. Appearing in the *Sutta Nipata,* said to contain the earliest layers of Buddhist scriptures, it presents a portrait of one in the Place of Peace that is far removed from the image of a cool, indifferent individual that has withdrawn from the world. On the contrary, such a one is depicted as imbued with a heart of compassion toward all sentient beings, "as a mother toward her only child."

Here we see equanimity in context as one of the four items of the Sublime State (*brahmavihara* = "divine dwelling"). The other three items in addition to equanimity *(upekkha)* are lovingkindness *(metta)*, compassion *(karuna)*, and sympathetic joy *(muditha)*. Lovingkindness is a mind and heart that actively wishes and seeks the well-being of others. Compassion is the mind and heart that puts itself in solidarity with the pains and sufferings of others, seeking to eliminate or eradicate them. Sympathetic joy, as the words convey, is a mind and heart that rejoices and celebrates with others in their joy. The four elements of the Sublime State are presented in relation to one another in the following way, taking their cue from the image of a mother's caring attitude for her offspring:

> When a youth is in the womb, the parents think with a loving mind, "When will we see our child healthy and endowed with all the major and minor limbs?" Then, when this tender creature lies on its back and cries or wails because of being bitten by troubled sleep, the parents hear this noise and feel simple compassion. Furthermore, when the parents observe the young one in the most desirable years, either at the time of play or while running races or at the time of rest, their minds become tender, like a hundred fluffy balls of cotton soaked in the finest clarified butter. The parents' minds are satisfied and joyous. Then, when their offspring (as a grown person) is able to provide adornments for its own spouse and settle in their own house, the parents become even-minded and think, "Now our progeny can live on its own." In this way, they have equanimity at that time. (AA ii.204, in Aronson 1980, 70)

Such a description thus presents the Awakened One relating to all sentient beings with a mind and heart of a loving parent toward its own offspring. This image of a loving parent will recur in scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism (see Chapter 8). This is also the mind and heart that followers of the Awakened One who seek the Place of Peace for themselves are enjoined to make their own.

The total freedom and perfect peace that are the hallmarks of the ultimate state of realization, *nirvana,* do not thereby lead to a state of mind that is indifferent to or unconcerned with the rest of the world. This may have been an impression of the Buddhist ideal left by the work of earlier Western scholars who propagated images of Buddhism as an individualistic or even a nihilistic and world-denying religion. There may have been a streak of this individualistic and indifferent attitude that certain passages tend to convey, as those describing a state "beyond joy and sorrow," and so on. But a contextual and inter-textual reading of

these passages, in the light of a more comprehensive picture of the mind and heart of one who has realized total freedom and has arrived at the Place of Peace, belies such an impression.

Passages depicting the Buddha as having remained in blissful contemplation for seven days, relishing the taste of enlightenment, also make a significant point regarding the state of mind of one who undergoes this experience. He is described as being inclined to stay there and continue to dwell in the bliss of enlightenment, but is enjoined by Brahma, lord of the world in the Hindu pantheon, to arise and share his discovery with the rest of the world. At this, the Awakened One, moved to compassion for all living beings in the world still caught in the misery of their delusions, decides to rise and share with others his discovery (GB, 227–35):

> Then the Perfectly Enlightened One rose up from there and returned to the tree and sat down at its foot. As soon as he had sat down, reflecting on the profundity of the Truth he had attained, there a rose in his mind, as had arisen in the minds of all the buddhas before when they realized they had attained the Truth, that he did not wish to teach for the sake of others. Then Brahma, the lord of the world, thought: "Alas, the world is lost, the world is lost," and went to where the Master was, taking with him Sakka, Suyama, Santusita, Sunimmita, Vasavatti, and Mahabrahma in ten thousand great world systems. He urged in such ways as these to preach: "Venerable Master, let the Blessed One teach! Let the Blessed one teach!" The master granted his request. (Jataka 1, 81)

Compassion eventually moves the Awakened One to rise from his seat of bliss and begin to share his discovery with others. And from this point on, the Buddha becomes the Teacher of *devas* and human beings.

Preaching the Dharma: Buddha as Teacher

Having resolved to share his experience with the world, the Awakened One seeks out the five ascetics whom he had met earlier in his search for enlightenment. Recognizing the earnestness of the five in their own search, he goes to them, before anyone else, to proclaim the way now opened to him. He encounters them at Sarnath, a small town near Varanasi.

Upon seeing him, however, the first impression of the five is recorded as one of disappointment; he has set aside the austerities they were intent on practicing and now "lives luxuriously, having abandoned striving, and reverted to extravagance" (MN, 26, I, 171). He corrects them, however, and enjoins them to hear his message:

> Listen, bhikkus, the Deathless has been attained. I shall instruct you. I shall teach you the Truth. Practicing as you are instructed, by realizing for yourselves here and now through direct knowledge, you will soon enter upon and abide in that supreme goal of the holy life for the sake of which people

of good family rightly leave their homes to become homeless practitioners. (MN, 26, I, 172)

Written accounts focus on how the Buddha now begins to expound the Middle Path and the Four Ennobling Truths as the kernel of his awakening experience. This exposition of the content of enlightenment to the five ascetics is regarded as the second most significant event in the history of Buddhism, after the enlightenment experience itself. This event is called Turning the Wheel of Dharma. The Buddha now begins to share what he experienced with the rest of the world. In the next chapter we will examine further the contents of this noted sermon, as well as other key aspects of the Teaching. For now, we place our focus on the figure of the Buddha as Teacher and see how he related to those who came to seek his guidance.

A first point to note is how the Buddha understood his own role in the context of the myriad reputed teachers of his day, whose doctrines on various ethical and metaphysical questions were being proferred in the marketplace of ideas of the time. Having been awakened to the Truth, from that vantage point, what could the Buddha offer regarding the burning philosophical issues of the time? For example, is the world eternal, or is it not? Is the universe finite, or infinite? Is the soul identical with the body, or are these two separate entities? Does a perfectly realized being continue to exist after death, or is such a one annihilated at physical death? When asked such questions of a speculative nature, the Buddha kept silent. The Buddha's silence is a point that has drawn attention to the nature of the very message that he conveyed to his followers. It has caught the attention of those who have sought to unravel this message and its import through the centuries. We will revisit this in our consideration of the Dharma in the second chapter.

A well-known passage describing a dialogue with a seeker named Malunkyaputta puts the Buddha's silence in fresh relief:

> Imagine, Malunkyaputta, one wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and whose friends and companions, kinsfolk and relatives, brought a surgeon to treat such a one, who responds, "I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the one who wounded me was a noble, or a Brahmin, or a merchant, or a worker." Or, who says, "I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know the name and clan of the one who wounded me . . . until I know whether the one who wounded me was tall, or short, or of middle height . . . until I know whether that one who wounded me was dark or brown or golden-skinned . . . until I know whether the one who wounded me lives in such a village or town or city . . . until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a long bow, or a crossbow . . . until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fibre or reed or sinew or hemp or bark . . . until I know whether the shaft that wounded me was wild or cultivated . . . until I know with what kind of feathers the shaft that wounded me was fitted—whether those of a vulture or a crow or a hawk or a peacock or a stork . . . until I know with what kind of sinew the shaft that wounded me was bound—whether that of an ox or a buffalo or a lion or a

monkey . . . until I know what kind of arrow it was that wounded me—whether it was hoof-tipped or curved or barbed or calf-toothed or oleander."

All this would not be known, and meanwhile, such a one would die. So too, Malunkyaputta, if anyone should say thus, "I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until the Blessed One declares to me, 'the world is eternal' . . . or 'after death, a fully perfected being neither exists nor does not exist,'"—that would still remain undeclared by the fully perfected being, and meanwhile, that person would die. (MN, 63, I, 430)

This passage presents the radical nature of the Buddha's standpoint in the light of the plurality of views regarding the burning metaphysical and ethical questions in his day. This made him stand out among the teachers of the time. His message was not one that added another viewpoint among the many expounded by others regarding those questions about the nature of the world and of human existence. Rather, his key emphasis was in presenting and inviting his listeners to a *way of life* of true peace and inner satisfaction, a way of liberation from the suffering and dissatisfaction that is part and parcel of our being human.

This liberative standpoint and the Buddha's way of teaching those who come to him for help in their various situations of suffering are highlighted further by another well-known passage about a woman named Kisa Gotami, who had just lost her child to death. Desperate in her grief, she drags the child's corpse around and comes to the Buddha for medicine that might revive her dead child. The Teacher, seeing that she was ripe for a change of heart, said, "You did well, Gotami, in coming here for medicine. Go enter the city, make the rounds of the entire city, beginning at the beginning, and in whatever house no one has ever died, from that house fetch tiny grains of mustard seed." The passage recounts how Gotami goes to a house asking for a mustard seed, but first ascertaining whether anyone has ever died in that household. And as she is told that, indeed, someone or other who belonged to that household had died, she of course declines the mustard seed offered. In this way she goes from house to house and in the process, comes to a realization:

Thought she: "In the entire city this must be the way! This the Buddha, full of compassion for the welfare of human beings, must have seen." Overcome with emotion, she went outside the city, carried her son to the burning-ground, and holding him in her arms, said, "Dear little son, I thought that you alone had been overtaken by this thing that people call Death. But you are not the only one Death has overtaken. This is a law common to all human beings." So saying, she cast her son away in the burning-ground. Then she uttered the following:

No village law, no law of market town,
No law of a single household is this—
Of all the world and all the worlds of gods
This only is the Law, that all things are impermanent.

When she said thus, she went to the Teacher, who said, "Gotami, did you get the tiny grains of mustard seed?"

"Done, Venerable Sir, is the business of the mustard seed. Only give me a refuge."

Then the Teacher recited to her the following:

That one who delights in children and cattle
That one whose heart adheres thereto
Death takes that one and goes away
As a mighty flood sweeps away a sleeping village.

Though one should live a hundred years,
Not seeing the Region of the Deathless
Better were it for one to live a single day,
The Region of the Deathless seeing. (TCB, 19–22)

The two passages cited offer a glimpse of the teaching style of the Awakened One, whose central intent is to invite his listeners to reflect on their own lives and to lead them to an experience that will resolve their situation, thus cutting off the net of delusions we humans are susceptible to in our search for truth. He offers not another doctrine or point of view on the nature of reality, as such, but invites those who seek his teaching to a liberating experience of their own.

The teaching that the Buddha imparts to his followers is like a raft; it is for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding to:

> Bhikkus, suppose in the course of a journey one saw a great expanse of water, whose near shore was dangerous and fearful, and whose further shore was safe and free from fear, but there was no ferryboat or bridge going to the far shore. Then one thought, " . . . suppose I collect grass, twigs, branches, and leaves, and bind them together into a raft, and supported by the raft and making an effort with my hands and feet, I got safely across to the far shore . . . " And when he had got across and had arrived at the far shore, such one might think thus: "This raft has been very helpful to me, since supported by it, and making an effort with my hands and feet, I got safely across to the far shore. Suppose I were to hoist it on my head or load it on my shoulder, and then go wherever I want." Now bhikkus, what do you think? By doing so, would that one be doing what should be done with that raft? (MN, 22, I, 13)

The Buddha is thus presented in early scriptures as offering a path toward liberation from a dissatisfactory human existence. He does not offer another set of doctrines about ultimate reality, but rather a set of practical guidelines suited to different seekers, to help them realize peace and inner freedom. A constant refrain in his discourses to his followers is the invitation: *"Ehi passiko"* (Come and see).

The Great Passing at Kusinara: The Buddha's Bequest

The final days of Gautama Buddha's life are recounted in a Pali text entitled the Mahaparinibbana-sutta:

> Ananda, I am now old, worn out, venerable, one who has traversed life's path. I have reached the term of life, which is eighty. Just as an old cart is made to go by being held together with straps, so the Tathagata's body is kept going by being strapped up. It is only when the Tathagata withdraws his attention from outward signs and, by the cessation of certain feelings, enters into the signless concentration of mind, that his body knows comfort. (DN, XVI, 2:100)

The passage indicates a cognizance of his impending death and a clear understanding of what this entails. What is conveyed is a sense of acceptance and resignation by one who has let go of all attachment to this life, as well as a clear mind that sees the inevitable and impending event with equanimity. Serenely he consoles those around him who, hearing of his impending death, are shaken by the thought of the loss of their teacher and guide:

> Enough, Ananda. Do not weep and wail. Have I not already told you that all things that are pleasant and delightful are changeable, subject to separation and becoming other? So how could it be, Ananda—since whatever is born, become, compounded, is subject to decay—how could it be that it should not pass away? (DN, XVI, 2:144)

This situation of his own impending death becomes an occasion for the Buddha to deliver a key message, the same one that he had sought to convey during his entire career since his experience of awakening. In the narrative this message is put in the words of Sakka, ruler of the *devas,* who exclaims after an earthquake that signified the Buddha's passing:

> Impermanent are compounded things, prone to arise
> and fall.
> Having arisen, they are destroyed. Their passing is the
> truest bliss. (DN, XVI, 2:157)

This is a refrain of a central message preached by the Buddha throughout his life, found in different places in Pali scriptures.

There were followers who, not having yet fully realized the import of the message, were taken aback by the loss of their beloved teacher. But those others who had been receptive to his teaching and were able to put it in practice in their lives were able to see this impending loss precisely as an occasion to embody that teaching:

> And those monks who had not yet overcome their passions wept and tore their hair, raising their arms, throwing themselves down and twisting and turning, crying, "All too soon the Blessed Lord has passed away, all too soon the Eye of the World has disappeared."
>
> But the monks who were free from craving endured mindfully and clearly aware, saying, "All compounded things are impermanent. What then is the use of this (weeping and wailing)?" (DN, XVI, 2:157–58)

> Therefore, O Ananda, be lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help.
>
> Hold fast to the Dharma as a lamp. Seek salvation alone in the Dharma. Look not for assistance to anyone besides yourselves. (DN, XVI, 2.26)

The Buddha's bequest to his followers then is a simple one: keep the lamp of the Dharma burning. To realize the Dharma is no other than to realize the Truth of Impermanence, the Truth of Dissatisfactoriness that seeks its Extinction, and the Truth of Selflessness. These three marks of the Dharma, which we will consider in greater detail in the next chapter, are the key to peace and inner freedom. And these three marks are recognizable to any who take the effort to look and see for themselves, as Gautama the Buddha did.

DEVELOPMENTS IN VIEWS OF THE BUDDHA

After the demise of Gautama the Buddha, his disciples continued to cherish memories of their encounters with him. Full of gratitude and awe, they recounted how their own lives were transformed in and through these encounters. In the process, the image of the Buddha as conveyed to successive generations underwent a multidirectional process of development.

Biographical accounts of the Buddha composed several centuries after his death reveal how the Buddha's life and person came to be regarded both as a paradigm of an ideal life and as an icon and source of spiritual power that one can turn to for refuge and veneration.

Buddha as Paradigm

Pali scriptures present a multilayered picture of views of the Buddha. In some written sources we find the Buddha being addressed by a term commonly used among equals in a familiar circle, roughly equivalent to comrade, or by a respectful address similar to sir. He is also referred to as the Wandering Ascetic, Leader of a Group, and Teacher, terms also used to refer to other contemporary figures.

Other sources, however, show much more reverent and deferential terms. The Buddha is referred to or addressed as World-honoured One, Great Sage, the most exalted among gods and human beings. The Awakened One is often described with a series of epithets: Worthy One *(arahant),* perfectly enlightened One, endowed with wisdom and conduct, sublime or well-realized, knower of worlds, incomparable guide of humans, and as we have already seen, teacher of human beings and *devas* (SN, 64). With these appellations we see how the Buddha comes to be regarded as even superior to the divinities of Hindu tradition, a being worthy not only of emulation but also of respectful veneration.

The attainment of such a superior state of being, so it was supposed, could only have been the result of multiple lifetimes of accumulated merit. This notion is behind the association made between the Buddha and the stories in Indian lore that told of meritorious acts of various kinds of beings, including those from the

animal realm as well as the human realm. These tales, called Jataka, or birth stories—collected from around the third century BCE—recount the many past lives of the Buddha-to-be.

In some accounts Gautama the Buddha is placed as the seventh of a series of manifestations of Buddhas through countless aeons (DN, XIV), and in others, the twenty-fourth. Sets of specific qualities came to be attributed to those beings regarded as Buddhas, elements in Hindu culture related to greatness and states of exaltation. These include ten powers, such as knowledge of consequences of actions of the past, present, and future, four grounds of self-confidence, eighteen extraordinary features, and thirty-two distinctive marks of the physical body.

In this context the life of Shakyamuni Buddha came to be seen as a paradigm recognizable by a set of themes. Reginald Ray (1994, 48–59) enumerates thirty-five of these themes found in the Buddhacarita, or Acts of the Buddha, a narrative composed around the first century CE. Accounts of other Buddhas that manifested themselves in the universe through a period that covered multitudes of aeons also contain these same themes, with variations in the epoch, place, and names of human beings surrounding the Buddha's life. These themes suggest a pattern of an idealized life that all human beings can aspire to, and hence, present a paradigm of the realized human being. These themes thus apply to Buddhist saints, those individuals who have attained various levels in the Buddhist path of liberation, including *bodhisattvas,* the independently enlightened ones *(pratyekabuddhas)*, and the worthy ones *(arhats)* who have realized the path of purification.

The image of Buddha as paradigm of the path of awakening was a male figure. The key element that played a role in determining this gender-specific character of the Buddha had to do with the attributes of Buddhahood, known as the Thirty-two Marks of the Great Person. Among the thirty-two characteristic marks of such a being was one whereby the male organ was wrapped in a sheath. There was a tendency in Buddhist history to take this provision literally, and thereby to stipulate that one must be male to become Buddha. This led to the view that females needed to be reborn in a subsequent life as males in order to become Buddha. We will address this issue further in the chapter on Sangha.

There are themes that emphasize the miraculous and superhuman qualities of the Buddha intermingled with the themes emphasizing his humanity. This suggests that for those who composed the sacred narratives, the Buddha was as much superhuman, transcendent being, as he was human. This tendency to depict the Buddha as a transcendent figure came into full play in the Mahayana texts that accentuate his role as savior.

Buddha as Savior

The Mahasanghika, one of the schools that came to be differentiated in the course of the divisions among various monastic lineages of the Buddha's followers, presented a view of the Buddha as a supramundane being, undefiled by any impure elements, with a limitless life span and endowed with divine power. The views of the Mahasanghikas were shared by some of the other schools and are

seen in close relationship to developments in Mahayana, wherein the Buddha's role as savior was brought out in greater relief.

The notion of a savior Buddha with transcendental powers that can be brought to the aid of devotees developed in India amid surroundings where there was a multitude of icons of religious veneration in traditional Hindu lore. These included Vishnu, viewed as Sustainer or Preserver of the universe, believed to manifest himself in various divine, human, or animal forms (avatars) in this earthly realm in order to help humans and other beings in their need. Krishna, a popular divine figure depicted in the Bhagavad Gita, is believed to be one of these avatars. It is interesting to note that Gautama Buddha himself was considered by Hindus to be an avatar of Vishnu.

With the Buddhist belief that the attainment of Buddha excelled that of any Hindu divinity, the notion of a multitude of accomplished Buddhas with transcendental powers and cosmic dimensions captured popular imagination. These Buddhas, dwelling in all the realms of the universe, are considered to be as innumerable as the grains of sand on the banks of the Ganges river or as the stars in the sky. In this context the historical Gautama, the teacher of the Dharma, is sidelined by these glorified and divinized figures in Buddhist devotion. He retains his authoritative place, however, even in the scriptural texts describing other glorified Buddhas, as the one who expounds the teaching about them.

In the *Sutra of the Lotus of the Wondrous Dharma,* popularly known as the Lotus Sutra, composed around the beginning of the common era, Shakyamuni Buddha is depicted as having attained enlightenment multitudes of aeons in the past. Yet he continues to manifest himself in this earthly realm for the liberation of all living beings. In the compassion that flows out of his wisdom, he makes use of various skillful means toward this end. Siddhartha Gautama is depicted as an earthly manifestation of this Shakyamuni Lord of Dharma, who goes through the motions of being born in a human state, experiencing dissatisfaction, going forth in homelessness, attaining realization, giving different kinds of teachings suited to different individuals in their respective situations, and finally entering *nirvana.* These manifestations of his humanity are regarded as among the skillful means used by the all-wise and compassionate Buddha to open the eyes of ignorant and stubborn human beings.

The Lotus Sutra thus presents a full-blown picture of a transcendent, all-wise, and all-seeing Buddha, existing on a plane that transcends historical time, yet who, out of compassion, manifests salvific and liberative action in history. The character of Shakyamuni Lord of Dharma, further elaborated on by commentators through the centuries, and identified with the Dharma of the Lotus Sutra, develops as an icon of religious worship and veneration.

Another image of Buddha as savior is seen in Amitayus ("Immeasurable Life"), or Amitabha ("Immeasurable Light"). This is the Buddha who is the central figure of the two Land of Bliss (Sukhavati) Sutras, composed in India also around the second century CE. In the larger of these sutras Gautama Buddha relates the story of Dharmakara, a *bodhisattva* of aeons past in another world, who resolved to attain supreme enlightenment and generate pure Buddha realms,

making forty-eight vows to this effect. Included in these vows was the provision to help all living beings seeking rebirth in the Land of Bliss attain this goal. Gautama Buddha then confirms that Dharmakara did attain ultimate realization and is now Amitabha Buddha reigning in his Land of Bliss in the western regions of the universe. From this place Amitabha hears the voices especially of those who call out his name asking to be brought to the Land of Bliss and fulfills his vow of doing so.

Amitabha Buddha became a widely popular icon of religious devotion especially in East Asia. The visualization of the resplendent qualities of the Land of Bliss came to be a form of meditative practice. The invocation of his name (Namo Amit'o Fo in Chinese, Namu Amida Butsu in Japanese) has become one of the most popular devotional practices in Buddhism through the centuries.

Another Buddha that became an icon of religious devotion was Bhaisajya-guru, also known as the Healing Buddha. Several early Mahayana scriptures, including the Lotus Sutra, make allusions to the Healing King or Healing Bodhisattva. The sutra on the Healing Buddha was most likely composed in late second or early third century CE in Central Asia. Here, Bhaisajya-guru is described as having made twelve vows as a *bodhisattva,* with the seventh brought into prominence: "May all who are ill be cured upon hearing my name." Other vows deal not only with physical healing but also with the fulfillment of other physical needs (hunger, clothing, the necessities of life), as well as spiritual needs (arriving at correct views, tasting the sublime Dharma, supreme enlightenment).

The same sutra describes the rituals of devotion to the Healing Buddha, including hearing and chanting the names of the Buddhas, as well as the manifold benefits that such devotion can bring. A later Chinese translation of this sutra describes seven brothers who are all Masters of Healing, Buddhas inhabiting their different realms. From the contents of the vows made by Bhaisajya-guru, religious devotion to this Buddha came to be associated with the attainment of worldly benefit and became a popular devotion in East Asia.

A Buddha that is portrayed in many artistic and literary forms is Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future. He is thought to be presently in Tusita Heaven, where Shakyamuni himself dwelt before he was born as the human Siddhartha Gautama, waiting to be reborn as the next Buddha. He is associated with millennial hopes of Buddhist followers, who see in him the savior figure that will save humanity from ruin in its darkest days.

The figure of Vairochana, a Buddha resplendent like the sun, emanating rays of Dharma throughout the universe, is mentioned in the Avatamsaka Sutra. It is given further development in Tantric or Esoteric scriptures composed from the seventh century onward, presented as a personified cosmic Absolute very similar in character to the notion of God in monotheistic religions, save for the function of creator.

The Primordial *(Adi)* Buddha also appears in Tantric scriptures as a divine, eternally enlightened being commanding worship and veneration.

In Tibetan Tantric literature female Buddhas came to be venerated figures alongside the male Buddhas. Among the most popular of these were Arya Tara,

the mother of all Buddhas, White Tara, Yellow Tara, Red Tara, Dark-Colored Tara, and many others who helped devotees attain different kinds of worldly as well as spiritual benefit.

In addition to the manifold Buddhas with their particular characteristics and proper religious function, accomplished *bodhisattvas* in celestial realms also came to be regarded as icons for veneration in Buddhist history. Among these is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, whose name means "the Master who Beholds," depicted as an embodiment of compassion. Avalokiteshvara's attributes and particular activities to help living beings in situations of distress and suffering are described in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra. In Tibet, Avalokiteshvara has become a central figure of devotion, believed to reincarnate in human form in the person of the Dalai Lamas. In China, Avalokiteshvara is transformed into a feminine figure, Kuan-shi-yin, or Kuan-yin, "Regarder of the Cries of the World" (Kanzeon or Kannon in Japanese). Kuan-yin became a vastly popular icon of devotion in East Asia. She is often depicted as having many eyes able to see in all directions and with a thousand hands that she is able to extend to all beings, to help them in their different situations of need. There are countless other figures of Buddhas and glorified *bodhisattvas* who are named in the scriptures and have been taken up as icons of religious veneration. These attest to the transformation of the image of the Buddha from Siddhartha Gautama, the human being who experienced awakening and taught others the way to this awakening, regarded as a paradigm of human perfection, to these celestial figures, icons of worship and devotion.

Three Bodies of the Buddha

The passing of Gautama Buddha left a vacuum for his numerous followers who felt a deep devotion to him as Teacher. The veneration of his relics enshrined in *stupas* became one way of filling this vacuum. Certain followers came to affirm how they could experience the continuing presence of the Awakened One in the rituals of veneration toward these relics. There were other followers, however, who recalled what was handed down as the Buddha's bequest before his passing, that is, to rely on themselves and no one else, and to take the Dharma as refuge (SN, I, 30). With this bequest in mind, they affirmed that it was in living by the Dharma that one could experience the presence of the Buddha in one's life. This is in the background of the term *dharmakaya* ("body of Dharma" or "one who has the Dharma as one's body"), used as a way of referring to the Buddha. This term came to take on metaphysical and cosmic dimensions in later stages of Mahayana thinking, as we shall see below. The Buddha, having experienced the Dharma, is one with the Dharma, so followers could affirm that "one who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha" (SN, III, 120).

In the Wisdom literature of the Mahayana we find expressions of reaction to the practice of *stupa* worship. The "true body" of the Buddha was made manifest in the Dharma, equated with the realization of Emptiness. To realize Emptiness is to experience the Dharma-body *(dharmakaya)* of the Buddha. The Buddha's

body of form *(rupakaya)*, represented by the human Gautama Buddha when he was alive, and after his passing by the relics venerated in the *stupas,* was only a provisional body.

These distinctions led to the initial formulation of the twofold Buddha-body framework, with the Dharma-body distinguished from the body of form, emphasizing the importance of the former. The Lotus Sutra's depiction of Shakyamuni, Lord of Dharma and the Father of all living beings, with transcendent, superhuman, cosmic dimensions, who, using skillful means, manifests the human form of Gautama Buddha, also lies in the background of a twofold Buddha-body structure.

The same Lotus Sutra describes the existence of multitudes of other Buddhas who testify to the truth of the teaching of the sutra. These other Buddhas are described likewise as emanations of the one Lord of Dharma, Shakyamuni. These elements then—Shakyamuni the Lord of Dharma, regarded as the primary Buddha; the multitudes of Buddhas in the different realms of the universe regarded as his emanations; and Gautama Buddha, the emanation in the earthly realm—were all on the horizon as followers asked the question, Who, or what, is Buddha?

The rise of devotional movements centered on Buddhas such as Amitabha, Bhaisajya-guru, Akshobhya (Fearless) Buddha, and others also brought in further elements to be integrated into the picture. These are among the various aspects of Buddhist thinking and devotional and ritual practice that led to attempts to synthesize views of the Buddha into what is known as the Threefold Buddha-body theory, or Trikaya.

There are two versions of the Trikaya theory found in Mahayana commentarial literature, manifesting different structural formations. One version is presented in a fourth-century treatise entitled *Garland of Mahayana Sutras (Mahayanasutra-alamkara)*, which expounds on the nature of ultimate reality as experienced by the yogic practitioner in the various stages of meditative practice. The three bodies of the Buddha described are the Dharma-body *(dharmakaya)*, the Enjoyment-body *(sambhoga-kaya)*, and the Transformation-body or Apparitional-body *(nirmana-kaya)*. The Dharma-body, regarded as the basis of the other two, is also called the Body of self-nature, identified with Emptiness, also referred to as the pure Dharma-realm. The Dharma-realm of Emptiness is realized as one reaches the heights and depths of meditative practice. Such a realization leads to fruition in the Enjoyment-body. Amitabha, Bhaisajya-guru, and other resplendent Buddhas are examples of Enjoyment-body. The third, Apparitional-body, takes on different forms in earthly history, as manifestations of skillful means employed to liberate beings from their situations of suffering, out of the Buddha's compassion. Gautama Buddha is thus understood as one such manifestation.

Another version of the Trikaya theory is developed in a fifth-century treatise, *Discerning the Jewel Lineage (Ratnagotra-vibhaga)*, whose central message is the proclamation that all living beings are the matrix or embryo *(garbha)* of the Tathagata (Thus-gone), another name for Buddha. Here the Dharma-body is also synonymous with Emptiness, and likewise referred to as the Dharma-realm, but

is *at the same time* identified with the Lord of the Dharma, a Transcendent Buddha as depicted in Mahayana sutras such as the Lotus Sutra. This Dharma-body, described as Timeless, Supreme Bliss, Supreme Self, Supreme Purity, is also presented as All-wise and All-compassionate, constantly preaching the Dharma and acting in manifold ways for the benefit of all beings. This action on behalf of living beings consists in manifesting various forms of its Enjoyment-body in the different Buddha realms, preaching the Dharma to accomplished *bodhisattvas* in these realms. It also consists in manifesting various forms of its Apparitional-body to show the path of liberation to living beings in the earthly realm.

The first Buddha-body theory described above comes out of the Yogachara school, whose accent is on meditative practice toward the realization of supreme enlightenment. In this threefold structure the centerpiece is the second, the Enjoyment-body, the state of being that enjoys the fruits of protracted and rigorous meditative practice, characterized as the attainment of the all-pervading wisdom of Emptiness (the first, Dharma-body) and the activation of an all-embracing Compassion for living beings (the third, Apparitional-body). The second Buddha-body structure presents the figure of a personified Absolute, the Dharma-body of the Tathagata, as its centerpiece. It is described as all-pervasive Wisdom, working incessantly out of Compassion for the alleviation of suffering and the liberation of living beings.

The first threefold Buddha-body structure described above is presented as a paradigm of the path of awakening, inviting all to take up the practice that will lead to ultimate attainment and realize the Enjoyment-body. The second threefold Buddha-body structure, with the character of a Personified, Absolute, Cosmic Buddha, is presented as an icon, the proper response to which is religious worship and veneration.

The passage below by John Strong gives us a panoramic view of how Buddhist followers have regarded the Buddha through the centuries:

> The whole history of Buddhism could probably be written on how Buddhists throughout the centuries have tried to deal with the problems posed by the Buddha's parinirvana [final passing, or extinction]. Some (for example, Theravadin monastics and certain early followers of the Prajnaparamita) . . . frankly recognized the Buddha's physical absence in nirvana but chose to emphasize his presence in his Teachings, his Doctrine, to the point that one could only relate to the Buddha if one perceived the Dharma. Others, more docetically inclined (Mahayanists), stressed the eternal transcendent reality of the Buddha and thus the unreality of his life as well as of his death. Still others, while accepting the fact of the parinirvana, looked forward to the coming of another Buddha, either in the distant or the imminent future (Maitreyists). Yet another group projected the Buddha not in time but in space into one or several paradises (Pure Lands) where they hoped to rejoin him after death; while others interiorized the Buddha within their bodies or minds, and sought to find him therein (Tantra and Zen). (Strong 1983, 130–31)

WHAT IS THE BUDDHA?

We are able to distinguish two recurrent, intertwining themes in Buddhist views of Buddha. One is the view of Buddha as a paradigm of a perfected being. This is one who has awakened and having traversed the path of liberation from this dissatisfactory mode of existence, has now gone beyond *(Tathagata)*. Having arrived at a place of inner peace and freedom, such a one is now imbued with the wisdom of seeing things as they truly are and a compassion that embraces all living beings as a mother would embrace her only child. This path of awakening is one that all human beings are enjoined to take for themselves, by following a life of disciplined Conduct, Concentration, and Wisdom, toward the attainment of the summit of the possibilities of being human.

Based precisely on this notion of Buddha as a model of perfected being, Buddha has been idealized, put on a superhuman, divinized level of existence, and presented as an icon for religious veneration. Buddha is thus seen not just as a model to follow but also as a savior to whom one could turn for assistance. Buddha is one who thus comes *(Tatha-agata)* to help devotees to attain the desired goal of awakening and liberation and to impart benefits for living in this world as well, employing all modes of skillful means in this compassionate activity. These include the healing of physical ailments and the procurement of different kinds of needs in this life. Human beings not able to traverse the path of awakening by their own efforts need only to turn with faith and devotion to an All-wise and All-compassionate One. In so doing, they will receive not only all the merit and empowerment they need to arrive at the ultimate goal, but also all kinds of benefit for this earthly existence.

Given the above, we must also note that there is a stream in Buddhism that offers an entirely different way of responding to this question, What is Buddha? In the short, anecdotal narratives called koans (*kung-an* in Chinese) handed down in the Zen tradition, this question is posed to different Zen Masters, and is given what may be perceived as outlandish answers. These include expressions such as "three pounds of flax," "a dried shit-stick," "This very Mind is Buddha," "No Mind, No Buddha."

In a film entitled "Land of the Disappearing Buddha," widely viewed in undergraduate courses as part of the Long Search Series on world religions, the British narrator poses this question to a Japanese Zen Master. "What is Buddha?" Without batting an eye, the latter silently points to himself in response to the question. But immediately the Master goes on to point to the interlocutor as well, and says, "You are Buddha." Further, taking his stick and raising it, he says, "This is Buddha." The scene then shifts to another Zen Master of a different temple in Japan. Asked the same question, this Master replies: "For those who don't know, there is Buddha. For those who know, there is no Buddha."

It is also in the Zen tradition that a widely quoted saying comes up: "If you meet the Buddha, kill him!" This is a reminder that whatever notion one may have of Buddha, that is only a concept and, therefore, not Buddha. The point is

that it is necessary to get rid of the concept in order to experience the "real" Buddha, the One who is Awake. Such an injunction to kill the Buddha functions as the proverbial "finger pointing at the moon," which in fact echoes the way the second-century philosopher Nagarjuna referred to the Buddha:

> the Blessed One isnt is
> (isnt isnt) isnt is and isnt
> isnt isnt is and isnt. (MM, XXV, 19–20,
> in Beyer 1974, 214)

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2

Dharma

What the Buddha Realized, the Buddha Taught

The word *dharma* is a noun that comes from the Sankrit verb *dhr,* which means "to hold," or "to sustain." *Dharma* thus refers to "that which sustains, or holds together." This is an important notion in the Hindu tradition, referring to the duty of every member of that society to live according to the norms suited to his or her status in life, which thus holds society together. New horizons of meaning in this term emerged in Buddhism as it came to signify "what the Buddha realized."

Siddhartha Gautama realized the Dharma, and became an Awakened One, a Buddha. He subsequently taught others the way to awakening that he himself had realized. Dharma in its Buddhist usage thus refers primarily to the liberating Truth that the Buddha realized and secondarily to the teaching offered by the Buddha to others as a way to this realization.

The question of the nature and content of the Dharma takes us right to the heart of what Buddhism is all about. Adherents seek to understand the Dharma in order to experience it and live its implications in their own lives, taking the life and teachings of the Buddha as a guide. Scholars, who may or may not be adherents or practitioners, study the Dharma to shed further light on the Buddha's view of reality and also on what the Buddha taught.

In this chapter we consider the Buddha's Dharma in these two senses: what the Buddha realized, and what the Buddha taught. We will first look at Dharma in Early Buddhism, and then Dharma as presented in Mahayana, or Great Vehicle.

THE WORD OF THE BUDDHA

Tradition has it that soon after the Buddha's passing, five hundred *arhats*, followers accomplished in wisdom and discipline, gathered together in formal assembly to determine precisely what the Buddha had taught. Out of this arose

an oral tradition consisting of two clusters of material. The first, the Sutra Pitaka (Basket of Discourses), is a collection of the Buddha's discourses in various situations, generally in response to questions posed to him by followers, or in the form of anecdotes and aphorisms.The second, the Vinaya Pitaka (Basket of Discipline), is a collection of rules for monastic life that came to be formed as followers banded together in communities with disciplinary guidelines held in common.

These two clusters, together with a third compiled at a later stage, the Abhidharma Pitaka (Basket of Expositions on the Dharma), came to form the Buddhist canonical corpus called the Tripitaka, or Three Baskets, preserved in the Pali language. Pali is closely related to Ardha Magadhi, the actual language the Buddha was most likely to have spoken, according to scholars. Handed down orally for several centuries, these accounts were put in writing around the first century BCE. There are also versions of these texts translated into Chinese and into Tibetan.The process whereby all this material came to be compiled and edited took several centuries. The fully formed Pali canon dates from around the fifth century CE.

The Sutra Pitaka consists of five collections (Nikayas): (in Pali form) the Long *(Digha)*, Middle-Length *(Majjhima)*, Sorted *(Samyutta)*, Numerical *(Anguttara)*, and Minor *(Khuddaka)*. The last mentioned includes well-known texts such as the Dhammapada, a compendium of Buddhist wisdom in verse, the Sutta Nipata, a collection said to contain elements from the earliest strata of tradition, and the Jatakas, stories depicting meritorious deeds of Gautama in previous lives, culled from Indian popular lore.

The Vinaya Pitaka contains rules for behavior conducive to awakening; it includes monastic precepts for men and women, as well as measures to be taken when these precepts are transgressed. In the fully developed form, there are 227 rules to be followed by male monastics, and 311 by female monastics.

The Abhidarma Pitaka comprises elaborate commentaries on the discourses of the Buddha, as well as philosophical treatises delineating realms of valid knowledge or analyzing various constituents of existence. These analytical attempts are part of the pursuit of wisdom engaged upon by the Buddha's followers, aimed at clarifying the status of things "as they truly are." In this light it was inevitable that differing views would arise, and successive divisions brought about at least eighteen different schools of thought within the Buddhist *sangha.*

What was held in common, however, was the acceptance of "the word of the Buddha" as authoritative in matters pertaining to the quest for awakening and ultimate realization. The Buddha was regarded as having opened a way to liberation that no other teacher had done. Thus, his status came to be elevated in the mind of his followers, from that of a human being who realized the way to freedom and inner peace, to an all-knowing, all-compassionate being, "the eye of the world," "the embodiment of wisdom" (MN, I, 111), "the god of gods, greater than Sakka, greater than Brahma" (VM 2), who had supreme authority over all truth.

This authority of the Buddha was invoked likewise in Mahayana scriptures, composed between five hundred and one thousand years after his death. These scriptures open with the traditional phrase, "Thus I heard," ascribing the contents

not to the historical Shakyamuni Buddha, but to the Buddha's Dharma-body, understood as a continuing presence that guides seekers in the path of awakening.

DHARMA IN EARLY BUDDHISM

The Four Ennobling Truths: Path to Well-being

The discourse traditionally regarded as the first delivered by the Buddha after the experience of enlightenment is known as "Turning of the Wheel of Dharma" (SN, V, 420ff.):

> At one time the Blessed One was staying in Deer Park, in the place where hermits dwell, in Baranasi. Then the Blessed One addressed the group of five bhikkus.
>
> Bhikkus, there are two extremes that should not be practiced by one who has gone forth. What are those extremes? One is to be devoted to sensual pleasures, given up to the desires; this is base, vulgar, the action of an ordinary foolish person, unworthy and unprofitable. The other is to mortify the self; this is painful, unworthy, and unprofitable. By avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata has gained realization in the Middle Way, which gives rise to insight, which gives rise to awareness, and which leads to peace, to superior knowledge, to enlightenment, and to *nirvana.*

This recalls Gautama's own earlier life experience, having wallowed in the one extreme of sensual pleasure and pursuit of desire for many years, and then going to the other extreme of severe mortification right after he embarked on his journey seeking enlightenment. It was his arrival at this Middle Way that ushers in the pivotal experience that transformed his entire life.

This Middle Way, the discourse continues, consists in the truth of the Eightfold Path, the fourth of a set of Ennobling Truths that lay out the Buddha's view of human existence. Continuing from the above, the Four Ennobling Truths are enumerated and summarized:

> This is the ennobling truth of *duhkha.* Birth is *duhkha*, old age is *duhkha*, illness is *duhkha*, death is *duhkha*. To meet with those we despise is *duhkha*, to part from those we love is *duhkha*. Not to obtain our desires is *duhkha*. In brief, the predisposition to cling to the five components of existence is *duhkha*.
>
> This is the ennobling truth of the cause of *duhkha*. It is the craving that leads to rebirth, connected with pleasure and lust, finding delight here and there: that is, craving for sensual desires, craving for existence, craving for the end of existence.
>
> This is the ennobling truth of the cessation of *duhkha*. It is the cessation that is the complete separation from craving, its abandonment, release from it, the absence of attachment to it.

> This is the ennobling truth of the way leading to the cessation of *duhkha*. It is in truth the Ennobling Eightfold Path, that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration . . .
>
> Monks, since in truth my knowledge and insight into the reality of these four ennobling truths . . . were perfectly purified, I could now call myself one who had actually attained true and supreme enlightenment among all living beings . . . And knowledge and insight arose within me: "My liberation is unshakable. This is my last existence. Therefore I will not be reborn again."

In the above translation I use the Sanskrit term *duhkha (dukkha* in Pali), rather than using the usual English translation, "suffering" or "pain." Renderings of *duhkha* as "suffering" or "pain" may convey the impression that Buddhism teaches a pessimistic view of life. Rather than being pessimistic, the Buddha's message can be better described as starkly realistic.

The first of the Four Ennobling Truths is a call to recognize the "dis-eased" state of our human situation. This first Ennobling Truth is not a life-negating proclamation that all is pain and suffering; rather, it is an invitation to consider the fact that human existence as we know it is marked by dissatisfactoriness, by a state of dysfunction, by sense of unfulfilled longing. The term *duhkha* comes from a compound evoking the image of a wheel that is dislocated or off center. In short, the first Ennobling Truth calls our attention to a kind of experience we humans inevitably encounter at some point of our earthly life—that "there is something amiss" in all this. Thus we humans can never be satisfied with the kinds of things available to us in our phenomenal life, that is, our life lived on the surface level of our consciousness.

An experiential appreciation of the first Ennobling Truth involves the realization of the basic dissatisfaction in a life lived in the pursuit of finite goals. This can be regarded as the first "moment" in the journey toward enlightenment. Such a moment can also be described as the beginning stirrings of the religious impulse, when a human being, seeing the fruitlessness of certain finite pursuits, begins to ask, "What is the point of it all?"

Augustine of Hippo exclaimed that "our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee" (*Confessions*, I, 5). In this utterance Augustine was attesting to the fact that the human spirit is made for nothing less than the realization of what is Infinite, identified in this case with the living God of the Jewish and Christian traditions. This restless heart is a "symptom" of our human finitude, calling upon us to admit that nothing finite can satisfy the inherent longings of the human spirit.

This is a view of the human condition likewise found in the Hindu tradition with which Siddhartha Gautama was undoubtedly familiar. In brief, the Hindu tradition affirms four basic wants of the human being (see Chapter 1). The first three, pleasure, power, and duty, are on the finite realm, while the fourth, liberation, refers to the longing in the human heart for nothing less than the infinite. The entire Hindu tradition is an affirmation of this dynamism of the human heart

toward the infinite, an attestation that the only true satisfaction for human beings lies beyond what this finite world can offer.

Siddhartha Gautama had become disaffected with this tradition for various reasons, but he could not set aside a pursuit that this tradition also had regarded as its underlying goal and central concern. His act of renunciation of his worldly status marked the inauguration of his religious search. This is also his attestation to the urgency and seriousness of the demand brought upon one's life by the experiential appreciation of this first Ennobling Truth.

Arrival at the kind of experience formulated in the first Ennobling Truth ushers in a question: What is the cause of this dissatisfaction that marks human existence? The second Ennobling Truth pinpoints the source: craving. What is it that humans crave, that results in a sense of dissatisfaction in the whole enterprise? This can be summarized as "craving for sensual pleasure, craving for existence, craving for the end of existence."

The craving for sensual pleasure may be temporarily appeased with the satisfaction of certain conditions that lead to pleasure of different sorts, whether of the palate, visual, auditory, tactile, aromatic, or other. It may be the pleasure of attaining an object of one's desires, like a palatial house, or flashy car, or an ideal partner or trophy spouse, and so on. Houses decay, cars get damaged with wear and tear or with collisions, partners or spouses age, get sick, and die. In short, a relentless pursuit of this craving for sensual pleasure results only in more craving, and thereby more dissatisfaction.

Craving for existence refers to that deep desire in our being to perpetuate ourselves in some form, which leads to all kinds of human projects negating our mortality. Philosophers and psychologists have inquired into this drive in the human spirit and have come up with various depictions of human ways of coping with our finitude, only aggravating the cycle of dissatisfaction.

Craving for nonexistence, on the other hand, is that which arises in us in the light of this sense of dissatisfaction, thinking that we can solve our human condition by "putting an end to it all." This death wish is only the opposite side of the craving for self-perpetuation. The law of *karma*, firmly entrenched in Hindu culture and also in those cultures that received its influence, lies in the background of this Buddhist insight that the pursuit of this craving for nonexistence is a misguided, fruitless one, leading to further unsatisfactory outcomes.

Buddhist commentaries have unpacked this root cause of dissatisfaction further, describing a threefold set of poisons: lust, animosity, and delusion (also rendered as greed, anger, and ignorance). Lust or greed is the inordinate desire of the ego to bolster itself and to enhance itself through various means. Animosity or anger flares up when this ego does not get what it wants and leads to a conflictual or violent attitude and behavior toward others. Ignorance or delusion is a state of not-knowing, whereby this misguided or deluded ego acts against its own interests, not realizing the implications of its actions and further generating lustful and anger-motivated attitudes and action.

Seeing the root cause of this unsatisfactory mode of existence gives us the key to its eradication. This state whereby the root cause has been extinguished is what the third Ennobling Truth proclaims. This state of cessation of *duhkha* is

the *summum bonum* (highest good) of the Buddhist tradition, a state described as *nirvana.* This is what one arrives at in the realization of "things as they truly are," that is, without delusion.

The path to this *summum bonum* is unpacked in the fourth Ennobling Truth, presented as an eightfold path. This consists of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These eight steps in the path can be considered not necessarily as a linear progression but rather as a spiral path leading one deeper and deeper and more firmly entrenched in the Path of Awakening.

Elements of the eightfold Path of Awakening can also be regrouped as the three pillars of the awakened life. The three pillars involve disciplined Conduct *(sila)*, Concentration *(samadhi)*, and Understanding or Wisdom *(prajna)*. Right view and right intention refer to the third pillar of Wisdom, while right speech, right action, and right livelihood pertain to the first pillar of Conduct. Right effort, mindfulness, and concentration are stages of the awakened life subsumed under the second pillar.

Three Marks of Dharma

As we examine the content of the Buddha's message, we need to keep in mind his fundamental stance, described in the previous chapter, in the section on the Buddha as Teacher. We noted how the Buddha was not propounding another metaphysical view or speculative truth on the same level as the various views taught by teachers of the time. Rather, he was offering a way of resolving the problematic of a dissatisfactory human existence. The Buddha's Dharma is presented not as a doctrine to be believed but rather as a liberating truth to be lived.

This liberating truth that was realized, embodied, and taught by the Buddha is described as having three distinctive features. These are called the three marks of Dharma, or three indications of the way things are. These three marks are impermanence (*anitya* in Sanskrit), unsatisfactoriness *(duhkha)*, and selflessness *(anatman)*. "Whether Buddhas arise, O monks, or whether Buddhas do not arise, this is the way things are: all [the world's] constituents are impermanent . . . all its constituents are unsatisfactory . . . all its constituents are selfless" (AN, III, 134). Whether or not there are Buddhas who come into this world and teach it to others or not, "the way things are" remains unchanged. That is, all things that constitute this phenomenal world are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. To realize that "the way things are," just as they are, is characterized by these three features is the key to becoming awakened, to becoming a Buddha.

> "Monks, what do you think? Is material form permanent or impermanent?"
>
> "Impermanent, venerable sir."
>
> "Is what is impermanent dissatisfactory, or conducive to happiness?"
>
> "Dissatisfactory, venerable sir."
>
> "Is what is impermanent, dissatisfactory, and subject to change fit to be regarded thus: "This is mine, this I am, this is my self?"
>
> "No, venerable sir." (MN, 22, I, 138)

All material form is impermanent, dissatisfactory, and selfless. After presenting the character of material form, the passage goes on to consider the other four constituents of existence as understood in the Buddhist world view. In short, feeling, perception, sensation, and consciousness are also characterized by these three marks of impermanence, dissatisfactoriness, and selflessness. The experiential realization of these three fundamental marks of our human existence is the key to liberation, to *nirvana*.

Let us examine and reflect on these three marks more closely.

Experiencing Impermanence

The sense of the impermanence of human life is an experience that cuts across cultural or religious boundaries. Coming face to face with the fact of one's mortality is a fundamental human experience that no one can escape. And this brings about the question that highlights the human problematic: Knowing that I will someday die, how may I live to the full?

The Sutta Nipata, a collection said to contain earliest strata of scriptures, describes this in graphic ways:

> A being, once born, is going to die, and there is no way out of this. When old age arrives, or some other cause, then there is death. This is the way it is with living beings.
>
> When fruits become ripe, they may fall in the early morning. In just the same way, a being, once born, may die at any moment.
>
> Just as the clay pots made by the potter tend to end up being shattered, so it is with the life of mortals.
>
> Both the young and the old, whether they are foolish or wise, are going to be trapped by death. All beings move toward death.
>
> They are overcome by death. They go to the other world. And then not even a father can save his son, or a family its relatives.
>
> Look: while relatives are watching, tearful and groaning, men are carried off one by one, like cattle being fed to the slaughter. (Sn, 575–80)

A stark look at the realities of this life on earth brings home that indeed there is nothing that one can hold on to and say, "This is forever." Face to face with one's impending death, one is able to see the tentative nature of all other things associated with one's life: social position, economic status, cherished projects, or life goals. One is no longer able to take these things for granted. One also sees those persons in one's immediate circle of loved ones, on whom one relies for support, in this light of impermanence.

Under this light our earthly pursuits—for pleasure, for power and fame, for more possessions—come to be seen as misdirected attempts to fill in a lack we are feeling from within:

> One who desires different sense objects, such as estates, gardens, gold, money, horses, servants, relations—passions will overpower such a one, dangers and pains will follow, as water leaks into a wrecked ship. (Sn, 769–70)

Such pursuits, in other words, are bound to leave us dissatisfied and more frustrated:

> If one who desires sensual pleasures is successful, such a one will certainly be gratified, having obtained what a mortal wishes for.
>
> But if those sensual pleasures are denied to the person who desires and wishes for them, that one will suffer as one pierced with arrows. (Sn, 766–67)

Yet, even the instant gratification received at finding a fulfillment of one's desires does not guarantee true and lasting satisfaction, as such a person will only be hankering for more.

Those who are bound to worldly pleasures, conditioned by craving, are difficult to liberate. They cannot be liberated by others. Perceiving their past and future indulgence, they hanker after sensual satisfaction.

> Those who are greedy, engage in and are infatuated by sensual pleasures, who remain stingy in a miserable state, wail: "What will happen to us after death?" . . .
>
> I observe these trembling beings of the world given to desire for various states of becoming; they are wrecked who cringe at death, not being free from craving for repeated birth.
>
> Look at those who struggle after their petty ambitions, like fish in a stream that is fast drying up. Seeing this, let one fare unselfish in this life, while ceasing to worry about various states of becoming. (Sn, 774–77)

> At one time, I had wanted to find some place where I could take shelter, but never saw any such place. There is nothing in this world that is solid at base and not a part of it that is changeless. (Sn, 937)

This basic insight into the impermanence of human pursuits is not a monopoly of Buddhism; it is also found in other religious traditions. Hebrew scriptures, for example, offer expressions coming out of this experience of the transitory nature of human endeavors.

> All people are grass,
> their constancy is like the flower of the field.
> The grass withers, the flower fades,
> when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
> surely the people are grass. (Is 40:6–7)

When we look at the wise, they die;
fool and dolt perish together
and leave their wealth to others.
Their graves are their homes forever,
their dwelling places to all generations,
though they named lands their own.
Mortals cannot abide in their pomp;
they are like the animals that perish . . .
Do not be afraid when some become rich,
when the wealth of their houses increases.
For when they die they will carry nothing away;
their wealth will not go down after them.
(Ps 49:10–12, 16–17)

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
What do people gain from all the toil
at which they toil under the sun? (Eccl 1:2–3)

Underlying these lamentations of the fleetingness of life on earth is a longing deep in the human heart. The sense of impermanence can thus lead one to embark on a religious quest, a search for that which abides, for that which is absolute and eternal. "The grass withers, the flower fades;/but the word of our God will stand forever" (Is 40:8).

The monotheistic traditions, notably Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, also take as a starting point the fleetingness and transitory nature of human endeavors. These traditions then present views of ultimate reality centered on the notion of God that is absolute, unchanging, and eternal.

A Buddhist approach stands in sharp contrast with monotheistic approaches in that it does not posit such a notion of something unchanging and eternal. Although later developments led to conceptions of the Buddha as a trans-historical being, endowed with everlasting life, in ways analogous to monotheistic understanding of Deity, the Buddhist attitude discernible in scriptures from early times through the Mahayana and onward is nontheistic (though not a-theistic). Such an attitude does not posit a notion of permanence or eternity to be sought as a way of overcoming impermanence but invites the religious seeker instead to contemplate the impermanence that is a mark of our human existence and see right through it. In seeing through impermanence, "just as it is," and letting go of the aspiration or longing for something permanent beneath or beyond these transitory manifestations, liberation is realized:

> Overcoming desire alike for sensory enjoyment and their causes, comprehending sense impressions, not hankering after enjoyments, and not doing what is against one's conscience, the wise one does not get attached to what one sees or hears . . . the sage is not attached to worldly objects.

> Having pulled out the arrow of passion and faring heedfully, one does not crave for this world or the next. (Sn, 778–79)

The Buddhist message about impermanence, taking a step beyond the lamentation of the fleetingness and elusiveness of human pursuits, is an invitation to see it as it is, and find freedom in doing so: "So death and aging are endemic to the world. Therefore the wise do not grieve, seeing the nature of the world" (SN, 581). "Seeing the nature of the world" (as impermanent) is the key that opens the gate to the wisdom that brings peace. How? The Buddhist message is not one of searching for some unchangeable, impermanent reality "behind" these transitory phenomena of our earthly existence. Rather, it is an invitation to see this reality of impermanence just as it is, and in so doing, find freedom in accepting things as they truly are. This is the freedom of the sage who has realized that there is truly nothing to cling to and is thereby enabled to live the fullness of each present moment, just as it is.

This message is enshrined in a passage in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta, an account of the Buddha's last days on earth, placed in the mouth of Sakka, a ruler of the *devas:*

> Impermanent are compounded things, prone to rise and fall.
> Having arisen, they are destroyed. Their stilling is truest bliss. (DN, XVI, 2:157)

What this passage suggests is a way of overcoming the dissatisfaction coming out of the sense of impermanence, not by looking for and taking refuge in something permanent, absolute, and everlasting, but precisely by taking a straight and unswerving look at the fact of impermanence and letting go of an attitude of clinging, enabling things to pass in the way they do. This involves a stance of accepting things in the way they are, having set aside one's desire to hold on to any transitory phenomenon, or even to the idea of a permanent substance behind these things that come and go. It is in assuming this stance that one finds inner freedom. It is in this freedom that one experiences bliss.

There is thus a twofold movement in the realization of this mark of Dharma called impermanence. First, there is the rude awakening experienced by one who comes to be acutely aware of one's mortality, or of the instability of the things one tends to take for granted in this life. The first line in the verse above describes this movement. It can come home to one through various events in one's life, such as a sudden illness, the unexpected death of a loved one, and so on. The lamentations in the passages cited above come from this first movement of rude awakening to impermanence. It opens a person to a renewed spiritual awareness and to a religious quest, as with Siddhartha Gautama just before his renunciation. Such an experience may lead one to seek something immutable, eternal, transcendent. These qualities refer one to the notion of God in the monotheistic traditions.

The path taken by the Buddha, however, is not in this direction, that is, of a search for an immutable reality referred to as God. Rather, the Buddha's path invites a straightforward gaze at the fact of impermanence in its particular manifestations—aging, disease, death, and the dissatisfactoriness associated with these inevitable events of human life. This straightforward gaze, cultivated by the practice of meditation and supported by attitudes of mindfulness and the observance of guidelines for responsible behavior (the precepts), is what opens one to the second movement in the realization of impermanence. If the first movement is a rude awakening, this second is a liberative kind of awakening. It is an interior movement that frees a person from clinging to things that only heighten dissatisfaction; it enables one to take things as they are, as they come and go. This is the *stilling* of "arising and being destroyed," referred to in the second line of the verse above, which brings truest bliss.

We can liken the two movements in the realization of impermanence to a mundane experience, that of roller skating. Standing or walking with regular shoes on, we have a presumed sense of the stability of the ground under us, helped by the friction between the ground and the soles of the shoes. As we put on roller skates, however, and attempt to walk, we feel shaky and may lose our balance. If we try to walk with the same presumed sense of stability as with regular shoes, we will surely lose our balance and fall. In our unreflective consciousness, we tend to think of the phenomena of our worldly existence as solidly there and available for us to grasp and hold onto. But things fall apart, and we become troubled when this comes home to us. This is the first movement, finding ourselves on shaky ground as we put on the roller skates. Inspired by those who have mastered this art of roller skating, who seem to breeze by and roll along without any trouble, we try to get our balance by shifting our inner fulcrum from an attitude that seeks some stable ground to step on to one that lets our whole body go with the movement and be carried by the flow of things. This may take a period of clumsy attempts, of stumbling and falling, getting up only to stumble again. As long as we cling to that presumed sense of stability that held us up before putting on the skates, we will continue to lose our balance and fall. Once we let go of this presumed sense of stability and throw our whole body and mind into the movement itself, a new awakening arises. This is the exhilarating experience of being able to roll along and move freely on our skates without any trouble.

Dissatisfactoriness and Its Extinction

If, on the other hand, one is not able to go beyond the first movement and continues to cling to things and lament their impermanence, one only aggravates one's frustration. This is the second mark of Dharma, that is, *duhkha*, often translated "suffering," but which more aptly refers to a state of chronic dissatisfaction:

> Life is unpredictable and uncertain in this world. Life here is difficult, short, and bound up with dissatisfaction.

> One who grieves gains nothing. One is doing no more than a foolish one who is trying to hurt oneself.
>
> Peace of mind cannot come from weeping and wailing. On the contrary, it will lead to more suffering and greater pain.
>
> The mourner will become pale and thin. One is doing violence to oneself, and still one cannot keep the dead alive. Mourning is pointless.
>
> One who cannot leave sorrow behind only travels further into pain. One's mourning makes one a slave to sorrow. (Sn, 574, 583–86)

A basic feature of this state of this dissatisfaction is described as not having things in the way we would want. The following passage captures the central point of *duhkha*: "What people expect to happen is always different from what actually happens. From this comes great disappointment. This is the way the world works" (Sn, 588). This situation is likened to that of someone pierced by a poisoned arrow. One struggles on with the pain but does not take the step of attempting to remove the arrow:

> Seeing people struggling, like fish, writhing in shallow water with enmity against one another, I became afraid.
>
> . . . I had seen them all trapped in mutual conflict, and that is why I had felt so repelled. Then I noticed something buried deep in their hearts. It was—I could just make it out—an arrow.
>
> It is an arrow that makes its victims run all over the place. But once it has been pulled out all that running is finished and so is the exhaustion that comes with it. (Sn, 936, 938–39)

How is this arrow to be removed?

> One who is searching for one's own happiness should pull out the arrow that is stuck in oneself—the arrowhead of grieving, of desiring, of despair.
>
> One who has taken out the arrow, who has no clinging, who has attained peace of mind, passed beyond all grief—this one, free from grief, is still. (Sn, 592–93)

The arrowhead "of grieving, of desiring, of despair" that is stuck within us, comes from a basic delusion. To dispel this delusion is to free oneself from the root cause of one's dissatisfaction and thereby to attain inner peace and the truest bliss. This is the opposite side of the coin of this second mark of Dharma, namely, the extinction of the fires of dissatisfaction: "When a house is burning, the fire is put out by water. In the same way, the wise one, skillful, learned and self-reliant, extinguishes sorrow as soon as it arises. It is like the wind blowing away a tuft of cotton" (Sn, 591). This state, characterized by the extinction of dissatisfaction referred to as *nirvana,* is the subject of endless discussion and

speculation throughout Buddhist history. Here we will simply cite a few sample passages from the Sutta Nipata and present some of its features.

> The removal of desire and passion for pleasant things, seen, heard, or cognized, is the sure path for the realization of *nirvana.*
>
> Understanding this, those who are mindful have attained this tranquility of complete *nirvana* in this immediate life. They are calmed forever. They have crossed the attachment in this world. (Sn, 1086–87)

> There is an island, an island you cannot go beyond. It is an indescribable place, a place of non-possession, and of non-attachment. It is the total end of death and decay, and this is why I call it *nirvana* (extinguished, cool).
>
> There are people who, in mindulfness, have realized this and are completely cooled here and now. They do not become slaves working for Mara (Death). They cannot fall into Mara's power. (Sn, 1094–95)

The question of what precisely is involved in the attainment of *nirvana* deserves much more extended treatment, as it is a central notion in the entire Buddhist tradition. This question has been addressed in Buddhist commentarial literature through the centuries, and Western scholars have offered differing interpretations on its key implications. Incidentally, a later version of the presentation of the marks of Dharma includes *nirvana,* the stilling of *duhkha*, as a separate mark, to make a fourfold set in addition to impermanence, selflessness, and dissatisfactoriness.

We cannot go into further detail here on the discussions about this central issue, but we *can* affirm that this term *nirvana* refers to the other side of *duhkha* or dissatisfaction. And, as suggested by Pali texts including those cited above, it is a state that is attainable in this life, given certain conditions. The central condition for this attainment is the eradication of the causes of dissatisfaction. And at the heart of this dissatisfaction is a deep-seated delusion about the self. The third mark of Dharma is about the overturning of this delusion.

Selflessness

To go about in the world living under this delusion of a separate self is to live in the state of chronic dissatisfaction described in the previous section: "Look at those who struggle after their petty ambitions, like fish in a stream that is fast drying up. Seeing this, let one go about in this world without thought of 'self,' ceasing to worry about states of becoming" (Sn, 777). Seeing that one's life is spent going around in circles pursuing things that never give one true satisfaction, one is moved to seek steps to become free from such a sorry state. A decisive step one can take is to make an act of renunciation of those things that one pursues or clings to which only leave one dissatisfied. As we saw in the first section of the first chapter, Indian society at the time of Siddhartha Gautama included a subculture comprising those who renounced their socioeconomic

status in order to pursue a spiritual quest. These homeless renunciants, called *sramana,* were regarded with special respect and deference. There may have been different motivations for people to choose such a way of life, but a common understanding was that this way was a path of inner freedom that led to a higher satisfaction. The spirit behind this way of life was one of letting go of a basic attachment to all that was identified with "mine," regarded as fetters. In many cases such an act of renunciation of one's householder state involved not only relinquishing one's possessions and social status, but also taking on a new name to signify a clean break with one's old identity.

> People grieve for the things they are attached to as "mine," but there is no enduring object of grasping. Comprehending this situation, the wise one leads a homeless life.
>
> What one grasps thinking "this is mine" is left behind by death. Recognizing this fact, let not the wise one who follows the right path turn to acquisitiveness. (Sn, 805–6)

Gautama was one of those who had taken such a step of renunciation, and this step launched him into an experience and a discovery that was to change the course of human history. In his discourses inviting others to take the path of freedom and inner peace, the renunciation of the thought of "this is mine" is a recurrent theme.

There have been many treatments by commentators and Buddhist scholars, as well as debates between Buddhists and non-Buddhists in the history of Indian thought, on the import and actual intent of this doctrine of *anatman* (*anatta* in Pali). One recurrent question is whether it involves an ontological negation, that is, the denial of an entity that is called self, or *atman* (*atta* in Pali). The various philosophical viewpoints on the nature of the *atman* in Hindu tradition before and around the Buddha's time can be seen in the background of the emphasis on *anatman*, which came to be a cardinal doctrine and identifying feature of the Buddhist tradition.

Non-Buddhists point out an inherent difficulty in affirming this doctrine of *anatman* in the light of the widely accepted notion of *karma* and rebirth. If there is no *atman*, critics ask, who or what is it that is reborn? Another criticism of this doctrine of *anatman*, taken as the negation of the existence of a conscious subject, is the logical contradiction involved: if there is no conscious subject, who is this that is negating the existence of the conscious subject?

An important passage to note in this regard relates to a question raised by a follower to the Buddha as to whether the self exists or not:

> Then Vacchagotta the Wanderer went to visit the exalted one . . . and said:
> "Now, Master . . . is there a self?"
> At these words, the Exalted One was silent.
> "How then, Master . . . is there not a self?"
> For a second time also, the Exalted One was silent.

Then Vacchagotta the Wanderer rose from his seat and went away.

Not long after the departure of the Wanderer, the venerable Ananda said to the Exalted One:

"How is it, Lord, that the Exalted One gave no answer to the question of the Wanderer Vacchagotta?"

"If, Ananda, when asked by the Wanderer, 'Is there a self?' I had replied to him, 'There is a self,' then, Ananda, that would be siding with the recluses and Brahmins who are eternalists."

"But if, Ananda, when asked, 'Is there not a self?' I had replied that it does not exist, that, Ananda, would be siding with the recluses and Brahmins who are annihilationists."

"Again, Ananda, when asked by the Wanderer, 'Is there a self?' had I replied that there is, would my reply be in accordance with the knowledge that all things are impermanent?"

"Surely not, lord."

"Again, Ananda, when asked by Vacchagotta the Wanderer, 'Is there not a self?' had I replied that there is not, it would have been more bewilderment for the bewildered Vacchagotta. For he would have said, 'Formerly indeed I had a self, but now I have not one any more.'" (SN, 44, IV, 400–401)

This passage emphasizes that this third mark of Dharma, referred to as the Selfless, is not to be taken as a philosophical position on the same level as the sixty-two viewpoints cited and criticized in Buddhist scriptures. In consonance with his position on other metaphysical questions, the Buddha took a stance of silence. We will examine the implications of this below.

An alternative interpretation would be that the Buddhist doctrine of *anatman*, rather than being an ontological statement about the nonexistence of the conscious subject, is to be taken as an axiological, or value-oriented, prescription about how one should live. That is, one should live without being attached to the notion of "my" self, that is, in a way that is selfless. This prescription can perhaps be summed up in the injunction: Live selflessly, and you will find peace.

This interpretation of *anatman* as a prescriptive statement enjoining those who seek the path of inner peace to live in a selfless way has its appeal, in that it avoids the logical difficulties inherent in the doctrine taken as an ontological statement about the status of the conscious subject. But to take it one-sidedly as a prescription for living would make the Buddha's teaching a simplistic and moralistic message, one without any import on how we are to understand the way things are.

The following passage suggests a middle way for understanding the third mark of Dharma, between a mere ontological negation and a mere axiological prescription:

At that time, the Blessed One addressed a group of five monks.

"Monks, material form is not the self [*atman*]. If material form were the self, material form would not be subject to disease, and we could say of

material form, 'Let my material form be so! Let my material form be not so!' Since material form is not the self, however, material form is subject to disease, and we cannot say of material form, 'Let my material form be so! Let my material form be not so!'

"Feeling is not the self . . .

"Perception is not the self . . .

"Mental constituents are not the self . . .

"Consciousness is not the self . . .

"What do you think, monks. Is material form permanent, or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Blessed One."

"That which is impermanent, does it cause dissatisfaction or ease?"

"Dissatisfaction, Blessed One."

"Then is it good to regard that which is impermanent, causes dissatisfaction, and is subject to destruction, in this way: 'This is mine, I am this, this is my self?'"

"Certainly not, Blessed One."

. . .

"Therefore, monks, everything that has material form, be it past, present or future, inward or outward, gross or subtle, coarse or fine, far or near, all material form should be regarded thus, as it really is, by correct knowledge 'This is not mine; I am not this; this is not myself.'"

. . .

"So, seeing, monks, the excellent disciple who has heard the teaching . . . becomes detached from greed. Being detached from greed, one is liberated. One knows without any doubt: Rebirth is exhausted. Enacted is the pure practice. Done is what has to be done. No longer is there any return to the world." (SN, cited in GB, 258–60)

First, let us note that the above passage is not about negation of an ontological subject. That is, nowhere does it make a statement to the effect that "there is no self *(atman)*." Yet neither is it merely giving a prescription, saying, "Set the self aside, and live selflessly." Rather, the refrain is seen to be, "This is not mine, I am not this; this is not myself."

If what it affirms is that "this is not myself," one can ask, bringing out an implied layer in the statement, What then is my (true) self? In this context, what is being asked is not about an *entity* called self but about a way of being that is "authentically myself." So this notion of "self," rather than being negated, is taken to a higher level of inquiry.

The following dialogue between the Buddha and an earnest questioner seeking guidance on the path to peace also brings up this notion of "self" as a crucial issue to be addressed:

Master of Wisdom, descendant of the Sun, said a questioner to the Buddha. I wish to question you about the state of peace, the state of solitude and quiet detachment. With what manner of insight does a monk become calm, cooled, and no longer grasps at anything?

> One achieves this, replied the Master, by cutting out the root obstacle, the delusion; one eradicates the thought of "I am." By being mindful all the time one trains oneself to let go of all the cravings that arise . . .
>
> One has to avoid thinking of oneself as better or worse than, or equal to anyone. Coming into contact with various things, one should not embellish the self.
>
> The monk must look for peace within oneself and not in any other place. For when a person is inwardly quiet, there is nowhere a self can be found. Where then, could that which is not self be found? (Sn, 915–19)

This last verse is highly significant, describing that state of the selflessness one arrives at in the path of peace. Such a state of mind is characterized by having let go not only of one's clinging to what is "mine," but also of one's vain pursuits of what is "not yet mine." For such a one, then, since "there is nowhere a self can be found," "where then, could that which is not self be found?" There is no longer a line between what is of the self and what is not, and one thereby experiences a total freedom:

> When one does not identify with mind and matter at all, when one does not grieve for what does not exist, there one cannot sustain any loss in this world.
>
> When one does not think, "This is mine," or "That belongs to them," then, since one has no egoism, one cannot grieve with the thought of "I do not have." (Sn, 950–51)

From just these few passages of the Sutta Nipata, we can better understand this third mark of Dharma in the light of the other two. It is not a denial of the ontological existence of the ego or subjective consciousness. Rather, it describes the state of mind of one who has realized an authentic way of being, that is, having arrived at the Place of Peace and inner freedom. This emphasis on the Selfless is in consonance with the invitation to enter into the path that opens to the place of peace.

Interdependent Arising

The nature and content of the Buddha's awakening experience is often described as an insight into "the interdependent arising of all things" (*pratitya-samutpada* in Sanskrit).

The following passage from Pali scriptures presents this insight in a systematic fashion:

> At that time the Blessed One was staying at Uruvela on the banks of the Neranjara River at the foot of the bodhi tree, having just attained enlightenment. At that time, the Blessed One was seated cross-legged uninterruptedly for seven days, delighting in his liberation. Then the Blessed One,

emerging from meditation after those seven days had passed, during the first division of the night gave close attention to the principle of interdependent arising in direct order: This being, that becomes; when this arises, that arises.

That is, from ignorance arise the mental impulses, from the mental impulses arise consciousness, from consciousness arises the phenomenal world, from the phenomenal world arise the six sense organs, from the six sense organs arises contact, from contact arises feeling, from feeling arises craving, from craving arises grasping, from grasping arises becoming, from becoming arises birth, from birth arise old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, sorrow, despair. Thus arises the whole mass of *duhkha* . . .

The Blessed One, during the middle division of the night, gave close attention to the principle of interdependent arising in reverse order. When ignorance is destroyed, the mental impulses are destroyed. If mental impulses, . . . consciousness, . . . phenomenal world, . . . the six sense organs, . . . contact, . . . feeling, . . . craving, . . . grasping, . . . becoming, . . . birth (are) destroyed, old age and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, sorrow and despair are destroyed. Such is the destruction of the whole mass of suffering . . . .

Thereupon the Blessed One, knowing its significance, pronounced this verse of uplift: "When the principle of all things grows plain to the ardent, meditating Brahmin, he smashes the hosts of Mara, as the sun illuminates the sky." (Udana, Vinaya, see GB 198–201)

Underlying this passage is this "principle of all things," also called the law of causality, expressed as "this being, that becomes; this ceasing to be, that ceases to be." Or in a nutshell, as anyone caught in a difficult situation would be able to exclaim, "one thing leads to another."

The long passage passage cited above presents an orderly and logical framework that supports a conceptual understanding of this central teaching of Buddhism, namely, the interdependent arising of all things. But such a logical presentation may leave many of us cold and unconvinced, in ways perhaps similar to the effect of reading about the traditional arguments for the existence of God offered in the Western philosophical tradition. In short, these arguments may be cohesive and logically sound, leading to what John Henry Cardinal Newman termed a "notional assent," but they are not sufficient in themselves to lead to a "real assent," namely, an interior experiential event with power to transform our lives and our way of looking at reality.

Let us look a little more closely at the mind of Gautama in the midst of his quest for some clues of the experiential dimension grounding this logical framework presented in scriptures. Japanese Buddhist philosopher Takeuchi Yoshinori offers very cogent reflections in this direction:

The young Buddha is gripped by the problems of old age, sickness, and death even as he stands healthy and strong in the full flower of youth. He becomes aware of them as his own problems. He is said to be "troubled"

> . . . (in a state of mind that) implies an anxiety, a self-torment, a tribulation over some matter. (Takeuchi 1991, 109)

Takeuchi goes on to note how the young Gautama rejects an initial attitude that arose in him as he encountered old age, sickness, and death, that is, a sense of abhorrence and disgust at these as they occurred in others. This rejection is based on his deeply felt realization that these realities pertained to himself as well. Thus, this encounter with old age, sickness, and death leads Gautama to an existential realization of his own vulnerability and mortality. These realities have now cast a shadow on his entire mode of existence, hitherto preoccupied with the pleasures of the senses and the enjoyment of the good things allowed him in his state of life, including his pursuits of learning and martial arts. These realities have now ceased to be merely issues involving others but have hit the young Gautama's heart and mind like a poisoned arrow. Takeuchi continues:

> To take up the task of old age, sickness and death in a radical way, as a task that leads one along the path to *nirvana,* is to experience a total conversion from one's former way of living. This is the essence of leaving home and cutting oneself off from the world. This way of living, which entails cutting oneself off from desires, giving up material possessions, and embracing a life of purity, means finding in this path to existential awakening the way of absolute truth; it means turning to it and trusting in it, becoming settled in it in a state of non-regression. (Takeuchi 1991, 109–10)

The existential appropriation of the truth of "old age, sickness, and death," this universal problem of human vulnerability and mortality, becomes a pivotal moment in a given individual's life. This is the starting point for the religious quest.

In Gautama's case, after taking a few turns involving extreme asceticism and self-mortification over a period of six years, he comes to a ripe stage in his quest as he settles down to contemplate under a tree. One cannot emphasize enough that, for Gautama, it is in this settled state of contemplation wherein the truth of the interdependent arising of all things is effectively grasped, not as the conclusion of a process of logical argumentation, but precisely as an experiential realization that transforms his whole mode of being. Going back to the long passage cited above, the series of twelve links making up our human situation with its whole mass of suffering points to the root of it all in the first element, namely, ignorance.

Recall that in the discourse on the Four Ennobling Truths, the cause of our state of duhkha is traced to craving, with the implication that the cessation of craving is what ushers in liberation. In this account of the links of causation as the content of the Buddha's enlightenment, craving is indeed named as one of the factors in the series. But this account goes a few steps further, tracing the causes of craving and pinpointing the root of it all, namely, ignorance. Not knowing what really is, or how things really are. And this state of not knowing is what makes us think and act in ways that cause our own suffering and misery.

How then is ignorance dispelled? This becomes the central question of praxis, the hinge upon which the whole Buddhist enterprise lies. How can we cast away all the clouds of delusion that prevent us from seeing what really is, how things really are? The Buddha's state of awakening, incidentally, is also described as a capacity to see things "as they really are" *(yathabhutam)*. It is this ability to see things as they really are that grounds total freedom, perfect peace, and that also ushers in a heart of compassion.

The question for us, then, is how *is* ignorance dispelled? Or in reverse form, what is involved in seeing things as they really are? The clue to answering this is in the contemplative stance whereby the Buddha came to realization. Let us pursue this further.

Other accounts of the truth of the interdependent arising of all things involve nine or ten links of the series. In these accounts we note the absence of the first (or last) two elements, namely, ignorance and mental impulses. The accounts of the ninefold or tenfold causal chain instead begin (or end) with a circular causal connection between consciousness *(vijnana)* and the phenomenal world *(namarupa)*. The following passage begins with the image of two sheaves of reeds to illustrate the point:

> It is just as if, friend, there stood two sheaves of reeds leaning one against another. Even so, friend, the phenomenal world comes about conditioned by consciousness, consciousness conditioned by the phenomenal world, the six senses conditioned by the phenomenal world, and so on—such is the arising of this entire mass of suffering.
>
> If, friend, I were to pull toward me one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall; if I were to pull toward me the other, the former would fall.
>
> Even so, friend, from the ceasing of the phenomenal world, consciousness ceases; from the ceasing of consciousness, the phenomenal world ceases; from the ceasing of the phenomenal world, the six senses cease, and similarly is there ceasing of contact, feelings, craving, clinging, being, birth, old age and death, and of this entire mass of suffering. (SN, XII, 7, 67, 79–81)

One may ask, what on earth could be meant by this "ceasing of the phenomenal world"? Does this involve the dissolution of the universe, a return to a state of nothingness? This would be a nihilistic view, and an unrealistic expectation as well. Such a view was rejected by the Buddha and by the whole Buddhist tradition throughout its history. Further, what, if anything, is meant by the ceasing of consciousness? Does this mean a total blanking out of awareness, as in deep sleep, or death? This would likewise be a turn to nihilism or escapism.

A clue to help us in the pursuit of answers to these questions lies in the recognition that the above accounts arise out of the contemplative process. This is a clue that applies as well in our attempts to understand many significant passages in Buddhist scriptures, namely, that what we are presented with are expressions arising out of contemplative experience.

Once the two "sheaves of reeds" leaning upon each other are toppled in this experience of contemplation, the rest of the elements that together make up the dissatisfactoriness of our mode of existence fall down like dominoes. The additional two elements found in the twelvefold accounts, namely, ignorance and mental impulses, are seen in context as underlying causes of the delusion of "consciousness vis-à-vis phenomenal world," eradicated in the process of deepening in *samadhi* (Concentration).

In short, accounts of the truth of the interdependent arising of all things that delineate the nine, or ten, or twelve links of causation are to be read as expressions coming out of a state of mind in deep contemplative experience. As many passages in Buddhist scriptures describe, "Arising out of *samadhi*, the Awakened One preaches the liberating truth *(dharma).*" The preaching of this liberating truth then comes out of a certain mental state, an "altered state of consciousness," if you will, wherein the conventional notions of subject and object, cause and effect, before and after, and so on, understood in a dualistic mode, have ceased to apply.

These accounts of "what the Buddha realized" in contemplative experience offer us an invitation to embark on a journey similar to the one taken by the Buddha. This is the invitation to follow the contemplative path. It is an invitation to experience a dimension wherein we may resolve the issues of life and death, unfettered by attachments and unclouded by delusion. An invitation to let the noonday sun illuminate the clear blue sky.

The direct, experiential insight into the nature of "things as they are," coming out of the Buddha's contemplative experience and expressed as the doctrine of interdependent arising, was further articulated in various ways throughout the history of Buddhist thought. The notion of Emptiness in Mahayana was linked specifically to this doctrine of interdependent arising by second-century philosopher Nagarjuna (see below). The *Avatamsaka,* or *Flower Garland* (*Hua Yen* in Chinese) *Sutra,* a Mahayana text, gave a new and creative articulation to the doctrine of interdependent arising, taking the image of a garland of flowers as a symbol of this interconnected universe, or perhaps better, "multiverse." This sutra offers the image of the Jewel Net of Indra, whereby each element in the universe or multiverse is taken as a unique jewel that, lo and behold, reflects and contains every other jewel in the interconnected net.

DHARMA IN MAHAYANA: THE WISDOM OF EMPTINESS

The Wisdom Sutras

The Buddha's insight into reality came to be articulated in another way in the *Prajnaparamita* or Wisdom literature of Mahayana Buddhism. The key theme of the sutras in this cluster revolves around the notion of Emptiness *(shunyata).*

This notion came to the fore as a way of expounding on the Buddhist insight into selflessness, as related to the insight into impermanence. This came in reaction to

substantialistic tendencies in the then-current interpretations of the Buddha's teaching. Briefly, in articulating the notion of selflessness, Abhidharma commentators analyzed the universe into its constituent elements, or *dharmas.* The emphasis was that what we ordinarily call self is simply an aggregate of these constituent elements. The implication was that self as such did not exist, but that these elements did. The Wisdom sutras countered this mode of thinking, asserting that these constituent elements were also devoid of substance, or "empty" *(shunya).*

There are many versions of Wisdom sutras, generally named according to their length. Of these, a short form, entitled the Prajnaparamita-hrdaya Sutra, or the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, has been the most popular and has been the subject of many commentarial treatises throughout the ages. We will take key passages from this short sutra as our key for unpacking this notion of Emptiness:

> Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, practicing the profound Perfection of Wisdom, saw that the five constituents of existence are all empty of self-being, and was thereby liberated from a dissatisfactory existence.
>
> O Shariputra, form is emptiness, emptiness is form. Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness no other than form. The same is true for sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness.

We have seen Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva in the first chapter as an awakened figure who embodies the Buddha's compassion. This is the opening clue to an experiential grasp of Emptiness, namely, that its realization, which is at the heart of the profound Perfection of Wisdom, leads to a mode of being characterized by compassion. We will come back to this later.

This experiential grasp involves the event of seeing that "the five constituents of existence are all empty of self-being." The five constituents are form, sensation, perception, reaction, and consciousness. These are the elements which make up the human composite, as well as everything else in this earthly realm characterized by dissatisfactoriness. To unpack this initial proclamation that all five constituents that make up this earthly existence are empty of self-being, the Heart Sutra begins with the first of the five, with its classic refrain:

> Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form.
> Form is no other than Emptiness, Emptiness no other than Form.

To grasp what this initial affirmation conveys is to unravel the point of the whole sutra, just as the tumbling of the first domino in a series leads to the tumbling of the rest in the line. How are we to approach this initial and at the same time central pillar that holds the entire sutra together, not to mention the whole of Mahayana Buddhism?

In this affirmation, there is a "forward" phase, "Form is (no other than) Emptiness," and a "reverse" phase, "Emptiness is (no other than) Form." Let us look at each of these in turn.

Form is whatever we can see, hear, smell, touch, taste, and cognize in this world of phenomena. What does it mean to say that all of these things that we see, hear, and so forth—in other words, everything that we experience in this earthly realm—is Emptiness?

We can distinguish two movements here, quite resonant with the two described in the experience of impermanence. First, there is the awakening to the fact that everything in this earthly existence is subject to decay and death. All human endeavors are undercut by this realization of our mortality and finitude. This can occasion a reaction of lamentation, of a sense of insecurity, or of an inner state of mind that the existentialists call angst.

Another way of approaching this first movement is from the experience of dissatisfaction in the pursuit of worldly things as pleasure, power, and fame. Not attaining what one is pursuing leaves one frustrated. On the other hand, attaining what one seeks may offer temporary gratification, such as the experience of the rich and famous and powerful of this world. But this experience of gratification in attaining one's worldly goals does not lead to genuine satisfaction, as it only drives one to want more. Also, it leaves one with a feeling of insecurity that what one has may be taken away as life's circumstances change. So there is always an empty feeling that accompanies worldly attainment. This first movement in the initial affirmation, "Form is Emptiness," can thus be taken as expressing this experience of dissatisfaction with life lived on the level of sensory or worldly pursuits. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccl 1:2).

To stop at this, however, would leave one in a nihilistic frame of mind, and this would be a crass misunderstanding of the message of the Heart Sutra and of Buddhism as such. Indeed, there have been interpretations of the Wisdom sutras and of the entire message of Buddhism as nihilistic or world-denying, mistaking this first movement and not going further.

In the Buddhist framework meditative practice is a crucial component in taking one from the first movement, which is understood in this context as the arising of the bodhi-mind or mind of awakening, toward the second, which is the event of liberation that takes place with a shift in inner attitude vis-à-vis existence as a whole. This shift can be characterized as a letting go or an active stance of emptying.

In this second movement, the statement "Form is Emptiness" can be rephrased thus: "There is nothing in this world of phenomena that one can or needs to cling to." In other words, all clinging to form has been emptied, and therefore, one experiences a freedom of having let go. This happens with an active stance, that is, of emptying one's clinging to what one sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or cognizes. The active stance in turn generates a state of mind that is now free of attachment to all these things that belong to the world of form. One has been emptied of clinging to the objects of the senses, as well as to the very notion of a self, the subject that sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or cognizes, and in so doing pursues these objects.

This state of mind that emerges out of this second movement is described in a succeeding verse of the Heart Sutra: There is "no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; no color, sound, odor, taste, touch, thing." This does not refer to a blank

state of no-consciousness but to a state of mind characterized by the inner freedom of having let go of one's clinging to these sense objects, as well as to that notion of the subject (self) that clings. In short, objects of perception, as well as their subject, have been emptied, and so one proclaims inner freedom and liberation in saying: "Form is no other than Emptiness."

A glimpse of this realm of freedom expressed as "Form is Emptiness" can give one a sense of exhilaration and joy, and this in turn can lead to a new form of clinging. This is when one begins to hold on to this realm of Emptiness, conceptualizing it and making it into an object. This turns into what can be described as a "clinging to non-clinging" or the "attachment to non-attachment."

This tendency to conceptualize and thereby idolize Emptiness is subverted by the reverse phase of the central affirmation of the Heart Sutra: "Emptiness is (no other than) Form." Here, from that experience of inner freedom that comes from letting go of one's clinging, one is enabled to come back to the world of form, affirming each and every element in it, that is, each color, sound, odor, taste, touch, thing, as a manifestation of Emptiness. And in so doing, one is able to celebrate every moment, every act, every thought, every sensation, as expressive of a dynamic, unobjectifiable, unfathomable, indescribable realm that, for lack of words, we call Emptiness. This dynamic, unobjectifiable, indescribable realm we call Emptiness is manifested as such in each and every form we experience in this world of phenomena. From this perspective, the world of phenomena no longer stands before oneself as an object of one's perception. Further, one no longer exists as a subject that perceives these objects. Rather, each element ("object") in this world of phenomena, and that ("subject") which experiences these phenomena, are in themselves no other than manifestations of Emptiness. This reverse phase, "Emptiness is Form," indicates a "return to the world of form" with a new freedom and with the wisdom of an awakened mind, seeing each and every form in the light of Emptiness.

To experience each moment in this world of form as a manifestation of Emptiness is likewise to experience the world in the light of compassion. Having been freed of the notion of self as a "subject in here" grasping "objects out there," one is also freed of this notion of self as separate from other selves. In this way one is able to experience the world of form, the same world wherein living beings continue to be born, become ill, suffer in different ways, grow old, and die, in a most intimate way. From this intimate perspective, the suffering and pain, as well as the joys and hopes, of all living beings, are no other than one's own suffering and pain, joys and hopes.

This intimate way of experiencing the world of form, from the standpoint of Emptiness, which thereby ushers in the mind and heart of compassion, is represented by the figure of Avalokiteshvara, literally meaning "that one who freely perceives the world." Avalokiteshvara, in the Chinese rendering, is Kuan-shi-yin, or Kuan-yin, for short (Perceiver of the Sounds of the World). This is a way of perceiving whereby the seer and the seen, the hearer and the heard, are not separated but are manifested as having overcome this opposition of subject and object. Thus, the sounds of the world, specifically, the cries of suffering of living beings in this world of form, are "heard" by Kuan-yin as one's very own cry.

From this perspective, experiencing the sufferings of the world as one's very own suffering, Kuan-yin is depicted as extending her thousand hands freely to alleviate the suffering of beings in this world in multifold ways.

This is the One who experiences Form as Emptiness, Emptiness as Form, and thereby embodies this as compassion in one's life in this world of form. Understanding this key point of the Heart Sutra throws light on the other parts, relating to the other constituents of existence. In Buddhist history the Heart Sutra is regarded not only as a text that expounds on the notion of Emptiness, but also as a ritual formula whose recitation is believed to bring about the experience of Emptiness itself.

Elaborations on Emptiness through the Ages

This central message of the Wisdom sutras, expressed in the statement "Form is Emptiness, Emptiness is Form," has been taken up by commentators throughout the centuries, marking different developments in the history of Buddhist thought. One of the most important figures to elaborate on the notion of Emptiness is Nagarjuna (ca. 150–250 CE). In his main work, *Stanzas on the Middle Way (Mulamadhyamaka-karika)*, he takes basic Buddhist terms developed and analyzed in Abhidharma literature and employs a dialectical method to critique them and show logical inconsistencies inherent in these terms, thus emptying them of their conceptual content. In so doing, he is able to lead those who follow him in his argumentations to an intended conclusion: an "aha" experience that transforms one's entire way of seeing reality.

Stanzas on the Middle Way conveys the message that to "understand" Emptiness is not merely to comprehend the lexical meaning and the conceptual content of this notion. Rather, it involves an experiential event whereby one's common sense view of things, based on the supposition that there is a knowing subject and an object to be known, is overturned. Thus, one tends to suppose that there are those things out there, such as trees, barking dogs, or other people, existing in themselves. Further, one supposes that, given normal faculties, I as a conscious subject am able to see, hear, or know those things out there. Nagarjuna subjects these common-sense notions to rigorous logical analysis and, in the process, reveals the contradictions involved in maintaining that there are self-existing things out there, or that they are seen, heard, or known by myself as conscious subject.

A key point of what Nagarjuna seeks to convey in *Stanzas* is found in chapter 24, an analysis of the Holy Truths taught by the Buddha. Having shown the indefensibility of four positions, that is, holding that existing things originate "from themselves, from something else, from both, or from no cause" (MM, 1, 1), Nagarjuna presents the notion of "originating dependently": "The 'originating dependently,' we call 'emptiness.' This apprehension, i.e., taking into account [all other things] is the understanding of the middle way" (MM, 24, 18, in Streng 1967, 213).

In demolishing the common-sense notions held by people in their ordinary consciousness, Nagarjuna sought to lead those who followed him in his logical arguments to a realization of emptiness. In so doing, he had a "soteriological

intention" (Streng 1967, 170–82); that is, he sought to reveal the delusive nature of our common sense ways of thinking, in order to enable us to see through those causes of dissatisfaction and suffering in human life and thereby liberate ourselves from them. Such an event of "seeing" would be ultimately transforming, enabling us to awaken to the truth, just as Siddhartha Gautama awakened to the truth and became a Buddha.

Nagarjuna's approach of logical argumentation was taken up and further developed by the Madhyamika or Middle Way school, which later branched out into two main lines. One, called the Prasangika school, represented by Aryadeva, Chandrakirti, and Shantideva, maintained that the Buddha's awakening transcended all concepts and logical processes. They saw the task of philosophy as the demolition of all positions to a point of absurdity *(prasanga)*, without establishing one of its own. The other, called Svatantrika, led by Bhavaviveka, took the same path of logical argumentation but also sought ways of articulating Emptiness in autonomous *(svatantra)* propositions.

Another school that arose inspired by the Perfection of Wisdom sutras was the Yogachara, which focused on ways of realizing Emptiness through meditative practice (yoga). This school, associated with the brothers Asanga and Vasubandhu (fourth or fifth century), is also known as the Vijnanavada, or the Way of the Mind, from its view that the world of phenomena is produced by mind. It teaches that our ordinary mind is wrapped in delusion, which is the root of our dissatisfaction. We can liberate ourselves from this state of delusion and concomitant dissatisfaction by training the mind through meditative practice to see things as they truly are and thus become awakened.

The teaching of this school is summarized in the doctrine of the Three Natures, or three levels of mind. In ordinary consciousness we suppose the existence of things "out there" as independent entities. This is the "deluded" or "imagined" nature, the first level of mind. This deluded mind is influenced by the ego-consciousness, which is in turn based on what is called the storehouse consciousness *(alaya-vijnana)*, the matrix of all experiences. This storehouse consciousness is the container of all our experience, as well as the karmic seeds that are generated by our actions and our experiences. The second "interdependent" nature, or level of mind, appears as one is able to discern one's experiences as productions of consciousness. The manifestation of the third "perfected" nature, or level of mind occurs as we are freed from ignorance, having seen the interdependent nature of all experience and casting aside all delusion and attachment, thus realizing freedom. This level of mind is identified with the wisdom of Emptiness, which is the realization of *nirvana.*

Another development that sought to elaborate on the notion of Emptiness in Indian Buddhism is the notion of the Tathagatagarbha, or matrix of the Tathagata. This is the notion that all living beings are the matrix as well as embryo *(garbha)* of the Buddha. Its roots can be found in the message of the Lotus Sutra, which depicts the Buddha as a compassionate Father who cares for all living beings as his own children. It views all living beings as endowed with the innate capacity to become Buddha but also describes how this original nature is covered by impure elements that prevent it from becoming fully manifest, like dirty rags covering a

statue of the Buddha. The observance of precepts, the study of scriptures, and meditative practice are thereby understood not as efforts on the part of ordinary beings to attain a status they do not yet have, but rather as the cultivation of a capacity that is innate in all, toward its full fruition and manifestation. The Lankavatara Sutra, composed around the fourth century, presented an integration of Yogachara and Tathagatagarbha ideas.

A treatise composed around the fifth century CE by an obscure author named Saramati, entitled *Discerning the Jewel Lineage—On the Ultimate Meaning of the Mahayana (Ratnagotra-vibhaga Mahayanottaratantra),* offered a systematic treatment that brought together key Mahayana notions of Emptiness, of the Dharma-body of the Buddha, and of living beings as the embryo/matrix of the Tathagata in a masterful synthesis. This treatise, translated into Tibetan and into Chinese, was influential in disseminating the notion of Tathagatagarbha as a Buddhist way of articulating of ultimate reality in regions beyond India. This notion of the matrix of the Tathagata served an important role in the formation of Tibetan Buddhism. In East Asia it developed further into the notion of Buddha nature inherent in all living beings, understood as all-pervasive, timeless, pure, and in perfect bliss.

As Mahayana scriptures were transmitted from India into Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan, Buddhists translators constantly faced the challenge of rendering Buddhist concepts into a linguistic and cultural context that differed in so many ways from the Indian. In the process, for example, elements from Tibetan indigenous religion inevitably found their way into Buddhist articulations of doctrine and practice. Likewise, Taoist and other indigenous Chinese terms were often used to convey Buddhist ideas in this new milieu. Over the centuries of assimilation into Tibetan, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese cultures, Buddhist notions found new levels of development through the positive contributions of these differing cultural matrices. Incidentally, this is an engaging subject under study by scholars of religion and culture, with underlying questions of continuity and discontinuity in religious doctrine and practice.

Two Chinese schools of Buddhist thought that made major contributions in the development of the understanding of Dharma, especially in the further elaboration of the notion of Emptiness, are those of Hua Yen Buddhism and T'ien T'ai Buddhism. Hua Yen Buddhism is named after the Mahayana scriptural text that became its inspiration, the *Avatamsaka,* or *Flower Garland Sutra.* A key notion of this sutra is that of the Jewel Net of Indra, whereby the entire universe is depicted as an infinite interconnected web, with a jewel ensconced in each eye of the web. Examining each jewel closely, one sees that it contains the reflection of all the other jewels in this infinite web, and conversely, that each individual jewel is reflected on all the others. *Hua Yen* or Flower Garland Buddhism builds upon this image to present a breathtaking picture of the world of enlightenment, which is also the world of Emptiness. The Hua Yen school did not gain a popular following. It remained within small circles of monastic adherents, but its ideas found widespread influence across the Buddhist world.

The T'ien T'ai school is named after the mountain location in China that was a center of monastic practice and learning where its ideas were formulated. The

central figure of this school of Chinese Buddhism is Chih-I (538–97), known also as the Great Master of T'ien T'ai. Taking the Lotus Sutra as the quintessence of the Buddha's teaching, Chih-I integrated speculative theory and religious practice to develop a comprehensive and systematic framework of a Buddhist understanding of reality. A key doctrine he formulated is that of the Three Levels of Truth, which is a positive exposition of the notion of Emptiness.

In Chih-I's framework, the first level of Truth is that which affirms that all things are devoid of substantiality, as they are interdependently arisen, and are therefore empty. The second level then posits a provisional existence to things, as they are manifested as phenomena that have arisen interdependently. The third level affirms both the Emptiness and the Provisionality of things, as the Middle Way that integrates ultimate and phenomenal reality. There are other features of the T'ien T'ai understanding of reality that we will look at in Chapter 8.

THE SILENCE OF THE BUDDHA

The historical development of Buddhism is marked by the continuing attempts toward articulating the Buddha's insight into reality. These attempts have given rise to the various schools of thought and practice in Buddhism. Yet underlying all these attempts at the articulation of the Buddha's Dharma, there is another facet to be noted, equally important, if not more so, which marks a distinctive feature of the Buddha's message. This feature is manifested not in verbal expression but in the Buddha's silence. The German scholar H. Beckh has rightly suggested that the proper appreciation of this silence of the Buddha is of utmost significance for understanding of Buddhism as a whole (cited in Nagao 1991, 35).

Scriptures describe how, immediately after enlightenment, the Buddha stayed in his meditative trance for forty-nine days, relishing the taste of the Dharma that he had realized:

> At that time the Venerable Master was meditating alone, and there arose in his mind this thought: "I have penetrated this Dharma, which is profound, difficult to perceive, difficult to understand, peaceful, sublime, beyond reasoning, subtle, intelligible only to the wise. The people of the world, however, are given to attachment, and are sunk in their delight in attachment . . . Even were I to teach the Dharma, others might not understand, and this would be a weariness and an unhappiness to me . . .
>
> While the Venerable Master was thus pondering, his heart was inclined to do nothing and he had no thought of teaching the Dharma. (SN, I, 6, 1, in GB 228)

The passage goes on to describe how Brahma, the *deva* who was lord of the world, took on a visible form and implored the Buddha three times, that he should teach what he had realized to the others, as it would be a great loss to the world if

he were not to do so. At this, the Buddha, looking at the world with his enlightened eyes, was moved with compassion and resolved to teach the Dharma to others.

Here the Buddha's silence is described as based on the profundity of the Dharma, such that any attempts to explain it would not be understood by those still wallowing in their worldly attachments. The Buddha's silence in this context is thus seen as based on his discernment of the inappropriateness of any attempts at verbal exposition.

Another facet of the Buddha's silence is highlighted in the stance taken in response to certain kinds of questions posed to him by followers. We have already seen how the Buddha responded to a follower named Malunkyaputta in the previous chapter's section on Buddha as Teacher. To recap, in response to speculative kinds of questions, including whether the world is eternal or not, whether a saint or accomplished being exists after death or not, whether the world is finite or infinite, whether the body and soul are identical or not, and so on, the Buddha remained silent. The reason given in the scriptural text is that these questions have nothing to do with the prime concern of the Buddha, namely, liberation from this dissatisfactory existence and arrival at the Place of Peace. The parable of the poisoned arrow is brought in to illustrate the practical import of the Buddha's message, overriding any theoretical issues about the universe or about human existence.

The pragmatic or existential nature of the Buddha's message has been explained as the basis for the Buddha's silence on matters of speculative import. He was not offering another theory about the universe, or about ultimate reality, to add to the sixty-two known philosophical positions at the time; rather, he was inviting his followers to a way of life that led to inner peace and freedom. In short, his message was not about speculative truth but about liberative truth with practical prescriptions on how to arrive at this liberation, toward the extinction of the causes of a dissatisfactory existence.

This pragmatic nature of the Buddha's silence is related to a corollary view, namely, of the Buddha's agnosticism. This interpretation holds that the Buddha claimed no knowledge of such matters regarding the universe and ultimate reality, and further, in consonance with his pragmatic stance, rejected any need for such knowledge at all.

A passage in Pali, however, counters this agnostic view of the Buddha:

> Once the Exalted One was staying at Kosambi in a simsapa grove. Thus, the Exalted One, gathering up a few simsapa leaves in his hands, said to the monks:
>
> "What do you think, monks? Which are the more numerous, just this mere handful of simsapa leaves I have here, or those in the grove overhead?"
>
> "Very few in number, lord, are the leaves in the handful gathered up by the Exalted One; much more in number are those in the grove overhead."
>
> "Just so, monks, much more in number are those things I have found out but not revealed. And why, monks, have I not revealed them? Because they

> are not profitable, they are not elements of the holy life, they are not conducive to detachment, to dispassion, to cessation, to tranquility, to full comprehension, to the perfect wisdom, to *nirvana.* That is why I have not revealed them." (SN, V, 370)

The above passage is linked to claims about the Buddha's omniscience, which are made repeatedly in Pali scriptures. One of the titles of the Buddha is the All-knowing One, implying that with his realization of the Dharma, there is no sphere of knowledge in the universe inaccessible to him. Though knowing everything, he has not revealed to others all those aspects of Dharma that do not pertain to liberation from a dissatisfactory human existence. This is given as the reason for his silence on those matters.

An illuminating perspective on the Buddha's silence is offered by Japanese philosopher Watsuji Tetsuro, who understood the Buddha's refusal to affirm or deny certain propositions about the world, the self, and ultimate reality as a critical philosophical stance, not unlike Immanuel Kant's insight regarding the antinomies of reason. This stance of silence was based on an insight into the inherent limitations of the human mind, which presupposes a subject-object structure of knowing. The Dharma realized by the Buddha went beyond the range of what could be grasped in the subject-object mode of human consciousness and thus could not be articulated in verbal terms.

This ineffable nature of the Buddha's Dharma is given a dramatic rendering in the Mahayana, with the composition of the Vimalakirti Nirdesa (Sutra). Here the Buddha's enlightenment is described as the realization of the non-dual Dharma. In this sutra different followers of the Buddha each give a conceptual formulation of non-dual Dharma. Toward the end Manjusri exclaims:

> "In my view, when all things are no longer within the province of either word or speech, and of either indication or knowledge, and are beyond questions and answers, this is initiation into the nondual Dharma."
>
> Having expressed himself in this way, Manjusri then turns to Vimalakirti to ask for his view. It is the latter's response that is the climactic moment of the sutra.
>
> Vimalakirti kept silent, not saying a word.
>
> At this, Manjusri exclaimed: "Excellent, Excellent. Can there be true initiation into the nondual Dharma until the point when words nor speech are no longer written or spoken?" (Luk 1972, 100)

Mahayana scriptures frequently allude to the ineffability and inconceivability of the Dharma realized by the Buddha. This is in consonance with its character as Emptiness, described as transcending the opposites of being and non-being, having or not-having.

This ineffable and inconceivable character of the Dharma is further emphasized in the Madhyamika dialectics developed by Nagarjuna, with its characteristic Four Negations. Here, the ultimate Truth realized by the Buddha is emphasized

as neither (1) being, nor (2) non-being, nor (3) both being and non-being, nor (4) neither being nor non-being.

How then are we to understand the function of language in the light of this emphasis on the ineffability and inconceivability of the Dharma? The *Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, a treatise composed around the sixth century in China that became influential through the history of Buddhist thought, takes the term *Suchness* as the expression of this ineffable and inconceivable Dharma and suggests that "all explanations by words are provisional and without validity, for they are merely used in accordance with illusions and are incapable of denoting Suchness. The term Suchness likewise has no attributes which can be verbally specified. The term Suchness is, so to speak, the limit of verbalization wherein a word is used to put an end to words" (Hakeda 1967, 53). The last sentence is most significant in calling our attention to the use of a word "to put an end to words." This is tantamount to saying: "Stop all words! Words are worth nothing!" One cannot, of course, fail to notice the self-contradictory nature of such a statement, and is thereby stopped in one's tracks.

Chandrakirti, a seventh-century philosopher of the Indian Madhyamika school, wrote about the realization of Emptiness as the attainment of bliss:

> Our bliss consists in the cessation of all thought,
> In the quiescence of Plurality.
> To nobody and nowhere any Dharma
> By the Buddha has been preached.
> (Cited in Nagao 1991, 42)

This verse alludes to an undercurrent tradition handed down through the centuries in Mahayana Buddhism, to the effect that the Buddha, from the time of his enlightenment at thirty-five until his entry into *nirvana* at the age of eighty, went about for forty-five years preaching the Dharma, yet did not utter a single word.

This theme of the Buddha's lifelong silence is upheld especially in the Ch'an (Zen) tradition and highlighted in the following anecdote from a thirteenth-century collection entitled *Wumen-kuan (The Gateless Gate):*

> A non-Buddhist in all earnestness asked the World-Honored One. "I do not ask about words, I do not ask about no-words." The World-Honored One just sat still. The non-Buddhist praised him, saying, "The World-Honored One in his great benevolence and his great compassion has opened the clouds of my delusion and enabled me to enter the way." Then bowing, he took his leave.
>
> Ananda asked Buddha. "What did the non-Buddhist realize that made him praise you so much?" The World-Honored One replied, "He is just like a fine horse that runs at the shadow of a whip." (Case 32, in Yamada 2004, 168)

Ananda, the disciple closest to the Buddha, who served as the latter's attendant for many years, was a Hearer of the Word, a disciple of the Buddha who

relied on the spoken teaching. Hence, he was not able to fathom the depths that went on between the Buddha and the non-Buddhist philosopher.

This same message is conveyed in another anecdote from the same collection:

> Once, in ancient times, when the World-Honored One was at Mt. Grdhakuta to give a sermon, he held up a flower and showed it to the assemblage.
>
> At this, they remained silent. Only the venerable Kashyapa broke into a smile.
>
> The World-Honored One said: "I have the eye treasury of the true Dharma, the marvelous mind of *nirvana,* the true form of no-form, the subtle gate of Dharma. It does not depend on letters, being transmitted outside all teachings. Now I entrust Mahakashyapa with this." (Case 6, in Yamada 2004, 39)

These anecdotes point to a central event that happens in a realm beyond words, wherein a pivotal transformation occurs. In the case of the encounter with the non-Buddhist, this realm can be glimpsed in what occurred as "the World Honored One just sat still." In the latter case this realm shows itself as the World-Honored One "held up a flower and showed it to the assemblage."

> The verse accompanying this latter anecdote suggests
> this:
> "Handling a flower
> The tail of the snake manifested itself.
> Kashyapa breaks into a smile
> And nobody in heaven or earth knows what to do." (Ibid.)

The words spoken by the Buddha in both cases are tangential to this central event and can even be said to be entirely redundant, if not irrelevant. Yet, from another angle they also serve the function as words that "put an end to words." Such "turning words" are uttered at a moment when the interlocutor, earnestly seeking to realize the Dharma, is deemed ready for an inner transformation. They are uttered with the acknowledgment of their self-contradictory nature as words; they are uttered precisely as a way of pointing beyond themselves, to a realm that one can only behold as one sits in silence, a realm wherein the flower is seen truly for what it is.

The history of Buddhist thought is a history of the developments in understanding and articulation of Dharma. Yet a continuous tradition in Buddhism also stands by the affirmation that the Dharma realized by the Buddha is of such subtlety and profundity that it can never be put into words. The words that do emerge as attempts at expounding the Dharma are acknowledged as faulty instruments, imperfect expressions caught in self-contradiction. These expressions issue forth from the Buddha's compassion, seeking to open the ears of all who would hear, the eyes of all who would look, to the liberating power of the Dharma.

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3

Sangha

Companions on the Path of Awakening

The word *sangha* means "assembly" or "gathering." This term is similar in meaning to the Greek word *ekklesia,* a public gathering, or a congregation in public worship, which came to be translated as "church." *Sangha* refers primarily to the community or communities of those who seek to live in the light of the teachings of the Buddha. In this chapter we take a bird's-eye view of developments in the *sangha* over its twenty-five hundred years of history. In Part 2 we examine particular forms of *sangha* that continue to be active today.

TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY

A key feature of Indian society and culture throughout the centuries has been the pervasive influence of religion in all the dimensions of human life. This has had implications in the way society came to be structured and the way different groups related to one another in such a society.

There was an underlying belief held in common that one's individual destiny is subject to forces beyond one's ken. In the background of this belief is the notion of *karma*, which stipulates that the situations in which one finds oneself in this present life are the result of actions and attitudes from innumerable previous lives. Thus, if one is born in a low caste or in a situation of social disadvantage such as extreme poverty or physical disability, or if one meets with misfortune or tragedy in life, this is attributed to some evil or unwholesome act one has done in a previous existence, whose fruits are now coming to manifest themselves. Such a view easily lends itself to a fatalistic determinism, which can function as a hindrance to taking action to alleviate one's situation, or to giving assistance to others in such situations. Also in the background was the belief in various kinds of deities acting in various unseen ways that affect human life and society that one needed to deal with by appeasement, to prevent them from causing harm in one's life, or by supplication, to enlist their aid in accomplishing intended goals. This belief provided firm support for the religious system in place and also ensured special power for the priestly class,

considered as the official intermediaries between the populace and this unseen realm.

Based on the religious world view outlined above, there was a rigidly hierarchical structure of society that placed priests and warriors high on the scale, with merchants and laborers ranked in descending order. There was also a significant segment of society that did not belong in the circle, those termed outcastes or untouchables. Outcastes were considered religiously impure and even less than human by others. They were relegated to doing the menial or unpleasant tasks of society, such as cremating or burying the dead. Indian society around the time of the Buddha was characterized by a discriminatory and oppressive social structure that privileged some and excluded others.

Further, women were relegated to stereotypical or subservient roles in this social structure. Women were not permitted to recite or even study sacred scriptures, nor could they pursue their own independent careers. They mainly functioned to serve the interests of the men in society, as mothers, wives, and dutiful daughters.

In the context of this deterministic, hierarchical, and male-dominated society, the Buddha's message presented an alternative vision of human existence and human community. He and his followers came to actualize this vision with the formation of the *sangha*. For example, the Buddha proclaimed that it was not birth or social status that determined one's worth, but rather one's actions and behavior. The following passage from the Dhammapada is significant in this regard:

> I do not call one a brahmana because of one's origin, or of one's mother. Such is indeed arrogant, and is wealthy (based on origin, etc.): but the poor who is free from attachments, that one I call indeed a brahmana . . .
>
> That one I call indeed a brahmana who is free from anger, dutiful, virtuous, without appetites, who is subdued, and has received one's last body (through birth) . . .
>
> That one I call indeed a brahmana who does not cling to sensual pleasures, like water on a lotus leaf, like a mustard seed on the point of a needle.
>
> That one I call indeed a brahmana who, even here, knows the end of one's suffering, has put down one's burden, and is unshackled.
>
> That one I call indeed a brahmana whose knowledge is deep, possesses wisdom, who knows the right way and the wrong, and has attained the highest goal . . .
>
> That one I call indeed brahmana who does not hurt any living beings, feeble or strong, and does not kill nor cause slaughter . . .
>
> That one I call indeed a brahmana whose path the gods do not know, nor spirits, nor humans, whose passions are extinct, and who is an arhat. (Dhp 26)

This emphasis on behavior rather than place in the social hierarchy overturned the fatalistic and deterministic implications of *karma*. It served to affirm that a human being's worth depended on one's actions rather than one's birth origins. Holy, pure, compassionate acts make for a holy, pure, and compassionate human being, one worthy of respect. The Buddha's message was one of liberation from the shackles of the discriminatory and oppressive caste system.

The Buddha's *sangha* was a community of beings striving to walk together on the path of purity and holiness and compassion. People from all classes of society were accepted and welcomed into the monastic order as equals. Seniority in this monastic circle was determined not on the basis of one's social class or wealth or chronological age, but simply on the basis of the time at which one formally entered the community as an ordained monastic. Thus, a twenty-year-old monastic ordained one year would be considered senior to a sixty-year-old monastic ordained one day.

Taking the positive side of the notion of *karma* as "action that brings about concomitant effects," the Buddha discouraged any reliance on supernatural or divine forces and enjoined followers not to place any value or credence on the religious rituals of appeasement or supplication presided over by the priestly class. Instead, he encouraged his disciples to "rely solely on the Dharma, rely solely on one's own self" in the Path of Awakening.

A new avenue was also opened for women who sought to give themselves fully to the religious quest. This came about with the establishment of the monastic order for women. Although there was initial hesitation recorded on the part of the Buddha in taking this step, and though there were some provisions that placed the women's order under the guidance of male monastics, the significant fact was that such a women's monastic community was instituted. This gave women the possibility to free themselves from the stereotypical roles assigned to them in society, and to pursue an autonomous religious career.

In sum, the early *sangha* provided an alternative vision of society in the context of its times. This was a new kind of community that overcame the deterministic implications of the notion of *karma*, that challenged and set aside the discriminatory and oppressive features of the caste system, and that provided women with the possibility of liberating themselves from the restrictive laws and conventions that marked their gender.

Over the next centuries after the death of the Buddha, the community of followers grew in numbers and in influence in India. The teachings of the Buddha were also transmitted from India to neighboring countries of Asia and took root and blossomed in new areas, becoming part of the social, cultural, political, and religious milieu in these areas through the ages up to the present.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE *SANGHA*

Early to Scholastic Buddhism

From the time of his awakening experience at the age of thirty-five until his death at the age of eighty, Gautama Buddha devoted himself to presenting the

Dharma to those around him. In the course of his lifetime, more and more people chose to follow him in his way of renunciation, forming monastic communities of men and women, supported by numerous lay followers.

Tradition maintains that after his death, five hundred monastic followers led by Mahakashyapa gathered together in council to determine matters relating to the organization of the *sangha*. During this council, said to have occurred at Rajagriha, a place often frequented by the Buddha, the teachings were recited from memory by Ananda and the rules of monastic life by Upali. The teachings and rules of conduct were thus transmitted orally, in the form of short prose passages or verses for facility in memorization. Meanwhile, the *sangha*, consisting of the four types of followers (male and female monastics, male and female lay adherents) continued to grow and spread its influence throughout the region; it would become a critical mass in Indian society.

Roughly one hundred years after the demise of the Buddha, a general council was held in Vaisali to iron out differences in views regarding monastic regulations and in interpretations of teachings among followers. As its outcome, a large assembly *(Mahasanghika)* broke off from the group who sought to hold to the ways of the Elders that dated back to the time of the Buddha. This event is called the Great Schism in Buddhist history.

The more traditional group referred to their Buddhist path as the Way of the Elders (*Sthaviravada* in Sanskrit, or *Theravada* in Pali). King Ashoka, who reigned from 268 to 232 BCE, was converted to this form of Buddhism. In addition to promulgating its teachings all over India with edicts based on Buddhist principles, Ashoka sponsored missionary enterprises that led to its spread in Sri Lanka and other parts of Asia. The Way of the Elders took root and flourished in Sri Lanka for centuries. Here its followers succeeded in consolidating the monastic community, codifying its canonical texts, upholding and disseminating Buddhist values and practices in the wider society, and sending monastic emissaries to different places in Southeast Asia. The Pali scriptures as we have them in their present form were preserved largely through the Sri Lankan *sangha*.

In time, more divisions occurred among the monastic followers, leading to the formation of at least eighteen groups or schools identified by a certain position each took with regard to interpretation of Vinaya rules or of doctrinal matters. Adherents of the different schools set forth their positions in commentaries on the collections of words of the Buddha and on the rules of discipline; these form a third collection of material called the *Abhidharma,* literally, "investigation into the dharma." Abhidharma literature thus provides a rich source of information on the philosophical and doctrinal issues considered by the followers of the Buddha in the first few centuries of their existence.

Among the groups of scholastic Buddhism, Theravada was transmitted to and established footholds also in Siam (Thailand), Burma, and Laos, eventually becoming the dominant religious influence in these Southeast Asian countries. The ways in which the Theravada Buddhist *sangha* related to the socioeconomic and political structures of the respective societies in which it found its place and thrived for centuries offer themes for continuing studies. (We will examine further features of Theravada and its contemporary manifestations in Part 2.)

The Rise of the Mahayana (Great Vehicle)

Some five centuries after the death of the Buddha, developments among the followers led to new forms of religious life and practice. These came to be collectively known as the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, whose proponents set themselves off from a more traditional kind of Buddhism they derogatorily called Hinayana, or Small Vehicle. The latter, they claimed, focused primarily on an individual's path of liberation, whereas their movement sought the enlightenment and liberation of all sentient beings.

There are several features that are identified with the Mahayana movement, which involved both monastic and lay followers. One is the spread of the devotion toward relics of the Buddha, preserved in memorial mounds called *stupas*. These mounds were considered sacred places wherein devotees could experience the living presence of the Buddha. The Buddha's remains were initially divided and placed in eight locations in central India where they were memorialized in *stupas*. During Ashoka's reign, more *stupas* were built throughout the country, and these became popular pilgrimage sites among followers.

The practice of *stupa* veneration involved ritualized expressions, which included the offering of flowers and incense, music and dance performance, and other forms of public manifestations of devotion. Gradually there came about a consolidation of beliefs surrounding the practice, about the continued presence of the living Buddha in the sacred relics, as well as about the merits and benefits of such a practice. These beliefs came to be articulated with the composition of new scriptures that formed the nucleus of what later became key Mahayana sutras. These scriptures extolled the superhuman attributes of the Buddha and thus accentuated the character of Buddha as savior. Not just Shakyamuni, but numerous Buddhas were posited, reigning over their respective Buddha lands in different regions of the universe.

The Land of Bliss or Pure Land sutras, which describe the beliefs and practices related to the figure of Amitabha Buddha, and the Lotus Sutra, which presents Shakyamuni Buddha as a continuing presence who guides living beings in this earthly realm, were composed in this light. Land of Bliss sutras became the scriptural basis for the development of Pure Land Buddhism, a form of Buddhism with emphasis on devotional practice. The Lotus Sutra became the basis for a devotional as well as activist form of Buddhism, with an emphasis on chanting of the august title of the Lotus Sutra and the propagation of this practice as a way to the transformation of this earthly realm into a Buddha land (see Part 2 of this volume).

Another feature of Mahayana crystallized with the development of writing and the codification and transcription of oral accounts of teachings of the Buddha, estimated by scholars to have happened around or shortly before the first century BCE. These accounts, set down in writing in scrolls, were regarded as settings wherein the living Buddha may be encountered. Scriptural texts thus became objects of veneration in ways that sometimes complemented, sometimes rivaled, devotional practice toward Buddha relics enshrined in *stupas*. This is referred to as the cult of the book.

Also, with the Mahayana came a shift in the ideal of human perfection, from that of an *arhat,* or "worthy one," to that of a *bodhisattva,* a "being of wisdom moved by compassion for all beings."

At the heart of the Mahayana was the articulation of the nature of the Buddha's enlightenment in the *Prajnaparamita,* or Wisdom literature. Here the central term that came to be emphasized is *shunyata*, usually translated into English as "Emptiness." This notion of Emptiness was developed with sophisticated logical articulation in the second century by Nagarjuna, whose writings became the basis for the Madhyamika, or Middle Way school. Other writings attributed to him offered seminal insights that influenced the different developments, and he is thus referred to as the founder of the eight schools of Mahayana.

There were many other Mahayana sutras composed from around the first century until the fourth or fifth century CE, with distinctive perspectives on the nature of the Buddha's enlightenment, the workings of compassion, and the stages of the path. These scriptural texts were translated into Chinese, Tibetan, and other languages, and played their role in the spread and consolidation of the *sangha* in different regions of Asia.

Vajrayana (Diamond Vehicle)

From the seventh to the eleventh century a new form of Buddhism known as the Vajrayana, or Diamond Vehicle, flourished in India. It placed emphasis on esoteric ritual practice handed down from master to disciple, as a way to becoming Buddha. This form of Buddhism is also referred to as Tantric Buddhism.

Tantra is a word that scholars have found difficult to define in precise terms. Etymologically it means "loom" or "weaving" and also suggests an intricate kind of "essence." In the Hindu tradition there are scriptures called tantras, pertaining to ritual practice with cosmological or mystical significance, in contast with sutras, texts that convey doctrinal content. In Buddhist usage, this distinction between tantra and sutra is also helpful to keep in mind in understanding the significance of this term in history and in contemporary practice.

The Buddhism of the Diamond Vehicle, or Tantric Buddhism, refers to those forms that place emphasis on ritual practice involving body, speech, and mind in the realization of supreme enlightenment. Its conception of the ideal of the accomplished being is presented in the image of the *mahasiddha,* or "Great Adept." We examine this development in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The *Sangha*'s Global Reach

With its place of origin in India as a point of reference, scholars map out the geographical expansion of Buddhism and distinguish Southern, Northern, Eastern, and lately, Western Buddhism, as it was transmitted and developed through the twenty-five centuries of its history.

Southern Buddhism, predominant in the societies of Sri Lanka, Siam (Thailand), Burma (Myanmar), Laos, and Cambodia, is generally Theravada. Northern Buddhism, which previously referred mainly to Mahayana developments,

more properly refers to the Buddhist forms in Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, and parts of the northwestern area of China where Tantric practice is cultivated. Eastern Buddhism refers to the mainly Mahayana forms that spread in and through China, incorporating Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese developments. Since the twentieth century we can also map out developments referred to as Western Buddhism. This heading would include the different forms of Buddhism transmitted from Asia into the Western hemisphere, notably Western Europe and North America, which now form part of the religious landscape of these countries.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century there have been significant developments in Buddhism in different parts of the world. These can be seen as innovative movements departing from traditional forms handed down through the centuries. These new forms both in Asia and in the Western hemisphere offer new prospects as well as challenges for the cluster of religious traditions known as Buddhism. We will briefly list some of these new forms as we survey the prospects and challenges in the concluding chapter.

We now retrace our steps, first by focusing on some prominent individuals in the early *sangha*, and then by examining developments in the ideals of human perfection as presented in Buddhist history.

EARLY DISCIPLES

There are a number of names that appear frequently in the Buddha's discourses and in the accounts of the activities of the early community of followers. These are individuals in the immediate circle of the Buddha's disciples who also undoubtedly played key roles in the early community (see Nyanaponika and Hecker 1997).

Shariputra and Maudgalyayana were boyhood friends from affluent Brahmin families. As youths, they often joined with others in sports events and other forms of merrymaking. Experiencing a sense of impermanence in life in the midst of a feast, the two friends relate these sentiments to one another. They both resolve to leave home and possessions and become wandering ascetics. They encounter a monk who impresses them as a person of deep interior peace. Asking the monk for guidance, the latter instead points them to his own teacher, the sage of the Shakyas known as the Awakened One.

Both then seek out the Teacher and go on to become two of the closest disciples of the Buddha, assisting him in many ways and speaking in behalf of the Buddha on many occasions.

Ananda is another name that appears frequently in scriptural accounts. He served as an attendant of the Buddha for many years, until the Buddha's death. Ananda was of the same chronological age as Gautama Buddha, and had joined the renunciant community when he was thirty-seven years old. Having been a close companion of the Buddha for many years and having heard him preach the Dharma on many different occasions, Ananda, with his keen memory, became an important figure in the transmission of the teaching after the death of the Buddha. Ananda also played a very important role in the history of the *sangha*,

as it was he who interceded on behalf of Mahaprajapati Gautami when the latter sought permission to establish a monastic order for women.

Mahaprajapati Gautami, the aunt and nurturer of Gautama, stands out in history as the foundress of the monastic order of women. After the death of Suddhodana, her husband and Gautama's father, she sought to leave her householder status to become a renunciant. She did so, bringing with her five hundred women whose husbands had already gone forth either in death or in the renunciation of the world, and after repeated attempts, finally received permission with the intercession of Ananda.

In roles comparable to those of Shariputra and Maudgalyayana in the male monastic order, two women stood out as leaders in their community. Khema, renowned for her wisdom, and Uppalavanna, known for her psychic powers, were held up as role models for other women by the Buddha himself.

Kisagotami is encountered in a well-known passage about a woman whose young child has just died. She comes to the Buddha in desperation seeking help to find medicine that will restore the child to life. The Buddha counsels her to go and find a grain of mustard seed from a household "where death has not visited." In the process she realizes that death is a fact that cannot be escaped (see Chapter 1 on the Buddha as Teacher). Freed from her obsession with her dead child and experiencing equanimity in the face of death, she seeks refuge in the Buddha and his teaching and joins the renunciant community.

The disciple that was entrusted with the leadership of the community after the Buddha's passing was Mahakashyapa. His close association with the Buddha during the latter's lifetime, his charismatic aura, and the depth of his spiritual attainment combined to make him the leader sought by the community after the founder's death. The Buddha had high esteem for Mahakashyapa and had confidence in his understanding of the Dharma. In the Ch'an (Zen) tradition, it is Mahakashyapa who receives the Buddha's direct transmission of the Dharma, thus becoming the Second Ancestor. This is related in a famous anecdote describing how he smiled when the Buddha twirled a flower (see Chapter 5).

There are many other prominent disciples in the early community who are mentioned in the discourses of the Buddha or who figure in the various events and anecdotes concerning the early community. Their lives witness to the dynamic way the teachings of the Awakened One inspired countless individuals to a life of purity in the pursuit of inner peace, wisdom, and compassion. Their testimonies are left to us in verse form, put together in two collections entitled *Therigatha (Verses of the Women Elders)* and *Theragatha (Verses of the Male Elders).* The former includes 494 verses by seventy-three women, and the latter 1,279 verses by 264 men. These testimonies in verse are by men and women who attained the ideal of purity and perfection in the early Buddhist community. Let us now look at the features of this ideal.

THE WAY OF THE *ARHAT:* THE PATH OF PURIFICATION

In early and scholastic forms of Buddhism, an accomplished being on the Path of Awakening is called an *arhat* (worthy one). This is one who has been

purified of all the defilements that cause the dissatisfactoriness in human existence. The householder's life was considered inherently laden with attachments to worldly affairs and values that militate against the pursuit of awakening. Thus the way of life of the monastic who renounces one's home and all that goes with it, including family ties, material possessions, social status, and the rest, was regarded as the most suited for the attainment of this ideal.

The path toward this ideal of "arhatship" revolves around three pillars: disciplined conduct *(sila)*, concentration *(samadhi)*, and the cultivation of wisdom *(prajna,* or *panna* in Pali). The various aspects and implications of this path are systematically presented in a treatise aptly titled *Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification),* written by Buddhaghosa, a monk who came from India to Sri Lanka around the fifth century CE. This classic work is a valuable reference for Theravada Buddhist teaching and practice even to our day.

The treatise affirms that "Purity is to be understood as Nirvana, which is devoid of all stains, is utterly pure. The Path of Purification is this path to the purity [of *nirvana*]" (VM, 1, 5). The *arhat* is one who has reached the summit of this path.

Disciplined Conduct

The monastic life can be aptly described as a path of purification, geared toward the overcoming of obstructions to a life of awakening. Renouncing family life is a key feature in this step, and with it, renouncing sexual relations and all types of sexual activity. The monastic code takes this proviso regarding sexual abstinence rather seriously, with detailed rules for both male and female monastics and provisions for punishment for those who transgress these rules, ranging from expulsion from the community to public reprimands. In the fully evolved form, in place by the fifth century CE, monastic precepts include 227 rules for men and 311 for women.

The rules are arranged according to their gravity, with the first four requiring expulsion from the community if violated. These are the precepts against engaging in sexual intercourse, taking another's property, killing a human being, and making false claims about one's spiritual accomplishments. The next thirteen call for a meeting of the entire monastic community to determine judgment in case of violation. These are rules regarding sexual misconduct in various forms short of intercourse, taking shelter in improper ways, or engaging in acts harmful to the community. Thirty rules relate to improper behavior with regard to clothing, food, and medicine, violations of which call for confiscation of problematic items. The remaining rules govern comportment in speech and bodily action, the kinds of people one may or may not have associations with, observance of certain guidelines in entering towns or villages, and also procedures to be observed within the community. The crux of disciplined conduct is expressed in a well-known passage from the Dhammapada:

> Avoid evil, do what is beneficial.
> Purify the mind. That is the teaching of the Buddha.
> (Dhp 183)

Concentration

Concentration involves single-mindedness. Expounding on this state of mind, Buddhaghosa writes that "concentration has non-distraction as its characteristic. Its function is to eliminate distraction. It is manifested as non-wavering. Based on the words (of the Buddha, which say) 'Being blissful, one's mind becomes concentrated' (DN, I,73), its proximate cause is bliss" (VM, 3, 4). Attaining this state of mind is the lifelong endeavor of one set on the path of purification and is the gateway to the realization of *nirvana.* Voluminous accounts of the elements and stages involved in meditative practice leading to single-mindedness can be found in many scriptural and commentarial sources.

Single-mindedness is attainable on different levels or to varying degrees of intensity. Exercises in its cultivation may be either perceptual or reflective. Whereas the former involves the bare perception of a subject selected for meditation, the latter involves reflection, reasoning, and imagination that lead to deeper understanding and insight.

Detailed instructions for meditative practice are given in *The Path of Purification* (VM, 3–11). One who enters into the meditative path does so under the guidance of an experienced teacher, who will be able to discern the individual practitioner's particular state of mind and be able to recommend a suitable subject (or "object") of meditation based on one's temperament and needs.

Forty kinds of subjects are specified and recommended for meditation, which lead practitioners to an experiential grasp of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and nonself (VM 3, 104–5). Any of the forty given items can be taken as the subject of one's meditative exercise, leading the practitioner to the depths of concentration, and thus to the levels of absorption, or *dhyana.* At this point the meditative experience comes to be modeled on the process undergone by Gautama himself, described in early scriptures as having attained the four stages of *dhyana* that paved the way for his enlightenment.

In a succinct and well-documented study on Indian Buddhist meditation, Paul Griffiths describes these four stages of dhyana as "a series of altered states of consciousness characterized by an increasing degree of enstasy" (Griffiths 1993, 38). Griffiths uses the term *enstasy* (standing within) in deliberate contrast with the more familiar term *ecstasy* (standing with-out) describing mystical states in other contexts. He notes that "an enstatic practice . . . is one aimed at the withdrawal of the practitioner's senses and thoughts from contact with the external world and at the reduction of the contents of her consciousness" (ibid.).

The practitioner who arrives at the first stage is freed from desires of a worldly nature and also freed from hindrances to inner tranquility. These hindrances include sensual attachments, ill will, laziness, torpor, anxiety, a sense of guilt, and doubt. Thus liberated, one comes to a state marked by the presence of applied thought, sustained thought, and inward joy and happiness. Here the fruits of one's spiritual endeavor have begun to make themselves felt as an interior kind of consolation, confirming one in the path and leading on to deeper stages. The second through the fourth stages are characterized by an overcoming of these

consolatory marks of the first stage, and the practitioner arrives at a state of equanimity (SN, V, 307, cited in Griffiths 1993, 39).

The four *dhyanas* are described as ushering in a further sequential set of five altered states of mind. These are called the four formless states and attainment of cessation. One attains a state of mind transcending concepts based upon sense data and experiences a realm of infinite space. Transcending even this realm of infinite space, one then attains the realm of infinite awareness. Going beyond this realm of infinite awareness, one arrives at a realm where there is nothing at all. And going even further than this, one attains a realm of neither conceptualization nor non-conceptualization. Finally, transcending even this, the practitioner attains the state of cessation of sensation and conceptualization, dwelling therein, that is, in a state impervious to external and internal stimuli (See DN, II, 71, cited in Griffiths 1993, 40) .

The Pali term for cessation in this context *(nirodha)* is the same one used to refer to the third of the Four Ennobling Truths, that is, the cessation of the root causes of *duhkha,* which is identified with *nirvana*. This attainment of cessation, as a culmination of meditative practice, is thereby suggested as the attainment of *nirvana* as such. However, a closer examination of the texts would indicate that this attainment of cessation is subsidiary to further states that would then usher in the liberative state of *nirvana* or supreme enlightenment.

Up to this point the meditative act has been focused on a phase that culminates in the attainment of perfect tranquility, in this state of cessation of sensation and conceptualization. In Pali this is termed *samatha,* translated as "calming," "stopping." This sets the stage for the phase that leads to insight into the true nature of things, termed *vipassana*, literally, "seeing through." Whereas the phase of calming, or the cultivation of tranquility, is concerned with setting aside, turning away from hindrances or imperfections, and overcoming incomplete states of awareness and of being, the phase of cultivation of insight focuses on a sustained mode of awareness that sees things as they truly are.

Wisdom

The attainment of Wisdom involves an active stance of cultivating the mind's eye to enable one to see things as they truly are: "Wisdom has the characteristic of penetrating insight into the essential nature of phenomena. Its function is the abolishing of the darkness of delusion, which conceals the essential nature of phenomena" (VM, 14, 7). The cultivation of wisdom involves learning the basics of the Buddha's teaching as handed down in tradition, such as the Four Ennobling Truths, interdependent arising, the structure of existence as comprising the five constituents (form, sensation, perception, mental response, consciousness), and so on. As the teachings were put down in writing and the scriptural canon took shape, the reflective study and analysis of scriptural texts came to be part of monastic life.

As one progresses in understanding the Buddha's teaching of a way of life grounded in disciplined conduct and meditative effort, one enters the Four Paths in succeeding order. The first of these paths is that of the Streamwinner. Here,

one gains direct experiential knowledge of *nirvana* as "the signless, unborn, unconditioned, cessation" (VM, 22, 1–2). Even though it may be just a glimpse of that realm, it is sufficient to destroy three of the Ten Fetters that hinder full awakening, namely, doubt regarding the Buddha's teachings, belief in the efficacy of ritual, and delusion regarding the nature of the self. Having reached this stage, one will no longer be born into the lower realms of hell, the animal realm, or the realm of hungry ghosts.

The second path is that of the Once-Returner, so named because the one who has attained this will be reborn into the realm of humans or of heavenly beings only one more time. With deeper realization of impermanence, of dissatisfactoriness, and of selflessness, two more fetters, those of sensual desire and ill will, are diminished.

As these two fetters are fully overcome, one enters into the path of the Never-Returner. Such a one continues practice and deepens one's insight toward overcoming the five remaining fetters: (1) craving for existence in the realm of form, (2) craving for existence in the formless realms, (3) pride, (4) restlessness, and (5) root delusion, or ignorance, which is the cause of the chain of causation leading to a dissatisfactory mode of being. As these are overcome, one is thus ushered into the fourth path, that of the *arhat*:

> At this point, this *arhat* . . . is one of the Great Ones with all cankers destroyed. This is one's last body, has laid down the burden, reached the goal and destroyed the fetters of becoming. One is rightly liberated with final knowledge, and is worthy of the highest offerings of the world and its deities. (VM, 22, 28–30)

The *arhat* is thus called a saint, a worthy one, who has now attained the summit of the path. The task is finished, the burden is put down, the path of purification realized. Even in continuing to live in this physical life, one already experiences the peace and joy of *nirvana*, and upon one's biological death, one will attain *Nirvana* Without Remainder.

THE BODHISATTVA PATH: WAY OF COMPASSION

The institutionalization of the *sangha* resulted in a new hierarchy among Buddhist followers. It is against this background that we can situate spiritual movements that arose among the populace several centuries after the death of the Buddha. These were movements that sought to recover and give renewed expression to a key feature in the life and teaching of the Awakened One, that is, the dimension of compassion. This important feature of the awakened way of life, and of the Buddha's message, was deemed by many to have been obscured or sidelined with the idealization of the individual's purification, embodied in the *arhat* ideal, as the summit of the path.

Proponents of these movements took the image of a great vehicle *(mahayana)* large enough to contain all sentient beings and ferry them to the other shore, as a

symbol of the Buddha's all-encompassing compassion. They emphasized that the Buddha embarked upon his journey toward ultimate awakening not just for his own sake, but with a heart that embraced all sentient beings, seeking the liberation of all from their dissatisfactory mode of existence. In this light they heaped criticism on those who maintained an individual-centered approach to liberation, depicting these as taking a lesser vehicle *(hinayana)*.

The recovery of this all-embracing compassion is an underlying dynamism in the rise of the Mahayana. Earlier scholars had theorized that it was a lay-based movement reacting to the monastic hegemony of Buddhist institutions. More recent studies, notably those by Gregory Schopen (1997, 2004), have shown that monks were also among the influential proponents of Mahayana ideas.

Studies on the development of the *bodhisattva* ideal link this to themes such as the notion of the past lives of the Buddha as depicted in the Jataka tales, featuring different kinds of sentient beings, including humans, animals, and *devas,* who lived compassionately and thus gained merit toward a future attainment of ultimate enlightenment, and the notion of a future Buddha (Maitreya) who will come to earth when humanity is in dire need of its intervention.

One who embarks on the path toward awakening, as understood in this Mahayana context, does so with an aspiration toward the awakening and ultimate liberation not just of oneself but of all sentient beings. In Mahayana texts this path is described as involving the practice of six perfections *(paramitas)*, later expanded to ten. The perfections were elaborated upon in the sutras on the Perfection of Wisdom *(Prajnaparamita)*.

The first perfection, of giving *(dana)*, is an offering of one's own material and spiritual resources in behalf of others. The second perfection is that of disciplined conduct *(sila)*, involving Ten Beneficial Actions applied to lay persons as well as monks. These consist of observance of precepts against killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and injunctions against the use of harsh words or divisive language, idle talk, greediness, anger, and the maintenance of erroneous views. The third perfection is that of forbearance *(ksanti)*, whereby one endures the difficulties encountered on the path and views all things as impermanent, dissatisfactory, impure, and devoid of a permanent self-identity. The fourth perfection is that of striving *(virya)*, whereby one generates renewed energy and vigor in the path and is able to overcome tendencies to sloth and exhaustion, thereby proceeding with greater ease. The fifth perfection is that of meditation *(dhyana)*, and the sixth perfection is that of wisdom *(prajna)*, which flows from the previous five. This is understood in Mahayana as involving an experiential grasp of Emptiness. The realization of this wisdom of Emptiness is the central theme of the scriptural genre called *Prajnaparamita* (Perfection of Wisdom), consisting of several versions with differing lengths. These six perfections later came to be expanded to a set of ten, corresponding to the Ten Stages *(bhumi)* of a *bodhisattva*'s Great Journey toward ultimate awakening.

The *bodhisattva* ideal is upheld as a common theme in all the Buddhist schools of thought and practice that blossomed from the Mahayana movement. The *bodhisattva* transcended the distinctions of monastic or lay, male or female, and

was marked by this emphasis on seeking enlightenment not just for oneself, but in behalf of all living beings, placing the latter ahead of one's own self.

In China, a verse expressing the four magnanimous vows of the *bodhisattva* became popularized, and was recited frequently in ritual gatherings. The Four Vows of the Bodhisattva continue to be chanted in the context of Zen meditative practice today:

> Sentient beings are numberless. I vow to free them.
> Delusions are inexhaustible. I vow to end them.
> The gates to the Dharma are countless. I vow to master them.
> The enlightened Way is unsurpassable. I vow to embody it.

MAHASIDDHAS—CRAZY WISDOM AND SKILLFUL MEANS

From the latter part of the seventh century until the twelfth century, Buddhism in India took a new turn of development, which proponents called Vajrayana, or Diamond Vehicle. Whereas traditional monastic Buddhism represented by Theravada and other monastic schools looked up to the *arhat*, and Mahayana looked to the *bodhisattva* as the ideal of the fully accomplished being, Vajrayana offered the ideal of the *siddha* (perfected one) or *mahasiddha* (Great [or fully] Perfected One).

There are oral traditions or texts written in India, many of which have been translated into Tibetan, that recount the lives of such perfected ones, describing their path from ordinary mortal to fully awakened one. These accounts manifest a general structure with distinctive characteristics that mark such idealized beings.

The *siddha* is depicted as born in a particular region and of a certain caste. In earlier Buddhist biographical accounts, the subjects tended to be from higher castes such as the priestly or warrior class. Shakyamuni himself was of the warrior class, and his immediate circle of disciples came from the same class, from the priestly class, or sometimes from the merchant class. In contrast, many of the *siddhas* came from lower echelons of society, including hunters, fishers, laborers, courtesans, vagabonds, and the like. Some enter the monastic life, while others remain in the lay status and are married.

The religious journey of the *siddha* begins with an experience of the dissatisfactoriness of his or her condition in life, which breeds a deep spiritual longing. The path takes a significant turn when the future *siddha* meets with a Tantric teacher who opens a new horizon, and offers the seeker guidance in spiritual practice. After years of training under the guidance of a teacher, consisting of various forms of meditative and ritual practice, the would-be *siddha* is enjoined to come back to some form of activity in the world. In many cases this involves the performance of menial and humiliating tasks as a way of overcoming any traces of ego.

This rigorous training undergone by the *siddha* is likened to a process whereby a noble person gradually strips away the dirty rags he or she has been wearing, to enable the pristine nature and nobility to become fully manifest. This is the innate Buddha nature each one of us bears within, but which has been covered with layers of delusions and defilements. To attain enlightenment is simply to be able to cast aside such extraneous layers that have kept one's original nature from coming into view.

There is a wide variety of ways in which the many *siddhas* whose lives are described in Indian and Tibetan texts arrived at full realization. A common strand noted is that the *siddhas* devoted themselves to liberating other beings from their situations of suffering in this world of phenomena, empowered by compassion. They were able to harness and employ different kinds of skillful means for this purpose, including the use of magical means. They are sometimes depicted as engaging in outlandish kinds of behavior, breaking social conventions and even accepted norms of morality, so that their behavior is sometimes referred to as crazy wisdom.

Some well-known *siddhas* include the figures who transmitted the Vajrayana from India to China and Tibet, including Subhakarasimha (637–735), Vajrabodhi (671–741), and his disciple Amoghavajra (eighth century), and the legendary figures of Padmasambhava (eighth century), Tilopa (988–1069), and Naropa (1016–1100). There are also female *mahasiddhas* looked up to in Tibetan tradition as embodying the fullness of awakening and compassion, exercising skillful means to lead others on the path. These include Yeshe Tsogyel (eighth century), a disciple and consort of Padhasambhava, Machig Lapdron (1055–1153), an important figure in the Buddhist renaissance in the eleventh century, and others.

WOMEN IN BUDDHIST HISTORY

A number of significant studies on perspectives and roles of women in Buddhism have appeared since I. B. Horner's pioneer attempt, *Women under Primitive Buddhism* (Horner 1930). These have sought to fill in the lacuna in scriptural and commentarial accounts of Buddhist doctrine and practice, largely written by men for men, through the centuries.

A look at the situation and religious roles of women in Indian society in pre-Buddhist times, and in the different phases of the history of Indian society, would situate our theme against a wider background. On the one hand, the woman is glorified and revered as mother and devoted wife. On the other, her subordinate position in a male-dominated society is also evident. The Code of Manu, which laid down the foundations of social and ethical order, did not allow women to read sacred texts or perform religious ritual. The stereotypical pattern found in other cultures, whereby as a child she is to obey her father, as a wife she is to obey her husband, and as an elderly widow she is to obey her son, is also found in Indian society.

In this context, the very possibility of pursuing an independent path through entry into a religious community of followers of the Buddha was a liberating

prospect for many women. The *Therigatha*, already cited earlier, is a testimony of the religious aspirations and experiences of many women who pursued the path of liberation. This collection, however, is one of the very few examples in Buddhist literature wherein women are presented in their own voices rather than from the slanted point of view of the men who authored the texts.

A frequently cited passage from the Mahaparinibbana-sutta, recounting the last days of the Buddha, reveals this point of view:

> [Ananda:] Lord, how should we act toward women?
>
> [The Buddha:] Do not see them, Ananda.
>
> [Ananda:] But if we see them, how should we behave, Lord?
>
> [The Buddha:] Do not speak to them, Ananda.
>
> [Ananda:] But if they speak to us, Lord, how should we behave?
>
> [The Buddha:] Practice mindfulness, Ananda. (DN, XVI, 141)

Indeed, much of the Buddhist literature that has been handed down manifests this very attitude of not seeing the women in their midst. Hence, the work of retrieval of those lost images and lost voices remains an ongoing task if we are to have a more comprehensive picture of the development of the Buddhist *sangha*.

Diana Paul's 1979 study *Women in Buddhism* puts together key texts that describe the different images of women in Mahayana literature.There is the familiar theme of woman as temptress, who stands in the way of the monk's path of purification with her sexual seductiveness. There is the ideal of the compassionate mother and devoted wife, praised for her virtue of service and dedication to her man and to her sons. There is the female monastic, who has embarked upon the path of liberation and who has thus attained some degree of autonomy in her religious pursuits, but who is nevertheless placed in a subordinate position to the male monastics. There is the image of the good daughter and good friend, who encourages those around her in the Path of Awakening as she herself embarks on it. There is the female *bodhisattva* who reaches the heights of attainment on the path and finally becomes a Buddha by undergoing sexual transformation.

This theme of sexual transformation comes up in Buddhist discourse against the background of the notion that a Buddha has thirty-two characteristic marks that make him stand out from other beings. One of these is that the Buddha's male organ is wrapped in a sheath of skin. Taking this notion to the letter, it would follow that a woman, notwithstanding her lofty achievements in the Path of Awakening, cannot take the final step and become a Buddha, lacking the infrastructure, so to speak, for all the thirty-two marks to be manifest. This simplistic inference is what led to the idea of the need for sexual transformation for the attainment of the ultimate state of Buddha.

A Mahayana sutra entitled the Srimaladevi Sutra extols a lay woman, sage, and teacher who manifests a profound understanding of the Buddha's Dharma and converts the king and numerous men and women to the Mahayana. She receives

the prediction that she will eventually become a Buddha. Commentaries on this sutra composed in China debated the status of Queen Srimala, with some asserting that she too was subject to the requirement of sexual transformation in the final stage of attainment.

Some Mahayana texts, however, are able to set aside this physiological condition for becoming a Buddha and emphasize that being male or female is irrelevant for such realization. A passage from the Vimalakirti Sutra, already seen above and noted for its revolutionary stance in affirming that lay people can reach the highest attainments in the Path of Awakening, uses humor and irony to overturn the traditional notion that women were barred from ultimate realization. Here, Shariputra, still encumbered by the belief that one needs to be male to become a Buddha, is presented in dialogue with a goddess who manifests deep attainment in the path of the *bodhisattva* and who uses her supernatural powers to free Shariputra of this mistaken belief:

> Shariputra: Excellent, goddess, excellent. What have you gained and experienced that gives you such eloquence?
>
> Goddess: The fact that I have neither gained nor experienced anything gives me this eloquence. Why is this so? It is because one who claims to have won and experienced something is arrogant in the eye of the Buddha Dharma.
>
> Shariputra: Why don't you change your female bodily form?
>
> Goddess: For the last twelve years I have been looking in vain for a female bodily form. So what do you want me to change? This is like an illusionist who creates an illusory woman. Is it correct to ask him to change this unreal woman?
>
> Shariputra: No, because it is not a real body. Into what can then it be changed?
>
> Goddess: All phenomena are also unreal. So why have you asked me to change my unreal female body?
>
> Thereupon, she used her supernatural powers to change Shariputra into a heavenly goddess and herself into a man similar to Shariputra, and asked him: Why do you not change your female form?
>
> Shariputra: I do not know why I have turned into a goddess.
>
> Goddess: Shariputra, if you can change your female body, all women should also be able to turn into men. Like Shariputra who is not a woman but appears in female bodily form, all women are the same and though they appear in bodily form, they are fundamentally not women. Hence the Buddha said "All things are neither male nor female."
>
> Thereupon the goddess again used her supernatural powers to change Shariputra back to his original male body, and asked, "Where is your female body now?"

Shariputra: The form of a woman neither exists nor is non-existent.

The goddess then declared: Likewise, all things are fundamentally neither existing nor non-existent, and that which neither exists nor is non-existent is proclaimed by the Buddha. (Luk 1972, 76–79)

The underlying theme in this passage, as it is of the whole sutra, is the notion of Emptiness, which is the basis for the view that nothing in this world of phenomena is of a substantial nature, and devoid of self-essence. In this light maleness and femaleness are seen as provisional conditions and are therefore not to be the object of attachment one way or the other. Such a message, needless to say, was a revolutionary one for women as well as for men.

It is this pivotal message that was to pave the way for later developments affirming that women could reach the highest stage of Buddha in Mahayana, and further, in Vajrayana traditions. Notwithstanding these rays of light that opened the way for women to the highest attainment in the Buddhist path, the male-dominant character of the societies in which Buddhism was transmitted and took root continued to relegate women to positions of subordination and to stereotypical roles in society that militated against religious pursuits. There have been exceptional individuals who were able to overcome these hurdles in their religious path, but on the whole, even today, Buddhist women continue in the struggle to find their own voice, shape their own destinies, and make distinctive contributions to their religious heritage.

THE PATH OF THE LAITY

A significant turning point in Gautama's life was when he left his householder status and took on the life of a renunciant. He was thus able to free himself from the tasks involved in supporting and maintaining a family and in fulfilling his roles in the social and political realm, and was enabled to devote his entire time and energy to his spiritual quest. In such a context the tasks related to a householder's life were regarded as fetters in the Path of Awakening.

Beginning with the five ascetics he encountered along the way, the circle of disciples who followed the Buddha's example in taking on a life of renunciation grew larger and larger, to form the nucleus of the *sangha*. Needless to say, countless individuals throughout history have chosen this way of renunciation to devote their lives to the Path of Awakening, taking the teaching and way of life of the Buddha as their guide. The way of life of solitary recluses and forest monks who devoted themselves entirely to meditative practice, on the one hand, and the life of those who gathered together in monastic communities of mutual support in the pursuit of awakening and wisdom, on the other, came to be extolled as ideal. In this context, the question arises as to what the Buddha would have to offer by way of teaching for lay persons, those who remain in their householder status and do not take on this path of the renunciant. This question is addressed in a discourse entitled Sigalaka Sutta, often subtitled "Advice to Lay

People" (DN, XXXI). Here, a householder's son named Sigalaka, performing a religious act of paying homage to the different directions, encounters the Buddha, who proceeds to offer his teaching:

> Young householder, it is by abandoning the four defilements of action, by not doing evil from the four causes, by not following the six ways of wasting one's substance—through avoiding these fourteen evil ways—that the Ariyan disciple covers the six directions, and by such practice becomes a conqueror of both worlds, so that all will go well in this world and the next, and at the breaking up of the body after death one will go to a good destiny, a heavenly world.
>
> What are the four defilements of action that are abandoned? Taking life is one, taking what is not given is one, sexual misconduct is one, lying speech is one. These are the four defilements of action that one abandons . . .
>
> What are the four causes of evil from which one refrains? Evil action springs from attachment, it springs from ill-will, it springs from folly, it springs from fear. If the Ariyan disciple does not act out of attachment, ill-will, folly, or fear, one will not do evil from any one of the four causes . . .
>
> And which are the six ways of wasting one's substance that one does not follow? Addiction to strong drink and to sloth-producing drugs is one way of wasting one's substance, haunting the streets at unfitting times is one, attending fairs is one, being addicted to gambling is one, keeping bad company is one, habitual idleness is one. (DN, XXXI, 180–82)

The discourse goes on to delineate the particulars involved in the sixteen items listed, ending with Sigalaka asking to be accepted as a lay follower, "from this day forth as long as life shall last" (DN, XXXI, 192). A significant point to note here is the description of what a lay person who follows such advice may expect: that "all will go well in this world and the next," and birth in a heavenly world after death. Thus, for lay persons, a felicitous earthly life and the prospect of a good rebirth, rather than awakening and ultimate liberation, are presented as the ideal to be sought. At best, such a person can aspire for a subsequent rebirth wherein he or she may be able to take the decisive step of renunciation and thus take on the Path of Awakening and *nirvana*.

A model lay disciple held up in Buddhist history is the Emperor Ashoka, who, having realized the suffering he had caused to others in the warfare undertaken to unite the empire, renounced violence and became a follower of the Awakened One. He did not thereby renounce his status to become a monastic, but rather made use of that status and the power he wielded to propagate the teachings of the Buddha. He is upheld as the model of the *chakravartin,* or Dharma-turning political ruler who supports, protects, and propagates the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and *sangha*.

The Theravada has maintained a two-tiered model of the *sangha*, with monastics and lay persons seen as leading two different lifestyles with distinctive though mutually supportive roles. This two-tiered model is described as one

wherein "the monastics practice a Buddhism of emulation, whereas the laypeople practice a Buddhism of devotion" (Ray 1994, 20). It would be overly simplistic to say, however, that monastics regard the Buddha as model, contrasted with the way lay persons regard him as an object of veneration, as there is an overlapping of these two attitudes toward the Buddha in both states of life.

With the advent of the Mahayana, this two-tiered model came to be challenged, and a new emphasis was placed on lay life as a state wherein one may also attain the highest stages of the Path of Awakening. The *bodhisattva* came to replace the *arhat* as the model of perfection, and although monastic life was regarded as a conducive state for such a being, it was not deemed a prerequisite. In the *Vimalakirti Sutra,* for example, a scriptural account with a dramatic twist that has remained popular through the ages, the leading character whose name gives the sutra its title is a lay person who towers above the monastic disciples and all the other *bodhisattvas* that figure in the narrative. Vimalakirti, whose name means "the glory of an unblemished one," is described in this way:

> Although a lay person, he was free from all attachments to the three worlds (of desire, form, and beyond form). Although he was married and had children, he was diligent in his practice of pure living. Although a householder, he delighted in keeping from domestic establishments. Although wearing jewels and ornaments, he embellished his body with its majestic spiritual characteristics. Although he ate and drank (like the others), he delighted in tasting the flavor of meditation. When entering a gambling house he always tried to teach and deliver people there. He received heretics but never strayed from the path of right faith. Though he knew worldly classics, he always took joy in the Buddha's Dharma. He was revered by all who met him. (Luk 1972, 16)

Vimalakirti is described as fully engaged in the tasks and responsibilities of a householder, going to places and doing things prohibited for monastics, including entering taverns, government offices, and even houses of prostitution, participating in worldly activities and associating with people from all walks of life, yet in all this maintaining an inner attitude of mindfulness and purity. All these activities are presented in the scriptural text as skillful means Vimalakirti employs to teach the Dharma to living beings he encounters and to deliver them from suffering. He is depicted in the sutra as beleaguered by an illness, the illness of a *bodhisattva* who takes upon oneself the pains of this world of suffering and dissatisfactoriness.

A key message of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* is the spiritual freedom of the *bodhisattva,* wherein external rules of conduct such as those that divided monastics from lay persons were seen as skillful means rather than as conditions in the path of realization. This message is taken up in later developments, notably in the Vajrayana, which extols the *mahasiddha* as its ideal, as we saw above. This is not to be taken as a denigration of the monastic path, but rather as a message of non-attachment to external forms as well as to fixed notions of enlightenment, including the very *notion* of non-attachment itself.

The Buddhist *sangha* stands in history as a community that looked up to those who have unceasingly pursued the highest ideals of being human. Whether it is an ideal of purity of life in all its facets, an ideal of a totally selfless way of life dedicated to seeking and promoting the well-being of others, or an ideal of total freedom grounded in wisdom and compassion and able to transcend all kinds and levels of human convention, the countless number of those who embodied these ideals throughout history or pursue these ideals today together offer a multifaceted witness to the possibilities and the glories of the human.

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PART II

Varieties of Buddhist Experience

4

The Experience of Theravada Buddhism

Theravada, a Pali term meaning "The Way of the Elders," was brought from India to Sri Lanka during the time of Asoka's reign (ca. 268–32 BCE), establishing a secure base and flourishing in this island country now for over two millennia. Through Sri Lanka, it also was transmitted to Southeast Asian countries including Burma (Myanmar), Siam (Thailand), Laos, and Cambodia, receiving popular support as well as state or royal patronage, to become a dominant religion that played the key role in the historical and cultural development of these societies.

Theravada Buddhism presents a multilayered tapestry seen against the background of the historical and cultural developments in these societies in South and Southeast Asia in which it took root and blossomed. There have been a number of important studies in the last few decades that have enriched our picture of the tapestry, describing the influence of Theravada Buddhism on the various levels of personal, social, economic, political, and cultural life of the people in those Asian societies where it has been a dominant influence. Taking these as our reference, this chapter describes different layers of the Theravada experience.

THE MONASTIC EXPERIENCE

Theravada Buddhism holds the distinction of maintaining a direct line of monastic ordination, with male and female lines, dating back to the time of the Buddha. Though the women's line died out in Sri Lanka around the eleventh century, this female lineage was transmitted to China by Sri Lankan nuns sometime in the fifth century and flourished in Mahayana Buddhist settings in East Asia, continuing there up to the present day.

Monastic communities, which could range in size from two or three in a small village to several hundred in large endowed enclaves, are supported by lay adherents, who provide for their material necessities in a way that frees them for their spiritual pursuits. A small number choose to live in seclusion in unpopulated areas and spend most of their time in meditation. These are called forest monks and are highly revered by the rest of the populace.

In Thailand it has become customary for young men to enter a monastery and live the monastic life for a given period, usually for the three-month period of retreat (mid-July to mid-October) and subsequently return to lay life. This is commonly regarded as an effective way of repaying one's debt of gratitude for one's mother, and of gaining merit in both parents' behalf as well as for oneself. In Sri Lanka and some other regions, monastic ordination is seen as a lifetime commitment, though attitudes among both monks and laity on this matter have begun to shift in recent decades. In any case, monastic ordination is a major transition-point in an individual's life, celebrated by family and peers—or the entire village in many cases—and memorialized in appropriate rituals.

Different motives lead individuals to the monastic life. Socioeconomic factors can and do play a part in motivating many young men from rural as well as urban poor families to enter a monastery, given the access to education and other social benefits connected with monastic status in society. It has become a very common practice for many Thai young men to go to high school as monks and to enter a monastic college, and perhaps earn a graduate degree. After some years of service, either as a teacher in a monastery school or in some other capacity that befits the higher education they have received, they return to lay life and take a suitable job in society.

However, though possibly mixed with various other factors, a genuinely religious motivation leads many individuals to pursue a monastic path and to stay for a number of years, or for life. In so doing, they receive all the benefits of an institution that dates back to the Buddha as they live a life dedicated to the pursuit of the Dharma.

The Dhammapada describes the qualities of a monk in the following way:

> That is a true monk who has trained one's hands, feet, and speech to serve others. That one meditates deeply, is at peace with oneself, and lives in joy.
>
> . . . That is a true monk who is content with what one receives and is never jealous of others. Those who are jealous cannot do well in meditation.
>
> Even the gods praise the monk who is contented and lives a pure life of selfless service.
>
> Free from the desire to possess people and things, one does not grieve over what is not.
>
> With friendship toward all and faith in the Buddha's teachings, one will reach the holy state where all is peace.
>
> . . . Overcome the five obstacles, rise above the five selfish attachments, and you will cross the river of life. (Dhp 362, 365–70)

A monk formally begins this path with novice ordination, which can be as early as the age of eight. The ordination ceremony is usually performed in the presence of the ordinand's family and friends, a celebratory occasion that will last up to two days, consisting of two parts. The first part, which can be held in

the ordinand's home, is a festive event with much merrymaking and enjoyment, centered on a ceremony invoking the spirits. This ritual is presided over by a lay man who also assumes a ceremonial role in other community occasions such as marriages or house dedications. The second part is the ordination proper, wherein a monastic preceptor presides, in the presence of ten monks, as required by the rules. By this time the ordinand has already been prepared, head shaved and dressed in a white robe, signifying the renunciation of worldly identity and all the things associated with it.

Before the preceptor monk and the entire community, the ordinand bows to the floor three times, recites the formula of the Three Refuges thrice, and then recites the ten precepts to be followed as monk:

> I take up the precept to abstain from taking life. I take up the precept to abstain from taking what is not given. I take up the precept to abstain from sexual intercourse. I take up the precept to abstain from lying. I take up the precept to abstain from intoxicating drinks, which lead to reckless living. I take up the precept to abstain from eating at improper times. I take up the precept to abstain from participating in events where there is dancing, singing, music, or entertainment. I take up the precept to abstain from wearing garlands, perfumes, ointments, ornaments, or cosmetics. I take up the precept to abstain from using elevated or enlarged beddings. I take up the precept to abstain from accepting monetary offerings. (*Khuddaka Patha* 1, 2)

The ordination ceremony is a reenactment of Siddhartha's renunciation of his householder status and of his going out into the world as a homeless ascetic. In some cases this is done with proper setting, including costumes, horses, and dramatic reenactments of the event.

For those twenty years of age and above who are found to be qualified, a higher or full ordination ceremony is performed, and the person so ordained becomes a full member of the monastic order, subject to the 227 rules of discipline. In the case of women, 331 rules apply. These rules are recited in formal ritual twice a month, at the time of the new moon and the full moon.

Behavior with regard to the opposite sex is a major item calling for caution and mindfulness. The following passage prescribes how male monastics are to regard women in general:

> To tell the truth, woman is a snare set up by Mara (the Tempter). It is better for a monk to quarrel with a man carrying a sword than to speak alone with a woman. It is better for a monk to quarrel with a friend than to speak alone with a woman. It is better for a monk to sit next to a dangerous snake than to speak alone with a woman. (AN, III, 68)

Such an attitude is reflected in the rules of comportment in public, which include prescriptions for keeping women at a "safe distance" in different kinds of situations. For example, in receiving an object from a woman, such as a dish of food or a gift, the custom is for her to place it in front of the monk, as on a

saffron cloth. After she steps back, the monk may then pick up the object. This attitude toward women reflected in codes for male monastics, which regarded them as "obstructions" on the Path of Awakening, came to influence the view of women in Buddhist societies, as we will consider further on. There are, of course, injunctions also for female monastics to avoid contact with men in a similar fashion.

Together with disciplined conduct, meditative practice is another key feature of the monastic life. This is the central occupation especially of forest monks, who have chosen a life of seclusion precisely in order to give themselves relentlessly to this spiritual endeavor. It is geared to the attainment of perfect tranquility, in this state of cessation of sensation and conceptualization. In Pali this is termed *samatha,* translated as "calming," "stopping." This sets the stage for the phase that leads to insight into the true nature of things, termed *vipassana*, literally, "seeing through."

Whereas the phase of calming, or the cultivation of tranquility, is concerned with setting aside, turning away from hindrances or imperfections and overcoming incomplete states of awareness and of being, the phase of cultivation of insight focuses on a sustained mode of awareness that sees things as they truly are.

Instructions for Insight Meditation, as *Vipassana* Meditation is usually called in English, are found in a text entitled Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana Sutta), included in the *Long Discourses of the Buddha* (DN, XXII), with an almost identical version in the *Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (MN, 10). Four foundations of mindfulness are enumerated: mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of sensations, mindfulness of mental states, and mindfulness of mental objects. This practice of calming and insight in one's daily life is a key feature of the path of purification and the gateway to the liberative experience of *nirvana.*

Wisdom is the third pillar in the monastic path. This is pursued through the study of the words of the Buddha preserved in scriptures, as well as the study of commentaries by masters in the tradition, notably Buddhaghosa and others. As part of their study, monks also learn to commit to memory certain key texts, notably *paritta* chants, or incantations to ward off harm and invite beneficial spirits, for use in various rituals on behalf of the laity.

Forest monks who spend their time in seclusion and in the practice of meditation represent a key feature of the Theravada experience, upholding traditions that date back to early Buddhism. A much larger number of monastics live in a *wat*, a monastic complex in a town or village, offering religious as well as social services to the laity living in the surrounding areas; the laity, in turn, provide them with material and other kinds of support. It is this mutually beneficial relationship between the monastic and the lay community that has maintained the vitality of Theravada Buddhism through the centuries.

THE LAY EXPERIENCE

An assumption long held in Theravada societies is that the realization of the ultimate goal of *nirvana*, presupposing as it does a total devotion to the path of

purification, is for those who are able to follow the monastic way of life. Those who cannot take such a step in this life, that is, householders or lay persons, can at best hope to accumulate merit so that they may subsequently be reborn in circumstances that would allow for such a step. It must be said, however, that this sharp divide between monk and laity has blurred in recent years, with the increasingly widespread practice of meditation among the laity.

The notion of merit is a central factor in molding attitudes and motivating various types of action among people in Theravada cultures. There are different ways in which merit is gained that are regarded as conducive to a favorable rebirth or to advantageous circumstances in subsequent rebirths. A most effective way of accumulating merit is by supporting monastics, through monetary gifts given on various occasions or in offering food as the monks make their daily rounds among the people in the community. Participation in rituals, festivals, and pilgrimages are also seen as meritorious.

A popular ritual in Theravada societies is the ceremony of presentation of new robes for monks. This usually takes place at the end of a three-month monastic retreat (from mid-July to mid-October), timed with the end of the rainy season. Here nearly every household in a village or community finds itself involved in the preparation of food and gifts to be offered to the monastic community in a celebratory occasion that lasts from one to three days. There is a procession of people attired in traditional costumes of the region, accompanied by drums, cymbals, horns, and other musical instruments making lively sounds. A representative of the community presents the gifts—robes, monetary donations, and other objects—first to a Buddha image and then to the monks. The monks respond by chanting sutras as a blessing to the donors.

Another ritual that imparts merit on attendees is the consecration of a Buddha image. This is a ceremony in which a newly sculpted image is transformed from being a mere cultural artifact into a religious symbol laden with spiritual power. The ceremony is usually held in connection with other festivities and also serves the purpose of collecting donations to support the monastic community in the locality or region. The consecration ceremony itself involves the chanting of sutras of protection and other appropriate sutras, and Dharma talks given by prominent monks. Recollection of the life of the Buddha and acclamation of his virtues, wisdom, compassion, and superhuman powers are elements featured in the chanted sutras and Dharma talks. During this time people come to offer incense, candles, flowers, and other gifts before the Buddha image. These ceremonial events can last from dusk to dawn.

Festivals are also celebrated throughout the year commemorating the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha (Visakha, or Vesak); the First Discourse of the Dharma at the Deer Park; and the gathering of the 1,250 disciples, where the Buddha expounded on the rules of monastic discipline. These three festivals can be seen as isomorphic with the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha—and have somehow come to be timed with the phases of the agricultural calendar. Visakha occurs in May with the rice-planting season; commemoration of the First Discourse is held in July in the growing season, and commemoration of the exposition of monastic rules is held in February during the harvest.

Ceremonies of ordination of new monks are also celebrated as major events of the entire community, generating merit for all of those who participate, both monastic and lay. Here, as we have seen above, all the members of the community or village can vicariously participate in a reenactment of the Buddha's Great Renunciation, as they witness one or more of their own making a profession to follow the life of homelessness, and tread the path of purification leading to *nirvana*.

Funerary services are occasions for participants to listen to chants and hear Dharma talks about the basic Buddhist teachings centered on the doctrines of impermanence and the unsatisfactoriness of this earthly life. The belief that the spirit of the deceased will live on and attain a rebirth in a subsequent life depending on his or her karmic merit, however, is a feature that many Buddhists do not find a need to reconcile with the doctrine of the Selfless.

Lay followers are enjoined to follow five general precepts of not killing, not stealing, not lying, not engaging in sexual misconduct, and not using intoxicants. General guidelines for laity are presented in a treatise entitled *Sigalaka Sutta* (DN, XXXI).

The following account from field work by Jane Bunnag provides a picture of the way these precepts are appropriated by many lay persons in Theravada societies:

> It is customary, prior to any merit-making ceremony, for the lay leader of the congregation to request the Five Precepts from the most senior monk present. The congregation of householders then repeats in unison after the monk the Pali formulae stating their adherence to the Precepts, outlined above. All the lay persons to whom I spoke subscribed to these religious proscriptions in this formal sense whilst at the same time recognizing that it was impossible in the course of normal life to fulfill all or any of these injunctions to the letter. The fact that one agrees to abstain from taking life, for example, does not prevent a Buddhist householder from killing a snake or a mad dog, nor the rodents and vermin which infest the gardens and paddy fields. Similarly, the villagers I knew appeared to feel no compunction about taking the life of a chicken or a pig in order to provide food for the family . . . The four remaining precepts are also susceptible to a fairly liberal interpretation, the fourth and first being most consistently contravened: few if any of my lay informants, for example, practiced total abstinence from alcohol, although even those who were habitually intemperate recognized from moral, social, and medical points of view, it was both deplorable and foolish to drink too much. (Bunnag 1973, 143–44)

The above scenario does not deny the fact that there are many lay persons who are conscientious and who take the ethical implications of the Buddhist religious vision to heart and live them close to the letter.

More and more lay persons have been taking up meditative practice at centers established for this purpose under the guidance of monastic teachers as well as lay teachers. In Burma (Myanmar), for example, there is a sprawling meditation

center established by the late Mahasi Sayadaw in the capital, Rangoon (Yangon), that can accommodate more than a thousand practitioners at once; it is open to lay persons, who can stay for a period of time from a few days to a few months. There are also popular meditation centers in Sri Lanka and Thailand that offer guidance for lay persons seeking to incorporate meditative practice in their life as householders. These centers are visited by thousands annually.

The need for providing a challenging and rigorous spiritual path for lay people is behind the widespread reception of two Buddhist reform movements in Thailand, the Santi Asok and the Dhammakaya. The former emphasizes simplicity and discipline in lifestyle and takes a critical and moralistic posture toward consumeristic and materialistic tendencies of Thai society and of the monastic *sangha* as well. The Dhammakaya, a rapidly growing Buddhist movement, has given its members a sense of belonging to a larger community espousing shared ideals of mindfulness in daily life and a communitarian spirit, which in some ways are reminiscent of the spirit of the early *sangha* during the time of the Buddha.

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE IN THERAVADA

Women have been active participants in the formation of the Buddhist tradition since its inception, with the founding of the order of *bhikkhunis* (*bhiksuni* in Sanskrit) led by Mahaprajapati, aunt and foster mother of Gautama Buddha. But the male-dominated nature of the societies in which Buddhism took root and flourished, not to mention similar patterns in other societies and cultures of the world, consigned women to subsidiary or silent roles throughout history.

The historical fact that the direct ordination line of women monastics that dated to the times of Shakyamuni Buddha died out in Sri Lanka in the eleventh century looms large in the background affecting the place of women in Theravada societies today. Briefly stated, because until recently there was no officially recognized line of ordained *bhikkhunis* in the Theravada tradition, women in these Asian societies who sought to lead the life of a renunciant following the footsteps of the Buddha were able to do so only in a form that was quasi-monastic, quasi-lay, that is, without the social or spiritual benefits accorded to the full monastic status.

In Thailand these female renunciants are called *mae ji,* a word of unclear etymological origin. They shave their heads, wear simple white clothing, and live a celibate life, following eight precepts (the five common to all Buddhist followers, plus not taking meals after midday, not using bodily adornments, and not sleeping on soft beds or couches). In Burma female renunciants also following eight precepts are called *thilashin*, a word that means "bearer of the precepts." There are also women in Burma who follow nine precepts, the ninth being "to spread lovingkindness (*metta, maitri* in Sanskrit) to all" (Kabilsingh 1991, 89). In Sri Lanka, where the order of *bhikkhunis* had survived for a thousand years before it died out, women renunciants are called *dasa silamata,* a term that means "ten-precept mother." All these kinds of renunciants enter this state of life

with a ceremony involving the formal reception of precepts. But what these women experience in common is being relegated to secondary or even tertiary status due to the fact that their "ordination" is not considered a legitimate one.

In Sri Lanka prominent Buddhist leaders and intellectuals had been advocating the revival of the *bhikkhuni sangha* since the early twentieth century, but resistance from the official Sri Lankan Buddhist hierarchy had stymied these attempts. Finally, these efforts came to an initial fruition with an ordination ceremony for ten Sri Lankan women, organized and supported by Korean monks and nuns, held at Sarnath, India, on December 8, 1996. This was presided over by Ven. Mapalagama Vipulasara, head of the Mahabodhi Society, and Ven. Ratmalana, rector of the Parama Dhamma Buddhist Seminary. In February 1998, 150 nuns from different countries were ordained in Bodhgaya, India, in a ceremony organized by the Fo Guan Shan Buddhist organization based in Taiwan.

Currently there are around two hundred fully ordained *bhikkhunis* in Sri Lanka, the most prominent among them Ven. Bhikkhuni Kusuma, a retired university lecturer, who has opened the International Nunnery, welcoming both Sri Lankan and international members who wish to devote their lives to the study and practice of Buddhism and to service for the welfare of society.

In Thailand there had also been some continuing attempts to revive the *bhikkhuni sangha*, challenging the accepted conventions of this Theravada society. In 1932 two young sisters received a *bhikkhuni* ordination from a senior monk. Incidentally, there is a provision in the rules for ordination that a mimimum of five monks must attend the ceremony and that the ordinands must have first been ordained in the *bhikkhuni sangha*. As there was no *bhikkhuni* community recognized as such, the Thai monastic hierarchy did not consider this a valid ordination. The two sisters attracted a few followers, who received similar ordination, and formed a group of eight *bhikkhunis*. This ("improper") ordination was considered an act of treachery and disobedience against the Buddhist order. Social and religious pressures, including negative reactions by mass media and police harassment, later forced the women to abandon their robes.

Voramai Kabilsingh (d. 2003), prominent for her social, educational, and religious activities, attempted to forge new paths for a Thai *bhikkhuni* order, receiving ordination from the Chinese *bhikkhuni sangha* in Taiwan in 1971. The Thai monastic hierarchy, however, refused to recognize her as a fully ordained person, regarding her on the same level as the *mae ji*.

A *bhikkhuni* ordination ceremony was held for the first time in Thailand in February 2002, which also officially inaugurated the establishment of the *bhikkhuni sangha* in this Theravada country. This was an ordination ceremony held for the Mae Ji Vanavichayen, now known as Ven. Dhammarakkhita.

Voramai's daughter, Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, an internationally known academic and activist, received *bhikkhuni* ordination in a ceremony in Sri Lanka that was covered in the worldwide media. Now known as Ven. Dhammananda, she has founded a *bhikkhuni* community at Nakon Pathom and continues her efforts in behalf of the nascent *bhikkhuni sangha* amid her country's monastic hierarchy.

The experience of Buddhist lay women also calls our attention. Needless to say, this experience is linked with the situation and status of women in male-

dominated Asian societies and has much in common with the experience of women in other cultures and societies. For example, the portrayal of women in Buddhist texts as "tempters" and "obstacles to the path," or as more prone to worldly tendencies, less able to overcome desire, or as weak and fickle, and so on, clearly reflects an androcentric bias in the writing of these texts. These depictions, together with the assertion in some texts that the only way for women to attain ultimate realization is through being reborn as a male, lead to a negative self-image that is perpetuated uncritically among women themselves. There is now an increasing number of women leaders in Asia who are challenging these derogatory images and raising the awareness of other women as well as men to more healthy and gender-balanced attitudes and structures in society.

An issue that has been raised regarding Buddhist women's experience relates to the large number of prostitutes in the predominantly Buddhist country of Thailand, leading many from outside to ask: Does Buddhism promote prostitution? What does the *sangha* say about prostitution? Can a prostitute still be a good Buddhist? Kabilsingh (1991) considers this situation, citing scriptural sources indicating how the Buddha reached out to prostitutes to lead them on the path of enlightenment, and makes thoughtful suggestions from a Buddhist perspective about addressing the plight of the women who are consigned to this role for socioeconomic and other reasons beyond their control.

BUDDHISM AND POLITICS

Theravada countries are generally characterized by a mutually supportive relationship between the Buddhist *sangha*, led by the monastic hierarchy in these countries, and the political authorities of the land, specifically, the monarchies that have ruled these regions for centuries. The exemplary political leader looked up to in Buddhist history is King Ashoka (reigned ca. 268–32 BCE), regarded as having embodied the virtues of one who ruled according to the Dharma. His life story has been enshrined in legends, and there are at least three versions handed down to us, each with a differing emphasis on the significance of Ashoka's life and reign. A grandson of the great Mauryan emperor Chandragupta, Ashoka extended the realms of the empire through conquest. The realization of the suffering he had wrought upon the Kalinga people through the battles he waged moved him to remorse, precipitating a conversion to the Buddhist Dharma that taught a way of peace and righteousness. Abandoning the use of violence as a tool of state power, he devoted himself to the propagation of the principles of the Dharma. There are accounts claiming that he entered monastic life in his old age.

Ashoka issued edicts that were inscribed on rocks and placed in different parts of the empire, and it is through these edicts that we can form a picture of his philosophy of government and of social life. A recurrent term in these edicts is Dharma; this is to be the basis of all government policies, of the legal system, and of the behavior of government ministers and subjects in the empire.

Ashoka is looked upon in Buddhist tradition not only for his active propagation of values and principles based on the Dharma, but more specifically for his

generous support of the *sangha*, issuing funds for the establishment and maintenance of monasteries. It was during his reign that missionaries were sent to different regions of India and Sri Lanka, where the Buddha's Dharma established a foothold and continues to prosper up to the present day. He also commissioned the establishment of *stupas*, memorial mounds of the Buddha's relics, in different parts of the empire; these became important pilgrimage sites for adherents through the centuries.

Ashoka is thus the exemplar of the righteous ruler who turns the wheel of Dharma *(chakravartin)* in the political realm. All monarchs in Southeast Asian countries have been enjoined to emulate him in their way of governing. The term *chakravartin* took on the nuance of a mythic universal ruler who establishes the Dharma in the political order and whose authority extends over the entire cosmos. Emulating Ashoka's example, especially as benefactor and protector of the monastic *sangha*, ensured particular monarchs of their status as a King of Dharma *(Dharma-raja)*, thus receiving religious legitimation for their rule. Particular actions such as establishing *stupas* that enshrine the Buddha's relics, offering royal land for monastic use, inaugurating and dedicating institutions devoted to religious purposes and to educational and social welfare, are seen as concrete signs of *Dharma-raja* status.

The enshrinement and protection of the Buddha's relics is a special kind of official action that gives an aura of power to the monarch. Donald Swearer elucidates this in the following way:

> The Buddha relic symbolizes political authority in two ways. First, when enshrined in a reliquary mound, the relic functions as a magical center or axis mundi for the kingdom. The enshrined relic becomes the symbol par excellence of the monarch as chakravartin or "wheel turner." Literally, the king becomes the "hub" of the cosmosized state. Second, from a historical perspective the enshrinement of a relic usually entails legitimation of the monarch by the monastic order. Thus, King Anawrahta of Pagan (eleventh century) justified his conquest of the Mon kingdom of Lower Burma (Pegu) by expropriating the Mon *sangha* and by building monuments. Anawrahta's religious edifices symbolized his power as world ruler. Patronage of the monastic order helped to guarantee popular support. (Swearer 1995, 93–94)

The monastic *sangha,* in turn, does its part and reciprocates through its expressed support of the monarch, lending legitimacy to the regime as well as to particular policies undertaken by the ruling government. This symbiotic relationship between monarchs and monks, between political and religious authority, is articulated in the notion found in Pali scriptures about "two wheels of Dharma." One refers to religious teaching presented by the Buddha that pertains to liberation from a dissatisfactory human existence, including the Four Ennobling Truths and other expressions of the Buddha's religious message. The other refers to the political power and authority that the righteous ruler wields for the

welfare of the populace. These two wheels are regarded as turning in tandem keeping the cosmic order together.

The ideal of governing the people based on principles of Dharma has been taken up by political leaders in Sri Lanka, Siam (Thailand), and Burma (Myanmar) to advance their own goals. A key point to note is how Buddhism relates to the political realm in the different Theravada countries. On the one hand, the Dharma has been used as a tool for legitimation of ruling authority, while on the other, it has also been used by Buddhists as the basis for challenging the legitimacy of those regimes that were deemed no longer at the service of the people's welfare.

THE EXPERIENCE OF INSIGHT

Over the last few decades more and more lay people in Asian countries, and also in the Western hemisphere, have taken up the practice of *Vipassana* (Insight) Meditation as a spiritual practice. Westerners who have undergone years of training in monastic institutions in Asia have come back as teachers of meditation in the Theravada tradition, establishing centers of practice in North America and Europe. There are also monastic teachers from Asian countries now residing in different places in the Western hemisphere who offer Buddhist teaching and training in meditative practice.

A feature of Insight Meditation as practiced by lay people is that it is not necessarily done in conjunction with the meditative phase of calming *(samatha)*. The latter can bring about a very deep state of single-mindedness in an individual, and grounded on this, the practice of Insight Meditation can open one to a powerful and liberative experience within a relatively short period of time. But the practice of calming can be a truly laborious exercise that takes protracted effort and total engagement of an individual over many years, well-suited indeed for those who have given their lives to the pursuit of enlightenment in a monastic setting.

Lay persons who continue to maintain ties to family and to bear responsibilities in society are not normally able to give themselves such an extended time frame for spiritual practice. For such individuals, however, participation in a retreat devoted to Insight Meditation can be a powerful way of being initiated into an experiential appropriation of what the Buddha taught. Such retreats can be in varying time frames, with a ten-day period as a usual offering, though month-long or three-month-long retreats are also offered at some noted centers.

Joseph Goldstein, one of the pioneering teachers of Insight Meditation in the United States, studied for many years in India with a renowned meditation master, Anagarika Sri Munindra. Goldstein presents the format and contents of a month-long period of Insight Meditation in a best-selling work entitled *The Experience of Insight* (1987). The themes of the talks over the thirty-day retreat period constitute the chapters of this book, but one needs to read between the lines to appreciate what the book opens up to its readers. In short, it reads like a menu with a commentary on the different flavors of the dishes offered and

invites readers to take up the practice of meditation in order to taste these flavors for themselves.

The daily schedule at an Insight Meditation retreat begins at 4:30 a.m. and continues to 10 p.m., with most of the waking hours devoted to group sitting interspersed by walking meditation. Participants are instructed in the proper postures for sitting meditation, usually on a cushion with legs crossed and with a straight back, although alternative ways are possible for those whose physical constitution does not allow for cross-legged sitting. One instructional talk is given to the group each day, either in the morning or in the evening, or sometimes in the afternoon. Individual interviews to address matters of practice, on an average of five to ten minutes in length for each person, are conducted by the teacher in a separate room.

The following is a typical set of instructions given to beginners by Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82), one of the great meditation masters of the twentieth century, who founded the International Meditation Center in Rangoon, Burma:

> Try to keep your mind (but not your eyes) on the abdomen. You will thereby come to know the movements of rising and falling of this organ. If these movements are not clear to you in the beginning, then place both hands on the abdomen to feel these rising and falling movements. After a short time, the upward movement of inhalation [expansion] and the downward movement of exhalation [contraction] will become clear. Then make a mental note, rising, for the upward movement, and falling, for the downward movement. Your mental note of each movement must be made while it occurs. (Cited in Sole-Leris 1986, 132)

As the retreat progresses, participants are given guidance for their individual practice and are presented with themes or subject matter suited to their particular situation or need.

Mindfulness of breathing, as summarized in the above instructions, is an entry point that leads an individual toward further deepening in Insight Meditation and, ultimately, toward the experience of enlightenment and inner freedom. In bare outline, this exercise of being mindful of one's breathing, repeated again and again, leads to an enhanced awareness (1) of one's body processes and body movements, (2) of one's sensations, (3) of one's mental states, and (4) of the mental objects that form one's thoughts. These constitute the four foundations of mindfulness.

A mastery of the four foundations of mindfulness, in turn, leads to an overcoming of hindrances to enlightenment. These hindrances are (1) sense-desire, (2) ill will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) anxiety and worry, and (5) doubt. This mastery also brings about the arising of seven factors of enlightenment: (1) mindfulness (as such), (2) a thorough seeing of reality, (3) energy, (4) rapture, (5) tranquility, (6) concentration, and (7) equanimity. Equanimity, as noted earlier, is a Pali word *upekkha,* which comes from the Sanskrit *upeksa*, a word that literally means "seeing at close range" or "seeing something just as it is." In other words,

the ability to see things as they truly are is the foundation of equanimity and of genuine wisdom that frees one from delusions.

The process outlined above is presented in succinct form in the following passage from the *Anapanasati Sutta,* on Mindfulness of Breathing:

> When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated, they fulfill the seven enlightenment factors. When the seven enlightenment factors are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and deliverance. (MN, 118, 15)

In this way the heart of the Theravada Buddhist experience is offered to anyone who would pursue it, monastic or lay, male or female. Its gateway is in this very simple act of paying attention to one's breathing. In this act one's entire being is opened to the interconnected realm of all breathing and living beings, activating the mind of wisdom and the heart of compassion.

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Personal Account: On Being a Theravada Buddhist in the World Today

Dhammananda Bhikkhuni

Living in Thailand is a blessing as we do not have any severe natural disasters such as earthquake, flood, and so on. But recently we had a storm coming with a strong wind from the north, many trees fell, some even crashed on our dwelling houses.

We live in an exclusively female temple. We could not call others for help as they also had to attend to their immediate problems. We, the nuns and women, had to cut the fallen trees ourselves. Someone commented that doing so is against the *vinaya,* or monastic rules for nuns (or monks).

To cut down trees. This incident brings to mind how we have to live in the world today yet try to be true to our commitment.

Cutting trees is not permitted as it is a destruction of environment, and many people do it for a living. In our context, we cut the fallen trees, we cut the logs in order to clear our own road. Therefore, whether cutting trees is permissible or not must be seen from within a given context. Understanding the spirit of the rules becomes an important factor to allow us to live meaningfully in the world yet committed to our spiritual path.

I am writing not only as a Buddhist but also as a Buddhist ordained nun. There are few of us in the world; we are indeed an endangered species. It will be too much to expect society to understand our need, so we have to adjust ourselves to fit in our society. If we extend ourselves too much and too far, we tend to lose our own identity. Yet if we are too rigid, instead of spreading the words of the Buddha as we intend to do, we simply turn people off.

What does it mean to be a Buddhist? We, like all Buddhists, believe that the Buddha was enlightened and, more important, that the enlightenment he achieved and has shown us is a way that can indeed be real to us. That state of enlightenment is accessible to each one of us, and it is our spiritual goal.

We realize that our existence is, after all, in a state of flux. It goes according to its natural law; suffering arises immediately when we do not understand and do not respect this natural law of suffering, impermanence, and no real self-identity.

We are totally interconnected and interdependent—human beings, animals, environmental surroundings. When we disregard one another's existence and emphasize and attend only to our own need, in that process we invite problems, unhappiness, and suffering.

The path toward enlightenment is open to all of us, but it is up to each one of us to pursue this path. Some may take longer; some may put everything aside and just walk the path diligently. No matter how long each one of us may take, the goal is the same.

This is what it means to be a Buddhist. If our goal is clear, we can live in the world today, yesterday, and tomorrow relatively in peace. We seem to have more difficulty adjusting to the world today because we are heavily bombarded by materialism, consumerism. We are constantly exploiting or being exploited, both consciously and unconsciously.

The power of mass media, advertisement, and globalization is so strong and effective. If we do not have strong spiritual roots we tend to be swayed off the path unknowingly. I can share with you my own experience. I walked into a supermarket with an intention to buy a loaf of bread, which would cost B25 (US$0.50), but when I walked out I had paid B1,700 (US$42) for all the "might need" things I saw on my way to get that loaf of bread. This is a small example of how greed can overtake us, and most of the things we have been made to believe that we might need are seldom used.

It is necessary to have a clear spiritual goal and, of course, spiritual roots so that we as Buddhists can handle our lives living in the world today more meaningfully. The Buddha reminded us that we should be beneficial to ourselves and to others. To live a meaningful life as a Buddhist is to balance ourselves and others peacefully and happily.

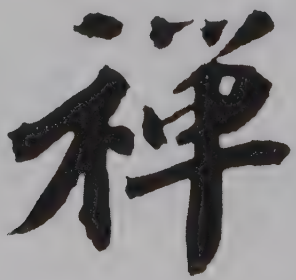
5

The Zen Experience

Zen is perhaps the most widely known but also on that account the most misunderstood of all the Buddhist traditions that continue to thrive in our day. The mention of Buddhism readily brings up Zen. Books with "Zen" on the title abound in any bookstore, associating the term with exotic vegetarian cuisine, rock gardens, windsurfing, golf, or motorcycle maintenance. This chapter introduces Zen as a living Buddhist tradition, offering a glimpse of Zen experience from various angles.

APPROACHES TO ZEN

Zen is a Japanese pronunciation of a Chinese character that the Chinese pronounce *Ch'an* and Koreans pronounce *Son.* This is a rendering of the Sanskrit word *dhyana* (or *dhyan*) by an ideogram that approximates its pronunciation rather than its semantic content. *Dhyana* is used with rather specialized meanings in the Hindu tradition, referring to an advanced state of yogic practice. It has been incorporated into Buddhism to describe the meditative stages arrived at by Shakyamuni in his quest for enlightenment. Whoever rendered this term into the Chinese ideogram made a very auspicious choice, combining a radical on the left side that means "to show" or "to reveal" with an ideogram that means "single" or "simple," or else "singleness" or "simplicity," on the right side. (We use the Japanese pronunciation throughout, as this is the form in which it has come to be widely known outside of East Asia.) This ideogram was used to refer to the practice of sitting with one's back straight, mindful of one's breathing, silencing the mind, with focused awareness in the here and now.



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D. T. Suzuki, a Japanese writer who played a major role in popularizing Zen in the West, emphasized its atemporal character and its accessibility only through "direct experience." Hu Shih, a Chinese historian, on the contrary, argued that "Zen can be understood only within its historical context, just as other schools of Chinese philosophy must be studied and understood in their historical contexts" (Dumoulin 1988, xix). D. T. Suzuki and Hu Shih represent two polarized positions in approaching Zen Buddhism. The former offered descriptions of the internal, philosophical, and structural features of Zen, without referring to how these developed in history. The latter pursued a mode of investigation that seeks historical and causal connections, toward the elucidation of these features. These two approaches can be seen as somewhat in parallel with the contrast between those endeavors in the humanities that seek "understanding," on the one hand, and those that seek "explanation" on the other.

Our own stance here, which also applies throughout the rest of this book introducing Buddhism, is a middle path between these two, giving due consideration to historical contexts and factors, but also seeking to elucidate experiential dimensions, toward a multidimensional appreciation of our subject. (See the discussion of the word *Experience* in the Introduction.)

The discovery of manuscripts in the caves of Tun-huang around the beginning of the twentieth century, with material dating back to the period between the eighth and tenth centuries, has given us a veritable treasure trove of information and has not only filled in the gaps of our knowledge concerning Buddhist developments in China during its formative stages, but also transformed our entire view of the historical backgrounds of Zen. This is analogous to the way the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls opened new vistas in the study of Early Christianity. Prior to the discovery of the Tun-huang manuscripts, accounts of the history of Zen were based on material composed during the Sung period (tenth to twelfth centuries), when the different forms of Buddhism in China had already reached a stage of systematization in the wake of the religious energy and creativity that marked the previous T'ang period (sixth to ninth centuries).

Zen's roots can be traced back to early Buddhist and Mahayana meditative traditions. Zen as we know it today, however, is a marvelous fruit of the encounter between Indian and Sri Lankan Buddhist practices related to cultivating the mind, and religious and spiritual elements in the East Asian cultures of China, Korea, and Japan.

In a recent work summing up years of research, done with the guidance of Yanagida Seizan, acclaimed as the greatest Zen scholar in the twentieth century, John McRae (2003), based on evidence from Tun-huang manuscripts, deconstructs many of the stereotypes of the "history" of Zen found even in scholarly books on the subject. He maps out four periods with distinguishable characteristics in the formation of this tradition, which he names the proto- (500–600), early (600–900), middle (750–1000), and Sung dynasty (950–1300) periods of its development. It was during this last period that attempts at systematization and legitimation of the extant lineages were undertaken. This was done through reconstructions of the past, with the idealization of a continuous line of Zen ancestors who, it is

claimed, had received mind-to-mind transmission from master to disciple, dating back to Shakyamuni himself.

Meticulous charts delineating the connection between the current lineage holder with all those considered to be legitimate ancestors down to Shakyamuni were drawn up. Formal rituals, with accompanying symbolic material, such as robes and particular ritual implements, came to be important features contributing to the aura of Zen and its transmission from generation to generation. Also, accounts of encounters between enlightened masters and their disciples, describing situations and verbal exchanges that occasioned the pivotal enlightenment experiences of the latter, who in turn became Zen masters in their own due time, were collected and enshrined as case studies (*kung-an* or *koan* in Japanese, literally, "public case") that could trigger similar experiences in others. These collections came to be an important legacy of this tradition.

FOUR MARKS OF ZEN

In an account dating around 1108, we find a neat four-line verse memorialized as an expression of the four characteristic marks of Zen. This is attributed to Bodhidharma, the legendary monk from South India who is said to have brought Zen to China, but it is undoubtedly of later composition. This verse describes Zen as

> A special transmission outside of scriptures
> Does not rely on words or letters.
> Pointing directly to the human mind
> Sees into one's nature, becoming Buddha.

These four marks offer a clue in situating the place of Zen within the larger stream of Buddhism.

Buddhism was introduced into China around the second century CE, with the translation of various scriptural texts and commentaries from Sanskrit and Pali sources, and the reception of Buddhist beliefs and practices among the people. By the sixth century there were many Buddhist institutions and centers of learning and spiritual practice, each taking a particular scriptural text or set of texts as the basis of its doctrinal expositions. Buddhist adherents took each sutra as an authoritative word of the Buddha, as expositions of the Dharma delivered on various occasions during his lifetime. It was in this milieu that the proponents of this meditative school sought to distinguish themselves, with the proclamation that the authority of their tradition did not come from any of these scriptural sources but was a transmission through a direct line from master to disciple, originating with Shakyamuni himself. The following story, included as entry No. 6 in the thirteenth-century collection entitled *Wumen-kuan (The Gateless Gate),* is offered to this effect:

> Once in ancient times, when the World-Honored One was at Mt. Grdhrakuta to give a sermon, he held up a flower and showed it to the assemblage.
>
> At this, they all remained silent. Only the venerable Kashyapa broke into a smile.
>
> The World-Honored One said: "I have the eye treasury of the true Dharma, the marvelous mind of nirvana, the true form of no-form, the subtle gate of the Dharma. It does not depend on letters, being specially transmitted outside all teachings. Now I entrust Mahakashyapa with this. (Yamada 2004, 39)

What went on between Shakyamuni, the World-Honored One, and the disciple Kashyapa is said to represent "the quintessence of Zen." This is described in flowery language in the anecdote as "the eye treasury of the true Dharma, the marvelous mind of nirvana, the true form of no-form, the subtle gate of the Dharma." This emphasizes the point that "it" can never be adequately grasped in language and is transmitted outside of all verbal or scriptural expression, as Shakyamuni transmitted it directly to Kashyapa. Kashyapa then transmitted it to Ananda, and so on down the line. Bodhidharma, who brought it from India to China, is said to be the twenty-eighth (or twenty-ninth, counting Shakyamuni) in this august lineage, who then transmitted it to Hui-k'o (487–593), the Second Ancestor in China. This transmission is related in the following story, No. 41 in the *Wuman-kuan* collection.

> Bodhidharma sat facing the wall. The second ancestor, standing in the snow, cut off his arm, and said, "Your disciple's mind is not yet at peace. I beg you, master, give it rest." Bodhidharma said, "Bring your mind to me, and I will put it to rest." The patriarch replied, "I have searched for the mind but have never been able to find it." Bodhidharma said, "I have finished putting it to rest for you." (Yamada 2004, 208)

A statement concluding the account is implied: "At that, Hui-k'o attained realization." In short, the focus in Zen is not on the content or meaning of the verbal expression, but on the experience that the words can trigger in an individual seeker. This experience is authenticated by the master with a discerning eye, with a set of checking questions. The responses to these questions are taken as manifesting the state of mind of the individual being questioned and judged accordingly as to the genuineness and depth, or lack thereof, of the purported experience.

Words and letters, in short, are likened to a "finger pointing to the moon," and accounts of Zen encounters, such as the one recorded above, are meant to point to that "moon of enlightenment." This enlightenment is regarded as no different from that experienced by Shakyamuni himself. To be able to "see" that moon is to "see into one's own true nature," which is to realize one's own Buddha nature. This, then, is presented as the whole point of the Zen enterprise: the realization of one's own true nature, that is, Buddha nature, and further, the actualization of

this Buddha nature in one's daily life. This actualization of Buddha nature in each individual is the underlying motivation behind the establishment of monastic institutions, as monastic life came to be considered as the optimum setting for this. We will look into this in a subsequent segment.

This disclaimer against the reliance on scriptural authority and verbal expression, however, is not to be taken to mean that followers of the tradition make light of learning and linguistic articulation. Contrary to what one might expect from a repeated emphasis on the first two of the four marks of Zen, scriptural study and precision in verbal expression are in fact highly valued in Zen life and practice, as evinced also in the wealth and scope of written accounts that come down to us from this tradition (see Hori 2003).

THE MIND OF BODHIDHARMA

In Japan one often finds, in front of a shop or other public area, or as a decorative figurine in some corner of a home, one of those ubiquitous bright orange carved dolls, depicted as legless, bearded, with large glaring eyes, and coming in various sizes. This is Daruma-san, a Japanese term of endearment for Bodhidharma, who is said to have brought Zen from India to China. A general feature of these figurines is that they are rounded on the bottom and made in such a way that, if one pushes it down as if to topple it, its center of gravity being located exactly at the right point, it rolls back and find its position seated upright once more (MacFarland 1987). Thus Daruma-san is a symbol for resiliency as well as centeredness and attentive presence, distinctive marks of a person of Zen.

There are many mythical narratives and hagiographical accounts surrounding the figure of Bodhidharma. Some are anecdotes preserved in Zen annals, and others are featured in popular lore such as those associated with the carved figurines found all over Japan. There are also at least ten written texts attributed to Bodhidharma. Of these, a short piece entitled "Treatise on Two Entrances and Four Practices" is regarded by scholars as giving a fairly reliable account of the Zen teaching of this foundational figure. Let us take this treatise as our point of entry as we seek a glimpse into the mind of this legendary Ancestor:

> To enter the Way there are many paths, but summing these up there are only two. One is to enter by principle and one is to enter by practice. To enter by principle is to realize the intent of the teaching. It is to have deep faith that all living beings are of the same true nature, though this is obscured by dust and delusion and thus not manifest. As one casts away delusion and comes home to what is true, sitting fixedly in front of a wall, one sees that there is no self and there is no other. Holy ones and ordinary beings are of the same nature. Remaining constant and unmoved, not even being swayed by letters and various teachings: this is to be implicitly in accord with principle. One remains without discriminating thoughts, in perfect stillness and non-action. This is called "to enter by principle."(My translation; Chinese edition in Pine 1987, 2)

The Way here is no other than the Way of Enlightenment. The character used here echoes the Way that was already familiar to the Chinese through the teachings of that other enigmatic sage, Lao Tzu, in fact using the very ideogram that is also rendered in English simply as Tao. Many Zen anecdotes handed down through the centuries refer to this Way, synonymous with the path of enlightenment as lived and taught by Shakyamuni.

To enter the Way by principle is simply to realize "the way things are." The intent of the teaching is to manifest the fact that all beings are of one nature, cutting through all dualistic oppositions. There is ultimately no separation between self and other, holy and ordinary, *samsara* and *nirvana.* This realization comes to one who sits fixedly in front of a wall, silencing one's mind, stopping all discriminative and dualistic modes of thinking that are the sources of delusion. Silencing the mind to perfect stillness and non-action, one becomes fully "in accord with principle," that is, realizes the Way in one's own being.

In the first paragraph of "Treatise on Two Entrances and Four Practices" cited above, we have a compendium of the underlying principle of Zen as well as its basic prescription for practice. This is simply to sit fixedly in front of a wall and realize that there is no self and no other. Everything else is but a footnote to this simplest and yet greatest of all matters. So now our description will be about the footnotes to this great matter, based on the remaining sections of the treatise: "To enter by practice refers to four kinds of practice, which subsume all the others. What are these four? The first is to endure karmic retribution. The second is to accept one's circumstances. The third is to seek nothing. The fourth is to realize the Dharma" (ibid). The first refers to the attitude to be taken as one encounters adversity in life. Meeting with some kind of disaster or misfortune, such as an unexpected illness, loss of a job, loss of a loved one, failure of a project, betrayal by a friend, bankruptcy, and so on, a situation when everything seems to be falling apart, one can find a most conducive opportunity for entering the Way. "The sutra says: Encountering adversity, do not be upset. How? Just know, that's the way it is." It is not clear which sutra is referred to here, but it is of interest to note that the writer of this treatise invokes scriptural authority just as other Buddhists of the time did, to grant legitimacy to a tradition that claimed no reliance on such scriptures!

The treatise goes on to encourage those in situations of difficulty or struggle. It counsels such persons simply to know that "that's the way it is" is to take things for what they are, just as they are. To live through such situations without blaming others or oneself, and without making value judgments or pursuing preferences such as "I want it to be this way and not that," or "I expected something else," is the key to experiencing total freedom. This is the description of the first kind of practice, to endure karmic retribution.

The second overlaps with the first, but also includes situations of joy and triumph, fame and fortune, again accepting these simply as they are, without clinging. "Those unmoved by the winds of joy live in accord with the Way."

The third goes deeper and invites us to the spirit of true inner freedom, in seeking nothing at all. People in the world are deluded, in search for something or other. Wise ones realize the truth, which is against the ways of the world. Their

mind is unmoved, though their physical being may follow the changes of circumstances. Indeed, the myriad things of this world are all empty . . . As the sutra says, "Those who seek something find only unsatisfactoriness. Seeking nothing is bliss." Knowing this, and ceasing to seek anything at all, is truly to accomplish the way. This is the practice of non-seeking (ibid., 4, 6).

The fourth practice, to realize the Dharma, is to awaken to the purity of one's nature, to know that all things are empty, and thereby to begrudge no one and expect nothing of anyone. This is to live in such a way that what one does for oneself is also done for others. Such a state of mind naturally flows out into acts of giving as well as all the perfections *(paramitas),* but without even the thought that one is practicing anything. This is the way of life referred to in realizing the Dharma.

In the short treatise briefly summarized above, we find a simple yet eloquent statement of the heart of Zen. It gives us a glimpse of the mind of the First Ancestor, who sat unmoving facing a wall and, in so doing, moved multitudes to experience inner peace, freedom, and joy.

ZEN AND MONASTIC LIFE

In India and Sri Lanka, and later in other countries of Southeast Asia, the followers of the Buddha established monastic communities that evolved into powerful institutions in their respective societies since the time of Ashoka (third century BCE). Entry into a monastic community entailed a "departure from home," cutting familial and social ties, and a life of celibacy, in single-minded dedication to the pursuit of the path of awakening.

In South and Southeast Asia monks were prohibited from doing agricultural work, as this would result in killing sentient beings inhabiting the soil. In China, however, as practitioners came together in groups numbering in the hundreds, the means of support and livelihood of those communities of practitioners became an issue. Monks needed to respond to criticisms that they were parasitical members of society, a heavy stigma in the Confucian world view. Monastic communities thereby found themselves engaged in productive activities such as rice planting, bamboo cutting, and vegetable growing. Manual labor came to be integrated into the life of monastic communities in tandem with meditative practice and ritual observances.

Pai-chang (720–814) is said to have made early attempts at codifying guidelines for monastic life in Zen. A famous maxim, "One day without work, one day without food," is attributed to him. However, no written text of this code has been handed down, and scholars have suggested that stories of his achievements were hagiographical accounts from a later (Sung) period.

The oldest extant monastic code in China is the Chan-yuan ch'ing-kuei, compiled in 1103 during the flowering of Buddhism in the Sung dynasty. This code contains detailed provisions for official functions in hierarchical structure, ritual observances, and rules of decorum and procedures for daily living in community. It also manifests a propensity to combine Pure Land notions with Zen (Ch'an)

practice, a tendency that was to become characteristic of Chinese Buddhism as a whole from this period onward.

An insider's view of Zen monastic life is given by Robert Buswell Jr., who spent five years as a monk in a Korean monastery, in his book *The Zen Monastic Experience* (1992). Buswell's excellent treatment demystifies many romanticized notions of the Zen experience, and provides a flesh-and-blood account of a group of human beings engaged in a spiritual pursuit in the confines of a well-structured hierarchical institution that dates back over a millennium. Buswell's descriptions evoke comparisons with monastic life in the Christian tradition.

Vignettes of life in a Japanese Zen training monastery are presented in a book entitled *Unsui: A Diary of Zen Monastic Life* (Sato and Nishimura Eshin 1973). It includes illustrations and descriptions of significant features, including protocol for daily behavior, ritual services, kitchen and garden work, begging rounds, and other aspects of the communal life of those in training to become Zen priests. A similar book, also with illustrations, is *The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk* (Suzuki 1934). In Japan, with a hereditary system of temple priesthood in place since feudal and pre-modern times, most of those who enter Zen monasteries do so as preparation for taking on priestly duties in their family temple; they enter as part of the requirement to obtain qualifications for this office. After completing the required program, which takes up to two years, they return to their home temples to assume their largely ceremonial duties.

Zen monasteries have been part of the cultural landscape of East Asia through the centuries, and some of these have become powerful institutions that wield not only religious but also social and political influence in their respective societies. During the Kamakura era in Japan (eleventh to thirteenth centuries), the military shogunate granted special favors to Rinzai Zen communities, even inviting prominent monks from China to become abbots of important temples and granting the title National Teacher to select individuals. The development of the Rinzai Zen monastic system in medieval Japan, known as the Five Mountains, referring to the five prominent temples that took leading roles, offers an interesting study of the relation of religious authority, on the one hand, and socio-political and economic power on the other. Soto Zen tradition, brought by Dogen back to Japan in the thirteenth century after a sojourn in China, gradually rose in prominence and power, especially through the achievements of Keizan Jokin (1268–1325), third in succession from Dogen.

Monasteries for women have also been an important part of the scene in East Asia. An eighth-century census in T'ang China records 75,524 monks and 50,576 nuns scattered in the different communities at the time. An official document in China dating back to 845 indicates 4,600 monasteries destroyed, and 260,000 monks and nuns forced to return to lay life, part of the persecution measures of Emperor Wu-tsung. From these figures alone, however, we cannot determine the proportion of male to female monastics. In Dogen's writings there are references to temples for women monastics in Sung China, suggesting a situation of equal standing with males and also questioning certain customs in Japan that were discriminatory toward women. We will look further into women's perspectives in Zen below.

THREE ZEN MASTERS

Let us now look at three selected figures prominent in Zen history in East Asia for an appreciation of differing experiences reflected in their styles of teaching and expression.

Lin-chi (d. 866)

Lin-chi (Rinzai in Japanese) is perhaps one of the more colorful figures in the annals of Zen. His rough and militaristic style of teaching continues to be recounted to the point of caricature. The account of his enlightenment experience when he was a young monk, from the famous collection that bears his name (Lin-chi-lu, Rinzai-roku in Japanese), put together by a follower, sets the tone for a teaching style that was to become a characteristic mark of his lineage:

> Lin-chi arrived at Ta-yu's temple. Ta-yu said, "Where have you come from?"
>
> "I have come from Huang-po's place," replied Lin-chi.
>
> "What did Huang-po have to say?" asked Ta-yu.
>
> "Three times I asked him just what the cardinal principle of the Buddha-dharma was and three times he hit me. I don't know whether I was at fault or not."
>
> "Huang-po is such a grandmother that he utterly exhausted himself with your troubles!" said Ta-yu. "And now you come here asking whether you were at fault or not!"
>
> At these words Lin-chi attained Great Enlightenment.
>
> "Ah, there isn't much to Huang-po's Buddha-dharma!" he cried.
>
> Ta-yu grabbed hold of Lin-chi and said, "You bed-wetting little devil! You just finished asking whether you were at fault or not, and now you say, 'There isn't so much to Huang-po's Buddha-dharma.' What did you just see? Speak! Speak!"
>
> Lin-chi jabbed Ta-yu in the side three times. Shoving him away, Ta-yu said: "You have Huang-po for a teacher. You have nothing to do with me." (Dumoulin 1988, 183)

A cursory reading of this exchange will leave one puzzled, as Zen anecdotes generally tend to do. Such anecdotes are taken as helps in practice, brought up in one-to-one encounters with the teacher in a way that can awaken a practitioner's mind. Let us examine key points of this exchange, in a way that may offer clues to its unraveling.

Lin-chi is already at a point that is ripe for awakening, having stayed and practiced Zen at the monastery under Huang-po's guidance for three years. Having gone to Huang-po to ask for guidance, asking the central question that underlies all Zen practice, that is, the cardinal principle of the Buddha's teaching, he is hit three times by the master. Not understanding what is going on,

and disappointed at this treatment, he goes away to another monastery to seek guidance from Ta-yu. This is where the above anecdote begins.

In presenting himself to Ta-yu, Lin-chi comes in a state of total openness, acknowledging his lack of understanding of what happened in the exchange with Huang-po and recounting this to Ta-yu. "Three times I asked him just what the cardinal principle of the Buddha-dharma was, and three times he hit me. I don't know whether I was at fault or not." Ta-yu is able to see this ripe state of mind clearly and offers him the appropriate "turning word," that is, a verbal or other expression that will open his mind to an awakened state. To paraphrase Ta-yu's response, "Huang-po was so kind and compassionate like a grandmother, spoonfeeding the little baby, giving you the answer you were seeking. Don't you get it?" This is what occasions Lin-chi's awakening. Lin-chi at this moment no doubt recalled the bodily pain of the three hits received from Huang-po and immediately realized what *that* was all about. Huang-po in his compassion was revealing to him the fullness of the world of awakening. Ouch!

It is this experience of awakening that Lin-chi thus wished to offer to his disciples as he himself became a Zen teacher. His way of responding to their questions about the Dharma or about the essence of Zen comes from the way he was given the answer by his own teacher, Huang-po, that is, by hitting them or shouting at them, "Ho!" (a character pronounced *Katsu* in Japanese).

Lin-chi then exclaims, "Ah, there isn't much to Huang-po's Buddha-dharma!" A surface reading would make one think he is downplaying his teacher. However, a further unpacking of this utterance may open another dimension: Lin-chi is precisely enunciating, to the best of his ability, the "content" of his enlightenment experience at that very moment. He is using words in a way that blows away the spell of the words, revealing the realm of Emptiness that each word expresses in its own unique way. Not only is there "nothing much" to Huang-po's Buddha-dharma, there is No-thing at all! Totally empty. How magnificent!

Ta-yu, hearing this, could undoubtedly see with his own awakened eyes what Lin-chi was trying to express. But he needed to give another thrust to check how Lin-chi would parry, just as a physician would tap a patient's knee with a rubber mallet to check the person's reflexes. Grabbing hold of him by the collar, he asked: "What did you just see? Speak! Speak!"

Evidently, Ta-yu was satisfied with Lin-chi's response, which was to jab Ta-yu in the ribs three times. This was Lin-chi's way of indicating what he "saw" in that moment of awakening. His comments, again easily mistaken for disapproval or a rejection of Lin-chi, were meant to show the exact opposite in a way that revealed Ta-yu's own magnanimity as a Zen teacher. "I had nothing to do with this. It was Huang-po who opened that world to you. Now that you have realized, go back to him as your teacher."

The Zen lineage that derives from Lin-chi is thus known for the blows and shouts with which it responds to the big questions about the Buddha's teaching or about enlightenment. It hopes to impart to practitioners the experience of the world of Emptiness in these very blunt and direct physical ways.

Chinul (1158–1210)

The imprint of Chinul pervades the legacy of Zen (pronounced Son) in Korea. He did not undergo formal training or receive transmission from a Zen master, but he is said to have experienced awakening on three separate occasions, each triggered by his reading of a certain passage by a previous master.

The following passage, from the Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch, is noted as the springboard for the first of these experiences, said to have happened when Chinul was twenty-four: "The self-nature of suchness gives rise to thoughts. But even though the six sense-faculties see, hear, sense, and know, it is not tainted by the myriad images. The true nature is constantly free and self-reliant" (Shim 1995). Again, in 1185, a passage from *Commentary on the Flower Garland Sutra* by Chinese scholar Li T'ung-hsuan brought Chinul to tears, opening his eyes of wisdom further:

> If the mind is brightened and your wisdom purified, then one hair and all the universe will be interfused, for there is nothing that is outside the mind . . . The wisdom of the Tathagatas is just like this: it is complete in the bodies of all sentient beings. Merely ordinary, foolish people do not recognize it. (ibid.)

Then, in 1197, having founded a retreat society seven years previously and now a renowned master himself, sought by many people for guidance, Chinul relates the following:

> I had not yet forsaken passion and views—it was as if my chest were blocked by something, or as if I were dwelling together with an enemy . . . I went to Chiri (mountain hermitage) and found a passage in the *Records of the Son Master Ta-hui*: "Son does not consist in quietude nor in bustle. It does not involve the activities of life nor logical discrimination. Nevertheless, it is of first importance not to investigate Son while rejecting quietude and bustle . . . If your eyes suddenly open, then Son is something which exists inside your home." I understood this passage. Naturally nothing blocked my chest again. From then on I was at peace. (ibid., 409)

These three experiences became the basis for three kinds of approach Chinul cultivated and encouraged among his students, depending on their individual temperament and capacity. The first involves cultivation of meditative practice in tandem with intellectual study, two wings that complement one another in the flight to enlightenment, inspired by the teaching of the Platform Sutra. The second is the cultivation of faith and understanding, based on the teachings of the Flower Garland Sutra. The third is the approach using *koans,* or the *hwadu* (Chinese *hua-t'ou,* Japanese *wa-to*) approach, considered a "short cut" to realization in bringing to a halt a practitioner's discursive intellect in penetrating through a word or situation with no possible rational solution.

In addition to these three approaches Chinul devised two other forms to guide students. For those advanced in practice, the cultivation of "no-mind which conforms with the path" is offered. In this form of practice one stills the mind to be able to see through the duality of sensation and acts of thinking, and thereby enables the pure mind to come forth and be fully manifest in all that one does. For those who struggle in their efforts at attaining stillness through meditative practice, Chinul recommended the recollection of the Buddha as a way that leads individuals to the same goal as other modes of Buddhist practice. With this last form he thus takes Pure Land devotion and incorporates it into his Buddhist teaching, a tendency that was also characteristic of Buddhism in general in China at the time.

Dogen (1200–1253)

To date, Dogen's Zen is arguably the subject of more Japanese language and Western language studies combined than any other Zen figure in history. His monumental work, the *Shobogenzo*, or *Eye Treasury of the True Dharma,* a collection of his Zen talks to fellow monks, has continued to lead its readers through the centuries to philosophic heights and depths with its wide range of themes relating to fundamental questions of human existence. Various passages have also been cited by Zen masters repeatedly in their exhortations to practitioners of *zazen* or seated meditation, and his penetrating words have no doubt triggered deep religious experiences in hearers and readers as well.

Our task in this short segment is to offer a few vignettes in search of a glimpse of his inner world of enlightenment. Readers who seek a more systematic treatment of Dogen's thought can turn to a number of excellent works published in English (Abe 1992 is one example).

Dogen was led to a religious career having experienced the reality of impermanence at an early age, according to traditional accounts, with the death of his father when he was two, and of his mother when he was seven. As a young monk practicing assiduously at Mt. Hiei, the center of Tendai Buddhism in Japan, he came to be plagued by a basic doubt. If, as it was taught in Mahayana scriptures, all sentient beings are originally enlightened, what is the point of continuing practice? This doubt, and the desire to learn more about the Buddha Way, led him to sail to China to study with the masters there.

It is the Chinese master Ju-ching (1163–1228) to whom Dogen is led, and during a summer retreat, at a midnight meditation session, as Ju-ching notices a monk falling asleep, he remarks, "In Zen, body and mind drop off. Why do you sleep?" These words trigger a deep experience in Dogen, and offering incense before the Buddha, he comes and bows before Ju-ching, exclaiming, "Body and mind dropped off." At this, Ju-ching replies, "Dropped off body and mind," and acknowledges his enlightenment.

This experience resolves all Dogen's doubts. Offered a position as Ju-ching's assistant, he declines, chooses to return to Japan "empty-handed," in his own words. This sets Dogen in sharp contrast with eminent monks before him, who

had returned from China with various sacred objects, Buddha icons, and scrolls of scriptures, enshrining these items to mark their new status as Buddhist teacher with authorization from China. In emphasizing that he returns to his homeland "empty-handed," Dogen disclaims all religious authority save that of the joy and freedom of having "dropped off body and mind," that is, having truly realized Emptiness. This experience only continued to deepen through the succeeding years, as Dogen took upon himself the task of establishing a place for sincere seekers of the Way of the Awakened to practice with him, and of guiding those who thus joined him with his own life and words of exhortation. It is out of this context of guiding others in the Way of the Awakened that his writings are composed or transcribed from his talks by disciples.

As to the doubt that plagued him in his early years, he came to a resolution in the understanding that practice, with *zazen* as its centerpiece, is not to be considered as a *means* in order to attain enlightenment, but as the very manifestation and *embodiment* of enlightenment itself. In his work entitled *Bendowa*, Dogen writes:

> In the Buddha-dharma, practice and realization are one. Because practice is the practice grounded on realization, discernment of the Way by a beginner's mind is the totality of original realization itself. Thus, even as one takes care in one's practice, one is taught not to expect any realization apart from this practice. This is because this practice directly points one to original realization itself. Since it is already the realization in practice, realization is boundless. Since it is the practice in realization, practice is beginningless.

Thus, Dogen repeatedly emphasized to his fellow practitioners, his companions on the Way of the Awakened, that every aspect of their daily life in the monastery, from waking up in the morning to washing their face to sitting in *zazen*, participating in the rituals, taking meals, doing chores, resting, and going back to sleep, was in itself the veritable manifestation of that world of enlightenment.

In a short treatise entitled *General Principles of Seated Meditation (Fukan Zazen-gi)* he makes the very same point of emphasis in his opening lines:

> Now, the Way is intrinsically perfect and all-pervasive. What then is the point of distinguishing practice and realization? The supreme vehicle is absolute freedom. What is the point of exerting effort to attain it? The entire body is indeed beyond all defilements. What is all the concern with the means to polish it clean from these? It is never separate from this very place. What is the point of going off on pilgrimage of practice to get there? Yet if there is even a hair's breath of a distinction, it makes for a difference like that between heaven and earth. Once even an iota of a thought of differing or conforming arises, the purity of mind is lost.

These repeated injunctions to cast aside all thoughts of "striving for realization" are not a recommendation to laxity and neglect of practice. All this, let us recall,

is said in the context of the rigorous discipline of monastic life, where one is called to be mindful each moment. Here is the crux: in being mindful each moment as one gives oneself entirely in one's practice, one is thereby brought home, that is to the *realization* that every moment manifests in all its fullness the very activity of enlightenment itself, as one does the ordinary things of one's daily life.

Yet the caution about the "hair's breadth of a distinction" is important. The moment "practice in realization" degenerates into a concept, making one think "I am already enlightened, so what is the point of all this exertion?" one falls into the mudhole of dualistic thinking once more and becomes separated from that world of realization.

The central practice of Dogen's successors in the Soto tradition of Zen is presented as "just sitting" *(shikan-taza)*. To experience truly the purity of just sitting is to be opened to the experience of just standing, and further, just walking, just laughing, just crying, and so on. Each of these moments becomes an expression of realization, of the Way of the Awakened.

"JUST SITTING" AND "*KOAN* ZEN"

There has been much discussion throughout the history of the Zen tradition, as well as in Buddhism in general, about whether realization is gradual or sudden. This is an issue that is said to have set lines of division between the so-called Southern and Northern schools of Zen, as it did between the Chinese faction and the Indian faction in a famous debate related to the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet.

A way of addressing this issue that appears to integrate both positions is found in the famous Zen Oxherding Pictures. This is a series of calligraphic sketches dating from twelfth-century China and drawn in different versions through the centuries by artists in China and Japan. These pictures, presented in sets of eight or sometimes ten, are a description of the stages of the Path of Awakening. Having "stages" seems to imply a gradual process. On the other hand, the fulcrum of the path is in the sudden flash of realization, identified with the third picture in the series, described as "seeing the ox." Yet again, the path does not end there but finds a new beginning, and goes on to greater depths and heights in successive stages.

There are two basic modes offered to help or facilitate practitioners toward deepening in Zen experience. These can be said to parallel the two standpoints of "gradual" and "sudden" realization, wherein these two polar perspectives also find integration. One mode emphasizes the practice of "just sitting" *(shikan-taza)* as a simple and direct way to clear one's mind and come to a point of open attentiveness. The experience of just sitting also unfolds and flows into the experience of just standing, just walking, just driving a car, and so on, with every particular act and event in daily life. In this ambience of open attentiveness, whether sitting or in the midst of activity, a "breakthrough" may occur, enabling one to glimpse a realm as vast as the boundless sky. Having had this glimpse,

one's entire life, lived in its particularity from day to day, becomes the field of Zen practice. In other words, that vast and empty, boundless realm comes to be embodied and manifested in every act, every event of one's daily life.

Another mode is offered for practitioners whose discursive mind tends to be rather active and restless, and who struggle with questions of meaning. These are individuals with the state of mind of one whose "hair is on fire." For such persons, a *koan* is offered as a focal point of one's attention in practice. It could be the *koan* that is summarized in the question, Who hears? Or it could be the *koan* "The sound of one hand," whereby the practitioner is instructed to sit and *hear* the Sound of One Hand. Or, it could be the *koan MU* (no), starting off with an anecdote about Chao-chou's dog: A monk asked Chao-chou in all earnestness, "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" Chao-chou answered, "*MU*."

Practitioners given this *koan* are told to simply breathe in and breathe out with MU. With regular practice of seated meditation, quietly repeating MU at each outbreath, one develops single-mindedness, whereby one loses oneself entirely in MU. This "absorption" or "dissolution" into MU can erupt in a moment wherein one is opened to a vast and boundless realm. This is what is called a breakthrough moment, wherein one "sees one's true nature" (*kensho* in Japanese).

Different individuals have different time frames for arriving at this point of initial breakthrough, whose authenticity is determined based on a practitioner's responses to a set of checking questions. To those whose experience is confirmed, a series of "post-*kensho*" *koans* are given to consolidate and deepen the experience, as well as their understanding and appreciation of its implications. Practice with these continuing *koans* enables individuals to integrate the new vision of reality that the breakthrough event ushers into their life and thereby "come home" to the world of Emptiness manifested in every form.

The Rinzai school makes ample use of such *koans* in guiding individuals toward an ever-deepening appreciation and integration of their Zen experience, whereas the Soto school deriving from Dogen's Zen teaching guides practitioners in integrating Zen into the totality of their lives centered on the practice of "just sitting." The Harada-Yasutani lineage of Zen, known in the West through *The Three Pillars of Zen* (Kapleau 1965) and which includes the Sanbo Kyodan lineage formed by Dharma heirs of Koun Yamada, as well as the Diamond Sangha line of Robert Aitken and the White Plum line of Taizan Maezumi and their respective successors, incorporates both approaches in its guidance of practitioners.

WOMEN IN ZEN

In the Zen tradition the lineage charts handed down from teacher to disciple, or in the Soto tradition from preceptor to preceptee, which purport to show the direct connection to Shakyamuni, list an all-male star cast. The line of ancestors acknowledged with gratitude and chanted in Zen rituals in practice centers throughout the world is also a male list. To counterbalance this situation, some Zen centers in the Western hemisphere have recently included women ancestors

in their chanting list, beginning with Mahaprajapati, the first *bhikshuni* and Shakyamuni's own aunt.

Enlightened women occasionally appear in *koan* anecdotes used for Zen practice. There is the old woman who presents a *koan* to Teshan that he cannot answer, and the old woman who greets the Chao-chou on the Way to Mt. T'ai in No. 28 and No. 31 of the *Wumen-kuan,* respectively. But aside from these exceptions, Zen tradition gives the impression of being another male-dominated club.

Where were the women in the Zen tradition, and how did they experience Zen? They may not be represented in published texts, but this fact does not mean that they were not there, as recent studies indicate (Tsomo 1988, 1999). We must acknowledge, however, that there is still a dearth of resources in this area, though significant efforts are being made to redress this from different quarters.

A study by Paula K. R. Arai on Japanese Soto Buddhist nuns may set the pace for further works along these lines. Arai's study includes a historical section describing Dogen's stance of equality of men and women in the Buddhist Dharma and noting his list of successors, which included three women monastics. Keizan, third in succession from Dogen, had thirty nuns under his guidance, and the Soto Zen tradition has continued this lineage of women up to the present, though not without challenges and difficulties through history. The following excerpt from Arai's study offers a glimpse of a Zen woman's inner world:

> In a small, inconspicuous nun's temple in Nagoya, a hardy Zen nun, Nogami Senryo, tried to live according to Dogen's teachings with her entire being. Though little known beyond the temple compound walls, her daily life was plain testimony to her supreme realization of Buddhist truth. She dedicated herself to caring for this nun's temple, Seikan-ji, while training a quiet but alert nun, Kuriki Kakujo. Kuriki, the current head nun of Seikan-ji, arrived under Nogami's tutelage at the age of eight. With a sense of awe, respect, and a hint of trepidation, Kuriki remembers how Nogami raised her on the classical Zen dictum: *Zadatsu Ryubo* (Die sitting. Die standing [or: Sitting, lose oneself. Standing, forget oneself]) . . .
>
> Nogami practiced this each morning as she sped—palms flattened on the damp, neatly folded rag—down the wooden floor in the hallway collecting each particle of dust, after each meal as she wiped her bowl clean with a piece of pickled radish, and every afternoon as she pulled tiny weeds from the white stone garden. Her body understood that enlightenment meant tolerating nothing less than perfect completion of each activity. Strictly adhering to Buddhist truth, she commanded those around her, but especially herself, to approach everything in the spirit of *Zadatsu Ryubo.* She repeated this like a mantra as she strove to live each moment with pure and relentless concentration. (Arai 1999, 153–54)

A fascinating first-person account of a woman's Zen journey is that by Satomi Myodo, who became a Soto Zen nun after a tortuous path including pregnancy, a failed marriage, and an acting career (King 1987). The highlight of her account

is the *kensho* experience that was confirmed by Yasutani Hakuun Roshi, an important figure in the transplanting of Zen in the Western hemisphere. Satomi describes a crucial moment during a retreat with Yasutani:

> I was dead tired. That evening when I tried to settle down to sleep, the instant I laid my head on the pillow, I saw, "Ah, This out-breath is Mu!" Then: "The in-breath too is Mu!" Next breath too: Mu! Next breath: Mu, Mu! "Mu, a whole sequence of Mu! Croak, croak; meow, meow—these too are Mu! The bedding, the wall, the column, the sliding door—these too are Mu! This, that, and everything is Mu! Ha ha! Ha ha ha ha ha! That Roshi is a rascal! He's always tricking people with this 'Mu, Mu'!" . . .
>
> I felt as if a chronic disease of forty years had been cured in an instant. I slept soundly that night. (King 1987, 106)

Satomi also recounts the aftermath of the experience in the following way:

> Since kensho, I have been working with *koans*, one after another. Every time I penetrate a *koan*, a thin skin peels off my mind. Layer by layer, the mind's foundation is gradually becoming clear. Thus the more I enter into the ocean of Buddha Dharma, the more I understand how deep it is. And yet its content is nothing at all. A human life filled with this "nothing at all" is a marvelous thing. (ibid., 109)

Incidentally, it has become customary for those in the tradition founded by Yasutani Hakuun, known as the Sanbo Kyodan Zen lineage, to write about their *kensho* experiences. Some of these accounts of both (non-monastic) men and women are included in the collection entitled *The Three Pillars of Zen* (Kapleau 1965). This volume also contains a series of letters written over a five-day period by a young woman, Iwasaki Yaeko, sent to Harada Dai-un Roshi, Yasutani's own teacher, just before her death from tuberculosis. Responses by Harada Roshi confirming the deep enlightenment experiences of Iwasaki with each letter are also included.*

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* Some scholars have questioned the status and reliability of such accounts, even extending their critiques toward the very notion of "experience" as a category in religious studies. See Robert Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor, 94–116 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), echoing Wayne Proudfoot's arguments against "mystical experience" in *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). A response to Sharf's critiques is offered by Victor Sogen Hori in the introductory section of *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Koan Practice* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003). Hori acknowledges the contradictory elements involved in the notion of "pure experience" as presented by noted religious thinkers from the Eastern and Western hemispheres, and he sets these aside entirely. But he elucidates on the parameters whereby practitioners and scholars alike can have meaningful discourse about "*kensho* experience" or the experience of realization in *koan* practice (9–15).

The transmission of Zen into the Western hemisphere in the twentieth century has brought about a new situation for women, with many women now in teaching roles and exercising spiritual leadership.

ZEN IN CONTEMPORARY SETTING

Books on Zen that were widely read in the middle and latter part of the twentieth century, notably those of Alan Watts, D. T. Suzuki and a few others, presented Zen with an exotic, mystical aura. Since the 1980s a good number of philosophical treatments of Zen have appeared, expounding doctrinal and theoretical aspects of the Zen in better light. Also, more recent studies have shed new light on historical, sociological, and institutional aspects of Zen that fill in the gaps in the overall picture. In particular, the ritual and devotional aspects, such as sutra-chanting services, funerary rites, rituals of merit-transference in behalf of the dead, and also the ceremonies of receiving of precepts, priestly ordination, and others, have come to receive due attention as significant features of the Zen experience.

In Japan, rather than being places of meditative practice, the numerous Zen temples located all over the country, administered by temple priests who assume these roles on a hereditary basis, provide the populace with funerary and memorial services as well as a graveyard within their precincts to place the remains of the dead. These services are their main source of revenue, as is so with other Buddhist sects. These temples also provide venues for people to offer petitionary prayer in the form of wooden tablets or slips of paper wherein devotees may write down their intentions, which may include good health, safety on a journey, success in a business venture, or overall well-being for oneself and others, and leave them hanging on a particular kind of tree believed to be of auspicious nature, within the temple precincts.

The role of Zen in Japanese history and society has been put under new scrutiny with the appearance of Brian Victoria's *Zen at War* (1997) and *Zen War Stories* (2003). Victoria documents how renowned Zen masters and practitioners contributed actively to Japan's militaristic schemes and imperial wars of aggression, raising the question of ethical action as related to Zen practice and enlightenment.

With its transplantation in the Western hemisphere through Japanese and Korean teachers and their authorized heirs, there are now numerous Zen communities of various lineages spread out in various locations. In contrast with East Asian societies, where the religious, cultural, sociological, and institutional aspects have been part of its legacy, Zen is encountering new contexts, new challenges, and new opportunities in the West. The directions it will take in the long run are yet to be determined, but some key areas can be noted at this stage, which we follow up in the concluding chapter.

First, the increased visibility of women in leadership roles in Zen communities and the highlighting of women's perspectives in the Zen experience have

already brought about a significant development in the tradition. There is, however, a multitude of tasks still ahead on this issue, as male-dominant attitudes and structures continue to be operative in religious communities, not to mention in society at large.

Second, as the majority of the serious practitioners and active members of various Zen communities in the Western hemisphere (Europe and North America) today were born and raised in Jewish or Christian environments, regardless of the degree of their previous or present commitment to these religious traditions, how these practitioners understand Zen in relation to these Western religious traditions is an issue that cannot be ignored. While there are many who have made a clean break with their previous tradition (Jewish or Christian) in coming to Zen, there are other serious practitioners who maintain some sense of belonging, or even a certain degree of commitment, to their original religious tradition. How these attitudes will affect the course of development of Zen in the West remains an open and at times controversial question.

Third, the meeting of Zen, on the one hand, and Western psychoanalytic approaches, on the other, is bringing about new views into the human spirit, and these two sources of wisdom are shedding light on one another toward healing individuals who bear a woundedness on different levels in our contemporary society.

Fourth, as more and more individuals with a heightened awareness of social and global injustice and of the impending ecological crisis begin to take up Zen or become committed Zen practitioners, how this social engagement and ecological awareness will throw light on their Zen practice, and vice versa, how their Zen practice will relate to their socio-ecological engagement, will inevitably be factors that will come into play in the forging of the Zen legacy in the years to come.

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Personal Account: My Life as a Zen Buddhist

Jan Chozen Bays

I began Zen practice thirty years ago. My husband was a young biology professor who undertook meditation to relieve the stress of entering the publish-or-perish environment. I was so impressed with the changes in him over the course of a year's time that I stopped reading about Zen and began doing daily meditation myself. It was like a duck discovering water. I felt that I was returning home to the quiet happiness of mind and heart that I had known during my childhood, when I spent many hours walking silently in the pine-scented forest, or climbing high in maple trees and resting against their swaying trunks, or sitting, barely breathing, in the snow under a crabapple tree waiting for chickadees to alight and eat the seed on my outstretched mitten.

The books told us to find a teacher, and soon we found a Zen master, Maezumi Roshi, in Los Angeles. After several years of commuting many hours to attend retreats, we decided to take leave of absence from our academic jobs and move with our three children to the Zen Center of Los Angeles. The Zen Center was an oasis of tranquility that occupied almost an entire city block in the midst of a noisy ghetto. It was a serious training ground—learning to quiet the mind and to keep the heart open and serene amid loud traffic, blaring music, drive-by shootings, and drug deals in the neighborhood park. We lived and trained there for seven years, helping to establish a neighborhood medical clinic and the Kuroda Institute for Buddhist studies.

After completing my Zen training and receiving sanction to teach, I spent several years working full time as a pediatrician in the field of child abuse in Oregon. When our children were settled in college, I began teaching Zen. As our small sitting group grew in size and spiritual maturity, we started looking for a place to establish a Zen monastery. A suitable place came forward at last, and in 2002 we moved to a cluster of school buildings on a quiet, wooded site in rural Oregon, founding Great Vow Zen Monastery.

Zen practice in America has its broadest foundation in the thousands of individuals and small groups meditating in homes. The next tier is composed of hundreds of Zen centers in towns and cities across the country that offer classes and workshops on topics ranging from beginning meditation and basics of Buddhism to flower arranging and *taiko* drumming. These two tiers have made Zen practice widely accessible to large numbers of people.

One risk in adapting Buddhist practice in the West to make it accessible and palatable is that we may make it shallow as well—that Buddhist practice will become a commodity. The name Zen is being used now to sell everything from perfume to bras. If Buddhism is to survive in this country, it must be anchored in the deep and strong monastic roots that have ensured its survival in the East.

In some respects my life as a Zen Buddhist is very different from most people's lives. My day is bracketed by spiritual practice. The sixteen to twenty residents of the monastery keep a monastic schedule, following the ancient rhythms of religious communities everywhere. We arise at 3:50 a.m. for two hours of silent meditation followed by chanting of liturgy, group cleaning of the temple, and a ritual breakfast.The day is punctuated by more chanting before lunch and dinner, which also is a ritual meal, eaten in silence. The day ends with two more hours of meditation ending at 9:30 p.m. At 10 p.m. the monastery closing chant is sung by people who carry a glowing lantern around the buildings and grounds. In between the bookends of silent sitting, we work together—in the organic garden making compost, in the kitchen chopping carrots, in the sewing room making meditation cushions, in the ceramic workshop casting Jizo statues, and in the office composing fliers and newsletters and welcoming our many guests.

In some respects my life as an ordained Zen Buddhist priest is exactly like any other person's life. I pay bills, wash dishes, attend meetings, plan workshops and retreats, teach classes, counsel students and see patients, deal with mountains of paperwork, talk to my grown children on the telephone, and teach marimba as a volunteer in the local elementary school. At night I lie down with a grateful sigh and snuggle with my husband.

Why have I practiced Zen for thirty years, and why do I practice it this intensely? A famous ballet dancer said that if he did not practice for one day, he could feel the effects. If he didn't practice for two days, his comrades were aware. If he didn't practice for three days, the audience knew it. This is exactly true for me and spiritual practice. To frame it negatively, I take six hours a day to do spiritual practice because I don't like the person that I am if I don't. To express it positively, it is because I wish to expand in this lifetime as much as possible my capacity to face all situations in life with wisdom and compassion—with a clear, agile mind and a warm, undefended heart. I practice this intensely because one lifetime is short, and I do not know what will come next.

Buddhism has provided me with many tools that are quite specific to certain situations and that work remarkably well to clear away the fog of my confused, narrow, self-preoccupied mind and to open the tightness of my heart. For example, there is the tool of *metta*—lovingkindness practice—for times when anxiety grips my heart. There is the practice of sympathetic joy for times when jealousy arises. There is the practice of breath meditation for times when anger constricts my chest and threatens to emerge as words through my mouth. There is the practice of absorptive listening for times when I should not be speaking.

This practice has made me more patient and more confident that I can face the uncertainty of the future—the likelihood of physical pain and the unpredictable time and circumstances of my death—with more serenity and peace of mind. I am very grateful to have encountered in this lifetime a spiritual practice that brings me so many opportunities for discovery, for shedding unneeded ideas and armor, and, above all, that provides an unending source of happiness in the small and ordinary events of this very moment.

6

The Experience of Tantra and Tibetan Buddhism

Toward the latter part of the seventh century a new movement in Buddhism crystallized in India, in tandem with the social, political, and cultural changes that had been occurring after the waning of the "golden age" of the Gupta period of Indian history (320–540). This resulted in the composition of a genre of scriptures that were referred to as *tantra,* as distinct from the familiar term *sutra.* Proponents of this movement distinguished it from two previous streams of Buddhism. First there was the kind of Buddhism lableled Hinayana, which we have seen earlier as a pejorative term meaning "lesser vehicle," referring to the path followed by those whose focus is on their own individual liberation. Then came the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, referring to the *bodhisattva* path with its stages of ascendancy toward Buddhahood, generally regarded as taking multiple lifetimes to accomplish. The new, third stream was referred to as Vajrayana, or Diamond Vehicle, a way to enlightenment presented as supremely effective and realizable within this lifetime.

The term *Vajra* means the "thunderbolt scepter" of Indra, ruler of the Vedic gods; it also means "diamond," that is, something indestructible and sturdy. Vajra thus refers both to the supremely effective and thunderbolt-like way to ultimate realization and to that diamond-like wisdom to be attained, the adamantine wisdom of Emptiness that is the non-dual, all-encompassing, and unfathomable Dharma-body of the Buddha.

Scriptural texts that expound this Diamond Vehicle to ultimate awakening, as noted above, are generally referred to as Tantra (hence the term *Tantric Buddhism*) in contrast to those scriptures called sutra. *Tantra* is a term with rich underpinnings in the Hindu tradition, though scholars have not been able to agree on its etymological backgrounds. In rough summary, we can say that in its religious usage it refers to those scriptures that deal not only with the (theoretical) content of wisdom but also with the (practical) way to the realization of that wisdom, and hence is a genre of text that places an emphasis on matters of ritual, practice, and realization.

In the Hindu tradition, as well as in some Buddhist textual expressions, certain descriptions of Tantric ritual involved quasi-sexual imagery, describing the fusion of a masculine principle of skillful means, with a feminine principle of wisdom. The term *tantra* has thus been associated with sexuality and has consequently been

looked down upon as a "degenerate" form of practice. Titles of books for popular consumption capitalize on this sexual dimension and thereby give one-sided and often misleading ideas about the Tantric path.

In the context of the Buddhism systematized in India from the late seventh up to the eleventh century and transmitted to East Asia as well as to Tibet and Central Asia, tantra refers to ritual action that one performs with the body, speech, and mind, that is, *mudra*, *mantra*, and *mandala* respectively, as practice toward ultimate enlightenment.

Mudra means primarily a seal or the imprint left by a seal. In Buddhist practice it refers to a way of holding the hands and fingers, a ritual gesture that is symbolic of a cosmic power that both issues forth from and represents the world of enlightenment, the realm of wisdom and compassion.

Mantra is a sacred word endowed with cosmic power that connects or unites the practitioner who chants or recites it with the realm of the ultimate. Early Buddhist texts refer to recited formulas, called *paritta*, whose use the Buddha sanctioned, to ward off snakes or protect people from all kinds of danger. Also, in certain Mahayana scriptures, including the Lotus Sutra, there is reference to a certain kind of formula, called *dharani,* by which Buddhist followers are able to "hold" (from the Sanskrit verb *dhr,* "to hold, support," which is the same root word for *dharma*) the Buddha's teaching in mind and body through its recitation. A *dharani* is thus also a term much like *mantra* used to designate a sacred word endowed with power that connects directly to the world of enlightenment, embodying the truth of the Buddha's teaching.

Mandala is a term that variously means "uncomparable taste," "assembly," or "circle." The first meaning refers, of course, to the exquisite and peerless taste of enlightenment. The second refers to the place where Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* gather, hence the realm of enlightenment. The third has the connotation of perfection and completeness, as well as emptiness, referring also to the realm of the Buddha's enlightenment. The term *mandala* in Buddhist usage is a representation of the enlightenment of the Buddha on which a practitioner focuses one's mind in order to experience for oneself and enter this realm of enlightenment.

Tantric Buddhism, also called Esoteric Buddhism, thus involves a mode of practice that places emphasis on prescribed ritual involving the body, speech, and mind as a way of attaining ultimate realization. In the socio-political context in which it arose and came to be systematized in India, entry into Tantric practice begins with a ritual of initiation *(abhiseka)* paralleling the royal coronation ceremony, as an investiture of authority. This involves an entry into a formal and intimate relationship with a teacher, acknowledged as a representative of the Buddha. One then engages in three kinds of Tantric practice with the guidance of the teacher, involving the visualization of oneself as a very embodiment of a Buddha represented in the particular *mandala* given in one's path of practice.

We will first look at the experience of Tantric Buddhism in the life and legacy of Kukai, a ninth-century Japanese monk who received its transmission in China and came back to found a center of Tantric or Esoteric practice on Mt. Koya, western Japan, which remains active to this day. We will then survey the Tibetan experience of Buddhism, including its adaptation in the Western hemisphere.

THE TANTRIC EXPERIENCE AND LEGACY OF KUKAI

Kukai (774–835) traveled from Japan to China and found various forms of Buddhism protected as well as encouraged by imperial patronage. New developments were furthered by the creativity of scholar-monks who sought new ways of synthesizing this imported religion with Chinese ways of thinking, and also sought after by the populace with a renewed religious sensitivity. Various schools of Buddhism, with centers of learning and practice in a few strategic locations, were in vibrant activity. In Ch'ang-an, where Kukai stayed, there were sixty-four Buddhist temples for male monastics and twenty-seven for female monastics. Among the different teachers of the various schools that Kukai visited, it was Hui-kuo (746–805), a Master of the Esoteric school, whose guidance he sought.

Esoteric Buddhism had been transmitted to China through the Indian Tantric masters Subhakarasimha and Vajrabodhi, who came to Ch'ang-an separately in the early part of the eighth century. Invited frequently by T'ang rulers to perform Tantric rituals at the court, they were also granted favors for their efforts at translating Tantric texts and furtherance of their teachings. Amoghavajra, who came from Central Asia, a disciple of Vajrabodhi, continued the task of translating many important Tantric texts and systematized what came to be known as the Truth Word (*Chen-yen,* or *Shingon* in Japanese) school, whose leadership he passed on to his disciple Hui-kuo.

Hui-kuo admitted Kukai as a disciple, giving the latter *abhiseka* initiation rites and transmission in the Esoteric tradition. Kukai later wrote the following, recounting the aging Master's exhortation:

> Now my existence on earth approaches its term, and I cannot long remain. I urge you therefore, to take the mandalas of both realms and the hundred volumes of the teachings of the Diamond Vehicle, together with the ritual implements and these objects which were left to me by my master. Return to your country and propagate the teachings there. (Cited in Hakeda 1972, 32)

This ritual act under Hui-kuo's hand was thus for Kukai the source of an empowerment that he was to wield and impart to others in his own country, paving the way to the establishment of the Esoteric tradition in Japan. Kukai returned to Japan amid imperial accolades and renewed religious authority, and he became much sought-after for the performance of Tantric rituals believed to impart spiritual as well as worldly benefit of different kinds. Kukai himself reinforces this belief in the benefit of Tantric ritual toward pacifying the land and overcoming difficulties in a memorial to the Emperor Saga. Listing some of the Tantric scriptures he brought from China, Kukai writes:

> [These] are concerned with the teaching of mantra recitation. The Buddha preached these sutras especially for the benefit of kings. They enable a king to vanquish the seven calamities, to maintain the four seasons in harmony, to

protect the nation and family, and to give comfort to himself and others. For these matters these texts are sacred and excellent. (Hakeda 1972, 41)

Appointed by the imperial court to prestigious posts in the religious echelons of Kyoto and Nara, Kukai rose in prominence in the years following his return from China. During this time he performed many rituals and presided over religious services for all kinds of occasions, including agricultural feasts, petitions for rain, ceremonies for protection from enemies, and so on. While making himself available for these religious services in behalf of people, however, his heart longed for the peace and quiet that would allow for deepened religious practice. Upon his request to the Emperor Saga, he was granted Mt. Koya and the vast territory surrounding this mountain, long considered a sacred site, to establish a monastic center for Esoteric Buddhism. In a poem to a court noble in Kyoto, he wrote:

> You ask me why I entered the mountain deep and cold
> Awesome, surrounded by steep peaks and grotesque rocks,
> A place that is painful to climb and difficult to descend,
> Wherein reside the gods of the mountain and the spirits of trees.
> . . . . . .
> Have you not seen, O have you not seen,
> That billions have lived in China, in Japan?
> None have been immortal, from time immemorial:
> Ancient sage kings or tyrants, good subjects or bad,
> Fair ladies or homely—who could enjoy eternal youth?
> . . . . . .
> You too, are like the sun going down in the western mountains,
> Or a living corpse whose span of life is nearly over.
> Futile would be my stay in the capital;
> Away, away I must go, I must not stay there.
> . . . . . .
> I have never tired of watching the pine trees and rocks at Mt. Koya
> The limpid stream of the mountain is the source of my inexhaustible joy.
> Discard pride in earthly gains;
> Do not be scorched in the burning house, the triple world!
> Discipline in the woods alone lets us soon enter the eternal Realm. (Hakeda 1972, 51–52)

This undoubtedly echoes the sentiments of the numerous individuals who followed Kukai to Mt. Koya and kept the lamp of Esoteric Buddhism lighted through

the centuries. Kukai remained in good graces of the imperial court to the very end, even being appointed senior priest general, the highest position in the imperial Office of Priestly Affairs, one of whose responsibilities was to supervise and preside over formal religious ceremonies for the state and the imperial throne. He exercised this office during the last eight years of his life, and thus he was able to secure the place of Esoteric Buddhist ritual in official state functions, including the ceremony of imperial accession, whereby the Japanese ruler was ordained as a *cakravartin,* a Protector of the Dharma, upon coronation. This ritual, which continued to be performed through the centuries with the successors to the imperial throne in direct lineage, signified the bond between state and *sangha* that became a hallmark of Japanese culture and society, somewhat analogous to the European medieval monarchs being crowned by the Roman Catholic pope.

Kukai distinguished his Esoteric teaching *(Mikkyo)* from the other Buddhist schools already active at the time, referring to the latter as Exoteric teaching *(Kengyo)*. These latter were based on texts that called for doctrinal and theoretical interpretation, whereas the former consisted in ritual prescriptions that were to be experienced and realized in the practitioner's own life, with the body, mouth, and mind. The many writings attributed to Kukai center around this key affirmation, that is, one may realize supreme enlightenment, or Buddhahood, in this very life, in this very body *(sokushin-jobutsu)*. "These words contain infinite meanings. In fact, the goal of all the teachings of Buddhism is no more than what this one phrase represents" (Hakeda 1972, 227). Kukai lays out concrete ritual prescriptions toward this realization in his other treatises, notably "The Meanings of Sound, Word, and Reality" *(Shoji jisso-gi)* and "The Meanings of the Word *Hum*" *(Ungi-gi)*, unpacking the infinite treasures contained in specific actions, words, or thoughts of sentient beings, expounding these as manifestations of the Dharma-body of the Buddha. The following passage from another treatise, his "Secret Key to the Heart Sutra" *(Hannya Shingyo Hiken)*, offers a glimpse of this world of infinite treasure:

> In the sermons delivered by the Buddha, a single word contains the teachings of the Five Vehicles; in a moment of thought, he preached the doctrines of the entire Buddhist scriptures. So what could be missing from this sutra, which consists of one scroll containing one chapter? The words in it are comparable to the diagrams [manifested on the back] of a tortoise, the divination stalks which bear the signs of all phenomena, the endlessly interrelated meshes of Indra's net, or the words in the Sanskrit grammatical text composed by Indra which contain manifold meanings . . .
>
> On the basis of the Esoteric Truth Word teaching, I have briefly interpreted the five parts of the Heart Sutra. The truth expressed in the Sutra is everywhere to be seen; It is in our mind, the beginning and end of which are unknown. (Hakeda 1972, 265, 275)

Particularized rituals in the system developed by Kukai and his followers, performed at Mt. Koya and affiliate temples throughout Japan, such as the Fire

Ritual, include combinations of bodily gestures, recitations of sacred words, and visualizations of deities. Rituals are thus manifestations of the world of enlightenment but are also performed for different purposes, among which are "to avert misfortune, to increase benefit, to subdue negative influences, and to bring about harmonious relations. Outwardly, these purposes relate to material, secular benefit, such as healing or prosperity, but their underlying meaning derives from the goal of esoteric union" (Yamasaki 1988, 152).

Kukai has come down in Japanese legend and lore as a larger-than-life figure, and he continues to be venerated as a saint among the people. His influence is by no means limited to those who have expressly taken up religious practice in the center he founded at Mt. Koya, as the Esoteric discourse he succeeded in establishing led to many of the most significant developments in Japanese religion, culture, and society as a whole. His legacy can perhaps be described as the "Tantrization" of Japanese religion in its various manifestations. For example, religious views that prevailed much later with the dissemination of the teachings of the Buddhist founders of the Kamakura period, such as that the single-minded recitation of the Name of Amida Buddha is sufficient for the assurance of salvation (Shinran), or that the recitation of the august title of the Lotus Sutra manifests the three thousand worlds in a single thought-moment (Nichiren), or that a single act of sitting *zazen* as such is an embodiment of enlightenment itself (Dogen), can be understood better in the light of Tantric influence. These religious acts of recitation of the Name (Namu Amida Butsu) or of the august title of the Lotus Sutra (Nam-Myoho Renge-kyo), or of "just sitting" *zazen* are understood as ritualized actions that, by their very enactment effects their intention, namely, the realization and activation of the world of enlightenment.

TIBETAN BUDDHISM

The image of the Dalai Lama comes to mind for most people at the mention of Tibetan Buddhism. Catapulted into world prominence, especially since his reception of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, this "simple monk" (in his own terms) of the Geluk order (see below) has come to represent not only the Tibetan people in and outside of Tibet, and not only Tibetan Buddhism, but also the face of Buddhism as such, to the rest of the world. As the plight of the people of Tibet, placed under the rule of the Chinese government since its annexation in 1949, continues to be a serious concern, the flow of refugees from this country has brought increased attention to Tibetan culture and religion in other parts of the world.

General Features

As part of his mission to promote a better understanding of the Tibetan people's culture and religion, the Dalai Lama has often presided over a ceremony called the Kalachakra initiation ritual in public gatherings in different parts of the world, with participants ranging up to the tens of thousands each time. Taking a ritual that is traditionally given only to select individuals deemed worthy and having

undergone adequate preparation, the Dalai Lama has broken tradition and has opened the treasures of this ritual to anyone who wishes to attend, proclaiming this rite a vehicle for world peace.

Other Tibetan *lamas* (spiritual guide or teacher) also conduct rituals of empowerment as they visit different places throughout the world, often in conjunction with sand *mandala* exhibitions. This facet of Tibetan Buddhism is now familiar to many Westerners, because groups of monks have visited various places to construct these religious icons, usually over a minimum six-day period, offering initiation and empowerment rituals in the process, and then concluding with the icon's destruction. This last act of the exhibition conveys a powerful message to participants and spectators of the impermanence of all conditioned realities in this earthly existence. There are now many Tibetan Buddhist centers with resident or visiting *lamas* located in the Western hemisphere as well as in other parts of the world outside of Tibet, and more and more people have been drawn to spiritual practice in this tradition.

A personal relationship with an authorized teacher or *lama* is a precondition of entry into Tantric practice in this tradition. This involves a mutual commitment meant to last for one's entire lifetime and beyond, unless broken off unilaterally or by mutual agreement for some grave and sufficient reason. A practitioner relates to the teacher with an attitude of total trust and devotion, and takes what the teacher prescribes for one's practice to heart as one's map in the path of liberation:

> For the disciple, the source lama [one's primary Tantric mentor] is more important than all the Buddhas. If you rely on the Buddhas to reach Awakening, this requires much time. On the other hand, it is said that if one prays to the lama from the depths of the heart, one will quickly attain Awakening. The grace of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas resembles the radiance of the sun. Even in the hot season, the sun cannot make a piece of paper on the ground catch fire, but if you have a magnifying glass, the paper will easily burst into flames. The Vajrayana consists of inserting the magnifying glass of the lama between the grace of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and the mind of the disciples. (Kalu 1995, 30, cited in Ray 2001, 153)

Among the authorized teachers of Tibetan Buddhism some observe the celibate monastic path, while others follow a tradition of non-celibate *yogins* or adepts that are also noted hallmarks of this tradition. The teacher prescribes particular practices suited to each individual. These involve certain preliminary practices done over a certain period of time, including taking formal refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha), the performance of prostrations, the repeated recitation of a given *mantra,* a *mandala* offering, and a practice of visualization of "union with the teacher," called Guru Yoga. The different schools may vary the way these preliminary practices are conducted.

A form of practice often recommended by Tibetan teachers is *tong-len,* literally, "sending and taking." This is a Mahayana meditative exercise wherein one draws forth from the infinite source of peace and happiness in one's own Buddha

nature and sends it to some particular person or persons one knows to be in a situation of suffering or difficulty, or to all sentient beings in their entirety, accompanying this intention with one's out-breath. One then inhales with the intention of drawing in the pain and anguish and suffering of the beings for which the exercise is intended. As this process is repeated over a given period of time, the practitioner experiences a lifting of the boundaries between self and the beings with which he or she is sending and taking, and thereby gets a glimpse of that world beyond the duality of self and other.

When the practitioner is deemed ready, a ceremony of initiation or empowerment *(abhiseka)* is performed, sealing the formal commitment between the practitioner and the teacher. The teacher will then be able to guide the practitioner into the intricacies of the Tantric path in a most intimate way. In the context of this relationship, a visualization practice involving a particular deity (called *yidam*, or deity yoga) is prescribed by the teacher based on the latter's knowledge of the practitioner's particular psychological temperament or spiritual need. The deity taken in this context is not an objective entity from the "other world" or a savior figure that is invoked for external help in one's practice, but a symbolic figure that manifests the ultimate reality of Emptiness in a given, particular form, that is, as embodying wisdom and compassion in a concrete way. The deity is regarded as one particular manifestation of Buddha, which "represents one's own potential for enlightenment; it is an archetype for the state one is trying to achieve through meditation" (Powers 1995, 235).

Four Major Schools

Within Tibetan Buddhism one can distinguish four major schools or sects: the Nyingma, or Ancient School, on one side, and three other schools, regarded as New Schools (Sarma) on the other. They come out of a common, rather complex matrix of Tibetan culture and religion, a result of centuries of interaction between Tibetan indigenous religious expressions, referred to as *Bon,* and the Buddhist tradition that entered Tibet from India.

The Ancient School: Nyingma

The Nyingma traces its basic teachings and approaches to practice to the legendary eighth-century Tantric *yogin* Padmasambhava (Lotus-born). He is endearingly known as Guru Rinpoche (Precious Teacher), regarded as an emanation of the Buddha Amitabha. His life story was preserved for posterity by Yeshe Tsogyal, a king's wife who became his disciple and consort and a legendary figure in Tibetan tradition, memorialized as The Great Bliss Queen (Klein 1995). To Padmasambhava is attributed a great number of "hidden treasures," sacred texts said to have been composed and concealed in different places in order to be discovered in the epochs and contexts when they would be most needed by succeeding generations of practitioners.

A distinctive practice of the Nyingma school is known as Dzokchen (The Great Perfection), also described as "the naturally liberated mind." This is considered

the highest level of spiritual attainment for human beings, the summit of a nine-level path to enlightenment prescribed in the Nyingma school. Three stages are distinguished in this practice, consisting first in the establishment of the right view, also called the basis; second, in the practice of the path itself; and third, in the enjoyment of its fruition. The first stage involves the recognition of one's true nature as Emptiness and as primordial wisdom, and also the recognition of how delusions and attachments arise, as well as the understanding of how to free oneself from such delusions and attachments. The second involves a path of meditative practice entered upon after having ascertained the basis, or right view, with differing prescriptions for different levels of intellect and detailed instructions for the various levels to be attained. The third involves a blissful contemplation of the fruits, which is the realization of the ultimate or Dharma-body of the Buddha:

> The fruition of dzokchen is the full realization of the enlightenment within. In practical terms, it involves the ability to rest in the innate state and not depart from it. Far from a state of dullness, lethargy, or apathy—as indeed it might seem from ego's standpoint—one rests in the natural state, or as the natural state, that is, vivid, vibrant, and dynamic. The buddhas rest in the natural state and, as expressions of it, remain in that world, interact with others, teach the dharma, and express their compassion to sentient beings in myriad ways. Yet none of this is done based on conscious intention. It all unfolds as Buddha activity that is always unpremeditated, spontaneous, and perfectly apt to the situation. The fruition of dzokchen produces men and women of extraordinary sanctity, compassion, and ability. (Ray 2001, 301–2)

This practice, needless to say, is done only with the guidance of an authorized teacher familiar with the intricacies of the path, who can walk with the practitioner in a process that can take years and years. The theoretical foundations of this practice derive from the doctrine of Tathagatagarbha, or the Matrix of the Tathagata, which was transmitted in East Asia as the doctrine of Buddha Nature, a notion central in the development of Chan or Zen.

The New Schools: Sarma

Kagyu

The Kagyu school traces its origins to a line of renowned teachers from the eleventh-century Indian Tantric master Tilopa, the teacher of Naropa, who was in turn the teacher of Marpa, the first Tibetan member in the august lineage. The latter's disciple, Milarepa (1040–1123), is regarded as one of the greatest figures in Tibetan Buddhism. He composed many treatises and hymns still read and chanted by practitioners to this day.

Key practices of this school include the Six Yogas of Naropa, and the Mahamudra (Great Seal or Symbol). Other schools of the Vajrayana path present detailed expositions of the inward journey of the spirit, but the Kagyu lineage

offers a very systematic guide to this journey through the Six Yoga framework traced to Naropa. The Six Yogas fall under the headings of (1) the inner fire, (2) illusory form, (3) dream, (4) luminosity, (5) the intermediate state following death *(bardo)*, and (6) transfer of consciousness from one's body *(phowa)*.

The Six Yogas prepare the way for the practice of the Mahamudra. The teaching concerning this form of practice also appears in Indian Vajrayana texts, but was developed and systematized in the Tibetan Kagyu tradition through Marpa, who transmitted it to Milarepa. It is also practiced by the Sakya and Geluk schools and is similar in many aspects to the Nyingma practice of Dzokchen briefly described earlier. It is also presented in three aspects of ground or basis, path or process, and fruition.

The ground is the acceptance of the notion that one is already endowed with Buddha nature, that the seed of enlightenment is already embedded in one's own being, but in the case of ordinary sentient beings, unrecognized. The path is the cultivation of this seed of enlightenment, including the removal of the hindrances to its coming to light, such as removing rocks and weeds that block its way, and exerting efforts toward its growth and maturation, such as watering it, loosening the earth around it, and so on. This refers to the particulars of the meditative path whereby one clears the mind of erroneous conceptions and enables the clear light of Emptiness to be fully manifest in one's awareness. The fruition is the full manifestation of this Emptiness-qua-Buddha nature in a practioner's life, which is the culmination of the path of ultimate enlightenment.

In the accounts of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, renowned meditation master and founder of Naropa University, this Mahamudra experience is presented as "the vividness of phenomena," "complete ordinariness," "the nakedness of raw experience," "youthfulness," "great bliss," "the communicative power of being," and "the magic of what is" (Ray 2001, 286–93):

> The bliss of Mahamudra is not so much great pleasure, but it is the experience of tremendous spaciousness, freedom from imprisonment, which comes from seeing through the duality of existence and realizing that the essence of truth, the essence of space, is available on this very spot. The freedom of Mahamudra is measureless, unspeakable, fathomless. Such fathomless space and complete freedom produce tremendous joy. This type of joy is not conditioned by even the experience of freedom itself; it is self-born, innate. (Ibid., 291, citing Trungpa)

Descriptions of this stage of fruition of Mahamudra cannot fail to evoke resonances with accounts of Zen masters on the mode of awareness of an enlightened person. The mode of awareness of one who has reached this fruition stage of Mahamudra is also presented in connection with the "crazy wisdom," "wisdom run wild," for which Trungpa Rinpoche was widely known.

Sakya (Gray Earth)

The Sakya school is named after the location of the monastery of its origins, founded in the eleventh century in an area in south central Tibet. Its practice is

based on the *Hevajra Tantra*, an Indian ritual text centered around the divinity Hevajra and his consort Nairatmya and translated into Tibetan around this time (eleventh century). The system of practice in this school, synthesizing Exoteric elements from Mahayana sutras with Esoteric or Tantric elements, was set in place around the twelfth century by Gunga Nyingpo (1092–1158), also called the Great Sakya. He was considered an emanation of the Bodhisattva Manjusri, and so are many of the successive hereditary leaders of this school up to the present day.

This school attained distinction in history when one of its leaders, who came to be known to posterity as Sakya Pandita (Scholar of the Sakyas) (1182–1251), was summoned by the Mongol prince Godan to negotiate the surrender of Tibet. Godan was then suffering from an illness that the Tibetan Tantric adept was able to cure, whereupon the Mongol ruler converted to Buddhism and became Sakya Pandita's disciple. Sakya Pandita stayed at Godan's court and became a spiritual adviser to the Mongol rulers, as well as the virtual regent of his own country, Tibet, backed by Mongol military might. His successors continued in this political role at the Mongol court until the fall of Mongol rule over China in the middle of the fourteenth century.

A distinctive practice of this school is termed "path and fruition," or better, "path as fruition" (*lamdre* in Tibetan). The following passage from the *Hevajra Tantra* offers a glimpse of the underlying vision of reality which presupposes this practice:

> There is no being that is not enlightened, if it but knows its own true nature. The denizens of hell, the hungry ghosts and the animals, gods and humans and devas, even the worms upon the dung-heap, are eternally blissful in their true nature . . .
>
> No Buddha is found elsewhere in any of the spheres of existence. The mind itself is the perfect Buddha, and no Buddha is seen elsewhere . . . Those fools who are obscured in ignorance and do not know this way, continue to transmigrate through the six realms of existence. But when one has found Hevajra, who is the Means, O Vajragarbha of great compassion, one purifies the spheres of the senses, and gains the highest state. (Snellgrove 1959, 107)

Various parts of this Tantric text contain detailed prescriptions for ritualistic practice involving bodily action, verbal recitation, and mental visualization, and hence one needs to have recourse to an experienced guide to follow the practice that opens one to the highest state of enlightenment. In the following passage, for example, the first four lines appear to contradict all traditional injunctions about right action in Buddhist tradition. But the succeeding lines open up the significance of the first four in terms of Tantric practice:

> You should slay living beings.
> You should speak lying words.
> You should take what is not given.
> You should frequent others' wives.

> Now to practice singleness of thought is the taking of life, for the thought is the life. To vow to save all people is interpreted as lying-speech. That which is not given is the bliss of woman, and she is your own Nairatmya who is the wife of all others. (Snellgrove 1959, 97)

A crucial aspect in this system of practice in the Sakya school called "path as fruition" is what is handed down from teacher to disciple in direct transmission, as distinguished from the teachings opened to the wider circle of practitioners or available in written form as in the Tantric texts used as the basis of practice. This distinction between the content of Esoteric teaching and open teaching is analogous to what is done with the *koan* in the Zen tradition, whereby the one-to-one transmission between disciple and teacher is distinguished from what is given in *teisho* or open talks expounding the *koan* to the larger group of practitioners.

Geluk (System of Virtue)

The succession of Dalai Lamas belong to this school, founded by Tsong Khapa (1357–1419), who succeeded in instituting a monastic reform program in the Buddhist world of his time and left a body of writings that offers a panoramic view of Buddhist philosophy and practice. Among Tsong Khapa's achievements is the revitalization of a structured monastic system that was dedicated to scholarship as well as to spiritual practice in a way that integrated both as wings of enlightenment.

The monastic program of study offered in the Geluk school spans a wide range of subjects including rules of conduct *(vinaya),* the analysis of elements *(abhidharma),* epistemology and logic, the dialectics of the Middle Path, and the stages of the Bodhisattva Path. The full academic program, involving from fifteen to twenty-five years of study, leads to the acquisition of the degree of Geshe, a term derived from the Sanskrit *kalyanamitra* (spiritual guide). Throughout the program of study monks engage in lively discussions and debate, presenting or defending philosophical positions or demolishing others, using bodily gestures as well as loud shouts in making their point.

Upon completion of the Geshe degree, monks often enter into a retreat that can last up to three years in order to integrate what had been acquired intellectually with one's whole life through meditative practice, with guidelines set forth in the Geluk tradition since Tsong Khapa.

Tsong Khapa's treatise entitled *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* lays out in detail the graduated path to ultimate realization, distinguishable into three aspects: first, the acknowledgment of the intention to be liberated from this cyclic existence of birth-and-death; second, the arousing of the mind that seeks enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings; and third, the clarification of one's mind toward a correct view of emptiness.

The Tantric path is geared toward the full manifestation of one's true nature, which is no other than Buddha nature, characterized by the full activation of the wisdom and compassion that is latent in one's being right from the start of the journey. Deity yoga is a very effective way of entering into the depths of this Tantric path, whereby the practitioner is given a particular deity as the focus of

meditation and visualization. This mode of practice, as noted briefly in the summary account above, is not an act of worship of an objectively existing divine figure but is a way of experiencing the ultimate reality of Emptiness, or of "no inherent existence," that brings about the clarity of the mind of wisdom. In the words of the Dalai Lama, "deity yoga encompasses the union of clarity—the visualization of the deity—and the profound—the realization of emptiness," which is realized in "the contemplation of the emptiness of oneself and the deity . . . on the empty nature common to both the deity and oneself" (Gyatso 1995, 101, 102).

Four classes of tantra are distinguished, prescribed to individuals based on particular factors in their stage of practice. These are action tantra, performance tantra, yoga tantra, and highest yoga tantra. All three of the New Schools have the same four tantras, though they differ in approach, emphasis, and strategy.

Action tantras involve actualizing enlightened body, speech, and mind. Deity yoga belongs to this type of tantra. Performance tantra involves a practice of

> generating an image of oneself as an enlightened being and also generating an image of a deity in front of oneself as a template. One views oneself and the deity as companions or friends, and one strives to emulate it. One also chants the mantra of the deity and endeavors to perfect one's ability to visualize the deity without mental fluctuation. (Powers 1995, 244)

Yoga tantra goes a step further, in that here "one visualizes oneself as an actual deity, and not merely as a devotee or companion of a deity" (ibid.). This leads to the fourth, called highest yoga tantra, called by the Dalai Lama the "daily diet" for Tibetans.This highest yoga tantra includes a generation stage whereby the practitioner develops proficiency in visualization with the help of a *mandala,* and a completion stage, whereby the practitioner, in arriving at a state of clarity and luminosity, is able to experience "the union of two truths, the union of bliss and emptiness" (ibid., 132). It is this union of bliss and emptiness that many icons depicting sexual embrace and used in the Tantric traditions attempt to portray.

Tibetan Practices on Death and Dying

One of the facets of Tibetan Buddhist belief and practice addresses the matter of death and dying. This aspect came to the attention of Westerners with the publication in 1927 of a text translated into English with the title *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. More recently, two other translations have come out, by Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa (1975) and Robert Thurman (1994). A take-off on the theme by Sogyal Rinpoche, entitled *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, published in 1992 with the cooperative editorial hands of Patrick Gaffney and Andrew Harvey, has become a bestseller in the New Age spirituality genre.

The central focus of Tibetan texts addressing the question of death and dying, as in all other religious texts, is the path to ultimate enlightenment. For example,

Tsong Khapa's classic *Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* devotes a well-structured chapter to the contemplation of death, beginning with an exposition of the faults of not cultivating mindfulness of death, and going on to delineate the benefits of contemplating death. Giving concrete guidelines on the cultivation of this mindfulness of death, he presents the following three points for contemplation: that death is certain, that the time of death is uncertain, and that at the time of death only earnest religious practice is of any avail.

Tibetan Tantric texts refer to the notion of an "intermediate state" *(bardo)* between physical death and the next stage, that is, either ultimate liberation or rebirth in one of the six realms of sentient beings. Understanding what goes on during this "in between" state is crucial in determining the actual course of that next stage.

The event of dying is marked by the disintegration of the elements that together make up our physical existence, that is, our senses, and the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air, an "outer dissolution," followed by the "inner dissolution," that is, the disintegration of thought states and emotions, and the cessation of breathing. This process of dissolution comes to an end with the appearance of what is called Ground Luminosity, which is no other than our original nature, the boundless, formless, clear, and bright Dharma-body of the Buddha now fully manifest without any obstructions. If the (now deceased) individual, having engaged in advanced Tantric practice (such as Dzokchen or Mahamudra) immediately recognizes this as one's own true nature, as "ordinary mind," "things just as they are," ultimate liberation is attained.

However, if one does not arrive at this recognition of Ground Luminosity as one's true nature, not having attained such a state during one's physical life span, a second opportunity arises, with the manifestation of the brilliant suchness of the Body of Bliss, the second body of the Buddha. This second body is likened to the noonday sun shining in a cloudless sky. Its immediate recognition, which will be the passage to liberation through rebirth in a pure realm, is prepared for during one's life span by exercises of Deity Yoga, wherein one is able to experience union with one's true (and empty) nature in the form of a deity in resplendent light.

The appearance of Ground Luminosity that is likened to infinite space (the Dharma-body) and of the brilliant sun of suchness (the Body of Bliss), happens in an instant, so that an ordinary person (who has not had the experience of these realms in Tantric practice) will not be able to recognize them. For such a person the next appearance during this intermediate state is a scenario one is familiar with in ordinary life—the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells of human existence. One begins to yearn for the comfort and security offered by these sensations, and this thereby conditions one for the next rebirth.

Tibetan tradition assigns a period of forty-nine days for this period between physical death and the next rebirth into a sentient form. At the end of this period, when the conditions are ripe, the karmic residue of consciousness seeking rebirth finds a particular egg of a mother at the moment of its fertilization by the father's sperm, and the new birth process begins.

A religious practice in the Tibetan tradition that pertains to this time of passage is called *phowa*, which means "transference" or "ejection" of consciousness. This refers to a ritual that one can practice in the context of the Six Yogas of Naropa as one approaches death, whereby one's consciousness is directed toward liberation. This can also be performed as a ceremony for others, seeking to direct the consciousness of one in the intermediate state toward rebirth in a favorable state.

There are other Tibetan practices to facilitate the journey after death toward liberation or favorable rebirth, including the ritual reading of the text of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* for a period of forty-nine days and the displaying of various icons in front of a picture of the deceased, depicting various scenes, objects, and deities, accompanied by the recitation of a ritual formula.

The Feminine and Women's Experience

Tibetan religion and culture abound in references to feminine figures. Perhaps the most prominent is the figure of Tara (Savioress), a female embodiment of compassion. She has been the subject of pious stories and Tantric accounts, as well as the focus of devotion and prayerful supplication through the centuries. There are other female divinities with benevolent as well as wrathful or vengeful characteristics that are part of Tibetan lore.

In Tantric circles, the figure of the *dakini* (sky-traveler) is a central one and has become the subject of several important scholarly studies in recent years (see bibliography in Simmer-Brown 2001, 363–83). As to interpretations of the significance of *dakini* in religious understanding and spiritual practice, Judith Simmer-Brown offers a helpful critical summary of Jungian interpretations, on the one hand, and of feminist interpretative strategies on the other, noting the contributive as well as the problematic aspects of both.

The *dakini*, as a feminine symbol, can be seen through Jung's schema of animus-anima in the human psyche. While this identification may yield insights as to the function of *dakini* in spiritual practice and enable it to throw light on activities of the unconscious, it tends to delimit the range of the symbol, relegating it to the realm of the "other" within the male psyche. This limitation of the Jungian approach also ties in with feminist critique of the *dakini* principle, where it is seen as a tool or emblem of patriarchal religious culture, filling in the lack and serving the needs of male practitioners in their aspirations toward enlightenment.

The situation of nuns in Tibet is severely hampered by the continuing male dominance of the religious structures and institutions, as various studies and testimonies attest. Stereotypes about women that run across various cultures are also notable among male religious leaders in Tibet, in spite of a legacy of outstanding women regarded as enlightened teachers and Tantric adepts.

Tsultrim Allione writes the following from her own recollections:

> When I asked a lama of this (Gelukpa) sect if men and women had the same capacity for enlightenment, he assured me that they did. Then, when

> I asked him for stories of great women in his lineage, he drew a complete blank. I asked him how this could be if men and women had essentially the same mind and the same capacity for enlightenment. Then he confessed that there was a slight difference between men and women. He described women as being "slightly less emotionally stable." He said this was his own observation from working with both men and women; however, behind this comment lay hundreds of years of male monks passing judgment on the spiritual capacities of women. Apparently this "slight" difference was supposed to account for a complete absence of any women saints within his monastic sect, in which there are thousands of nuns. The lamas who now are teaching internationally are constantly confronted with questions of sexism and have therefore altered tradition somewhat so that women have become teachers and administrators, but still, even in the West, Buddhist organizations are usually dominated by men. (Allione 1984, 14–15)

Allione, a recognized teacher in her Nyingma tradition, is one among an increasing number of those seeking to transform Tibetan Buddhism to a more egalitarian religious structure and tradition in which women are not merely given deference as "symbols of the feminine principle" placed at the service of male practitioners on various levels, but are also enabled to reclaim their own subjectivity and engage themselves fully in the path of enlightenment on the same plane as their male counterparts. Allione's own contribution toward this has been to call attention to the lives of various "women of wisdom" in the Tibetan tradition who have embodied this path of enlightenment.

Judith Simmer-Brown, an authorized teacher in the Kagyu lineage and noted scholar based at Naropa University, presents a view that supplants the Jungian and feminist perspectives on the *dakini* and opens the possibilities for women—and men as well—to find in this important figure of Tantric practice a key to genuine wisdom and the recovery of their wholeness:

> The warm breath of the dakinis is the expression of conceptual mind liquefying and wisdom dawning . . . When we understand the image of the dakini's warm breath, we discover the key to her centrality in the Tantric traditions in which the dakini symbolizes the spiritual subjectivity of the practioner, the fuits of meditation experienced in a constantly fresh, immediate way as the dynamic display of wisdom. (Simmer-Brown 2001, 291)

Scholar-teacher Anne Klein presents Yeshe Tsogyal, the Great Bliss Queen who was a disciple and consort of Padmasambhava, as a way of exploring "how feminists and Buddhists can expand each others' narrative horizons" (Klein 1995, 193). In presenting the the extensive narrative associated with Yeshe Tsogyal, Klein emphasizes that "at the same time she has a dimension of subjectivity that is not simply the product, container, or display of that narrative. In her ritual context she is not a mask; she is not a role model. She is an expression of one's own capacity and potential. To meet her in this way means, for Western women, to possess and come to terms with their own story" (ibid.).

In sum, Tantric Buddhism represents a religious development that takes the path to enlightenment laid out by Shakyamuni Buddha as a primary paradigm. In common with the entire Buddhist tradition, it seeks to liberate us from the root causes of our suffering, identified with our attachment to our deluded notions of self and other. However, its distinctive approach is in its way of taking the "poisons" that are the causes of our suffering, namely, greed, lust, anger and ignorance, as the very antidotes that can help in their eradication, in the way vaccines injected into our systems immunize, using doses of the harmful organisms from which we seek protection. Tantric masters throughout history attest to the potency of this approach but have also repeatedly cautioned against its dangers.

A key feature of Tantra, as described above, is ritual practice. In this context, acts of our body, expressions of speech, and contemplations of the mind are engaged upon as expressions of the world of enlightenment. Tantric Buddhism thus offers a set of practices whereby we human beings can open our eyes to the sacrality and sacramentality of our earthly existence in all its dimensions.

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Personal Account: Living as a Practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism Today

Judith Simmer-Brown

The most profound contemplation in my years of Buddhist practice has been on the elusive line from the Prajnaparamita Heart Sutra that says, "Form is Emptiness; Emptiness also is Form. Form is no other than Emptiness; Emptiness also is Form." How am I to realize this in my practice and daily life?

I first recited this line in daily Zen practice in the 1960s, chanted in Japanese syllables. Eventually I began meditation practice in the Tibetan tradition, and for twenty-nine years I have recited these verses in English. It is the sitting practice of meditation, calm abiding and insight, that has introduced me to Emptiness. Conventionally, we are ensnared in a conceptual reality, a stage play in which we are the dramatic leads, the stars. Yet there are many events of our lives that demonstrate that this conceptual reality is flawed. Seven weeks ago my husband and I proudly bought a new car, delighted to find the exact model and color we wanted. We were thrilled with its power, its sleek lines, its sporty style. Then, one week ago, as I returned home with a load of groceries, a teenager ran a red light and smashed our new car. While I was not seriously injured, our new car was destroyed. That conceptual reality was demolished in a moment.

When I sit still in meditation and witness the flow of my thoughts, sense perceptions, and emotions, I can see that no version of my world has any abiding substance. One moment I have big plans, the next I am bored. One moment I feel hot, then I feel sleepy, or irritable, or spaced out. There is nothing permanent in the contents of mind upon which to depend. The one radiant reality that shines through all my experience is the vast transparency of awareness, empty and luminous. There is no way to grasp it, hold it, or name it. It can only be pointed to with elusive words like *emptiness.* It is this reality in which I sit in meditation, and it is this reality that dawned full force in that intersection.

How about the teaching that form is emptiness, emptiness form? It is tempting to conceptualize even Emptiness, to posit it as a nothingness or blankness. But when I understand that *emptiness* is a word that points to a radiant reality beyond concept, I see there are vivid phenomena everywhere. Our shiny green car, now mutilated, with bags of groceries strewn—plump nectarines, Greek olives, flaky tortillas. The heavy ache of the bump on my head. The sparkle of glass fragments and plastic pieces on the street. The fear and devastation of the teenager, hands in pockets, staring at the ground, trying not to cry. The warmth and kindness of the police officer who efficiently filed reports. Emptiness is not merely empty, it is full of radiant display of unique beauty. When concepts drop away, the rich and diverse interplay of Form and Emptiness shows itself directly.

This is why Tibetan Buddhism teaches not just sitting meditation practice but also ritual practice. Out of the Emptiness of sitting practice, I generate a vivid

prescribed visualization of a completely awakened world beyond my concept. The world is expressed in mentally visual forms, uttered mantras, graceful hand gestures. The symbols of that world express something essential about form and emptiness—that all forms are transparent displays of emptiness, all sound echoes, all feelings blissful, and all awareness limitless. When I participate in this visualized world, I am receiving blessings from my teachers and their enlightened lineages, expressing my connection with them, and my participation gradually awakens me to the profundity of their teachings.

What they are teaching me is that all phenomena are nothing independently existing, that they are dependently arisen based on many causes and conditions. But in the present moment, these phenomena are beautiful and sacred because they are what they are. My car is lovely because of the conjunction of parts and causes that brought it together, a coincidence of engineering, human yearning, and pragmatic efficiency. Each piece of fruit, of bread, is unique and unparalleled just as it is. Humans, no matter how confused, are infused with basic goodness and gentleness that drives their every action.

The practice of sitting meditation and ritual practice reminds me every day of the power of this central teaching of Form and Emptiness. If Emptiness infuses all Form, and Form is an expression of the power of Emptiness, then there is no justification for rejection of the world. The view of inseparable Form and Emptiness is a powerful basis for household life, parenting, holding gainful employment, and responsibly participating in civic and institutional life. The *bodhisattva* participates fully in the dreamlike, apparitional world, while never forgetting exactly what phenomena are. And life's purpose can be expressed as threefold: do no harm, benefit others, and enjoy life.

7

The Experience of Pure Land

The Pure Land experience emerges from the story of a king of aeons past who, hearing the Dharma preached by the Buddha Lokeshvara, is moved in his heart and aspires for supreme perfect enlightenment. Renouncing his throne and his kingdom, he becomes a monk, taking the name of Dharmakara (Treasure-house of Truth). Prostrating himself before the Buddha, he proclaims:

> I resolve to become a Buddha, equal in attainment to
> you,
> O holy king of the Dharma
> To save living beings from birth-and-death,
> And to lead them all to emancipation . . .
> The World Honoured Ones in the ten regions
> Have unimpeded wisdom.
> I call upon those Revered Ones to witness my intention.
> Even though I must remain in a state of extreme pain,
> I will diligently practise, enduring all hardships with
> tireless vigor. (Inagaki 1994, 237, 239)

With this he pronounces forty-eight vows, each expressing an aspect of his great resolve to save all sentient beings. The eighteenth vow is particularly notable. "When I attain Buddhahood, and sentient beings in the lands of the ten directions sincerely and joyfully entrust themselves to me, desiring to be born in my land, and call my name even ten times—if they should not be born there, may I not attain perfect enlightenment."

The good news, according to the *Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life* (also known as the *Larger Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra*, or *Larger Sutra of the Land of Bliss*) that relates this story, is that he *did* become a Buddha, named Amitayus (Infinite Life), or Amitabha (Infinite Light). He has generated an infinite store of merit that he is able to open up to all sentient beings. Based on the power of this merit and of his compassion, which extends through time and space, the vows he pronounced are made efficacious. He now extends an open invitation to all sentient beings in all ten directions of the universe to come and join him in the Land of Bliss. All they need to do is to call upon him by name, and he will be there to welcome them.

This story is the foundational narrative of what has come down through the centuries and developed through different cultural matrices as Pure Land Buddhism. The term *Pure Land* refers to any one of the innumerable Buddha lands or Pure Lands in the ten directions, but here points specifically to Sukhavati (Land of Bliss), where Amitayus or Amitabha now reigns.

HISTORICAL LANDMARKS

The doctrinal basis of this form of Buddhism is found in three scriptural sources, known as the Three Pure Land Sutras: the *Larger Sukhavati-vyuha Sutra,* cited above, a *Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha,* and the *Sutra on Visualization of Amitayus.* The first two probably were composed around the first century CE in Northwest India, while the third is thought by some scholars to be of a late-fourth-century compilation in Central Asia or on Chinese soil.

Several factors are in the background of the development of Pure Land Buddhism. One is the concept of multiple Buddhas of the past and the future, related to the notion of Buddhas of the present living in their respective Buddha realms in all the ten directions of the universe. This idea of a multiplicity of Buddhas in the past, present, and future was already noted in northern India by the second century CE. This was most likely spurred by the socio-religious and cultural environment of the time, wherein the *bhakti* movement, a devotional form of Hindu religious expression centered on Shiva and Vishnu in the particular incarnation of Krishna, came into prominence and wide acceptance among the populace. Buddhist adherents also felt the need for savior-centered devotional expressions. Thus, the figures of Bhaisajya-guru (the medicinal Buddha), Akshobhya Buddha, and Amitayus or Amitabha, came to the fore as foci of devotion within a Buddhist framework.

In the Theravada tradition, one of the meditative exercises among those recommended for followers involves the recollection of the virtues and powers and other excellent features of the Buddha. The Path of Purification devotes a section describing the particulars of this practice, and affirms:

> Now when one is truly wise
> One's constant task will surely be
> This recollection of the Buddha
> Blessed with such mighty potency. (VM 7, 67)

This form of practice, that is, of calling to mind *(anusmriti)* the wondrous traits of the Buddha, resonated with those who sought a devotional form of expression in the context of a Buddhist world view. In early Mahayana sutras, this practice is also described as a way of developing single-mindedness, such as the "concentration on the heroic Buddha which destroys defilements" (Surangama-*samadhi*), and "concentration in which the Buddhas appear" (Pratyutpanna-samadhi) (Tanaka 1990, 10).

Another important factor in the background of the development of Pure Land Buddhism is the concept of merit and of merit transference *(parinama)*, which came to be influential as an underlying principle in motivating attitudes and behavior in many Asian cultures. This is related to the notion of *karma,* needless to say, also an underlying principle operative in many Asian societies. As we have seen earlier, this principle stipulates that each individual is accountable for one's actions, and that harmful action begets harm on others as well as on oneself. Conversely, beneficial and meritorious action begets beneficial and meritorious results. These results may not be immediately visible but will inevitably manifest themselves in due time and in due circumstances.

The idea that the fruits of meritorious action performed by a given individual can be transferred to others, or directed in behalf of others, came to be a pivotal one in Pure Land Buddhism in particular. The Great Resolve of the monk Dharmakara, expressed in his forty-eight vows, and which led to his becoming a Buddha, generated an infinite amount of merit, more than enough to be dispersed to all sentient beings of the ten directions of the universe. Anyone can thereby "plug in" to this infinite store of merit by simply visualizing and reciting the name of Amitabha.

A question that can be raised is this: how does this religious form relate to the Buddhism taught by Gautama Shakyamuni? Adherents are quick to point out that it is Gautama Buddha himself, in the company of numerous *bodhisattvas,* who expounds the Land of Bliss sutras. It is he who narrates the story of Dharmakara-become-Amitabha, lending his authority to the narrative. The question of the status of the Pure Land Sutras in Buddhism is thus on the same plane as the question of the status and authority of other Mahayana sutras, accepted by adherents as the word of the Buddha.

The origin of the notion of Amitayus/Amitabha Buddha is a question that has also been raised by scholars. The Zoroastrian sun god Mithra has been cited as a possible influence of "immeasurable light." The Zoroastrian primordial principle of "infinite time" as a possible influence behind "infinite life" has also been mentioned. Mythological elements related to Vishnu, Varuna, and other Hindu figures have also come up as possible backgrounds in the development of this notion. However, scholars have also noted that ideas found within the parameters of Buddhist thinking are sufficient to ground central Pure Land themes in Buddhist tradition. Among these are Mahasamghika notions of the Buddha's unlimited life and infinite power, as well as the notion of becoming a Buddha by those who perform acts of exceeding merit as found in the Jataka stories.

This form of Buddhist belief and devotional practice found wide acceptance in China, and later, Korea and Japan. Several translations into Chinese of the two *Sukhavati* sutras appeared between the third and fifth centuries. Further, the composition of the *Visualization Sutra* in the early fifth century was a significant step toward the dissemination of the Pure Land faith, opening also to new stages of doctrinal development.

Among the Chinese Buddhist thinkers who took up the teaching and devotional practices associated with Pure Land, it was T'an-luan (476–572) who set

forth ideas that gave this devotional path a secure place as a school of Buddhism in China. Integrating Pure Land notions with Taoist and Confucian elements familiar to the Chinese, T'an-luan succeeded in conveying the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism effectively to religious seekers of his society.

One key idea that T'an-luan highlighted was the distinction between Difficult Path and Easy Path. This distinction is found in a treatise attributed to Nagarjuna commenting on the ten stages of the Bodhisattva Path. This was further developed by T'an-luan to present Pure Land teaching as a way accessible to those who could not take up the difficult path of bodhisattvahood. He also highlighted the notion of Other-Power. This refers to the efficacious power of the vow of the Buddha Amitabha, as distinct from the self-power based on the efforts of the individual seeker. Entrusting oneself to this Other-Power was the most effective way of being assured of entry into the Pure Land and thereby realizing supreme enlightenment. These two related notions, namely, of the path of Pure Land as Easy Path, and as a way of entrustment to the Other-Power of Amitabha's original vow, became pivotal in the transmission of Pure Land Buddhism to later generations and across cultures.

One development that deserves note is this transition from emphasis on the recollection of the attributes of Amitabha and the glories of the Land of Bliss, encouraged largely in monastic practice, to the simplification of the key requisite for rebirth (in Pure Land after this earthly life), namely, the oral recitation of the name of Amitabha. The Chinese term *nien-fo* (*nembutsu* in Japanese) refers to both recollection and oral recitation, though it has today come to be associated with the latter. This shift in emphasis is often attributed to Shan-tao (613–81), but it was Shan-tao's teacher, Tao-ch'o (562–645), who was in fact behind the popularization of this simple practice in China. It was this shift that opened Pure Land faith to the wider populace, as a readily available religious resource that did not set high requirements for access and did not presuppose or require affiliation with any specific religious community.

NEAR-DEATH AND DEATHBED ACCOUNTS OF PURE LAND DEVOTEES

A key aspect of the appeal of Pure Land faith to many people throughout the ages has been that it offers clear-cut answers to a fundamental question human beings born in this world confront: what happens after I die? Its answer is simple: if you recite the name of Amitabha "even once or ten times," you will be met by Amitabha himself at the point of your death and escorted to the Western Land of Bliss.

This belief looms in the background in many accounts of deathbed practices and experiences related by Pure Land devotees. This is a genre that constitutes an important heritage of the Pure Land tradition. As such, special attention was paid by devotees to ensure that such experiences of those close to death would be recorded for posterity and for the edification of other adherents.

The following is recounted by Shan-tao, one of the prominent Chinese ancestors and systematizers of Pure Land tradition, as cited in the Collection of Rebirth Accounts *(Ojoyoshu)*, attributed to eleventh-century Japanese monk Genshin.

> If the [dying] patient has a vision, let him tell the attendant about it. As soon as you have heard it, record it just as you have heard. Moreover, when the sick person is not able to relate it, the attendant should ask over and over, "What kind of vision did you see?" If he tells of seeing his sinful deeds, let those beside him reflect on the Buddha for him and assist him in his repentances and thoroughly cancel the sinful deeds. If the sinful deeds are canceled, and he sees before him in response to his Buddha-reflection the lotus dais holy assembly, record it just as described. (Andrews 1974, 83)

The following is a record of the death of T'an-luan, included in a compilation by Chia-ts'ai, a seventh-century monk-disciple of Tao-ch'o, who is said to have been the first to advocate and thereby popularize the practice of the recitation of Amitabha's name. The compiler relates how T'an-luan, in a state of *samadhi,* was visited by Nagarjuna, who alerted him to a "golden opportunity not to be missed" (Lai 1996, 176):

> T'an-luan understood the message and sent for his lay disciples living in the various villages nearby, as well as his monk disciples from the temple itself. More than three hundred gathered around him like rain clouds clustering together. The master took a bath, put on new clothing, and then, holding the incense burner while facing West, instructed them, saying that they should also seek out the path to the West. When the sun rose, the multitude chanted the name of Amitabha, just as the master passed away. Music was heard coming from the West, and then returning there, so the people inferred that the master had gained the Pure Land . . . in accordance with the scriptures. (T.47, 97c., excerpted in Foard et al. 1996, 176)

Chia-ts'ai's compilation includes accounts of lives of twenty individuals who fit into a hagiographical pattern, all given a happy ending with the person's entry into the Land of Bliss through the merits of faith in Amitabha. A spiritual hierarchy, with monks at the top, and lay persons on a lower scale, with women at the bottom rung, was still the received view at the time. However, elements in the accounts appear to challenge this hierarchy, as the following suggests:

> A laywoman of unknown surname . . . was half-paralyzed and confined to bed. (Upon her spouse's advice) she practiced nien-fo for two years, after which she felt her sins and obstructions lifted. She could see Amitabha's kingdom. (After thanking her spouse for the advise, she wanted to supervise her imminent departure to the Pure Land.) "But how can a commoner like you see the Buddha? Couldn't it be that you are delirious?" She assured her husband that she was not . . . When the time for that parting

> (vegetarian) meal came, a carpeted platform was set (at a height) above the common people and (even) the monks, so as to duplicate the sacred rankings (in the Pure Land congregation). However, when the heavenly host arrived, it would only hover in the air; it refused to come down because of the improper mingling (still) of the saintly and the worldly (in the arrangement). The woman asked the carpet to be moved (higher) to the top of the roof . . . so that the host would join them (which it did). Afterwards, she called her family together and instructed them, saying, "I am going to the Pure Land in the company of the saints. Shouldn't you aspire for the same? Dear friends and relatives, do practice nien-fo, for you too can be born in the Pure Land in manners most mysterious." Then facing West, and with those attending chanting the name of Amitabha, she passed away. (T.47, p.99ab, cited in Lai 1996, 186–87)

This account of the entry into the Pure Land of a lay person, a woman, in the company of and thus in equal standing with all the saints, indicates that popular belief had already begun to overturn the traditional notions of a spiritual hierarchy. This notion of the entry of lay persons, even those who had led lives of evil, was to be given theoretical grounding in the writings of Shan-tao in the seventh century and came to be the established view of the majority of Pure Land devotees. This view was given renewed emphasis in Japanese developments of Pure Land doctrine, with "evil ones" given preferential access to Amitabha's compassion, notably with Shinran in the thirteenth century.

In the background of developments of Pure Land devotion in China was a loose religious movement, termed the White Lotus Society, which arose and spread among lay persons beginning in the sixth century. It exerted influence in society for centuries. Its members directed their lives toward rebirth in Amitabha's Western Land of Bliss, and a key practice was the recitation of Amitabha's name to this effect.

In an account dating 1178, the wet-nurse of a court official's mother tells of events surrounding the death of the latter:

> She could only recite [the name of] Buddha Amitabha, diligently and without the smallest pause. She did not use beads for counting, so she was unaware how many tens of millions of times [she had recited the name]. In 1148, when she was 72, she became ill. She had terrible diarrhea and could not leave her bed. Still she would persist in reciting even more earnestly. Suddenly she seemed to be without suffering anymore. At that moment she sang the following gatha: "When you have properly cultivated the road to the Western Paradise, then there are no more mountains up high and no more crevices down below [which have to be crossed]. When you go you do not need to wear shoes or socks anymore. As you proceed lotus flowers will bud at every step." This she intoned continuously. People asked who had said this. She replied, "I have made it myself." "Dear old woman, when will you go?" She replied, "I will go at the shen-hour [between 3 and 5 p.m.]." And indeed she died at that hour on the fifth day of the tenth month.

> She was cremated in the manner of monks, and when this was completed only her tongue had not been consumed [by the fire], it was in the shape of a lotus flower. (Haar 1992, 18)

In these and in similar accounts that can be found through the centuries in East Asian societies, there is a central concern with the individual's destiny in the afterlife, and Pure Land devotion was thus seen in the context of assuring a felicitous rebirth.

In Japan, Pure Land teaching and practice centered on recitation of Amitabha's name were propagated by many spiritual masters and left their mark in Japanese religious history. But it was Honen (1133–1212) and his disciple Shinran (1173–1262) who secured the foundations and saw the blossoming of Pure Land faith and doctrine in a way that came to capture the hearts and minds of multitudes through the centuries. Their followers succeeded in institutionalizing Pure Land Buddhism and making it a significant feature of the religious landscape in this country.

For Honen and his followers the afterlife remained a central concern. He taught that one must recite the Name repeatedly throughout one's life, right up to the point of death, to assure the welcome promised by Amitabha (Amida in Japanese):

> Even though through the days and years of life, you have piled up much merit by the practice of the Nembutsu, if at the time of death you come under the spell of some evil, and at the end give way to an evil heart, and lose the power of faith in and practice of the Nembutsu, it means that you lost that birth into the Pure Land immediately after death. And though you may have one or two or three or even four lives after this, or no matter how many times you experience birth and death hereafter, you are cut off from the possibility of salvation . . . The one way to be sure of reaching birth into the Pure Land is to be always repeating the Nembutsu. These are Zendo (Shan-tao)'s own words: " . . . Only repeat the name of Amida with all your heart, whether walking or standing, sitting or lying. Never cease the practice of it even for a moment." (cited in Coates and Ishizuka 1925, 407–8)

There was even a custom of granting a posthumous name ending with NamuAmidaButsu to devotees, so that when they are asked at the entrance by Yama, the Guardian of the Death Realm, to identify themselves, their response would include this chant of the Nembutsu. This way of answering the question would thus immediately propel them to the Pure Land (Coates and Ishizuka 1925, 282).

With Shinran, a significantly new development in Pure Land faith and experience is reached.

SHINRAN'S EXPERIENCE OF AMIDA'S COMPASSION

At the age of nine, Shinran was sent to live in a temple in Mt. Hiei. His father had lost his position as a minor aristocrat in the Kyoto court, and the family was

dispossessed of its property amid the political upheavals and imperial maneuverings of the time. Shinran subsequently spent twenty years as a monk in this center of Tendai Buddhist learning, adhering faithfully to its regulations for living and for spiritual practice.

At the age of twenty-nine, in his own account, weighed down by his own passions and desires, he began to have serious doubts about the efficacy of the ascetic practices that were part of the monastic life. Seeking to resolve his doubts, he plunged headlong into a hundred-day period of rigorous meditative exercise, secluding himself in a narrow basket-like space in Rokkakudo, a district of Kyoto. On the ninety-fifth day, as he records in his later writings, he had a dream, wherein the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Kanzeon in Japanese) came to him with this message: "When, due to past karma, sexual passions arise in a practitioner, I myself will appear as a lovely woman and become the recipient of the act. Manifesting beauty in this present life, at the precise moment of his death I will guide him to the Land of Bliss" (SSZ, 4: 201, my translation).

For Shinran, the feminine figure of Kanzeon was embodiment of the Buddha Amida himself. Through this dream Shinran finds confirmation in the Pure Land teaching that deliverance from this world of delusive passions and suffering cannot be attained through one's own power; rather, it comes through total entrustment to the Other Power of Amida's vow. He is thus confirmed in his decision to set aside a life of monastic discipline. He leaves the monastery to become a follower of Honen, who was then in Kyoto propagating devotion to Amida Buddha as a way of attaining rebirth in Pure Land. He subsequently marries and through the years, raises several children with his wife, Eshin-ni.

In taking this step to leave monastic life, Shinran does not thereby renounce the Path of Awakening but rather plunges himself wholeheartedly into it in a different form. Following Pure Land teaching, he places trust not in his own effort but in the great compassion of the Other Power of Amida's vow. He writes in the postscript of his major treatise, *Kyogyoshinsho* (True Teaching, Practice, and Realization of the Pure Land Way):

> Hence, I am now neither a monk nor one in worldly life. For this reason, I have taken the term "Toku" (stubble-haired) as my name . . . I, Gutoku (Foolish and Stubble-haired) Shinran, disciple of Shakyamuni, discarded sundry practices and took refuge in the Primal Vow in 1201. In 1205, Master Genku (Honen), out of his benevolence, granted me permission to copy his Passages on the Nembutsu Selected in the Primal Vow . . . How joyous I am, my heart and mind being rooted in the Buddha-ground of the universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flowing within the dharma-ocean, which is beyond comprehension! I am deeply aware of the Tathagata's immense compassion, and I sincerely revere the benevolent care behind the master's teaching activity. My joy grows ever fuller, my gratitude and indebtedness ever more compelling. (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:289–91)

Throughout his life, Shinran continued to refer to himself by this self-deprecatory term, "Foolish and Stubble-haired," renouncing all claims to wisdom and

to respectability. And yet in his usage this appellation was always followed by the phrase, "disciple of Shakyamuni," indicating a relentless fidelity to the path of ultimate awakening, now seen by him as a path of total entrustment of mind and heart *(shinjin)* to Amida's all-pervading compassion.

In the opening pages of *Kyogyoshinsho* Shinran enjoins his followers:

> This then is the true teaching easy to practice for small, foolish beings; it is the straight way easy to traverse for the dull and ignorant. Among all the teachings the Great Sage preached in his lifetime, none surpasses this ocean of virtues. Let the one who seeks to abandon the defiled and aspire for the pure; who is confused in practice and vacillating in faith; whose mind is dark and whose understanding deficient; whose evils are heavy and whose karmic obstructions manifold—let such persons embrace above all the Tathagata's exhortations, take refuge without fail in the most excellent direct path, devote themselves solely to this practice, and revere only this shinjin. (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:3–4)

This entire treatise, as is the entire corpus of Shinran's writings, is an exposition of the doctrinal backgrounds and implications of what he took to be the true teaching of Pure Land. Shinran's legacy thus came to be known as the True *(Shin)* Pure Land school *(Jodo-Shinshu)*, formally distinguishing it from the Pure Land School *(Jodo-shu)* of Honen, his teacher.

Among many important features of the Shinshu teaching and practice handed down to later generations of followers, we focus here on three points that will give us an inroad to a better understanding of Shinran's experience of Pure Land. First, we consider his emphasis on the efficacy of a single recitation of the Name (Nembutsu) and its significance for religious life. Second, we look at an enigmatic statement about "evil persons" and the prospect of their rebirth in Pure Land, attributed to Shinran by a disciple, Yui-en, in a collection known as the *Tannisho (A Treatise Lamenting Heretical Views)*. Third, we will look at Shinran's teaching on compassion from a Pure Land perspective.

For the Pure Land followers since Heian times (tenth to twelfth centuries), the recitation of the Name of Amida at the instant of an individual's death was emphasized as a key feature of religious practice. As depicted in the eleventh century treatise *Ojoyoshu*, recitation of the Name at this precise moment of death would ensure the devotee's deliverance into the Pure Land. With Honen and his followers, frequent recitation of the Name throughout one's life was advocated as a way of disposing oneself and preparing for the moment of death. Devotees were cautioned that an evil thought might enter at anytime in one's life, leading to a loss of faith in the power of the Vow, thus blocking one's entry into Pure Land. With the awareness that death might come at any moment, especially in those times of upheaval and uncertainty that characterized Japanese medieval society, the repeated recitation of the Nembutsu was a "safety device" that would keep one's mind focused on one's religious goal.

Shinran's experience, however, led him to take a radically different view of the matter. It must first be noted that Kosai, another disciple of Honen, had already

been teaching that a single recitation was efficacious for rebirth but was severely rebuked by Honen in counter-arguments. The danger that Honen warned against in such a teaching was that those who upheld it tend to fall into worldly ways, thinking that they "need not forsake meat eating or sexual relations, but may consume deer or fowl as they wish" (Dobbins 1989, 51) and still merit rebirth in Pure Land. This question of single versus multiple recitations was thus already a debated issue among followers of Pure Land teaching in Shinran's own day.

Shinran expounds his view in a treatise specifically addressing this issue *(Notes on Once-Calling and Many-Calling),* affirming that "when one realizes true and real shinjin, one is immediately grasped and held within the heart of the Buddha of unhindered light, never to be abandoned . . . The person who rejoices in realizing shinjin is taught in a sutra to be equal to the Buddhas" (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:475, 480). The emphasis here is "true and real shinjin," that is, a totally entrusting mind and heart, as opposed to a mere oral act of recitation done in a half-hearted or perfunctory way. This key term, which has also been rendered into English as "faith" (Bloom 1985), is a clue to further unraveling the depths of Shinran's own religious experience. Affirming that one is "immediately grasped and held within the heart of the Buddha of unhindered light" indicates that something decisive happens to a practitioner who recites the name with a totally entrusting mind and heart. This is what opens the floodgates of inner joy and peace, and gratitude—themes that constantly recur in Shinran's writings. True peace of mind and heart *(anjin)* has thus come to be an important theme and gauge of religious life among Shinran's followers.

Shinran places a premium on single recitation that expresses genuine *shinjin.* However, he also points out in this same treatise that "the teaching of many-calling should not be considered false" (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:482), cautioning against those who would take an affirmation of single recitation as a license to do what they please. For a person of *shinjin* who has arrived at peace of mind and inner joy, having entrusted one's whole being and one's whole future to the infinite compassion of Amida in a single, efficacious recitation of the Name, subsequent recitations are no longer necessary as supplications for rebirth in Pure Land, for this is already assured. Having experienced inner peace through a single *shinjin*-filled recitation, one can continue to recite the Name throughout one's entire life, now as an expression of gratitude and joy.

Shinran's statement about "evil persons" is likewise linked to his central teaching on *shinjin:* "Even a good person attains birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will" (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:663).

There is an intentional irony and provocation in this passage attributed to Shinran. A common understanding of many people, based on widely held notions of good and evil and karmic retribution, is the opposite, namely, that "even an evil person attains birth (in the Pure Land), so it goes without saying that a good person will." Addressing this, the passage continues:

> People who rely on doing good through their self-power fail to entrust themselves wholeheartedly to Other Power and therefore are not in accord with Amida's Primal Vow, but when they overturn the mind of self-power

> and entrust themselves to Other Power, they will attain birth in the true and real fulfilled land. It is impossible for us, who are possessed of blind passions, to free ourselves from birth-and-death through any practice whatever. Sorrowing at this, Amida made the Vow, the essential intent of which is the evil person's attainment of Buddhahood. Hence, evil persons who entrust themselves to Other Power are precisely the ones who possess the true cause of birth. (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:663)

Given what Shinran repeatedly taught about the mode of life of one already "grasped" by Amida through *shinjin,* such a radical statement would not lead people to think that just because evil persons "are precisely the ones who possess the true cause of birth" in the Pure Land, one is thereby given license to do evil. But to those who may have mistakenly taken his teaching as an encouragement to do evil, Shinran cautions, "Do not take a liking to poison just because there is an antidote" (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:671).

In short, Shinran's emphasis throughout his life was on the overpowering efficacy and merit of Amida's Primal Vow, which unleashes the powers of compassion in the universe. Sentient beings only need to abandon themselves in a single-minded way to this power to attain rebirth in Pure Land. This theme lies behind his stance on the question of good deeds done on behalf of others, summarized by Yui-en in the *Tannisho* (no. 4):

> Concerning compassion, there is a difference between the Path of Sages and the Pure Land path. Compassion in the Path of Sages is to pity, commiserate with, and care for beings. It is extremely difficult, however, to accomplish the saving of others just as one wishes.
>
> Compassion on the Pure Land path should be understood as first attaining Buddhahood quickly through saying the nembutsu and, with the mind of great love and great compassion, freely benefiting sentient beings as one wishes.
>
> However much love and pity we may feel in our present lives, it is hard to save others as we wish; hence, such compassion remains unfulfilled. Only the saying of the nembutsu then, is the mind of great compassion that is thoroughgoing. (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:663)

Confronted with the suffering of the innumerable sentient beings in this earthly realm, a person moved to compassion may perform good deeds, helping to alleviate the sufferings of others. But one soon realizes that no matter how much one does, it is never enough, because there is simply an overwhelming amount of sorrow and pain in this world that can never be eradicated. So one who starts out on a compassionate path of action may sooner or later come to a feeling of helplessness or powerlessness before it all. This is a common experience among those who have dedicated themselves and who spare no efforts in alleviating the suffering of others.

Shinran's message especially addresses such persons, those on the Path of Sages, whose own compassion has moved them to a life of doing good for others,

but who may have come to such an impasse in their path of selfless service. He is saying, in effect, "Put your trust in the infinite compassion of Amida, and let that Power be the one that works in and through you, rather than relying on your own good deeds." This is also expressed by the following entry of the *Tannisho*:

> As for me, Shinran, I have never said the nembutsu even once for the repose of my departed father and mother. For all sentient beings, without exception, have been our parents and brothers and sisters in the course of countless lives in many states of existence. On attaining Buddhahood after this present life, we can save every one of them.
>
> Were the saying of the nembutsu indeed a good act in which I strove through my own powers, then I might direct the merit thus gained toward saving my father and mother. But this is not the case.
>
> If, however, simply abandoning self-power, we quickly attain enlightenment in the Pure Land, we will be able to save, by means of transcendent powers, first those with whom we have close karmic relations, whatever karmic suffering they may have sunk to in the six realms through the four modes of birth. (Hirota et al. 1997, 1:664)

Again we have a paradoxical statement being made to convey a significant point that comes out of Shinran's religious experience. One must note that honoring and taking care of one's parents is a primary obligation in East Asian societies, and its breach is considered an enormous transgression. Thus, to claim that he has never said the Nembutsu, the religious act that is supposed to be efficacious toward rebirth in Pure Land, in behalf of his own biological parents, already raises eyebrows.

This claim likewise counters the traditional belief in Buddhist societies about the "transference of merit" presupposed by many of Shinran's followers. Recalling his basic message, it is not by our own powers or merits, even of reciting the Name, much less by our own "good deeds," that we can gain merit to be reborn in the Pure Land. Shinran thus proclaims that our primary duty in life is to entrust ourselves entirely to the boundless compassion of Amida, thus attaining "enlightenment in the Pure Land." Having done so, the infinite power of this compassion works in and through us and carries out the salvation, "first, of those with whom we have close karmic relations," namely, our parents and immediate loved ones, and then goes on to the wider circle of sentient beings with whom we are karmically connected.

The earlier statement, then, advocating simply the saying of the Name and attaining Buddhahood as the Pure Land way of compassion, is not taken as a negation of intentions and acts toward the alleviation of the suffering of others. Rather, it is understood as inviting the infinite power of Amida's compassion to take over our lives and letting *that* Other Power (and not our self-power) do its work of compassion in and through us.

These injunctions relating to the single recitation, the accessibility of rebirth especially to evil persons, and the entrustment of works of compassion to the

Other Power working in and through the devotee, can be appreciated as coming from the depths of the religious experience of Shinran.

Resonances between Shinran's religious vision, on the one hand, and theological themes found in the Christian faith tradition, on the other, have been noted by scholars. Similarities to religious insights found in Paul's writings, as well as in Martin Luther and other reformers, have been pointed out, offering tasks for further comparative studies and reflection.

Shinran disclaimed having any disciples (*Tannisho*, no. 6), much less an intention to found a religious organization. For him, anyone who heard his message and was moved to recite the Name of Amida with a total entrusting mind and heart was a companion *(dobo)*, a fellow traveler along the path *(dogyo)*. The stark simplicity and at the same time the profundity of his religious message had a powerful appeal and came to attract more and more adherents from various social strata during his lifetime.

After his death Shinran's followers took steps to consolidate the communities of adherents and gradually set the framework of a religious institution founded on Shinran's religious teaching. An important task that followers faced was that of demarcating what was received as Shinran's authentic message, which came to be referred to as Shinshu, from other Buddhist teachings, regarded as heresies. Religious authority came to be invested in the head priest of the Honganji, which came into being as a memorial chapel and pilgrimage site lodging Shinran's grave, and later developed as a temple institution through the leadership of Kakunyo (1270–1351), Shinran's great-grandson. Several generations later, during times of social, political, and religious upheaval and crisis, the Shinshu community was further consolidated and expanded through the religious genius and organizational gifts of Rennyo (1415–99), eighth head priest of Honganji.

For various political reasons the Honganji complex was divided into two independent branches, the Higashi (Eastern) and the Nishi (Western), during the Tokugawa or pre-modern period of Japan. There are officially ten branches of Jodo Shinshu, followers of Shinran's teaching, but those affiliated with these two Honganji temples combined constitute the majority of Pure Land followers today.

Rennyo succeeded in bolstering the identity and cohesiveness of the Honganji community with the promulgation of rules of conduct, guidelines for behavior meant to distinguish Shinshu followers from others. Of these, the following five have been culled and continue to inform the lives of Shinran's followers to this day:

1. Listen to the teachings (of Jodo Shinshu) throughout one's life.
2. Refrain from quarelling with other schools and religions.
3. Fully actualize the mind of equality that sees and treats people and events of our lives with equanimity.
4. Respect and honor life.
5. Abandon superstitious and magical practices. (Tanaka 1997, 211)

The fifth is particularly notable and sets the followers of Shinran apart from other Japanese religious traditions, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist, in that there is an express rejection of beliefs and practices associated with the attainment of worldly benefit. Shinran's emphasis on the total entrustment of one's whole being to Amida rules out any kind of reliance on those (miscellaneous) religious practices that seek one's own or even others' worldly or even spiritual benefit other than the peace of mind that comes with assurance of rebirth in the Pure Land.

WONDROUS AND EXCELLENT PERSONS *(MYOKONIN)*

During the Tokugawa era the religious lives of a number of Pure Land followers who exhibited extraordinary virtue and devotion came to be memorialized by Shinshu priest-scholar Jitsujoin Gosei (1721–94) in a collection entitled *Myokoninden (The Legacies of the Myokonin).* This term is derived from a treatise of seventh century Chinese Pure Land master Shan-tao, who praises those who recite the Name of Amida with sincere devotion with five glorious attributes, including "wondrous and excellent *(myoko).*" Accounts of such lives came to be a genre that served as inspiration for devotees. The notable point about these accounts is that their subjects are people from all walks of life, but mostly those coming from the ordinary masses of people, including woodcutters, carpenters, housewives, as well as temple priests. Their lives are described in these accounts with some hagiographical embellishment. The feature that these lives shared in common was the peace of mind that was grounded on an entrusting mind and heart, expressed in the recitation of the Name with joy and gratitude. The message conveyed was that anyone, regardless of social class or origin, gender, age, or profession, could be a "wondrous and excellent person," simply through this devotion to Amida, and would be able to live a life transformed by Amida's compassion. This ideal of the "wondrous and excellent person" continues to be upheld in exhortations by Pure Land devotees to this day.

An underlying attitude that such persons share is common is gratitude. The following verse is by an eighteenth-century figure named Saichi, a maker of wooden clogs:

> How grateful!
> When I think of it, all is by Amida's grace.
> O Saichi, what do you mean by it?
> Ah, yes, his grace is a real fact.
> This Saichi was made by his grace.
> The clothes I wear,
> The food I eat,
> The footgear I put on,
> Every other thing we have in this world is made by
> Amida's compassion.
> Including the bowl and the chopsticks.

Even the workshop where I work making wooden clogs.
There is really nothing that is not the Namu Amida Butsu
How happy I am for all this. (Cited in Unno 1998, 106–7)

A testimony from a contemporary Shin Buddhist follower who lived on the West Coast of the United States refers to, as well as echoes, the inner world of a *myokonin.* The following excerpt is a response to the question of how compassion, or caring, is understood in Jodo Shinshu:

I find caring in the things that sustain my life: the sunshine, the rain, the oxygen in the air, and all the beings that are sacrificed for my food. I also find compassion in the beauty and greatness of nature that add quality to my life: the many shapes and textures of trees and flowers that fill my neighborhood, the magnificent autumn sunsets behind the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Marin hills.

Nowhere is this fulfilling sense of caring felt more intensely than during my three-mile walks to or from work. The beauty of the blooming garden flowers of all shapes and colors enlivens my spirit. At times I am reminded of a poem by a well-known Myokonin woman named Osono (born 1774):

A lily flower
Just nodding,
Yes, yes.

These flowers cheer me on during times of personal letdowns. They are joined by the chirping of the birds, whose exquisite singing sound I savor as much as I can. Once a baby squirrel came out onto the sidewalk lured by the rattling of my keys and even perched on my shoes looking for food or its mother. And most of all, the trees are the constant source of my inspiration. The majesty of their silence is combined with their leaves that reach out by providing the source of life: oxygen. When the soothing California breeze makes the leaves dance, flutter and shimmer in their shades of green, I am reminded of a scene from the Pure Land: "When a gentle breeze wafts through its (Bodhi-tree) branches and leaves, innumerable exquisite Dharma-sounds arise." In such moments, I feel one with Compassion! (Tanaka 1997, 141–42)

PURE LAND TEACHING IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Pure Land faith was transmitted to the Western hemisphere in the nineteenth century through the communities of Japanese immigrants who came to the Americas and the Hawaiian Islands. Most of these came from family lineages affiliated with the Nishi or the Higashi Honganji, so the clerical hierarchies of these temple institutions saw fit to send Jodo Shinshu missionaries *(kaikyoshi)* to take care of the religious needs of their devotees abroad. In North America, communities of Shinran's followers are brought together formally under the aegis of three organizational structures: the Buddhist Churches of America, Honpa Honganji

Mission of Hawaii, and the Buddhist Churches of Canada. Numbering tens of thousands in membership, they have taken on religious forms based on Christian models, including the titles for religious office (minister, bishop), religious attire (dark robe and colored stole hung around the shoulders), and church activities (Sunday school and summer camps for children). But the content of the teaching and preaching remains thoroughly within Pure Land Buddhist tradition.

Devotees in the Western hemisphere have also continued the tradition of maintaining a Buddhist home altar, enshrining an image of Amida Buddha, sculpted or painted, most often with a calligraphic representation of "Namu Amida Butsu," also commemorating deceased ancestors and relatives. Flowers and candles are placed upon the altar, as well as a receptacle for incense offering:

> So when you offer incense you are making a promise to the Sangha (the Buddhist community) and to yourself: "Yes, I will learn, live, and share the teachings."
>
> Incense offering is also considered and expression of honor and respect to the Buddha. And in the context of a memorial service, the same feelings are expressed to the person(s) to whom the service is dedicated. The incense offering, however, does not create merit for worldly benefits or enhance the spiritual status of the deceased. (Tanaka 1997, 200)

The last sentence is a disclaimer concerning the Shinshu understanding of ritual, distinguishing it from that of other Buddhist and non-Buddhist Japanese religious views. In short, as cited above in the description of Shinran's teaching and experience, no action of sentient beings accrues any kind of merit, as the power of Amida's Primal Vow as a manifestation of compassion is the sole source of efficacious merit. Further, no credence is given to any religious or quasi-religious rituals or actions seeking any type of worldly benefit. This point continues to be emphasized by Shinshu followers as they seek to clarify basic elements of their belief system to others.

Shin Buddhist followers have formulated a statement, called the *Daily Aspiration of Jodo Shinshu*, recited at communal services, which offers a glimpse of the principles that inform their religious and ethical life:

> I affirm my faith in Amida's Infinite Wisdom and Compassion. Reciting his Sacred Name, I shall live with strength and joy.
>
> I shall look upon Amida's Guiding Light. As I reflect upon my imperfect self, I live with the gratitude for His Perfect Compassion which surrounds me at all times.
>
> I shall follow Amida's Teachings. I shall understand the Right Path and resolve to spread the true Teachings.
>
> I rejoice in Amida's Wisdom and Compassion. I shall respect and help my fellow humans and work for the good of my community. (Tanaka 1997, 195–196)

Another verse, also recited at services, called the "Golden Chain," was "composed on American soil and . . . [is] especially popular among the younger generation" (ibid.):

> I am a link in Amida Buddha's golden chain of love that stretches around the world. I will keep my link bright and strong.
>
> I will try to be kind and gentle to every living thing and protect all who are weaker than myself.
>
> I will try to think pure and beautiful thoughts, try to say pure and beautiful words, and try to do pure and beautiful deeds.
>
> May every link in Amida's golden chain of love be bright and strong, and may we all attain perfect peace. (ibid)

These references to Amida as the center of devotion of Pure Land devotees, as imbued with the character of Infinite Wisdom and Compassion and understood as an underlying principle that bonds all beings in a "golden chain of love," cannot fail to evoke the notion of an All-Merciful God understood also as the ground and goal of the universe in the monotheistic traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Yet asked about whether Amida is a Buddhist "God," the following response is made:

> You could say that Amida is "God," but only if you define God as the dynamic activity of understanding (wisdom) and caring (compassion).
>
> But clearly, Amida is not a personal God who is 1) the creator of the universe, 2) a divine, transcendent being, 3) an omniscient (all-knowing) being who knows my daily activities, and/or 4) a judge who decides my final destiny . . . It seems that many Christians feel a sense of duty and fear toward God. These feelings are noticeably absent in the way the Jodo Shinshu Buddhists experience Amida. (Tanaka 1997, 153)

In a contemporary world characterized by religious diversity, Pure Land Buddhists endeavor to articulate their identity, to recover the core message of their tradition, and to situate their religious experience in the context of dialogue with members of other religions and with the wider society in general. As they do so, they turn to their foundational scriptures, the Three Pure Land Sutras, and most important, to the figure of Shinran, as a constant source of inspiration and insight.

The contemporary significance of Shinran has recently been highlighted in a bestselling book by a Japanese novelist and essayist in Japan. The author, Itsuki Hiroyuki, cites an article printed August 23, 1999, in *Asahi Shinbun,* a Japanese newspaper, reporting on the joint declaration of the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church on the doctrine of justification:

> In 1967, the Vatican and the Lutheran church, the largest of the Protestant denominations, with sixty million followers, established an international

committee, and from that time a theological dialogue has continued. In June (1999) the World Conference of Lutherans and the Vatican's Committee for the Promotion of Christian Doctrinal Unity held a joint news conference and announced that in October they would sign a joint agreement on the doctrine of justification.

The agreement will read in part, "Both parties hereby agree that justification is due solely to God's blessing and is not attained by good works. It is received only through faith, and its fruits are manifested through good works."

The author, who is himself a devoted Shin Buddhist, as he acknowledges and expounds in this book, then continues with the following comment on the newspaper article:

> Can anyone sympathetic to the thought of Shinran fail to be astonished by this declaration? This joint declaration of the Lutheran Church and the Vatican very closely approaches the core of Japan's Other Power Buddhism. If that declaration were reworded as "Salvation (Birth in the Pure Land) is due solely to the Buddha's (Amida's) compassion (original vow) and is not attained by good works (miscellaneous practices). It is received only through faith (taking refuge), and its fruits are manifested through acts of gratitude (nembutsu)," it would be a perfect expression of the essence of the original vow of Other Power. (Itsuki 2001, 211)

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Personal Account: On Being a Pure Land Buddhist Today

Kenneth Tanaka

At dawn with the sky filled with bright sunrise colors.
    It's a large catch!
Truly a large catch of giant sardines!
    The harbor is like a festival.
But in the ocean,
    I wonder
How many sardine funerals are taking place?

This is a poem entitled "A Large Catch" by Misuzu Kaneko (1903–30). She was raised in Senzaki, a predominately Jodo-Shinshu community that thrived as a regional center of fishery located on the coast of the Japan Sea. Today, a century after her birth, many have been deeply touched by the simplicity and honesty of her poems, which deal mostly with humans' relationship to nature and its creatures.

In this poem, she expresses one of the central insights of Jodo-Shinshu spirituality, that of awakening to our "human foolishness" *(bonbu)*. Everyone in the community is elated as the boats return with huge catches of sardines. A festive mood envelopes the huge crowd gathered at the harbor, but, as an example of their human foolishness, no one gives a thought to the tens of thousands of sardines that were plucked out of the ocean. Kaneko, however, is painfully aware of the self-serving and anthropocentric human nature. This awareness of one's self-centeredness is in line with Shinran (1173–1262), the founder of the Jodo-Shinshu school of Pure Land Buddhism. Shinran once lamented:

> I know how grievous it is that I, Gutoku Shinran, am sinking in an immense ocean of desire and attachment and am lost in the vast mountains that seek fame and recognition.

For Shinran, however, the other dimension of the Pure Land spiritual experience buttressed this admission of his human foolishness: the liberative and salvific Amida:

> How joyous I am! My heart and mind are rooted in the (Amida) Buddha-ground of the universal Vow, and my thoughts and feelings flow in the inconceivable Dharma-ocean.

Amida Buddha refers to the compassionate spiritual working that liberates us even with our foolish human nature. In fact, it is precisely because of our foolish

human nature that we need and appreciate the Amida. The truth of this foolish self cannot be imposed upon an individual; rather, one must realize it through one's own life experience, within the context of aspiring to become a Buddha, a goal common to all Buddhists.

Let me now share a bit of my own experience of the two dimensions, first the *bonbu* foolish self and then the compassionate workings that I call Amida.

Even today there are moments of remorse I feel about the Vietnam War. Over sixty thousand Americans of my generation paid the ultimate price, and many continue to suffer from physical and psychological scars. This sadness extends to the millions in Indochina who died and were maimed in the conflict by the ammunition bought by taxes that I paid. Yes, I did oppose the war and entered a Buddhist seminary. Yet as an American, I am partly responsible, especially as my family and I have been beneficiaries—public education, college scholarship, medical support, and liberty—as members of this society. I am even more ashamed that these remorseful thoughts do not last long. Most of the time I am too preoccupied with my own life. As the Vietnam War fades further into history, I let it slip out of my memory too easily, just like those people at the docks in Kaneko's poem.

Despite my foolishness, I am a beneficiary of the multitude of undeserved, everyday compassion that I call Amida (boundless life and light). I find it in my daily experience of awe and gratitude for the life-giving forces that produce, nurture, and sustain my life: the DNA molecules, the sunshine, the rain, the oxygen, and the orange juice that I had this morning, just to name a few. I can't forget to mention the majesty and grandeur of nature that enrich my life. Many times I have been moved to tears by the sheer beauty of the soft breeze rustling the leaves on the trees in our neighborhood. There are also the inspirations in hearing a truly beautiful piece of music, or witnessing an impressive artistic creation, or being part of an amazing athletic performance, and much more.

Last but not least, the deep bonds that I have with my family and time-tested friends are painfully precious. The look on my children's faces when they are asleep never fails to make me smile. My smile expresses the joy, pride, and gratitude I feel because they are such a vital part of my life.

When these two dimensions of Amida and foolishness are deeply felt, I often feel a need to recite the Nembutsu, Namu Amida Butsu, as an expression of gratitude. Now, ideally I should feel it *everytime* when I have my meals that include, for example, the sardines . . . but I don't. Such is my foolishness!

8

The Experience of Lotus Buddhism

The lotus flower, blossoming in murky waters, has been taken as an apt symbol of the Buddha, an enlightened being in the midst of this world of suffering. This image is thus shared across the different forms of Buddhism. There is, however, a particular stream that claims the lotus for its icon in a distinctive way.

The scriptural text that serves as the original inspiration for this stream we are calling Lotus Buddhism is entitled *The Sutra of the Lotus Blossom of the Wondrous Dharma* (*Saddharmapundarika Sutra* in Sanskrit), or Lotus Sutra for short. This text was one among the many scriptural expressions composed during the early phase of the development of the Mahayana in India. Translated into Chinese, it came to prominence in East Asia and was upheld by Buddhist adherents as the sutra that contains the quintessence of the teaching of Shakyamuni above all others scriptures. It was the subject of numerous commentaries across the centuries, serving also as the inspiration for various movements in religious, cultural, social, and political spheres. The Lotus Sutra has also been regarded as one of the four most influential religious books in the world, along with the New Testament, the Qur'an, and the Bhagavad Gita.

It may be worthwhile noting here that notwithstanding the historical as well as contemporary significance of this form of Buddhist belief and practice, Lotus Buddhism has up to recently not been given the attention it deserves in Western-language accounts of the Buddhist traditions, that is, compared with treatments given to other forms. This chapter is one attempt to fill a lacuna in this respect.

THE LOTUS SUTRA AND ITS RELIGIOUS MESSAGE

The Lotus Sutra conveys its religious message not just through didactic and discursive means, but also more effectively, in the form of parables and stories that listeners and readers can readily grasp and identify with. One of the most well-known of these is the Parable of the Burning House, which appears in the third chapter of the sutra:

Suppose there is an elder who has a large house.
And for long this house has been old, is also falling and
decayed,
With lofty halls in dangerous condition, pillar bases
broken and rotten.
. . . This decaying old house belongs to a man
Who has just gone outside but a little while ago,
Whereupon that house of a sudden catches fire.
All at once, in every direction, its flames are in full
blaze . . .
At this time the master of the house
Is standing outside the gate, when he hears someone
saying:
"All of your children a little while ago in their play
Came into this house in their youth and ignorance
Enjoying themselves in their amusements." (Kato et al.
1975, 91, 93, 94)

The master of the house in the parable represents the Buddha, and the children are the sentient beings who inhabit this earth, depicted as caught inside an old house about to collapse and raging in flames. Rapt in their own little games, the children are oblivious to the danger that is about to befall them, just as we human beings are caught up in our self-centered preoccupations in this life. We do not realize that as we continue in our mindless amusements, we will be enveloped in the flames of our delusive passions and lose our precious lives:

On hearing this, the elder
In alarm enters the burning house,
With intent to save them from the harm of burning.
. . . The children, unheeding,
Though they hear their father's admonition,
Remain attached to their pleasures
And do not stop their play. (Ibid., 95)

The wise father thus devises skillful means to draw his children out of the burning house. He announces to them that he has prepared three kinds of play-carts outside, one goat-drawn, another deer-drawn, and another drawn by oxen. He invites them to come out to get these carriages and try them out. So they all run out to see and try out the carts promised by their father. Upon getting outdoors, lo and behold, there are the carts, with all kinds of embellishments and designs, but only of one kind, the one drawn by oxen, which the children proceed to ride with surprise and joy:

I tell you, Shariputra,
I also am like this,
The most honored of all the sages,

The Father of the World.
All living beings are my children
(though) deeply attached to earthly pleasures
And without wisdom.
Now this triple world
All is my domain;
The living beings in it are all my children.
But now this place abounds with distresses
And I alone
Am able to save and protect them.
. . . Therefore, skillfully
I teach them of the three vehicles
Which cause all living beings
To know the sufferings of the triple world
And reveal and expound the way
Of being free from the world. (Ibid., 98–99)

In addition to this Parable of the Burning House, two other parables portray the relationship of Buddha vis-à-vis sentient beings as a father toward his own children: the Parable of the Impoverished Son in chapter 4, which has been often compared to the story of the Prodigal as narrated in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 15:11–31); and the Parable of the Skillful Physician in chapter 16, presented in connection with the teaching on the inestimable life span of the Tathagata.

There is the simile of the Raincloud (chapter 5), likening Buddha to an all-encompassing cloud that showers rain upon plants, shrubs, and trees in accordance with their various capacities to absorb the life-giving moisture. There are also stories about an Illusory City conjured to encourage weary and discouraged travelers to persevere in the path (chapter 7), and a Concealed Jewel that a Good Friend, representing the Buddha, had sewn into the garment of a traveler to provide resources on a journey (chapter 8). These parables and similes convey key themes that together make up the basic message of the Lotus Sutra.

First, the Buddha is portrayed as the Father of all beings in this earthly world, who has himself gone beyond this world of suffering, but who continues to be present in it. The Buddha is depicted as having attained enlightenment innumerable aeons ago, yet he continues to manifest himself in various ways in this earthly realm. The historical Shakyamuni is an earthly manifestation of this Tathagata of incalculable life span, meant to show sentient beings the way to liberation from the cycle of birth-and-death by his life and teaching. The Buddha, filled with compassion toward all sentient beings, employs all kinds of skillful means toward their liberation from their calamitous state.

A corollary of this first point is that all living beings are understood to be children of the Buddha. This notion, in conjunction with the Lotus Sutra's message of the One Vehicle (below), later became the basis for a central doctrine in East Asian Buddhism, that is, the doctrine of Buddha nature as inherent in all sentient beings.

Second, there is One Vehicle preached by the Buddha toward the ultimate liberation of all sentient beings. The emphasis here is that the three traditional vehicles toward liberation (those of the voice-hearers or followers of the historical Shakyamuni, the solitary awakened ones, and the *bodhisattvas*) are devices used by the Buddha to respond to different needs of living beings, and that these are ultimately subsumed under the One Vehicle. This notion of the One Vehicle grounds the doctrine of universal and all-inclusive salvation that is a keynote of the Lotus Sutra. This all-inclusive salvation, embracing even those who may have committed heinous offenses, is given a distinctive emphasis in a chapter describing the deeds of Devadatta, a cousin of the Buddha who had plotted to kill him.

A third key point in Lotus teaching relates to the notion of the *bodhisattva.* The Lotus Sutra presents the compassionate action of the Buddha as continuing to be manifested in this earthly realm through the work of countless beings destined toward supreme enlightenment, or *bodhisattvas,* children of the Buddha who carry out compassionate work on this earthly realm. They are ready to bear all kinds of difficulties, sufferings, and persecution with the single-minded purpose of teaching sentient beings the way to awakening. And the most effective way of accomplishing this liberation is through the propagation of this teaching of the Lotus Sutra itself. This is the Bodhisattva Path—the path leading to awakening, presented as a life dedicated to the welfare and liberation of others, and to transforming this earthly realm into the Buddha land through the propagation of Lotus teaching.

Fourth, this sutra carries the religious message of the Mahayana a step further in articulating and legitimizing a form of practice that has been described as a cult of the book. In short, a key aspect of Lotus teaching relates to the very reception and retention in one's mind, with a stance of devotion and faith, of this Lotus Sutra itself:

> If my good sons and good daughters receive and keep, read and recite, expound, and copy even a single word of the Lotus Blossom Sutra, and make offerings to it in various ways with flowers, perfumes, garlands, sandal powder, fragrant unguents, incense for burning, silk canopies, banners, flags, garments, and music, as well as revere it with folded hands, these people will be looked up to by all the worlds; and as you pay homage to tathagatas, so should you pay homage to them. (Kato et al. 1975, 187)

The Lotus Sutra is highlighted in Buddhist history for this self-referential doctrine, whereby in conveying the liberative teaching of the Buddha, it presents itself as an object of veneration and devotion. This doctrine is a key element in its emphasis on the faithful veneration of the Lotus Sutra and the active propagation of Lotus teachings that Nichiren took up as his life mission. This mission continues to be taken up by proponents of Lotus Buddhism in our day.

Devotional practices toward the written text of the Lotus Sutra, as well as toward other sutras, include not just perusal toward understanding its message

and its recollection and reflection, but also such physical acts as copying, reciting, and expounding the sutra to others. These acts are considered meritorious and as leading the devotee to awakening. Devotion to the text of the Lotus Sutra itself has thus generated various form of artistic and literary expression that forms part of the heritage of Lotus Buddhism.

LOTUS TEACHING AND PRAXIS IN CHINA

The Lotus Sutra is said to have been translated into Chinese at least six times, the earliest being around the second century CE. The most popular and influential of these translations was that by Kumarajiva in 406. This translation was the basis for the amplification and systematization of Buddhist doctrine with the Lotus Sutra as its quintessential expression, through the work of the masters of the T'ien T'ai school of Buddhist philosophy, the most notable among whom was Chih-I (538–97).

Chih-I offered a synthesis of Buddhist doctrine based on a passage in the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, referring to the "ultimate truth of all things" manifested in ten aspects of "suchness." Chih-I developed this into an all-encompassing philosophy grounded on the central Mahayana insight into Emptiness, expressed as a threefold truth as experienced in contemplative practice—the truth of Emptiness, the truth of Provisional Existence, and the truth of the Middle:

> The reality of non-duality is called the Middle . . . This is the enlightened perception of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas . . . therefore it is called the supreme truth of the Middle Path. It is also called the truth of one reality, and is also called emptiness, the Buddha-nature, the Dharma realm, thusness, and the matrix of the Tathagata. (T. 47, 727c, [Swanson 1989, 153])

To see the entire universe in its emptiness in a single experiential moment is to realize supreme perfect enlightenment. Toward this realization Chih-I offers a set of prescriptions for contemplative practice. Chih-I's achievement thus lies not only in the profound and all-encompassing theoretical framework he provided for understanding reality grounded on the Buddhist awakening experience but also in offering concrete guidelines for praxis toward the realization of supreme enlightenment and its actualization in one's life.

POPULAR BELIEFS AND PRACTICES SURROUNDING THE LOTUS SUTRA

The Lotus Sutra was received in East Asia as an object of veneration that was believed to impart spiritual power and merit on devotees. One of the significant expressions of piety that took hold of popular imagination in China and the whole

of East Asia was the devotion to Kuan-yin (Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit), a *bodhisattva* whose attributes and intercessory powers are described in the twenty-fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This form of devotional practice has generated much energy and creativity and has left its mark in many forms of religious, artistic, and literary expression through the centuries, continuing to this day.

The meritorious value of copying the Lotus Sutra, as well as of its recitation and other forms of veneration, as proclaimed in the text itself, came to be a widely accepted notion that inspired rituals and gatherings dedicated to this purpose. These were dedicated specific intentions, such as protection from harm, recovery from illness, the procurement of different kinds of worldly benefit, the expiation of evil *karma* of the deceased, and assurance of felicitous rebirth in the hereafter. As one example, Prince Shotoku (574–622) of Japan is said to have copied the Lotus Sutra by hand for the recovery from illness of his aunt, Empress Gensho, who had abdicated in his favor.

The Lotus Sutra's influence was by no means limited to the ruling classes. A collection of anecdotes involving people from all classes of society and meant to inspire religious devotion, composed around the eighth century by a monk named Kyokai, entitled "Miraculous Tales of Japan" *(Nihon Ryoiki)*, makes frequent mention of the Lotus Sutra, affirming that its devoted recitation, including the invocation of its title alone, was an effective way of accruing merit for oneself as well as for others, and of overcoming evil *karma.*

An eleventh-century collection specifically intended to extol the virtues and merits of practices relating to the Lotus Sutra, "Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra" *(Hokke-genki)*, includes accounts of individuals, monastic and lay, men and women, who received extraordinary benefits in their devotion to the Lotus Sutra. The other stories in the collection recount instances of reception of different kinds of worldly benefit, as well as the gaining of rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha through the recitation of the Lotus Sutra. These stories indicate that in the minds of the populace, there was no sharp distinction between Pure Land faith and devotion to the Lotus Sutra. This distinction between the two forms of Buddhist devotional practice came to be emphasized from the thirteenth century on, with the arrival of Nichiren (1222–82).

NICHIREN, PROPHET OF THE LOTUS

Nichiren entered Kiyosumidera, a temple in his hometown on the eastern coast of Japan, at the age of twelve and was ordained there at the age of sixteen. In various writings of his later years, he describes how he was "motivated by an awareness of life's impermanence and a desire to escape the round of birth and death; that he desired to know which, among the many sutras and rival schools, represented the Buddha's true intention; or that he wished to resolve doubts" (Stone 1999, 243) about certain historical and political events that seemed to contradict Buddhist teaching. He pursued studies in various Buddhist centers of the time, including those in Kamakura, seat of military rule and location of key

temples under government patronage: Mt. Koya, the center of Esoteric Buddhist practice, founded by Kukai in the ninth century; and Mt. Hiei, the center of Tendai teaching and practice.

Returning to Kiyomisudera at the age of thirty-two, he gives a public presentation wherein he announces a conclusion reached in his many years of study. He proclaims the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra above all other scriptures and denounces Pure Land practice as an erroneous path that would lead those who follow it to hell. By that time chanting the name of Amida Buddha had become a widespread devotional expression, as there were many in society who had grown weary of this earthly existence, amid the social turmoil and insecurity that characterized the epoch, and who sought a way out through rebirth in the Pure Land in the afterlife.

His critical stance against a popular practice supported by the local leaders made it difficult for him to stay at the temple, and circumstances led him to move to Kamakura, where he continued to propagate the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and advocated the practice of chanting its title *(Nam-Myoho-Renge-kyo)* as an expression of one's devotion. It was in Kamakura where he presented a treatise to the ruling authorities, *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land (Rissho ankoku-ron)*, which opens with the following observation:

> In recent years, there are unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the empire and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets, the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and in every family, someone grieves. (Yampolsky 1990, 13–14)

The treatise goes on to expound on the religious causes of the sufferings and the disintegration of the social fabric that were part of the common experience of the time and to recommend the promulgation of the Lotus Sutra as official teaching as a way to the resolution of the problems of the land. The treatise also heaped harsh critiques on Honen for misleading people into taking up "erroneous" religious practices that in Nichiren's view were the root cause of the problematic situation. In short, the single-minded focus on devotion to Amida Buddha advocated by Pure Land is tantamount to a slanderous act against the true Father of this earthly realm, the Shakyamuni Lord of Dharma (Kyoshu-Shakuson), who is the Reigning Buddha as taught in the Lotus Sutra. Citing the *Senchaku-shu,* a work of Honen, who had popularized Pure Land devotion a generation before him, Nichiren claims that "it lumps together all the various Buddhas, sutras, bodhisattvas, and deities, and says that one should 'discard, close, ignore, and abandon' them . . . and as a result of this, the sages have departed from the nation, the benevolent deities have left their dwelling places, hunger and thirst fill the world, and disease and pestilence spread abroad" (ibid., 37). This treatise produced the opposite of the author's desired result: rather than leading to the banning of Pure Land practice and the promulgation of devotion to the Lotus Sutra, it evoked the ire of the authorities against Nichiren and his followers. In

the years after the submission of *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,* he and his followers were subjected to ongoing persecution and harassment. The military government ordered his exile with a few disciples, first to Izu peninsula, and later to Sado Island. But rather than dampening his or his followers' enthusiasm, these experiences of adversity, results of the pursuance of their proclaimed mission of propagating faith in the Lotus Sutra throughout the entire nation of Japan, served to bolster it.

The writings composed in Nichiren's early fifties, during his two-year exile at Sado Island, attest to the profound religious experiences that gave him a deepened conviction of the genuineness of his mission and spiritual sanction for his actions, as a historical fulfillment of what had been predicted in the Lotus Sutra itself:

> This sutra passage conforms exactly with my own experience. By now all doubts I have raised earlier should be dispelled, and thousands of difficulties are nothing to me. But let me show you phrase by phrase how the text applies to me.
>
> > You may be reviled," or, as the Lotus Sutra says,
> > "They will despise, hate, envy, and bear grudges
> > against you"—and in that manner I have been treated
> > with contempt and arrogance for over twenty years.
> >
> > "You will be cursed with an ugly appearance." Or, "you
> > will be poorly clad." This too applies to me.
> >
> > "You will be poorly fed." That applies to me.
> >
> > "You will seek wealth in vain." That applies to me.
> >
> > "You will be born to an impoverished family." That
> > applies to me.
> >
> > "You will be persecuted by your sovereign." That
> > applies to me.
>
> How can one ever doubt these words of the sutra? The Lotus Sutra says, "Again and again, we will be banished . . . " [Can there be any doubt that the passage applies to me?] (ibid., 138)

Throughout the years of carrying out his mission, Nichiren had come to read the Lotus Sutra in a way that led him to see historical events and political circumstances before him as throwing light on the scriptural text. He carried a copy of the sutra wherever he traveled and made annotations on the side to record his reflections and experiential observations. Later followers gave a name to this mode of reading scriptural text in the light of contemporary events, and vice versa, of reading contemporary events in the light of scriptural text, as a "bodily reading" of the Lotus Sutra *(Hokke-shikidoku).* This mode of "bodily reading" provides us with a helpful hermeneutical tool in understanding Nichiren's Buddhism.

In short, Nichiren's religious experience can be seen as grounded in his reading of the text of the Lotus Sutra, as the "content" of the text came to be actualized in his own life. In a circular way he also came to apprehend his own life as the very realization and authentication of the Lotus Sutra. He thus has been aptly described as a prophet of the Lotus Sutra.

In a letter to one of his closest disciples Nichiren wrote:

> (In the chapter on the Story of the Bodhisattva Medicine King, etc.,) the Buddha makes a prediction: "In the fifth five hundred years after my final nirvana, there will be a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra who will be subjected to slanderous treatment by ignorant persons, and who will be struck with swords and sticks and stones and bricks, and will be exiled and condemned to death," etc. Now, if it were not for Nichiren, all these predictions of Shakyamuni, Prabhutaratna Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions would be great lies. (cited in Anesaki 1916, 296)

Nichiren understood the message of the Lotus Sutra against the background of his careful reading of and reflection on the works of Chih-I and other T'ien T'ai masters, whom he cites often in his own writings. He has a way of rendering abstruse philosophical doctrine in terms readily accessible to ordinary followers. As an example, he expounds on the doctrine of the mutual interpenetration of the ten realms, a keynote of the T'ien T'ai world view, in the following way:

> When we look from time to time at a person's face, we find him or her sometimes joyful, sometimes enraged, and sometimes calm. At times greed appears in the person's face, at times foolishness, and at times perversity. Rage is the world of Hell, greed is that of Hungry Ghosts, foolishness is that of Animals, perversity is that of Ashuras, joy is that of Heaven, and calmness is that of Humans. These worlds, the six paths, are all present in the physical appearance of the person's face. The remaining four noble worlds are hidden and dormant and do not appear in the face, but if we search carefully, we can tell that they are there . . .
>
> The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles (of hearers and of solitary Buddhas) are present in the Human world? Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the Bodhisattva world within him. Buddhahood is the most difficult to demonstrate. But since you possess the other nine worlds, you should believe that you have Buddhahood as well . . . That common mortals born in the Latter Age of the Dharma can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of Buddhahood is present in the Human realm. (Yampolsky 1990, 155–56)

This notion of the "Latter Age of the Dharma" is a significant feature in the background of Nichiren's religious understanding, which he shares in common with Buddhists of other traditions in his time, including Pure Land devotees. This is the notion that history since the time of Shakyamuni Buddha has been a

process of degeneration, with the first five hundred years called the Age of True Dharma, when teaching, practice, and enlightenment were available in the world. After the passage of these first five hundred years, the Age of Semblance Dharma arrives. This is when teaching remains, and practice may be available, but people only go through the motions. This is an age when genuine enlightenment is extremely rare, or nil. The final stage is called the Latter Age of Dharma, wherein neither practice nor enlightenment is to be found, though true teaching remains. In Japan there was a shared belief among Buddhists that the Latter Age had begun in the year 1052. Nichiren thus took it for granted that he was in this degenerate age wherein only the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra could be of any efficacy.

Nichiren also takes the notion of the "three thousand realms in a single experiential moment," part of the Tendai heritage, as a key feature in his religious world view. Nichiren, however, emphasized that people in this Latter Age of the Dharma had no access to enlightenment, nor were they capable of the contemplative practice that leads to it. For him, then, this notion came to be related to a very concrete mode of religious practice that he encouraged people to take up: "Showing profound compassion for those ignorant of the gem of 'three thousand realms in a single experiential moment,' the Buddha wrapped it within the five-character phrase *(Myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo)*, with which he then adorned the necks of those living in the Latter age" (ibid., 179). For Nichiren, then, this was the direct way to becoming Buddha. This was so even—or better, especially—for ignorant beings living in the Latter Age of the dharma. This is to take up the devotion-filled recitation of this five-character phrase, the august title of the Lotus Sutra, wherein the gem of the Buddha's supreme perfect enlightenment is wrapped.

Nichiren's teaching of a lifetime, grounded in his experience of reading and reflecting on the Lotus Sutra seen vis-à-vis the various events of his own career and expounded in his writings over three decades, can thus be summarized: receive and keep the Lotus Sutra in faith, and chant its august title with devotion, Nam-Myoho-Renge-kyo.

This act of chanting the august title *(daimoku)* is considered one of the three great secret *dharmas* that constitute a tripartite mode of religious practice for Nichiren's followers, the other two being the veneration of a calligraphic representation in Nichiren's own hand, of the cosmic gathering centered on the Lord of Dharma Shakyamuni, flanked by attendant Buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and guardian divinities *(Go-honzon)*, and the establishment of a Precept-Platform *(Kaidan)* as a sacred place before which one chants the august title.

LOTUS BUDDHISM AFTER NICHIREN

In Nichiren's own time more and more followers came to be convinced of the efficacy of the practice of chanting the august title of the Lotus Sutra, experiencing assurance in the path to ultimate realization. They also came to experience how this practice opened devotees to receive other kinds of benefits, such as the healing of illness, the improvement of their situation in life, and so on. Nichiren

notes in his letters to followers that "the Lotus Sutra answers prayers for this life as well" (Yampolsky 1996, 421).

Nichiren's heirs are now divided into various autonomous groups that trace their lineage to one of the six monastic disciples that were in Nichiren's immediate circle. There are also followers who are members of one of the powerful lay movements established in the twentieth century that derive inspiration from the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren's teaching. What these groups have in common is the emphasis that the chanting of the august title of the Lotus Sutra will lead devotees to their ultimate goal of becoming Buddha and also bring with it different kinds of worldly benefit.

Nichiren's teaching on the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra above all other Buddhist teachings had a corollary in the rejection of other paths as valid ways to ultimate realization. This exclusivist stance, coupled with a sense of superiority vis-à-vis other Buddhist lineages, was thus a feature of Nichiren's teaching that his followers tended to assume. Attitudes toward other religious groups were marked by a militancy that tried to show those others their errors, using various tactics of religious argumentation *(shakubuku)* in the endeavor to convince them to accept the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

This exclusive faith in the Lotus Sutra was put to the test during the time of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, military ruler of Japan in the late sixteenth century, when he sought to gather a thousand priests from all the Buddhist lineages in a ritual to commemorate deceased ancestors. Followers of Nichiren were divided on whether to participate or not, as participation would be tantamount to recognizing the clerics from other Buddhist lineages on the same level as followers of the Lotus Sutra. While a larger group chose the path of nonresistance and opted to participate, a smaller group refused to join the common ritual with the others and consolidated itself into what came to be known as the Fuju-fuse-ha (No-receiving-no-giving sect). There were other socio-political reasons that led to the formation of this group, but as this refusal was an open act of defiance against the government, the military authorities retaliated with public edicts banning the group and harassing those who continued their resistance. Members of the Fuju-fuse group of Nichiren's followers, both priestly and lay, were thus subjects of persecution during this era together with the Christians, who were the target of the government's policy of total eradication. Noted leaders and members of the Fuju-fuse group were exiled, others were martyred, while still others chose to go underground. The larger group of Nichiren's followers who did cooperate with the ruling authorities were allowed to continue their religious activities; this group grew to become one of the three largest combined groups of Buddhist lineages administering thousands of temples all over Japan (the other two groups being Zen and Pure Land).

In the twentieth century, outstanding individual devotees of the Lotus Sutra came to national prominence in Japan in the socio-political, military, literary, cultural, and religious arenas. Some of them were part of a movement that was dubbed Nichirenism *(Nichiren-shugi)*, an ethnocentric and politically motivated reading of Nichiren's key ideas, and others were opposed to it, but these individuals generated renewed interest in the teachings of Nichiren and of the Lotus

Sutra among intellectuals. The influence of these individuals, Tanaka Chigaku, Ishihara Kanji, Miyazawa Kenji, Seno Giro, and others, who took positions all along the political spectrum, continues to be felt in Japanese society today. It is also worth noting that the governor of Tokyo at this writing is a professed devotee of Lotus Buddhism; he headed the Lotus-inspired Brighter Society Movement and has himself written a book on the Lotus Sutra.

Besides the traditional Nichiren sectarian groups traced to his six original disciples, Nichiren's legacy continues in new religious movements that arose in Japan during the early part of the twentieth century and have now come to exert influence also in the international scene. Among these, worthy of mention are the Rissho Kosei-kai (Society for Establishing the True Dharma through Mutual Relationships—henceforth RK), and the Soka Gakkai (Society for the Creation of Value).

The RK was founded in 1938 by Naganuma Myoko (1889–1957) and Niwano Nikkyo (1906–93), who had both been members of the Reiyu-kai (Society of Spiritual Friends), a religious group established in the 1920s espousing the religious ideas of Nichiren. Distancing themselves from that organization for various reasons, Niwano and Naganuma went on to lay the foundations of a new movement, also based on Nichiren's and the Lotus Sutra's teaching, that has captured the allegiance of many in prewar and postwar Japan. A point of appeal of the RK is its way of building community based on interpersonal communication and rapport through the group meetings known as *hoza* (*dharma* circle). Members of a particular circle come together on a regular basis either at the home of one of the members or at a public hall rented or owned by the RK. At these meetings, which can be called group counseling sessions, members share and discuss aspects of their lives, seeking guidance from one another on problems and difficulties encountered and looking at the various events in their lives in light of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

RK members are also encouraged to share their faith with others who are not yet devotees of the Lotus Sutra. This is called dissemination activity, whereby those who have come into the faith and into the organization take it as part of their mandate to lead others into it. This is done in various ways, such as inviting new members into the *dharma* circle or actively going out to share with others how faith has become a transforming factor in their lives. Respect for ancestors is another feature of the religious life of RK members. For this, a family altar is set aside as a sacred space in the home, wherein names of deceased ancestors are placed and before which the family members chant the august title *(Nam-Myoho-Renge-kyo)* as well as selections from chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

On the institutional level the RK has been active and supportive of endeavors in interfaith dialogue, thus intentionally overcoming the exclusivist tendency of Nichiren's heritage. It was a founding member and continuing supporter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace, a loose federation of religious organizations inaugurated in 1970 with an international conference in Kyoto, Japan, which continues to hold world assemblies every four or five years in different parts of the world, inviting religious leaders from the six continents representing the major world religious traditions. The RK has also been seeking ways to make

itself relevant in the international scene by initiating peace activities, volunteer missions, and health, education, and welfare projects in different parts of the world where these may be needed. It is an active member of the International Association for Religious Freedom, exerting a decided influence in this pioneering international interfaith organization. It has also taken initiative in networking and cooperating with other new religious groups in Japan on issues of mutual interest to religious communities and organizations. The RK currently has branches in different countries in Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia, and Australia, and it continues to expand its membership internationally.

The Soka Gakkai is another movement of Lotus Buddhism founded in Japan that now has a wide international following. There are many books in English on this movement, covering historical, doctrinal, political, and sociological perspectives. The Soka Gakkai saw its birth in the 1930s out of the ideas and activities of Makiguchi Tsunesaburo (1871–1944), a schoolteacher and educational theorist who became a Lotus devotee and convert to the Nichiren Shoshu, a branch of Nichiren's followers that traces its origins to Nikko, one of the original six disciples. He later joined forces with Toda Josei (1900–1958), a dynamic leader who led the Soka Gakkai to its period of postwar expansion and consolidation, increasing its membership from around 3,000 individuals in 1942 to 750,000 households by the time of his death in 1958. Toda and Makiguchi, along with other Nichiren devotees, were arrested by the repressive military authorities in 1943 for their refusal to accept talismans from Ise, the Imperial Shrine. Doing so would have signified their submission to the state-sponsored Shinto religion. Makiguchi died in prison, while Toda survived and was released shortly before the end of the war in 1945.

It was Toda's ideas, built upon the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren's teaching, that became the galvanizing force and the basis for the rapid expansion of the Soka Gakkai. Tokyo University Professor Shimazono Susumu describes how Toda's doctrine of Life-Force served as a framework to tie together the experience of the devotee who chants *Nam-Myoho-Renge-kyo* and the Lotus-based doctrine that one becomes a Buddha "in this very body." Thus, three affirmations can be made based on this unifying framework:

1. Buddhism can be conceived as the fervent pursuit of a way of life in the present world.
2. The relationship with ultimate reality is perceived as pertaining to this-worldly existence, and hence is both practical and concrete.
3. Personal religious transformation is perceived as inseparable from an active stance toward the present world, which is positively promoted. (Shimazono 1999, 446–47)

The last in particular lays out the doctrinal foundation for the socially engaged stance that Soka Gakkai followers are encouraged to cultivate, which thus motivates the numerous activities sponsored by the organization in Japan and worldwide, promoting peace, cultural exchange, and education, toward global transformation.

The Soka Gakkai's influence in Japan is attested to by the success of the New Komeito (Open and Bright Party), translated in the media as Clean Government Party, often described but officially disclaimed as the political arm of the Soka Gakkai. It has won a good number of strategic seats in the Japanese Parliament and has been part of the ruling coalition with the long-reigning Liberal Democratic Party since the mid-1990s.

In recent decades, under the leadership of Daisaku Ikeda, the Soka Gakkai has extended its outreach and is known outside of Japan as Soka Gakkai International, with members in more than 186 countries. A basic appeal of Soka Gakkai International appears to lie in the effect on individual devotees of the core practice itself, advocated by Nichiren, of repeatedly and rhythmically chanting the august title of the Lotus Sutra—*Nam-Myoho-Renge-kyo*—as attested to in numerous conversion stories or personal *dharma* accounts:

> Female, white, single, under 30: Chanting has cleared up my mind enough to see that in the years before I chanted I had many misconceptions about life . . . I avoided looking at this until chanting brought out the wisdom that could help me see such problems. (Snow 1993, 294)
>
> Male, white, single, 29: Once I began to chant I came to realize that sometimes behind what seems to be a completely happy person there lie problems and limitations that even the person himself is unaware of. Now, after thirteen months of practice, I can look back and see what the true state of my life was. (Ibid., 295)
>
> I started chanting not for material things but for really big changes inside of myself. Consequently, it took me a long time to see any benefits in the beginning. But after six months of chanting, I made a decision that was a breakthrough for me. After that, consistently I've been getting these tremendous things every day in my life. Sometimes it doesn't always seem that it'll turn out for the best, but somehow I've learned how to challenge my situations and really be happy with whatever happens to me. My most recent benefit is one of rhythm. When you chant you get into a real rhythm. Things just seem to happen at the right time. (Marcy, [member for] 5years) (Hurst 1992, 246)

In North America the Soka Gakkai International has an appeals to people from different ethnic backgrounds, and many Asian Americans, Latinos, and African Americans have found a home in this religious tradition and contribute in many creative ways to its activities and public presentations. In Japan, the Soka Gakkai has a reputation for taking an exclusivist stance and for using aggressive tactics, and it is often shunned by members of the traditional Buddhist groups and other newer religious movements. On the international scene the Soka Gakkai International is known for its official endorsement of and participation in interreligious activities, especially those with a socially engaged orientation. The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, a Soka Gakkai International–sponsored institution, continues to promote and support interfaith

encounters and has issued a series of important publications out of these experiences.

Another internationally known group of Lotus Buddhists is the Nipponzan Myohoji (Temple of Wondrous Dharma on Mt. Japan), established in Japan in 1924 by Fujii Nichidatsu (1885–1985), inspired by the ideas of Mahatma Gandhi as well as of Nichiren. It is dedicated to the promotion of peace in human society through the propagation of Lotus teaching. Members initiate or participate in antiwar protests and peace marches in different parts of the world, wearing their white and yellow robes and beating their celestial hand drums while chanting the title of the Lotus Sutra, *Nam-Myoho-Renge-kyo.*

A group of temple priests of the Nichiren and Shin Pure Land schools in Japan have been working together since the 1980s in a loose network to form the Japan chapter of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (initially formed through the initiative of Thai Buddhist activist Sulak Sivaraksa). They are led by Maruyama Teruo (b. 1932), a religious writer and priest ordained in the Nichiren sect, and disciple of Uehara Senroku (1899–1975). The latter was a historian, civic leader, and author who challenged his Japanese readers to rethink their national identity and role in the context of the world community and to consider how they could contribute in the global scene to the eradication of human problems of war, poverty, and injustice. Inspired by the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren's message, Uehara's vision has moved his disciple Maruyama to take steps to lead other Japanese Buddhists to act in solidarity with grassroots peoples in other parts of Asia struggling against issues of structural violence, poverty and injustice, as a way of contributing to the global community.

In sum, Lotus Buddhism has been a major Buddhist stream since its inception in India with the rise of the Mahayana movement, through its developments in East Asia over two millennia, and now, in its various representations in different parts of the world. In these times of social, political, economic, and ecological crises of global proportions, Lotus Buddhism appeals to increasing numbers of people in different cultural contexts. Nichiren's message resonates with the spiritual needs of people and attests to the timeless message of the Lotus Sutra itself, ever presenting new perspectives on the human situation it portrays in the Parable of the Burning House.

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Personal Account: On Being a Lotus Buddhist in Today's World

Virginia Straus

I began practicing Nichiren Buddhism in 1983 when I was living in Manhattan, down and out and unemployed at 35. I joined a Soka Gakkai International group of mostly struggling actors who held lively meetings in Greenwich Village. The story of the lotus flower first caught my attention when a particularly dramatic member exclaimed: "The muddier the swamp, the more beautiful the lotus. You never see lotus flowers growing in swimming pools, right? So, forget about making your life into a swimming pool." By this stage I was dragging around a number of karmic swamps, an embarrassing number. What a novel idea to accept—and almost glorify—my muddy swamps. I hadn't a clue, though, until I began to practice, how to cultivate a lotus flower.

Today, after twenty years of a twice-daily practice of chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-kyo, doing Soka Gakkai International–USA activities, and studying Buddhism, I now see beautiful blooms in the midst of those personal swamps. Just the other day, visiting a sick friend, I was surprised to hear him say, "I'm so glad to see you because, of all the people I know, you are the most consistently happy and it's genuine!" This was a poignant moment for me, a moment of gratitude. I had spent much of my twenties and half of my thirties plagued by mood swings. So, the first year of my practice was almost entirely focused on attaining emotional stability. One Japanese leader advised, "Chant first, then think." This became my personal motto. When the dark moods struck, I cut the brooding short, chanted more, and got out of the house to be with other Buddhists. Eventually, I tapped a profound life energy—beneath my noisy ego—that stays with me as a wonderful, harmonizing presence through good times and bad.

During that first year of practice and discovery, I dove right into the middle of another muddy swamp. I moved back to Boston where my family lives. For most of my adult life I had felt alienated from my family, especially my father, and oppressed by a patriarchal family culture. Today, my father, once my nemesis, is my best friend. Caring for my ailing mother for ten years brought us together. Everything that had ever irked me about my father popped up during this time, but chanting *through* my anger turned helpless rage into powerful compassion. I was able to say the things that needed to be said . . . sticking by him and speaking up for the sake of *his* enlightenment in the end, not just mine. Today, his Buddha nature outshines that of any other eight-eight year old I know, and domineering he is not.

Another vast muddy swamp was my career. As a child I had yearned to "do good" in the world—somehow, some way. But my career choices always seemed to lead nowhere. I poured my energies into bottomless pits and saw no meaningful results—even at a supposed dream job in President Jimmy Carter's White

House. By the time I came to Buddhism, I was convinced I didn't want to work anymore. The Soka in Soka Gakkai means value creation. It was just the idea I needed to break through my career deadlock. It goes like this: Wherever you find yourself, no matter how bad it is, the key to happiness lies in creating something of lasting value out of the situation, for yourself and for others.

As I embarked on my great goal of finding meaningful work, I used a passage from Soka Gakkai International President Daisaku Ikeda's writings as my guide. "Find your mission in society," he said, "and sink down your roots. Then, you can make a real contribution." When a job got rough and I wanted to quit, as I had so many times, I used his words again—"Dig for gold at your feet"— to open a way forward. What a surprise to find that the mentor I had always missed in my work life ended up being a Buddhist *sensei* half a world away, a prolific writer of "guidances in faith." Using such a road map to develop my character led to concrete results that even I couldn't deny: two successful institutes in less than two decades, one in public policy and the other in peace education, a field I love.

Second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, called *karma*-changing self-development "human revolution"—the path to true social reform. Looking back, my inner eye tells me revolution is the right word. A struggling actor trying to get me to be a Buddhist said, "Just pretend your life is a laboratory, and this practice is an experiment. Do it for three months, and then you be the judge." Three months got me out there in those swamps, and in twenty years of wading I've been surrounded by lotus blossoms. The muck of the swamp makes the lotus all the more precious . . . and astonishing.

9

Prospects and Challenges for Buddhism in the Twenty-first Century

In this concluding chapter we consider challenges and opportunities for Buddhism in the twenty-first century and look at five specific areas. How those who identify themselves as Buddhist, in one or other of its particular forms, pursue these challenges and opportunities will have tremendous bearing not only on the future of Buddhism but also on the future of our entire global community.

BUDDHISM AND SOCIO-ECOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT

The image of Buddhism reflected in the writings of Western scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was that of a world-negating, reclusive, and individualistic kind of religion. This image may indeed represent an aspect of religious ethos as found in Pali scriptures and commentaries or as lived in some Buddhist monastic communities. However, it is neither an accurate nor adequate depiction of many of the forms of Buddhism that continue as living traditions today, as we already have seen in the second part of this volume. The twentieth century saw the flourishing of new Buddhist movements in different parts of the world. Their features included an active engagement with social realities of oppression and poverty, addressing such situations from the point of view of Buddhist teaching and practice. Let us briefly cite some examples.

The Neo-Buddhist movement of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956) and his followers was a response to the oppressive and dehumanizing situation in which members of the so-called Untouchable caste in India found themselves. The Sarvodaya movement initiated by Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne of Sri Lanka is another noted example of how a Buddhist world view has inspired community-based initiatives toward the alleviation of human suffering in the socioeconomic and political realm.

Thailand, whose culture and history have been intimately intertwined with monastic-centered Theravada Buddhism for centuries, is in the vanguard of ongoing developments in socio-ecologically engaged Buddhism that sets the pace

for the rest of the world. There are increasing numbers of those referred to as developmental monks, who inspire and work with people in village communities toward self-help and mutual assistance projects, and environmental monks, who have taken leadership in the protection of their country's natural resources from pillage and destruction by corporate interests. They turn to their Buddhist heritage and find there the ethos and the rationale for such engagement.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–93), a forest monk who inspired a large following in Thailand and beyond, presented a vision of Buddhism as grounding personal as well as social transformation. For Buddhadasa, the cause of human suffering and dissatisfaction lay in the deluded notion of the ego (the "me and mine"), which operates not only on the individual level but also on the social, political, and economic dimensions of life. Buddhist practice thus entails not just personal purification from defilements that bring about delusion, but also social engagement that seeks to diminish the influence or to dismantle the structural evils that operate based on the delusive corporate ego.

Sulak Sivaraksa, a lay follower of Buddhadasa and prominent social critic and activist, has further articulated the implications of a socio-ecologically engaged Buddhist vision in his numerous publications (see Chappell 2003). Sulak has also been a prime mover inspiring numerous monks and lay persons in his own country to organize and participate in community-based projects toward socioeconomic betterment and ecological healing. He is also the founder and guiding spirit of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, which links Buddhist activists in different countries throughout the world in mutual support of their tasks of personal and social transformation in their different socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts.

The Buddhist monk Maha Ghosananda returned to Cambodia from a ten-year retreat he had begun in Thailand and began efforts to revive the *sangha* and also to lead his people toward reconciliation and social amelioration after the devastating effects of the Khmer Rouge regime. Maha Ghosananda has articulated his socio-ecologically engaged Buddhist vision in the context of the need to address the sufferings of his people, brought about by long years of war and socioeconomic and political oppression.

As the Vietnam War raged in the 1960s and 1970s, the image of Buddhist monks immolating themselves in Saigon's streets in protest against government war policies caught world attention. During this period many monks took to the streets in solidarity with the people suffering because of the war, seeking to uphold Buddhist ideals in the midst of a world racked by violence. Vietnam has also given to the world the Buddhist teacher and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, who is credited with having coined the term *Engaged Buddhism*, which is now part of common parlance.

In Burma (called Myanmar by the military regime), Nobel Peace Prize awardee Aung San Suu Kyi and her associates loom in the foreground as examples of those who have found in Buddhism the source of empowerment and support for resisting a repressive military regime and the foundation of a vision for rebuilding a society based on nonviolence, respect for life, and compassion.

In Taiwan, where many Buddhists from mainland China sought refuge from the Communist regime in 1949, a resurgence of Buddhist activity has been a marked feature of society since the latter half of the twentieth century. Among the prominent groups is the Fo Kuang Shan (Mountain of Buddha's Light) Order, with millions of followers in Taiwan and now also in many other parts of the world. Its founder is Grand Master Hsing Yun, a lineage holder of the Lin-chi School of Ch'an, who came to Taiwan and promoted what he calls Humanistic Buddhism. Influenced by the thought of Tai Hsu (1890–1947), a monk who led a Buddhist revival in mainland China, Humanistic Buddhism as propagated by Fo Kuang Shan seeks to integrate ritual and meditative practice with social service. Hsi Lai University, located in California, is an officially recognized educational institution of higher learning that imparts this vision of Buddhism to its students and to the wider world.

Another Taiwanese group is the Tzu Chi (Compassion Relief) Foundation, founded by the Buddhist nun Cheng Yen. Her vision encompasses the establishment of a Pure Land of peace and joy on this earth through awakening to the universal love that is inherent in our true nature. Toward this awakening and realization, Tzu Chi professes an eightfold mission, including charity work, medical care, education, cultural upliftment, establishment of a worldwide bone-marrow donor registry, international relief work, environmental protection, and community volunteerism.

Still another group rising in prominence is the Ling Jiou Shan community of Dharma Master Hsin Tao, Founder of the Museum of World Religions in Taipei. Emerging from years of ascetic and meditative life, Master Hsin Tao gathered around him a community of monks and nuns, imparting to them his vision of engagement in the world as the manifestation of their Buddhist practice as contemporary *bodhisattvas.* His projects include the pursuance of interreligious understanding as a way to world peace, with an emphasis on youth interfaith exchanges, and the promotion of dialogue and mutually supportive encounters between Buddhists and Muslims, who together make up the majority of the population of Asia.

In Japan, new religious movements arose in the twentieth century, including those inspired by the life and teaching of Nichiren, whose vision centered on the transformation of this earth into the Lotus Land through the propagation of Lotus teaching, such as the Soka Gakkai, and the Rissho Kosei-kai, the Nihonzan Myohoji. The small but well-connected group of ecumenical Buddhists who form the Japan chapter of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists is likewise to be noted for its continuing efforts to integrate Buddhist praxis and teaching centered on compassion in a way that addresses contemporary issues of human rights, justice, ecology, and global community.

In Korea, a reform movement known as Won Buddhism, taking the symbol of the perfect circle, has become a major influence in society. It now also has temples and communities located in different parts of the world. It espouses a fourfold platform for addressing the social malaise of our world, involving the cultivation of a way of life conducive to wholeness in all dimensions. The fourth platform

emphasizes selfless service for public well-being, grounding a socially engaged Buddhist stance.

The Dalai Lama, indisputably the most prominent and revered Buddhist figure in the world today, is also regarded as an example par excellence of a socially engaged Buddhist. His personal efforts in promoting peace, with his message of nonviolent though nonetheless staunch resistance to the Chinese occupation of his country, Tibet, serve as an inspiration for the entire world. His talks and published writings convey a simple message of the well-being of all through the practice of wisdom and compassion in daily life.

In Europe, North and South America, Australia, South Africa, and other countries where different forms of Buddhism were transplanted during the last century, a growing number of individuals are finding a source of spiritual empowerment and vision for socio-ecological healing and transformation in Buddhist practice and world view. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship—begun in 1978 with the initiative of Robert Aitken, Zen Master of the Diamond Sangha with headquarters in Hawaii, Nelson Foster (now Aitken's Dharma successor), and a circle of friends—was established to serve as a catalyst for socially engaged Buddhism. It sets for itself a mission "to help beings liberate themselves from suffering that manifests itself in individuals, relationships, institutions, and social systems," and, through its programs and publications, to be able to "link Buddhist teachings of wisdom and compassion with progressive social change" (website). It has now grown to an organization of several thousand members from different Buddhist lineages, with dozens of chapters in cities all over North America and beyond.

The Peacemaker Order, established by Zen Master Bernie Glassman, is another growing organization that seeks to embody key principles of Zen practice to bring about personal and social transformation. While deriving inspiration and guiding vision from Zen Buddhist practice and principles, the Peacemaker community also cultivates interfaith alliances and includes Christian (Roman Catholic and Protestant), Jewish, and Muslim participants among its circle of leaders and motivators.

Buddhists are becoming more visible in many areas of social activism, including peace and antiwar demonstrations, initiatives for racial and gender equality and justice, prison ministry and advocacy, including the movement against the death penalty, and ecological action. Ecological action is an important area in which Buddhists are making their mark and are also looked to for initiative, spiritual leadership, and vision. This movement includes not only environmental activism, that is, action toward the protection of the natural environment, but also advocacy toward right livelihood. This involves calling people's attention to the destructive and dehumanizing effects of consumeristic lifestyles, leading not only to the further widening of the rich-poor gap and to the deterioration of the natural environment but also to the heightened dissatisfaction and unhappiness of those caught up in such lifestyles and values (Badiner 2002; Kaza 2004).

Buddhists active in socio-ecological issues find their grounding in the same key insight into *duhkha*, affirming the social and ecological dimensions as inseparable

from the human spiritual condition characterized by *duhkha.* The writings of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, Sulak Sivaraksa, Thich Nhat Hanh, Joanna Macy, Ken Jones, David Loy, Stephanie Kaza, and others, coming as they do from the Buddhist praxis of the authors themselves, serve as valuable resources in this regard.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN BUDDHISM

The early Buddhist *sangha* took a significant step in empowering women in a male-dominated society with the establishment of an autonomous order of monastic women. First, it opened a socially viable option for women beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother. Second, it enabled women to pursue a religious path wherein they could attain ultimate realization on a par with men. True, the women's monastic order was placed under the guidance of male monastics. This indicates that, however significant the step of establishing a women's monastic order may have been, it did not fully overcome the view regarding women as subservient to men. Ambivalent attitudes toward women, extolling them as dutiful wives and wise mothers, on the one hand, and regarding them with contempt in their roles as seductress and temptress, or shunning them as sources of defilement and as obstacles to men's path of purification, on the other; or proclaiming them capable of highest realization as they pursue the path of spiritual practice, on the one hand, and yet placing them under the tutelage of male monastics as they pursue such a path, on the other, are part of the legacy of Buddhist history. The question is whether, given the historical as well as the current scenarios, new prospects relating to the views and roles of women can be expected as Buddhism further unfolds into the future.

Several challenges loom in the forefront. First, the restoration of full monastic ordination for women, notably in Theravada and Tibetan traditions, still remains to be realized. Efforts are being taken in this regard, going against tides of resistance by male-dominated *sangha* hierarchies. Initiatives led by Karma Lekshe Tsomo and her associates in the Sakyadhita series of international conferences for Buddhist women and by Ven. Dhammananda in Thailand, Ven. Kusuma in Sri Lanka, Ven. Tenzin Palmo in India, among others, are also making their mark in this direction.

A second, interrelated challenge is the assumption of leadership roles by women in various Buddhist lineages. Zen communities in the Western hemisphere, where increasing numbers of fully authorized women teachers offer spiritual guidance and leadership to their *sanghas,* are notable for having made major strides in this regard. This is significant not only in quantitative terms but also in the qualitative difference women are able to make in overcoming traditional hierarchical patterns of relationship and behavior. Other Buddhist lineages hopefully can follow suit in this regard as their adherents take on the tasks presented by their respective institutional contexts.

A third challenge lies on the level of constructive and deconstructive work of a philosophical or theoretical order. Here the work of Buddhist scholars and practitioners such as Rita Gross, Anne Klein, Judith Simmer-Brown, Sandy Boucher,

Jose Cabezon, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, and others, elucidating Buddhist notions and how these bear on contemporary discussions on gender and sexuality across traditional religious, cultural, and other demarcations, set the pace.

Sexuality in the context of Buddhist spiritual practice is a theme of ongoing discussion. The traditional guiding principle in this regard is the precept against sexual misconduct, one of the five fundamental precepts for all Buddhist followers. For monastics, this entailed strict sexual abstinence, and for laity, sexual responsibility and fidelity in the context of marriage and family life. The emphasis that lay followers as well as their monastic counterparts can also arrive at the highest attainment in Mahayana scriptures brought the question of sexuality in the context of the Path of Awakening beyond the simple and clear-cut mandate to abstinence. Further, the spread and acceptance of Tantric religious practices among the populace and their assimilation into Buddhism from the seventh century onward brought new horizons to the role of human sexuality in the context of religious practice. From being merely a source of attachment, and as such an area to be shunned, it can be considered as part of the "skillful means" that could be turned in the direction of ultimate realization.

The socio-religious system that evolved in Japan, whereby ordained Buddhist clergy with spouse and children live in temples and serve the religious and ritual needs of the populace as administrators of these temples, brings another angle to the matter of sexuality in Buddhist life. With this system comes the blurring of the traditional distinction between monastic follower and laity, specifically in the matter of marriage, maintenance of a family, and ownership of property. This blurred distinction is also reflected in North America, Europe, and other countries where Buddhism has been transmitted since the twentieth century. Many who have received full monastic ordination in the different Buddhist lineages do not regard sexual abstinence or celibacy as a condition for or feature of the ordained status, and they continue relationships of marriage or committed partnership. Thus, there are discussions among those who seek or have received ordination, notably among the growing number of Western-born authorized Dharma Teachers across the various lineages, on the question of what Buddhist ordination entails and what constitutes Buddhist monastic life in twenty-first-century Western society. These ongoing discussions by Buddhists in leadership roles intent on maintaining and strengthening the Buddhist heritage on Western soil will undoubtedly bring forth new perspectives and new forms of Buddhist life and practice in the future.

Another aspect that deserves mention in the area of sexuality and Buddhist practice is sexual orientation. Many gays and lesbians have found in Buddhism a religious framework and form of spiritual practice where they can be fully at home in their sexual orientation and at the same time find an accepting community with shared spiritual values (Leyland 1998).

BUDDHISM AND WESTERN PSYCHOLOGY

A notable area where aspects of Buddhist world view and thinking have made a definitive impact is in Western psychology and psychotherapy. Conversely,

those engaged in forms of spiritual practice in different Buddhist traditions have found valuable insights and directives from Western psychological theory and psychotherapeutic practice. At the heart of the Buddhist world view is a therapeutic message that addresses the "dis-ease" of the human condition. It is here where a point of convergence is found by those engaged in Western psychological theory and psychotherapeutic practice.

One important fruit of this encounter is the growing acceptance of the view that for a good number of individuals who need or seek psychological help in some form, psychotherapeutic sessions can work in tandem with guided meditative practice in a way that can be effective for healing. An increasing number of psychotherapists are beginning to incorporate meditative practice as a feature of the treatment process they prescribe for given individuals. Conversely, teachers of Buddhist meditative practice, whether of Zen, Insight/Vipassana, or Tibetan forms, have also come to recognize the need at least to be conversant with developments in psychological theory in order to be able to identify certain needs and tendencies in the individuals under their guidance and adequately to address them. Cognizant of the fact that meditative practice as such does not address all the issues individuals who engage in such practice find themselves struggling with, they are more readily able to recommend that individuals with certain issues seek psychotherapeutic or other kinds of professional help that they, as teachers of meditation, cannot provide. There is an increasing number of individuals trained both in psychotherapy and in Buddhist meditation able to offer professional guidance in both areas. Their familiarity and experience with both areas provide the rest of us with valuable insights and open new perspectives (see the References/ Recommended Readings at the end of the chapter for examples).

BUDDHISM IN INTERRELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS

Interreligious encounters have been part of Buddhist history since the days of Gautama Buddha. In India there are written accounts of debates between Buddhist followers, on the one hand, and philosophers of various schools of Indian thought, on the other, regarding questions of religious and philosophical import found in Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist sources. These testify to the rich intellectual life and activity of Buddhists through the centuries as they encountered adherents of other religious traditions and reflected on the validity and cogency of aspects of their own religious standpoint vis-à-vis those of these others. These encounters inevitably influenced the way Buddhists formed and expressed their own perspectives, at times in reaction to other views, at times in ways that assimilated them, or vice versa, were assimilated by them.

As forms of Buddhism were transmitted to other cultures of Asia, these took root and developed in these new cultures in ways that were shaped by the encounter with the religious ethos that had been there before. In China, where Taoism and Confucianism were a pervasive influence on all levels of culture and society for centuries, Buddhism was received at first through a process of translation whereby its key teachings were rendered in terms of Taoist or Confucian

concepts already familiar to the people. It was only after a few more centuries of transmission into China that Buddhist followers took steps to draw clearer lines of distinction between their own Buddhist teachings and notions, on the one hand, and Taoist and Confucian elements, on the other. There are also recorded debates between Buddhist followers and representatives of Taoist and Confucian schools of thought, discussing various aspects of doctrine as well as religious and ethical practice. There are treatises that address particular issues comparing the standpoints of these three traditions.

In Japan, the encounter with indigenous religious elements generally referred to as Shinto (the way of the *kami,* or the manifold deities in the Japanese pantheon), as well as with Taoist and Confucian elements from China that had preceded the transmission of Buddhism into this island country, led to an amalgam of these various elements that make up what developed as Japanese Buddhism. Likewise, in Tibet, the encounter with the indigenous Bon religion is in the background of the development of what presents itself to the world as Tibetan Buddhism.

The particular historical, cultural, doctrinal, ethical, and other facets involved in the encounters that took place in the history of Buddhism, and the way these gave shape to the particular forms of Buddhism as we find them now, remain as ongoing tasks for research. Other aspects that can be considered as tasks for further elucidation include those encounters between Buddhism and other religious traditions in certain regions in particular historical circumstances, and their outcome. The encounter with Greek culture, which is said to have influenced certain Buddhist styles of sculpture, especially those originating in the area of Gandhara and environs, is one such theme. The influence of Muslim invasions into India and the relationship of these historical events to the decline and disappearance of Buddhism from the main regions of India is another. The encounters reported by Jesuit missionaries with Buddhist priests in sixteenth-century Japan, including the public religious debates held between Christian and Buddhist representatives, are also of interest in the history of Buddhist-Christian relations.

In this twenty-first century, as Buddhism continues to spread its influence and win the hearts and minds of people in different parts of the world, its encounters with the three Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—are significant factors in the shaping of its future.

Many leading figures in Buddhism and recognized teachers of spiritual practice in the various lineages in the Western hemisphere are of Jewish background. From their public as well as informal statements, one can note striking differences in their particular ways of relating to their Jewish heritage. There are those who emphasize their viewpoint as Buddhist through and through, disclaiming any personal religious allegiance to Judaism. There are others who acknowledge their Jewish ethnic and cultural roots and some degree of spiritual indebtedness to the religion of their ancestors but concede that they no longer adhere to the belief system or observe the ritual practices of this tradition. And then there are those who recount a spiritual journey that involved explorations and engagement in some form of Buddhist practice, which led them to a rediscovery and a renewed appreciation of the spiritual riches of the Jewish tradition. Alan Lew, for example, relates his fascinating journey of rediscovery and reaffirmation in *One*

God Clapping (1999). Sylvia Boorstein, a noted teacher of Insight meditation, wrote *That's Funny, You Don't Look Buddhist: On Being a Faithful Jew and a Passionate Buddhist* (1996), offering a glimpse of her inner world, which is enlivened and enlightened by two spiritual traditions coming to a unique integration in her own life and person.

The encounter between Christianity and Buddhism has brought new horizons and untold riches to both sides. To recount only the most notable developments in this area would require volumes, and Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück have done a great service in bringing out one (2001) in the Faith Meets Faith Series of Orbis Books. Many of the other noted volumes in this Orbis series emerge from the different authors' experiences and reflections on various aspects of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

One feature worthy of mention is the activity and creative endeavors surrounding the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies, a small but significant international association of scholars and practitioners whose members come from different streams and lineages of the two major traditions. Founded in the 1980s by David Chappell and associates, this society holds regular annual conferences with presentations on varying themes in Buddhist-Christian encounters and has affilitates in Europe and Japan whose members also conduct activities in their respective regions.

Three specific areas that deserve mention in the Buddhist-Christian encounter are those of spiritual practice, developments in doctrinal understanding, and socio-ecological engagement. On the matter of spiritual practice, there are many accounts by Christians of how their own spiritual journey has been vastly enriched by their encounter with and engagement in some form of Buddhist practice (Kasimov et al. 2003). There have been, and continue to be, exchanges between monastics of both traditions, and many Buddhist participants have expressed renewed appreciation for Christian spiritual and liturgical practices. But accounts by Buddhists of adapting or applying these practices in their own lives and in their communities are still rare.

A question posed by more and more individuals whose religious life is informed by both traditions is this: can one be a Christian and Buddhist at the same time? One way of viewing the matter is through a distinction made by some who claim that, for them, Buddhism is not so much a belief system or a set of doctrinal propositions to be adhered to, but a way of life and a form of spiritual practice. With this line drawn between belief system and spiritual practice, the same person may accept basic tenets of the Christian faith while engaging in meditative practice such as Insight/Vipassana or Zen. In support of such a possibility the silence of the Buddha on metaphysical issues is taken as an inherent openness from a Buddhist perspective regarding issues of the afterlife, the question of the status of ultimate reality as personal or impersonal, and so on. In Zen terms, "not relying on words or letters" can be taken as a stance of non-attachment regarding doctrinal issues, leaving the field open for different positions in matters of belief or nonbelief.

Others claim that taking Buddhism simply as a form of spiritual practice and ignoring its philosophical underpinnings, which include such notions as the law

of cause and effect, interdependent origination, or the notion of Emptiness, the twofold level of truth, and so on, arbitrarily takes elements convenient to one's own purposes. This would distort or truncate the practice and violate the integrity of the Buddhist tradition. Further implications of testimonies of dual belonging call for further reflection, and testimonies of individuals in this regard can serve as catalysts and resources for ongoing discussion (Cornille 2002; Kasimov et al. 2003).

On the doctrinal level, more and more Christian thinkers are beginning to see theological tasks in fresh relief, as central doctrines and notions in Christian faith are set in comparative light with Buddhist terms. Among such key notions examined are God and Emptiness, Trinity and Trikaya (the Threefold Body of the Buddha), Creation and Dependent Origination, Incarnation and the *bodhisattva*'s rebirth in the realm of sentient beings, Salvation and *Nirvana,* and so on (Keenan 1989, 1995; Knitter and Corless 1990). These comparative ventures are calling forth reconfigurations and fresh perspectives in Christian theological understanding. They are also inspiring new ways of articulation of Buddhist doctrinal and ethical perspectives that address questions of the import and relevance of the Buddhist message in the light of the vital issues confronting our contemporary world.

In Asia, Buddhists are also recognizing the need for, and taking initiatives toward, engaging Muslims in dialogue. As pointed out by Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, a Malaysian Muslim journalist and social activist, Buddhists and Muslims together form the majority of the population of Asia. Thus, dialogue and cooperation between members of these two religious traditions will be of tremendous import not only for the future of Asia but for the entire world as well. Ventures in Buddhist-Muslim dialogue have been taken from the Buddhist side, through the initiatives of Dharma Master Hsin Tao, a religious leader of a small community of monks and nuns in Taiwan, also known as the Founder of the Museum of World Religions based in Taipei. Master Hsin Tao and his associates are also cooperating with Elijah Interfaith Institute, based in Israel, in preparing Buddhist-Jewish-Muslim "trialogues," considering issues that may lead to more cooperative and peace-oriented ventures among faith traditions that have historically been in relations characterized by tension and conflict.

These interreligious encounters have generated a momentum that continues to challenge Buddhists to draw from the resources of their spiritual tradition and engage in dialogue and cooperative endeavors with individuals and communities of other faiths, toward goals shared in our common humanity. As these are carried out on different levels, including spiritual practice, doctrinal reflection, and social and ecological engagement, the future shape of Buddhism is being forged, and those who carry on its heritage in its varied forms find themselves being transformed in and through these encounters.

CRITICAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE TASKS OF BUDDHIST THEOLOGY

As Buddhists of different lineages reflect on their spiritual heritage and consider what they may have to offer to our contemporary global society, particular

sets of tasks come to the fore, especially for intellectuals and scholars formed by Buddhist traditions. This is what some scholars have come to refer to as Buddhist theology. Strictly speaking, the term *theology* could be problematic from a Buddhist perspective, which excludes *theos* from its world view, as those engaged in this area of critical and constructive reflection would be the first to admit. But given this acknowledgment, the term is used in the broadest possible sense, taking the cue from Christian theologian David Tracy, as "intellectual reflection within a religious tradition." Applying the term in a specifically Buddhist context, Buddhist "theology," then, is "critical reflection upon Buddhist experience in the light of contemporary understanding, and critical reflection upon contemporary understanding in the light of Buddhist experience" (Jackson and Makransky 2000, 19).

Intellectual reflection that addresses aspects and implications of the Buddha's teaching, needless to say, has been a longstanding tradition since the times of the early *sangha.* The history of Buddhism from India through the various countries in Asia reveals a vast arena of intellectual creativity and originality grounded in and enlightened by spiritual practice. Buddhist adherents throughout the ages have always faced tasks of bringing doctrinal matters to bear on ways of living and interacting with others in particular historical and social contexts. Intellectuals have always come forward in different epochs to carry on this task. In our twenty-first century world, with our global community facing challenges of immense proportions in ways that impinge upon the very question of our future as a planet, Buddhists are called upon to draw from the manifold wellsprings of their religious traditions in addressing the situation.

Taitetsu Unno, noted scholar and Shin Pure Land thinker, notes three important areas that need to be addressed by Buddhist theology in our day:

> First, it must respond to the deepest existential and spiritual yearnings of people who seek but cannot find answers to the perennial questions of life and death. All religions address these questions, but what will be the unique contribution of Buddhism towards this end—not something simply different or exotic but providing real answers to nourish the spirit? Second, it must respond to the intellectual, social, and cultural challenges of postmodernity without losing its critical perspective. How does Buddhism find its place in this new world? How does it translate spiritual practice into social praxis? And third, it must offer alternative solutions to concrete problems, ranging from conflict situations in everyday life to global concerns for the survival of the planet. (Jackson and Makransky 2000, 387)

Among these "concrete problems" are ethical issues of war, abortion, euthanasia, sexual behavior, as well as issues of socioeconomic and ecological justice and well-being. The challenge here is that of drawing from the pre-modern systems of thought found in the Buddhist traditions in ways that can respond to the questions and the needs of people in a post-modern age, with all the critical apparatus of post-Enlightenment thought. This is not a matter of taking Buddhist doctrines or ideas found in tradition and "applying" or "adapting" them to

contemporary contexts, but one of *going back to the experiential sources* that gave rise to these doctrines and ideas and letting these shed light on our contemporary tasks and concerns in critical and constructive endeavors. Adherents of the various forms of Buddhism can thus look to their rich spiritual heritage for resources in addressing the crucial issues we face together as a global community.

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Bibliographical Essay

This volume introducing Buddhism focuses on the varieties of human experience identified with being Buddhist in some way or other. The reader may also turn to a number of introductory guides currently available. In particular, I have found Donald Mitchell's *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2002) an excellent historical guide to Buddhism through the epochs and geographical areas of its development, with lucid expositions of doctrinal issues and very helpful and up-to-date bibliographical lists for each chapter. It also has an enhanced appeal in including brief testimonies of contemporary Buddhists from different parts of the world, presented in self-contained boxes of a page each throughout the volume. E. A. Burtt's *Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha,* revised with updated bibliography (New American Library, 2000), puts together important texts throughout Buddhist history in one paperback-sized collection useful for undergraduate classes. John S. Strong's *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations* (Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1995) is also a handy volume for class use. Charles Prebish and Damien Keown's *Buddhism: The ebook* (Journal of Buddhist Ethics Online Books, 2004), available for purchase on the Internet, is a mix of information based on recent scholarship, with convenient links to websites related to the many different themes addressed.

The present volume contains a selective bibliographical list following each chapter for those who wish to read more about the chapter's material, but I wish to highlight the following titles from among the thicket. On the life of the Buddha, John Strong's *The Buddha: A Short Biography* (Oneworld, 2001) incorporates the findings and perspectives of recent scholarship and is a very clear and delightful read. Hajime Nakamura's *Gotama Buddha: A Biography Based on the Most Reliable Texts* (Kosei Publishing, 2000) is a valuable collection of canonical texts from various accounts of the Buddha's life. Volume 1 is soon to be followed by a second volume, both based on material previously published in Japanese.

On the teaching of the Buddha, Walpola Rahula's *What the Buddha Taught* (Grove Press, 1974) remains an enduring classic. Rupert Gethin's *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 1998) offers insightful treatment of key notions that belong to "the common ground between the non-Mahayana and Mahayana in the formative phase of Indian Buddhist thought and practice" (5). Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's collection of essays translated into English and edited by Donald K. Swearer, entitled *Me and Mine* (State University of New York Press, 1989) provides an inside view of the Buddha's message by a twentieth-century sage. Also, for clear, illuminating, and inspiring accounts of the Buddha's Dharma relevant to our times, I highly recommend Steve Hagen's *Buddhism Plain and*

Simple (HarperCollins, 1999) and Alan Clements's *Instinct for Freedom: Finding Liberation Through Living* (New World Library, 2002). Steven Collins's *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravada Buddhism* (Cambridge University Press, 1982) presents an incisive, text-based historical as well as philosophical analysis of a core Buddhist doctrine. On a central Mahayana notion, Frederick J. Streng's *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Abingdon Press, 1967), a cohesive and insightful treatment of the subject matter, has become a classic in its field.

On developments in the sangha, Reginald Ray's *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations* (Oxford University Press, 1994) is a solid and thoroughly researched historical account of the ideals of human living as these evolved among the followers of the Buddha. The studies by Gregory Schopen, published in two volumes by the University of Hawaii Press, entitled *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism* (1997) and *Buddhist Monks and Business Matters: Still More Papers on Monastic Buddhism in India* (2004), have thrown fresh light on the backgrounds of the Mahayana and have given us better perspectives on an important period in the development of the Buddhist *sangha.*

Donald K. Swearer's *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (State University of New York Press, 1995), and also his *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton University Press, 2004) are excellent treatments of the multidimensional facets of Theravada Buddhism in Asia.

John McRae's *Seeing through Zen: Encounter, Transformation, and Genealogy in Chinese Chan Buddhism* (University of California, 2003) overturns many of our received ideas about the origins and historical backgrounds of the Zen tradition. Heinrich Dumoulin's two-volume *Zen Buddhism: A History* (Volume 1, *India and China;* Volume 2, *Japan*) (MacMillan Co., 1988, 1990) remains a handy reference, though some facets need revision based on McRae's research. Thomas Kasulis's *Zen Action/Zen Person* (University of Hawaii Press, 1981) is a lucidly written philosophical account of the world of the Zen practitioner. As a guidebook for Zen practice, *Three Pillars of Zen*, published by Philip Kapleau in collaboration with Yamada Koun (Beacon Press, 1965) offers an inside view of the *koan* Mu. *The Art of Just Sitting* (Wisdom Publications, 2002), edited by John Daido Loori, includes representative short pieces by ancient as well as contemporary Zen Masters. Victor Sogen Hori's *Zen Sand: The Book of Capping Phrases for Koan Practice* (University of Hawaii Press, 2003) is an extremely valuable sourcebook not only for Zen practice but also for vignettes of East Asian history and culture.

Reginald Ray's two-volume work, *Indestructible Truth: The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism* (Shambala, 2000) and *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet* (Shambala, 2001) offers a comprehensive and readable treatment that both scholars and practitioners will enjoy. John Welwood's *Wake Up to Your Life* (Shambala, 1999) relates facets of Tibetan practice to Western psychological themes.

On Pure Land Buddhism, Alfred Bloom's edited volume *Living in Amida's Universal Vow* (World Wisdom, 2004) is an excellent collection of essays that

convey the key themes of Shinran's religious thought and its contemporary significance. Taitetsu Unno's *River of Fire, River of Water: An Introduction to the Pure Land Tradition of Shin Buddhism* (Doubleday, 1998), and Kenneth Tanaka's *Ocean: An Introduction to Jodo-Shinshu Buddhism in America* (WisdomOcean Publications, 1997), provide accounts of contemporary Pure Land piety. Dennis Hirota's edited volume *Toward a Contemporary Understanding of Pure Land Buddhism: Creating a Shin Buddhist Theology in a Religiously Plural World* (State University of New York Press, 2000) is a collection on the relevance of Pure Land spirituality for our time.

Gene Reeves's collection *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope: Essays on the Lotus Sutra* (Kosei Publishing, 2002) brings together exceptional essays by well-known scholars on historical, systematic, and practical issues related to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Jacqueline Stone's award-winning *Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism* (University of Hawaii Press, 1999) is a solid and well-researched account of an important theme in East Asian Buddhism that derives from the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Its sixth chapter on Nichiren's life and religious vision is the best treatment of the subject I have seen available in English.

On Buddhism and its prospects for the future, David Loy's *A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack* (State University of New York Press, 2002), offers an incisive Buddhist view of the ills of Western society and its historical underpinnings. The same author's *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (Wisdom, 2003) expands the discourse, examining our global consumeristic society as a manifestation of corporate greed, the international arms trade and the ceaseless warfare being waged in different parts of the world as manifestations of corporate ill-will, and the misleading directions taken by media and educational institutions as manifestations of corporate ignorance. These diagnoses of the roots of our global malaise pave the way for visions and prescriptions for healing, drawing from the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition. David Chappell's edited collection *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace* (Wisdom, 1999) outlines some of these visions and prescriptions. Rita Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Christian-Buddhist Conversation* (Continuum, 2001) and my own *Healing Breath: Zen Spirituality for a Wounded Earth* (Maria Kannon Zen Center Publications, 2001) offer scenarios of what can happen as adherents of two major world religions encounter and challenge one another toward healing on the personal and global dimensions.

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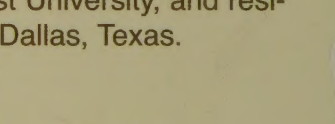

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