
CHAPTER II

The Historical Development of Buddhism

OVERVIEW

Siddhartha Gautama (563–483 B.C.E.) lived in a time of rapid social change resulting in the disintegration of old tribal values. His quest for meaning led to the renunciation of all worldly pursuits and the adoption of the life of a mendicant; as such he was one of many inhabiting the forests of northeast India. He was influenced by the prominent religions of the time, especially **Brahmanism** and **Jainism**, but, in the end, forged his own way. Through rigorous moral discipline and meditation he achieved an insight by which he became known as the Buddha, “the Awakened One.” After his awakening, he continued to wander as a monk-teacher, encouraging others to follow the path he had discovered to nirvana, the cessation of suffering. He gave shape to an order of monks (Sangha) supported by lay charity. Highly charismatic, he inspired devotion to his person as well as adherence to his teaching.

The Sangha, charged with a mission to preach the Dharma (the Buddha’s teaching) “out of compassion for the world . . . for the welfare of gods and men” and supported by wealthy merchants and rulers, steadily grew, to become a distinctive, highly structured, and powerful institution in Indian society. Lay Buddhism continued to derive its fundamental inspiration from the Sangha, but progressively a cult of devotion to the Buddha was formed that in time significantly altered the whole tradition.

The movement developed harmoniously for the first two hundred years. After 300 B.C.E. distinctive schools of thought began to appear in the Sangha. Increasingly, both lay and monastic Bud-

dhism were influenced by Hinduism and the influx of Greek and Iranian ideas. By the beginning of the Christian era the Sangha was effectively divided into schools adhering to either Great Vehicle (Mahayana) Buddhism or Little Vehicle (**Hinayana**) Buddhism, the latter self-styled as the Way of the Elders (*Theravada*). The elders held to the old ways; the Mahayana set forth a new vision.

After nine hundred years of prosperity, 250 B.C.E.–650 C.E., Buddhism slowly declined to extinction in India. But long before that, Buddhist monks and merchants carried the Way of the Buddha to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, through central Asia to China, Korea and Japan, and to Tibet. The Theravada came to dominate in Sri Lanka and on the mainland of Southeast Asia, the Mahayana in China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet. In modern times all of these traditions have come west to Europe and North America, where they thrive, becoming progressively westernized.

The Buddha and His Times

The Record

The chief source of our knowledge of the Buddha and early Buddhism is the authoritative or sacred literature of the Buddhist movement known collectively as **Tripitaka**. Tripitaka, “Three Baskets” or “Three Collections” is made up of *Sutra* (“Discourses”)—discourses attributed to the Buddha and embodying his general teachings; *Vinaya* (“Disciplines”)—the Buddha’s specific pronouncements on the rules of the monastic life; and *Abhidharma*, “The Further or Higher Teachings,” formulated by the Buddha’s disciples. The oldest portions of this literature, the *Sutra* and *Vinaya*, as we now have them date from about four hundred years after the death of the Buddha. They are based on memories of the Buddha and his teachings, preserved in the monastic community and transmitted orally for two hundred and fifty years (there is evidence that there were written records about 250 B.C.E. but they are not extant). During the oral period, the events of the Buddha’s time were reviewed, supplemented, and interpreted again and again as the movement progressed, each addition and interpretation being attributed to the Buddha. This has resulted in a record that reflects two hundred and fifty years of development and in which we cannot

clearly distinguish the original teaching from what was added later.

The life story of the Buddha found in this record is an interpretation of the Buddha by his followers over a long period of time and in the light of their belief that he was an extraordinary, wondrous being, an archetype of heroic human existence. We shall consider this archetypal life in chapter III as a key element in Buddhism as a unified system of beliefs and practices. It portrays Gautama as a prince, conceived and born under extraordinary circumstances, married to Yashodhara at the age of sixteen, and productive of a son, Rahula, just prior to renunciation at the age of twenty-nine. If we view the existing record in the light of what critical historians can tell us about the Buddha's period in Indian history, we can conclude only that the Buddha lived during the late sixth and early fifth centuries B.C.E., that he belonged to the Gautama clan of a people known as the Shakyas, that he came to prominence in the kingdoms of Koshala and Magadha as a wandering monk whom many believed to be enlightened, and that he founded a monastic community supported by lay devotees.

Background

Northeast India in the time of the Buddha was divided into small kingdoms and republics according to tribal affiliation. Gautama's tribe, the Shakyas, inhabited the Himalayan foothills along what is today the border between India and Nepal. Gautama wandered the lands of the Koshala, Magadha, Vrijji, and Kashi tribes, spending much of his time in and around their capital cities. The Shakyas were governed by a council of elders, possibly including Gautama's father. They lived on the edge of and paid tribute to the more prosperous kingdoms to the south (Koshala and Magadha) that controlled the fertile lands along the Ganges river and its tributaries.

The economy of the area was based on agriculture. Iron technology had permitted not only more effective weapons of war but also the clearing of the previously forested areas along the Ganges and the development of an increasingly prosperous rice culture. Agricultural prosperity, growing trade, and centralized rule had given rise to large towns and cities—the centers of government, commerce, and guilds of artisans. With the cities and increasing commerce came the

mixing of peoples and cultures and the consequent breakdown of old tribal ties and values. One response to this crisis of shifting values was renunciation, withdrawal into the forest for meditation. Gautama was one of many who made this response.

The religious life of the time was dominated by *brahmanas* (priests) and *samanas* (wandering monks). The brahmanas were officiants of a religion of fire-rituals that developed in northwest India beginning c. 1500 B.C.E. among a people known as the Aryans. Brahmanism was an elite religion with worldly goals, based on an ancient revelation called *Veda*. This revelation, effectively known only to the priests, was the instrument for the performance of rituals believed to maintain harmony between humans and a hierarchy of forces (the gods) in the natural world. The offering of food to the gods in fire rituals ensured health, wealth, and good offspring in this life and abode in heaven after death. Brahmanism fostered a highly structured social order, with the priest (*brahmana*) at the top, followed by the warrior/ruler (*ksatriya*), then by the herdsman/farmer (*vaishya*), and at the bottom by the laborer (*udra*). This hierarchy was believed to be ordained from the beginning of creation and was consistent with the hierarchy of gods and levels of the natural world—sky, upper atmosphere, and earth. As in the natural world the sky directed the activities of the atmosphere and the earth, so in human society the priest ordered the activity of the three lower classes. The high status and power of the priest were guaranteed by his knowledge of Veda and his performance of the rituals by which ordered, prosperous life was maintained.

In renunciation, Gautama joined the *samanas* (literally, "strivers"), homeless wanderers—monks who rejected the settled, worldly life, preferring to live on the fringe of society. They inhabited the forests, living on alms and seeking wisdom through physical renunciation and meditation. By the time of the Buddha a monastic thrust had taken shape within Brahmanism, but it was not well integrated; the *brahmana* and the *samana* essentially represented two different ways of life. The *brahmana* was concerned with ritual purity and social order; the *samana* was concerned with individual moral purity and self-knowledge. The *brahmana* was concerned with worldly prosperity; the *samana* rejected the world in hope of release from the struggle for wealth and power. The *brahmana* was oriented outward, concerned with social structure and rituals by which to

brahmana
-1
samana

worship divine powers; the *samana* turned inward on the self. *Samanas* renounced all function in society and sought a new vision of reality through monastic discipline and meditation; they sought to cut through the illusions and suffering of wealth and power and, as the Buddha put it, "see things as they really are." Having renounced all means of sustenance, the *samanas* relied on householders—rulers, merchants, artisans, and farmers—for food, clothing, medicine, and temporary housing. In exchange they offered their wisdom and healing powers, their blessing to the affairs of their patrons.

Among the *samanas* contemporary with the Buddha was the teacher Vardhamana, known as Mahavira ("Great Hero") or Jina ("The Conqueror"). His disciples were called Jains ("Followers of the Conqueror"). Vardhamana taught the attainment of release of the soul from the material world by extreme asceticism and nonviolence. He went about naked, subjecting himself to discomfort and showing his total rejection of worldly possessions. He taught strict vegetarianism and the rigorous avoidance of the taking of life in any form.

Gautama's Innovation

According to traditional accounts, Gautama studied under two masters of Yoga, a discipline of body and mind whereby one systematically withdraws from all ordinary sensory/mental experience and passes into a succession of trance states. He also tried the extreme asceticism of the Jains, punishing his body by fasting. Finding no lasting satisfaction in these disciplines, he turned to the practice of what he called "mindfulness" (*smṛiti* or *satī*), a kind of self-analysis in which, rather than trying to subdue or cut off sensory/mental experience, he simply sat, watching his feelings and thoughts as they arose and reflecting on causal patterns.

He realized that his existence was an aggregation of physical and mental states conditioning one another and endlessly arising and passing: "This arising, that arises; this ceasing, that ceases." He realized that his experience of pleasure and pain was conditioned by mental states—states of desire. He felt pleasure when his desire was satisfied and pain when it was not. He knew that a certain amount of pain is inevitable in physical existence, which is constantly subject to change and decay, but he realized that his very physical existence

was the result of the force of desire, that desire was merely the surface phenomenon of a complex mental construction—the ego or self-concept. He saw that the mind controls the body, indeed brings it into existence as an instrument of ego satisfaction. The ego patterns or energies that gave rise to present existence were themselves the product of a former existence, the resultant energies of which are called karma. Through the practice of intense mindfulness, aided by certain disciplines of concentration that quiet and purify the mind, Gautama was able to review his karmic stream far into the past. He saw how one life stream gave rise to another, again and again. Having realized this causal pattern, he then saw that since it was desire—the whole ego complex—that caused existence and therefore the physical and mental suffering inherent in existence, subduing and finally extinguishing this ego would result in the cessation of suffering (*nirvana*). Gautama is portrayed as recounting his enlightenment experience as follows:

With the mind concentrated, purified, cleansed . . . I directed it to the knowledge of the remembrance of my former existences. I remembered many former existences . . . There I was of such and such a name, clan, color, livelihood, such pleasure and pain did I suffer, and such was the end of my life. Passing away thence I was born elsewhere . . . This was the first knowledge that I gained in the first watch of the night. Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose . . . (Then) I directed my mind to the passing away and rebirth of beings. With divine, purified, superhuman vision I saw beings passing away and being reborn, low and high, of good and bad color, in happy or miserable existences according to their karma . . . This was the second knowledge that I gained in the second watch of the night . . . (Then) I directed my mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the binding influences [sensual desire, desire for existence, and ignorance.] I duly realized (the truths) "This is suffering . . . This is the cause of suffering . . . This is the destruction of suffering . . . This is the way that leads to the destruction of suffering." As I thus knew and thus perceived, my mind was emancipated . . . I realized that destroyed is rebirth . . . There is nought for me beyond this world . . . Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose. Darkness was dispelled, light arose. So is it with him who abides vigilant, strenuous, and resolute.¹

In common with Brahmanism and Jainism, the Buddha taught that life is conditioned by karma—"the force of deeds." The Law of Karma stipulates that what a person is and does is significantly the result of his or her past deeds, that the circumstances of life—a person's mental and physical capacities, the social and economic situation into which a person is born, and the ongoing events of life—are not accidental or caused by some outside force but are the fruit of a person's own past lives as well as the present one. Karma implicates all living beings—animals and insects as well as human beings—in a series of births and deaths (*samsara*), the present life being the fruit of past lives and, in turn, contributing to the shape of future lives. The Brahmanas and Jains called this process "transmigration," believing that living beings possess an eternal, unchanging soul (*atman*) that "crosses over" from one body to the next at death. The Buddha rejected the idea that any such eternal, unconditioned entity—soul or God—exists. His self-analysis revealed that everything that makes up a living being, as well as everything that makes up the natural world, is constantly changing, arising and decaying moment by moment. Inasmuch as one complex of fleeting elements decays, at what is commonly called "death," and gives rise to an initial complex of elements that shapes another body, we can speak of "rebirth"—but not transmigration; nothing unchanging carries over. This same rebirth is occurring every moment in what we call life.

Indeed, according to the Buddha, it is the belief in the fact of or possibility of permanent soul/selfhood (*atman*) that causes all human suffering and dissatisfaction. The core of the Buddha's discovery in becoming enlightened was the realization that life is a mass of suffering and this suffering is caused by desire—desire for life, for pleasure, for status, for possessions—which is rooted in belief in self. His prescription for the good life—freedom from suffering—was moral and mental discipline leading to insight into the true nature of life and therewith the extinction of desire. The desireless state, the goal of his teaching, he called nirvana, "extinction" (of the flame of desire).

Brahmanism, Jainism, and Buddhism respected the same moral principles (nonviolence, sexual restraint, and prohibitions against lying, stealing and alcoholic drink), but in Brahmanism morality was secondary to ritual purity, that is, ritual correctness based on knowl-

edge of Veda. Jainism and Buddhism emphasized knowledge of the self through meditation. They parted company on the degree of rigor in moral discipline.

The Buddha offered his insight as "the Middle Way," defined by the rejection of worldliness and asceticism, Brahmanism and Jainism. He rejected the *brahmana's* claim to superiority by reason of his knowledge of Veda and performance of the fire rituals. He rejected the *brahmana's* concern with worldly riches. Instead he preached the simple life that renounced attachment to worldly goods and was concerned for moral character and self-knowledge through discipline. He did not reject the gods of Brahmanism but subordinated their power to the one who has conquered all desire. At the same time, he rejected the extreme asceticism of the Jains, which he considered "painful, ignoble, and useless." For the Buddha, the goal of self-discipline was not the punishment and death of the body, but the serenity of mind and body through the extinction of desire.

The Formative Period: 500–250 B.C.E.

Monks and Laity

According to the record, the Buddha wandered for forty-five years after his enlightenment, teaching and gathering both lay and monastic disciples. He is portrayed as teaching the laity the merits (good karma) of giving alms to those who have taken up the homeless life and of keeping the five moral precepts—abstention from taking human life, lying, stealing, illicit sexual activity, and alcoholic drink. He taught charity and morality as the means to harmony and prosperity in this life and a favorable rebirth in the next. To those he perceived ready, he taught "the higher dharma," the truths of suffering, its cause, its cure, and the monastic path leading to nirvana.

In general, *samanas* avoided contact with society as much as possible. The Buddha instructed his monks to "wander alone, like a rhinoceros," to have no refuge but the Dharma. But this did not mean that they were to avoid all contact with society. The Buddha rejected the life of extreme asceticism—total withdrawal and the practice of physically punishing disciplines; he instructed the monks to teach the Dharma, "for the welfare of the many." Most impor-

CHAPTER III

Buddhism as a Unified System of Beliefs and Practices

We have seen how Buddhism developed from the life and teachings of Siddhartha Guatama into a religion practiced worldwide. Now let us look at this religion as a fully developed system functioning in the modern world. As in the historical survey, our focus will be Asian Buddhism, both Theravada and Mahayana. With respect to the Mahayana, we shall specifically consider the Zen and Pure Land Buddhisms of Japan.

Overview

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as a wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.¹⁵

The "result of what we have thought" is karma. Buddhism defines the world in terms of karma. Karma manifests itself as a multitude of life forms, each with its distinctive characteristics and potential, each in its appropriate sphere or environment according to its merit-status. Karma causes suffering; it causes relative happiness; and it

causes ultimate happiness—release from suffering, nirvana.

The resources for shaping good karma, which results in worldly prosperity, favorable rebirth, and nirvana, are the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. These Three Treasures are the source of self-power to those who actualize them through a life of self-discipline. They are power to be shared with those who respect them, have confidence in them, and worship them. The Buddha is a heroic example for those who seek self-power. He is a reservoir of merit for those who need to rely on the power of another. The Dharma is wisdom-power or enlightenment-power to those who comprehend it. It is a force of healing, protection, and blessing to those who invoke it. The Sangha is an instrument of enlightenment and nirvana to those who commit themselves to its discipline. It is a reservoir of merit for those who respect and materially support it.

The Theravada and Mahayana interpretations of the Three Treasures, each in its own way, give emphasis to both foci of the Buddha's life and teaching—self-power through self-discipline and shared power by the conjunction of compassion and devotion. Charity, moral discipline, meditation, and worship are the means of actualizing the power of the Three Treasures, that is, making and sharing merit in the production of good karma and the attainment of worldly prosperity, enlightenment, and nirvana. These means dictate a ritual ordering of individual, familial, and community life.

The World as Constituted by Karma

There is no story of the first or primal creation in the annals of Buddhism. Buddhists, like Hindus, taking their cue from the repeating phases of the sun and moon in relation to the earth and the ever-repeating cycles of growth and decline in nature, think of time and space as without beginning or end and incessantly pulsating in lesser and greater cycles. The material universe repeatedly issues forth from a state of latency, expands to a peak, and then declines to a state of rest once again, much as the moon appears, phases from new to full, and then goes back to new. Of course, the life span of a manifest universe, 432 billion years (a *maha-kalpa*), is enormously greater than the 30-day "life" of a moon. Within the great span of time of the *maha-kalpa*, the universe pulsates in lesser phases of 432

million years (a *kalpa*), each of which is constituted of four ages (*catur-yuga*). A universe is made up of one billion world systems, each of which consists of an earth with heavens above and hells below.

While they recognize these great cycles of time and the numerous world-cycles, the teachings of Buddhism focus on the repeated cycling (*samsara*) of life forms in this world system by reason of karma. Karma, the force or energy created by human thoughts, words, and deeds, causes the various life forms that inhabit our world system—their physical and mental capacities, sex, and social circumstances. There are gods who reside in heavens above the earth; humans, demons, hungry ghosts, and animals who live on or near the earth; and hell dwellers whose abode is below the earth. Karma is of two kinds: meritorious (*punya*, or “good,” karma) and demeritorious (*papa*, or “bad,” karma). Merit results in pleasure, demerit in pain. Merit and demerit are accumulated in human existence. Their effects must be experienced, if not in the present life, then in another. Human beings who die with greater merit than demerit are reborn as gods or again as humans. Those with greater demerit than merit are reborn as demons, hungry ghosts, animals, or inhabitants of hell. The life of a god is one of great pleasure; that of a human, mixed pleasure and pain; and that of demons, hungry ghosts, animals, and hell dwellers, great pain. Thus, it is desirable to gain heaven, or at least rebirth in a human form of high status and potential. But, even heavenly existence comes to an end when merit is exhausted; these beings must then revert to human status, or if they carry sufficient demerit from their former human existence, a lower form where they experience the results of this demerit. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the practice of Buddhism is freedom from karma and rebirth, freedom from suffering.

The resources for merit and through it for the attainment of heaven and nirvana are the Three Treasures or Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Faith or confidence in the Three Jewels is the foundation of the practice of Buddhism. It is expressed by the chanting of the Threefold Refuge:

Reverence to the Lord, the Holy One, the Perfectly
Enlightened One!
I take refuge in the Buddha!

I take refuge in the Dharma!
I take refuge in the Sangha!

Full faith in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is the mark of conversion, the assurance that one will never again be born in a form of life lower than human. The content of this confidence is defined in an early formula:

The elect disciple is in this world possessed of faith in the Buddha—believing the Blessed One [*bhagavan*] to be the Holy One [*arhat*], the Fully-enlightened One [*sammāsambuddha*], Wide, Upright, Happy, World-knowing, Supreme, the Bridler of men's wayward hearts, the Teacher of gods and men, the Blessed Buddha.

He (the disciple) is possessed of faith in the *Dharma*—believing the truth to have been proclaimed by the Blessed One, of advantage in this world, passing not away, welcoming all, leading to salvation, and to be attained to by the wise, each one for himself.

And . . . he is possessed of faith in the *Sangha*—believing the multitude of the disciples of the Blessed One who are walking in the four stages of the noble Eightfold Path, the righteous, the upright, the just, and law-abiding—believing this church of the Buddha to be worthy of honor, of hospitality, of gifts and of reverence; to be the supreme sowing ground of merit for the world . . .¹⁶

“Taking refuge” in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha has two levels of meaning. It means following the example of the Buddha by practicing the Dharma—giving gifts (*dana*), cultivating morality (*sila*), and striving for wisdom (*prajna*) through meditation (*śamādhi*). It also means relying on the power (merit) of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, which is actualized by prayer, offerings, and ritual incantations. The Three Jewels are resources for worldly prosperity as well as for the achievement of nirvana.

The Buddha

The Buddha is the great teacher and example of one who attains nirvana for those treading the path that he revealed. At the same time, by his meritorious deeds, purity, wisdom, and compassion, he is a reservoir of power for those in need.

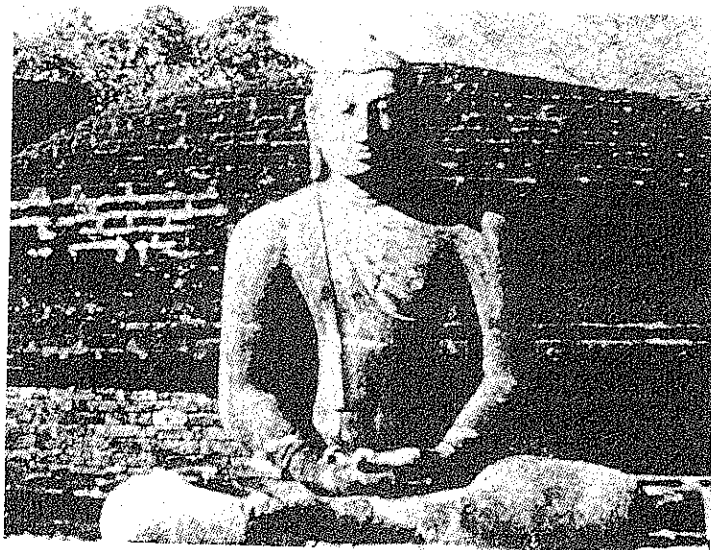
mean to believe in the Buddha?

The Buddha is the Holy One (*arhat*)—he has conquered all lust, anger, and delusion, dispelled all sensuous desire, all yearning for personal existence, and all ignorance. He is the Perfectly Enlightened One—he has knowledge of his former lives, knowledge of the sufferings of other beings, knowledge of anything he wishes to know.

Now, someone, in things never heard before, understands by himself the truth, and he therein attains omniscience, and gains mastery in the powers. Such a one is called a *sammāsambuddha*.¹⁷

By his holiness and perfect enlightenment, he is the Blessed One, the Lord and Teacher of all beings—he has power over all realms of life and the compassionate skill to deliver all beings from suffering. He is

abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an exalted one, a Buddha. He, by himself, thoroughly knows, and sees as it were face to face, this universe—including



The Buddha, in meditation posture, amidst the ruins of an ancient monastery at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.

ing the worlds above of the gods, the Brahmas, and the Maras [forces of death]; and the world below with its *samanas* and *brahmanas*, its princes and peoples—and having known it, he makes his knowledge known to others.¹⁸

He is the Tathagata, the one “Thus-come” or “Thus-gone.” He has come and gone the way of a Buddha: he has come, accumulating great merit through many lives; he has gone beyond the physical and mental characteristics that define and limit other beings:

In the world with its devas [certain of the gods], Maras and Brahmas, amid living beings with recluses and Brahmins [Brahmanas], devas and mankind, the Tathagata is the victor unvanquished, the absolute seer, self-controlled. Therefore is he called Tathagata.¹⁹

A Tathagata has ten powers by which he comprehends all causes and effects, the nature and destiny of all beings. A *brahmana*, seeing the footprints of the Buddha with their thousand-spoked wheel markings, exclaimed: “Indeed, how wonderful and marvelous—it cannot be that these are the footprints of a human being.” Coming to the Buddha he inquired, ‘Is your Lord [Are you] a god, an angel, a demon, or a human being?’ The Buddha responded that he was none of these; rather he was a Buddha. All the characteristics by which he would be a god, an angel, demon, or man had been extinguished.

Just as a . . . lotus, although born in the water, grown up in the water, when it reaches the surface stands there unsoiled by the water—just so, brahmin, although born in the world, grown up in the world, having overcome the world, I abide unsoiled by the world. Take it that I am Buddha²⁰ . . .

Great Events

The story of the Buddha, as it came to be told from the second century B.C.E., is a story of heroic conquest, compassionate service, and the exercise of impressive power. Representing the Buddha as an example of perfection in self-control and self-knowledge and the magnificence and power of a perfected being, it is an inspiration to-

ward faith, charitable deeds, and morality and a model for the monastic life. It portrays a wondrous being who is supremely confident, completely in control not only of himself but of the physical environment and all of the gods, spirits, and powers honored and feared by the people of the Buddha's time. The great events of the story are the birth of Gautama at Lumbini, his renunciation of worldly things at the age of twenty-nine, his enlightenment at Gaya six years later, his first sermon at the deer park near Banaras—"setting in motion the wheel of the Dharma"—and his death at Kushinara at the age of eighty. These events are the final effects of long strivings—the strivings of more than five hundred lives.

The Buddha's pilgrimage to enlightenment began "one hundred thousand cycles vast and four immensities ago," when Sumedha, a wealthy and learned *brahmana*, happened upon a Buddha by the name of Dipamkara. Sumedha, dissatisfied with life and overwhelmed by the serenity of Dipamkara, vowed to undertake the discipline by which he too would become a Buddha. Thereafter, he was known as a *bodhisattva*, "a being striving for enlightenment."

When Sumedha died, the force of his deeds and his vow to seek enlightenment caused the birth of a new form—a body and consciousness appropriate to these accumulated life-energies. In this form and again and again in hundreds of rebirths, sometimes human form and sometimes nonhuman, the *bodhisattva* strove to achieve ten perfections: perfection in morality, renunciation, courage, patience, truthfulness, resolution, good will, equanimity, wisdom, and charity. For example, as a rabbit, he showed supreme charity by offering his body on the fire to provide food for a hungry *brahmana*:

There came a beggar, asked for food;
Myself I gave that he might eat.
In alms there's none can equal me;
In alms have I perfection reached.²¹

As a great bull elephant, he was pierced in the navel by a hunter's poisoned arrow but showed no antagonism toward the hunter. Indeed, as he slowly died, he graciously assisted the hunter in removing his tusks. Finally, as Prince Vessantara, the *bodhisattva*'s last life but one, he manifested supreme perfection in charity, giving away not only his material wealth, but his beloved wife and children.

The Magnificent Conception and Birth

At the death of Prince Vessantara, the *bodhisattva* was born among the gods where he reflected on the circumstances of his upcoming final birth. Concurrently, on the earth in the Shakya capital city of Kapilavastu, Queen Mahamaya, sleeping, dreamed of being carried off to a golden mansion on a silver hill somewhere in the Himalayas. There, laid out on a couch, assisted by several angelic beings, she experienced the arrival of a great white elephant. The elephant, bearing a lotus in its trunk and trumpeting loudly, circled her couch three times and entered the side of her body. Thus was Gautama conceived, and the entire cosmos responded:

Now the instant the Future Buddha was conceived in the womb of his mother, all the ten thousand worlds suddenly quaked, quivered, and shook. . . . An immeasurable light spread through ten thousand worlds; the blind recovered their sight; . . . the deaf received their hearing; the dumb talked; . . . rain fell out of season. . . . In the mighty ocean the water became sweet. . . .²²

Having awakened and reported her dream to King Suddhodana and the wise men of the court, she was informed by the wise men that she would bear a son who would either become a universal monarch or a Buddha.

When pregnancy was nearing its term, Queen Mahamaya set out for the home of her parents, there to give birth. Labor pains came upon her en route, near the village of Lumbini. Withdrawing to a grove of Sal trees blooming out of season, she gave birth to the child while standing, holding onto a branch of a tree. The child emerged from her side, pure and sparkling, and fell into a receiving net held by several of the gods. Bouncing up from the net, the well-formed child came down on the ground and, taking seven steps, shouted, "I am the greatest of all beings. This is my last birth!"

Prince Gautama was born on the full moon of the month of Vaisakha (April–May). (His renunciation, awakening, and death will all occur on this same day of the year.) His body bore the thirty-two marks of greatness, some of which were golden skin with a hair to each pore and so smooth that dust would not cling to it, netted hands and feet, and thousand-spoked wheel designs on the soles of his feet. Asita, a wandering ascetic, wept upon seeing the child because he realized that the child would become enlightened and teach

others, but only after his (Asita's) own death. Queen Mahamaya died seven days after Gautama's birth and was reborn in one of the heavens of the gods.

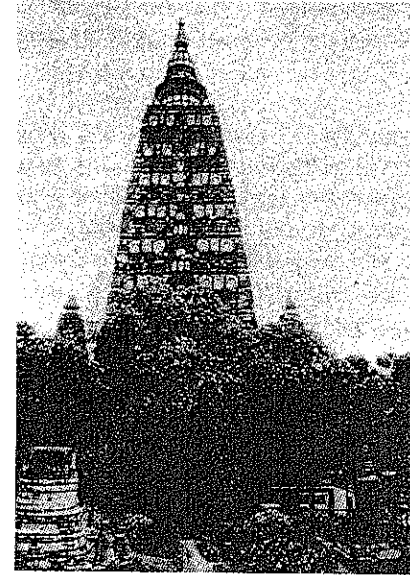
Still a baby, the child was left seated beneath a great tree during a plowing festival; there he entered upon meditation and experienced successively four states of trance. He will reflect back on this incident as he sits just prior to final awakening.

The Great Renunciation

The young Gautama showed skill in all the martial arts and great promise toward becoming a ruler. He married Yashodhara at age sixteen. However, even though he was surrounded by lovely female servants and enjoyed all the physical comforts, he was unhappy. According to the biographies, at age twenty-nine, riding near his father's palace, Gautama saw persons suffering from disease and old age; then, he happened upon a funeral procession. Informed by his charioteer that disease, old age, and death are common to all people, he became despondent and returned to his room for deep reflection. Upon observing a serene wandering monk, he vowed to renounce his princely status and go forth into the homeless life in search of a cure for suffering and death. Not long before this decision, Yashodhara bore him a son, Rahula (literally, "fetter").

Late one night, setting surrounded by the exhausted bodies of dancing girls and servants with spittle running from their mouths as they slept sprawled on the floor, he experienced utter revulsion. Kissing his sleeping wife and child, he took his horse and favorite servant and started for the gate of the city. The Great Renunciation had begun! The gate to the city was securely locked, but the "spirits," cheering on Gautama's renunciation "for the welfare of gods and men," opened it with ease. Going forth, he stopped near the river, cut his hair with his sword, exchanged his princely attire for the simple clothing of a passing hunter, and dismissed his horse and servant.

Gautama joined the *samanas* inhabiting the forests of Koshala and Magadha. He practiced Yoga successively under the guidance of two well-known *samana* masters but found no deep satisfaction. He then spent several years with five companions practicing severe asceticism, attempting to starve the body into submission by extreme fasting. On the verge of death and having only enhanced suf-



The Bodhi Tree—tree of enlightenment—at Bodhi Gaya in northeast India; believed to be the tree under which Gautama attained final awakening. The Mahabodhi temple in the background dates from the twelfth century. The stupas in the foreground enshrine relics of saints.

fering rather than having conquered it, he again wandered alone, finally settling in a grove near the village of Gaya.

Seated beneath a great fig tree, his body glowing with a golden aura, he received the first solid food since breaking his fast. A young woman, Sujata, who believed she had been blessed with a good husband and a male child as the result of a prayer beneath the great tree, came to make an offering of fine food to the tree. She made her offering to Gautama, thinking him to be the spirit of the tree. Gautama took the food; he bathed at the river, ate, and cast the food bowl into the river where it floated upstream, a sign that he was destined that day to become a Buddha. At nightfall, the night of the full moon in Vaisakha (April—May), the same night on which he was born, he seated himself again beneath the tree facing east, determined not to rise until he had achieved true insight:

Let my skin, and sinews, and bones become dry, and welcome! And let all the flesh and blood in my body dry up! But never from this seat will I stir, until I have attained the supreme and absolute wisdom!²³

Then came Mara, the Lord of Death, and his hosts of demons

personifications of all the desires and ego-ridden satisfactions of human life. Exclaiming, "Prince Siddhartha is desirous of passing beyond my control, but I will never allow it," Mara arrayed his army for battle.

Mara's army extended in front of him for twelve leagues, and to the right and to the left of him for twelve leagues, and in the rear as far as to the confines of the world, and it was nine leagues high. And when it shouted, it made an earthquake-like roaring and rumbling over a space of a thousand leagues. And the god Mara, mounting his elephant, which was a hundred and fifty leagues high and had the name "Girded-with-mountains," caused a thousand arms to appear on his body, and with these he grasped a variety of weapons.²⁴

Mara tempted Gautama with lovely women and positions of wealth and power. Failing to dissuade him from his discipline, Mara showered fierce storms upon him—rain, hot rocks, flies, and wind. Each successive shower was transformed into harmless flowers as it came near the pure and powerful *bodhisattva*. Finally, in desperation Mara questioned Gautama's perfection, taunting him as being alone and without a witness to his achievement. Gautama shifted the fingers of his right hand to point to the ground and silently called upon the earth itself to witness to his perfection. Mother Earth bellowed forth, "I bear you witness," and Mara and his hosts were utterly dismissed. The entire cosmos of nonhuman beings—gods, spirits, snakes, birds, and so forth—acclaimed his victory:

The victory now hath this illustrious Buddha won!
The Wicked One, the Slayer, hath defeated been!²⁵

The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of the Dharma

The Buddha remained seven weeks in the vicinity of the great tree, savoring his insight and pondering whether it would be profitable to try to teach others what he had discovered.

Through painful striving have I gained it,
Away with now proclaiming it;
By those beset with lust and hate

Not easily is this teaching learnt.
This teaching, fine, against the stream,
Subtle, profound, and hard to see,
They will not see it, lust-inflamed,
Beneath the mass of darkness veiled.²⁶

Seeing that the Buddha was "inclined to remain in quiet," Brahma, himself, lord of the gods of the Brahmanical pantheon, came down to persuade him to go forth and teach:

Lord, may the Blessed One preach the doctrine! May the perfect One preach the doctrine! There are beings whose mental eyes are darkened by scarcely any dust; but if they do not hear the doctrine, they cannot attain salvation. These will understand the doctrine. . . . The Dhamma [Dharma] hitherto manifested in the country of Magadha has been impure, thought out by contaminated men. But do thou now open the door of the Immortal; let them hear the doctrine discovered by the spodess one! . . . Look down, all-seeing One, upon the people lost in suffering, overcome by birth and decay. . . . Arise, O hero; O victorious One! Wander through the world, O leader of the pilgrim band, who thyself art free from debt. May the Blessed One preach the doctrine; there will be people who can understand it!²⁷

Receptive to Brahma's plea and encouragement, the Buddha decided to go to Banaras. He had first thought to enlighten his former teachers, but the gods informed him that they had died. He then saw, with his "divine, clear vision" his former companions in asceticism, dwelling at a deer park near Banares. He decided that they should be the first to hear his teaching, and so proceeded to Banaras. There, his former companions greeted him with great respect and he delivered his first sermon, called "The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dharma." In it he taught the Middle Way consisting of the Four Noble Truths:

1. The truth of the existence of suffering;
 2. The truth of the cause of suffering;
 3. The truth of the cessation of suffering; and
 4. The truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.
- One after the other, the companions, "having understood the Dharma, . . . having dispelled all doubts, . . . having gained full

knowledge," asked the Buddha to receive them as disciples. In a short time, all five attained the status of *arhats*—those free of all attachment to the world.

Feats of Ministry

Many extraordinary feats are attributed to the Buddha. He exorcised disease-causing spirits from a city; he preached while walking in the sky. He instantaneously quieted a mad elephant; he outwitted the great magicians of his time. In one of the more spectacular events of his ministry, the Buddha ascended into the heavens to preach the Dharma to his mother where she resided among the gods. After three months he descended to the earth triumphantly on a jeweled staircase accompanied by the Brahmanical gods Brahma and Indra. When the Buddha goes into the village for alms

... gentle winds clear the ground before him; the clouds let fall drops of water to lay the dust in his pathway, and then become a canopy over him; other winds bring flowers and scatter them in his path; elevations of ground depress themselves, and depressions elevate themselves; wherever he places his foot, the ground is even and pleasant to walk upon, or lotus flowers receive his tread. No sooner has he set his right foot within the city gate than the rays of six different colors which issue from his body race hither and thither over palaces and pagodas, and deck them, as it were, with the yellow sheen of gold, or with the colors of a painting. The elephants, the horses, the birds, and other animals give forth melodious sounds; likewise the tom-toms, lutes, and other musical instruments, and the ornaments worn by the people.²⁸

The Great Decease

In his last year, traveling north from Rajagriha, the Buddha fell ill with dysentery. A short time later, this condition was aggravated by a meal of dried boar's flesh he received from Cunda, a blacksmith. He retired to a grove near the village of Kushinara. There, lying on his side, he gave final instructions to Ananda about the monastic life, authorized the ordination of one last disciple, and received the Malla people of Kushinara who had come to pay their respects. As

he lay dying, flowers fell from the sky and heavenly music sounded; the area was crowded with the gods—for twelve leagues around the grove "there was no spot in size even as the pricking of the point of the tip of a hair which was not pervaded by powerful spirits." Finally, with the words: "To everything that arises, there is cessation; work out your salvation with diligence!" he passed in and out of a series of states of deep concentration and expired.

When the Blessed One died there arose, at the moment of his passing out of existence, a mighty earthquake, terrible and awe-inspiring; and the thunders of heaven burst forth.²⁹

Malla chieftains prepared the body for cremation. They were unable to move it or to set it afire without first apprehending the will of the spirits. When the cremation was completed, the fire was extinguished by a flow of water from the sky. After some debate, the remains were distributed to eight parties who, upon returning to their native places, enshrined them in memorial mounds (*stupas*).

The great events of the Buddha story are well known to every devotee. The Buddha's former lives, especially the one as Prince Vessantara, are remembered in acts of charity. His birth, enlightenment, and death are celebrated as events of great power by festivals, pilgrimages to Lumbini and Bodh Gaya, and the building of *stupas*. The Great Renunciation is reenacted at every ordination to the monastic order. Various mishaps of life are commonly referred to as due to the attack of Mara, and they are faced with the confidence of knowing that the Buddha conquered Mara. The incident of the Earth Goddess witnessing to the Buddha's merit is appealed to in every act of transferring or sharing merit in the Theravada tradition. The whole story of the Buddha concretely illustrates the integration of gods and spirits into the Buddhist worldview and the subordination of these powers to the power of the Buddha. The gods honor and serve the Buddha and the spirits are vanquished by his power; these episodes provide inspiration for many of the rituals of daily life.

Two Visions of the Buddha

Theravada Buddhism affirms the Buddha as a unique being of the present age of time (indefinite in length). He stands in a line of Bud-

dhas, the enlightened ones of other times, each of whom brought the Dharma. He has achieved a status that will not be achieved by others in this age. He has come and gone, leaving the Dharma as a guide by which others may attain arhatship, the extinction of suffering but not full Buddhahood. This view is exemplified by remarks attributed to the Buddha just after his great awakening. On the road to Banaras, Gautama met an ascetic, Upaka, who, noticing his serenity and pure and bright complexion, asked what teacher and doctrine the Buddha followed. The Buddha replied:

I have overcome all foes; I am all-wise; I am free from stains in every way; I have left everything; and have obtained emancipation by the destruction of desire. Having myself gained knowledge, whom should I call my master? I have no teacher; no one is equal to me; in the world of men and of gods no being is like me. I am the holy One (*Arhat*) in this world, I am the highest teacher, I alone am the Perfectly Enlightened One (*sammāsambuddha*); I have gained coolness and have obtained nirvana. To found the kingdom of truth (*dharma*) I go to the city of the Kashis (Banaras).³⁰

The Buddha foretells the coming of the Buddha for the next age, Maitreya, who now resides in the Tusita heaven awaiting his time for birth in the human realm. Theravada Buddhists occasionally appeal to the power of Maitreya as well as to that of the Buddha Gautama. Maitreya, of course, is "alive" in the world system and may be prayed to directly; even so, residing as he does in another realm, his presence is distant and his power not particularly related to everyday matters of human life. Gautama has come and gone, but his power is close at hand and can be easily brought to bear on mundane affairs. It resides in the Dharma which is mediated by the monks, and in the *stupas*, bodhi-trees, and images, which are still "hot" by their association with the Buddha or his remains.

In the Theravada, the concept of *bodhisattva* ("A Being of [i.e., destined for] Enlightenment") is not central to the doctrine of Buddhahood. It is applied to the many lives through which the Buddha strove toward Buddhahood. The designation does not especially emphasize striving for the sake of others, nor is it applied to anyone other than the Buddha, former Buddhas, and Maitreya, the one to come. It is not used in reference to the Buddha's disciples. It

is significant to the Theravada that the Buddha proclaimed the Dharma for the world, but this is not the central purpose of his striving as a *bodhisattva*. The Buddha's power for others, like that of the monk, is incidental to his striving for nirvana.

In the Mahayana the concept of the *bodhisattva* is central and has the meaning (as, in fact, exemplified by the lives of the Buddha) of a being striving toward enlightenment not for his or her own sake, but for the sake of others. It also has the meaning of a being who has attained enlightenment but forgoes nirvana in order to deliver others from suffering. A Buddha, for eons prior to perfect enlightenment (Buddhahood) and thereafter, that is, even as a Buddha, is essentially A Being for Others. Further, he has not come and gone, but exists eternally, emanating merit (goodness and truth) throughout the cosmos.

In the discourse known as *The Sutra of the Lotus of the True Dharma*, the Buddha reveals his transcendent nature as everlasting: "Father of the world, the Self-born One, Healer, Protector of all creatures," who attained perfect enlightenment eons and eons ago, but out of compassion for his children takes form again and again to educate them and bring them to nirvana. Like a father who offers his children splendid bullock-, deer-, and goat-drawn carts to lure them out of a burning house, to which they are oblivious by their play, the Tathagata offers people various vehicles (teachings) by which each of them, according to his or her capacity, may attain to nirvana. Like a father who, separated from his son for many years, employs various skillful devices by which to bring his son to an awareness of his inheritance, the Tathagata, Father of the world, exercises various means by which to save suffering beings. Since their parting, the father has become rich and powerful, the son poor and destitute. The father remembers and longs for his son; the son has long since forgotten his father. When the father happens to see his son, his impulse is to run to him and embrace him as a son, but he realizes that the son, in his destitute state, would be unable to comprehend that he is really the heir to great wealth. Instead, the father sends servants to offer the son work in the stables. After a time, the father disguises himself and works alongside of his son, getting acquainted and encouraging the son to look upon him as if he were his father. Eventually the father bestows his wealth upon the son, revealing to him his true nature.

original son

As the father in the parable disguises himself to work alongside of his son, so the Tathagata makes appearance among people as Shakyamuni ("The sage of the Shakya Tribe"—a title for Gautama Buddha preferred in the Mahayana) and skillfully plays out the drama of renunciation, the attainment of enlightenment, the wandering teaching, and final decease: ↵

The force of a strong resolve which I assumed is such . . . that this world, including gods, men, and demons, acknowledges: Now has the Lord Shakyamuni, after going out from the home of the Shakyas, arrived at supreme, perfect enlightenment . . . at the town of Gaya. But . . . the truth is that many hundred thousand myriads of kotis [ten millions] of eons ago I have arrived at supreme, perfect enlightenment. . . . I . . . created all that with the express view to skillfully preach the Dharma. . . . Without being extinct, the Tathagata makes a show of extinction, on behalf of those who have to be educated.³¹

The transcendent, formless Tathagata is called the Dharma-kaya, the "Dharma body" or "Dharma principle." Shakyamuni is the Nirmana-kaya or "Appearance body," the Dharma temporarily taking form in the phenomenal world. The Dharma principle also manifests or takes form in celestial realms or Buddha-lands. This is the Sambhoga-kaya, "Enjoyment body"—the form by which various Buddhas enjoy themselves and are enjoyed by the happy beings who inhabit their realms.

The Mahayana envisages an enormous cosmos made up of numerous universes, many of which are "Buddha-fields," paradises, each presided over by a Buddha whose merit assists suffering beings. Also inhabiting these realms are countless *bodhisattvas* striving to relieve suffering and enjoying the vision of the Buddhas and the hearing of the Dharma that constantly emanates from these Buddhas. To understand this phenomena of numerous Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, we must have in mind not only that the one Buddha-truth or Dharma principle takes many forms, but also that the goal of the practice of the Mahayana is not arhatship, in the sense of individual extinction, but bodhisattvahood and Buddhahood.

Amitabha Buddha (Chin. *A-mi- duo-fo* [*A-mi-to-fo*]; Jap. *Amida Butsu*), "The Buddha of Endless Light," presides over Sukhavati, "The Pure or Happy Land," in the western region. Eons ago he was

the monk Dharmakara who, like the Buddha Shakyamuni, heard the preaching of a Buddha and vowed to strive as a *bodhisattva* to achieve full Buddhahood. He vowed to strive to accumulate the merit necessary to create the most magnificent paradise, a land "prosperous, rich, good to live in, fertile, lovely, . . . rich with manifold flowers and fruits, . . . adorned with silver and gold gem trees," a land rich with every conceivable food, to be consumed simply by the thought of it. There would be no physical or mental pain and only gods and humans would reside there. By Dharmakara's vow, men and women could be reborn in this paradise by good deeds and meditating on Amitabha; they may even be received there by simply hearing Amitabha's name and keeping it firmly in mind for one night. Having arrived in the Pure Land, they may remain there indefinitely or, if they wish, pass easily to nirvana. Striving for many eons, Dharmakara attained his goal and now resides in Sukhavati as Endless Light and Endless Life (Amitayur).

Other Buddhas have no personal history like that of Amitabha; they are essentially personifications of characteristics of enlightenment, ruling the spheres of the cosmos. Akshobhya, "the Imperturbable," presides in the east. Vairocana, "the Illuminator" (Jap. *Dainichi*, "Great Sun"), reigns in the center. Ratnasambhava, "the Jewel-born," presides in the south, and Amoghasiddhi, "the Unfailing Success," reigns in the north.

Among the celestial *bodhisattvas*, the most powerful and gracious is Avalokiteshvara (Chin. *Guan-yin* [Kuan-yin]; Jap. *Kannon*), "the Lord Who (Kindly) Looks Down from Above." Originally male, he is designated female in China and Japan. He resides in Amitabha's Pure Land as chief attendant of the Buddha. Having strived on the *bodhisattva* path for hundreds of eons, he

possesses the perfection of all virtues, and beholds all beings with compassion and benevolence, he, an ocean of virtues, Virtue itself, . . . is worthy of adoration.

He saves those in dire trouble, who merely think of Him:

If one be thrown into a pit of fire, by a wicked enemy, . . . he has but to think of Avalokiteshvara, and the fire shall be quenched as if sprinkled with water. . . . If a man delivered to the power of the execution-

ers, is already standing at the place of execution, he has but to think of Avalokiteshvara, and their swords shall go to pieces.³²

He grants the wish of women who pray to him for children.

The Dharma

Dharma has the dual sense of "the doctrine" and "the path" taught by the Buddha; and the latter is most important. Doctrines merely point to that which is to be realized experientially. The power or merit of Dharma lies in the practice and realization of it in one's life. It also resides in the mere sound of the Dharma, the energy of the Buddha-word, when ritually chanted. The word of the Buddha, like the Buddha-name (e.g., Amitabha, above), is charged with the merit of the Buddha and is powerful simply as sound, apart from the meaning of the word.

The Dharma to Be Realized

The core of the Dharma is the Four Noble Truths:

1. There is suffering (*dukkha*);
2. Suffering is caused by desire;
3. The cessation of desire results in the cessation of suffering (*nirvana*); and
4. There is a path that leads to the cessation of desire.

These truths are not theories—the result of philosophical speculation—nor are they the content of a divine revelation. They were realized experientially by the Buddha through moral discipline and meditation—rigorous self-analysis. They are the conclusions of a physician, rather than the reasonings of a metaphysician or the visions of a mystic. The physician experienced disease (suffering), experientially isolated its cause (desire) and therefore its cure (cessation of desire), and took the medicine (the Path) by which he definitively conquered the disease. Buddhism takes a psychological approach to reality, describing the world in terms of a depth analysis of personal experience. It begins with an existing state of affairs—the personal experience of physical and mental suffering—and looks for a solution to this undesirable state of affairs not in manipulating the natu-

ral environment or human society, but in examining the feelings and thoughts of the sufferer. The fact of suffering is to be comprehended; the cause of suffering is to be abandoned; the cessation of suffering is to be realized; and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering is to be practiced.

A man asked the Buddha a series of abstract questions: "Is the world eternal or noneternal? Are the soul and the body the same or different?" and the like, saying that if he could answer these questions satisfactorily, the man would become his disciple. The Buddha replied that the questioner was like a person wounded with a poisoned arrow who wanted to know who shot the arrow, the assailant's village, caste, family, and so on, before being willing to have his wound attended to. The Buddha's point was that the wounded man's questions, like philosophizing about life in general, draw attention away from the existential, "brute" fact that there is suffering, that it has a cause and a cure. The Dharma is not a general theory about life but a practical and personal discipline by which one may realize the nature and extinction of suffering.

SUFFERING

This is the Noble Truth of Suffering: birth is suffering; decay is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering; presence of objects we hate is suffering; separation from objects we love is suffering; not to obtain what we desire is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates which spring from grasping, they are suffering.³³

All religions wrestle with the finitude—the impermanence and imperfection of human existence. In a word, Buddhism describes this problem as suffering (*dukkha*). Being born is suffering; growth is suffering; experiencing disease is suffering; growing old and dying is suffering. Subtler than physical pain is the suffering of dissatisfaction, the unhappiness occasioned by not having what we want and having what we do not want. There is anxiety (mental suffering) even in the experience of pleasure and satisfaction—the knowing or at least apprehension that it will not last. There is fear of failure, loss of status, loss of self-worth, loss of loved ones, loss of property. Deep down, there is a vague and gnawing anxiety about death—not only the prospect of life ending but of ultimate meaninglessness. It is

anxiety about death that motivates human striving, that makes the world run.

To describe existence as suffering implies more than simply physical pain. *Dukkha* signifies a state of being "ill-at-ease, insecure, unsatisfied." It identifies life as impermanent and characterized by constantly changing personal identity: (*anatman*). Everything that exists is transitory, momentary, subject to constant change. With respect to the natural world, this is a fact confirmed by modern science. We used to speak of particles in motion—matter and energy; now, we speak of energy fields. What is functionally a solid object is, in fact, a process identified by reference to molecules, electrons and protons, motions, and so on, which themselves are not solid, but processes, patterns of interacting energies.

What is true of nature at large is also true of human existence. Buddhism identifies the human being as interacting moments of material form, sensations, consciousnesses, perceptions, and volitions (acts of will). These energy patterns are called the Five Aggregates. These aggregates are no more solid than molecules and electrons. Everything that a person is or experiences can be described in terms of the interaction of these five phenomena.

The material sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) come into contact with sense objects, giving rise to sensations, which are either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral;

From sensation arises consciousness, awareness of an object;

From consciousness arises perception, the identification of the object;

From perception arises volition, an act of will with reference to the object.

Touch a finger to a table; a sensation (smoothness, hardness, etc.) arises from material contact. From the sensation a consciousness arises: the awareness of the object that is smooth and hard. This touch consciousness causes the perception of a table and stimulates a decision to sit on the table. As there are six organs of sense and six kinds of sensory objects—sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought—so there are six kinds of sensations, perceptions, consciousnesses, and volitions. They are all momentary, incessantly rising and passing.

There is no unchanging personal identity, no self (*atman*) apart from the constantly changing aggregates. This is the teaching of

"no-self" (*anatman*): not no self at all, but no permanent, underlying selfhood or soul. The interplay of the aggregates creates the illusion of a self—an agent underlying and experiencing materiality, sensation, consciousness, perception, and volition—just as a point of light moving in a circular pattern creates the illusion of a solid circle of light. In fact, there is no such self—a person is process, a constant becoming.

In the absolute sense, beings have only a very short moment to live, life lasting as long as a single moment of consciousness lasts. Just as a cart wheel, whether rolling or whether at a standstill, at all times only rests on a single point of its periphery: even so the life of a living being lasts only for the duration of a single moment of consciousness. As soon as the moment ceases, the being also ceases. For it is said: "The being of the past moment of consciousness has lived, but does not live now, or will it lie in future. The being of the future moment has not yet lived, nor does it live now, but it will live in the future. The being of the present moment has not lived, it does live just now, but it will not live in the future."³⁴

The aggregate energies arise and decay in serial succession, the cessation of one moment causing the rise of the next, the self being born and dying from moment to moment.

DESIRE

Thus, life is impermanent; in particular it is without unchanging personal identity and characterized by the experience of physical and mental suffering. Having identified a condition, the physician/psychoanalyst inquires into the cause of that condition. He or she asks, "What is the cause of suffering?"

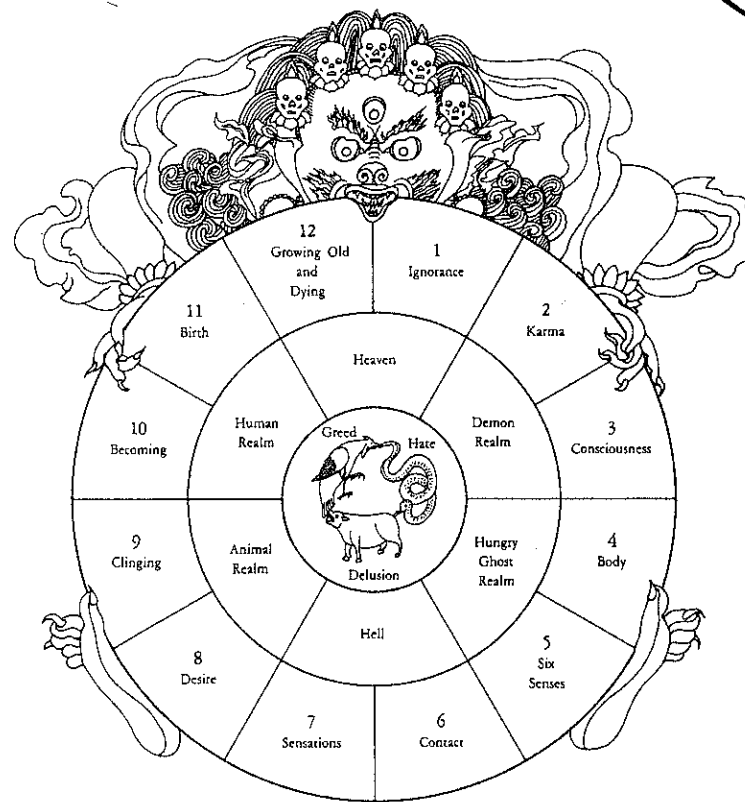
This is the Noble Truth concerning the Origin of Suffering: verily, it originates in that craving which causes rebirths, is accompanied by sensual delight, and seeks satisfaction now here, now there; that is to say, craving for pleasures, craving for existence, craving for nonexistence.³⁵

It is easy to see how desire or craving causes mental suffering. If a

person wants something that cannot be attained, there is mental stress. If something or someone a person is emotionally attached to is taken away, there is the anguish of loss. We can understand how desire causes physical suffering, if craving leads a person into a situation in which injury occurs. It is not so easy to understand how desire causes the physical suffering inflicted by, say, an earthquake or by another person where one is an innocent bystander. Much of the suffering of the human condition is inherent in the impermanence of that condition. But Buddhism submits that desire is the cause of the very existence of a human being. There are no innocent bystanders. This is explored and explained by what is called the Wheel of Becoming—the wheel of life based on the principle of dependent origination.

The wheel identifies causal patterns, factors linked in dependence, one giving rise to another. Together they constitute what is called *samsara*, an "endless cycling," marked by birth, death, and rebirth. *Samsara* is symbolized by the demon Mara (literally, "death") holding the wheel in his grasp. In general, three factors of ill—greed, hatred, and delusion, symbolized by the cock, the snake, and the pig at the wheel's center, perpetuate *samsara*. They cause humans to be reborn in realms of punishment—as demons, animals, hungry ghosts, or denizens of hell. Those who strive to conquer the three ills are reborn again as humans or in heaven as gods. The outer ring breaks down the twelve factors that characterize human life from moment to moment and in the past, present, and future.

Reference to desire is only a simple, convenient way of referring to a whole complex of continuously arising and ceasing states discovered by meditative self-analysis. Desire (8) arises in a person dependent upon sensations (7), which arise from contacts (6)—physical and mental impressions occasioned by the existence of sense organs and mind (5). The sense organs and mind are the instrumentalities of a body (4) that has come to exist as the result of a life-force called consciousness (3). This life-force is what we associate with the interaction of sperm and egg, which then is to be thought of as materializing itself, "growing itself" a body with a brain, nervous system, and sense organs in the mother's womb. Such an organism, through contact with itself, other organisms, and physical



The Wheel of Becoming

objects, experiences sensations (7) that give rise to desires (8). Desires lead to clinging (9)—attachment to things and persons—which perpetuates and progressively complicates ongoing life or the process of becoming (10). It is desire for sensory pleasure, desire for life, or even desire for death that perpetuates life.

These eight factors (3—10) describe present life, but they do not arise out of nothing. Life does not begin at birth or even at conception. The life-force of birth-consciousness (3) is the result of acts of will (karma) (2) that occurred in a previous existence. These acts of will arose as the result of ignorance (1) of the true nature of reality.

Thus, two factors in the past (ignorance and karma) gave rise to the eight factors that characterize the present. Likewise, the eight factors of present life result in the life-force of yet another, future life—birth (11) (rebirth) and more growing old and dying (12).

Thus, desire is bound up with a fundamental delusion that continually expresses itself as an individual personality, with body and mind interacting with sense objects, striving for satisfaction of desires. Desire gives rise to attachment or grasping—a clinging to life, to self—which causes continued becoming, rebirth, and from birth decay and death. These twelve elements in a causal chain of dependent arising may be taken to describe any one moment in a person's life (a moment of ignorance, volition, consciousness, and so on) or the progression from past life (life essentially characterized by ignorance and volitions) to present life (life in the Five Aggregates, characterized by desire, clinging, and constant becoming) to future life (birth and continued growing old and dying).

The first two noble truths, then, describe the common human situation—suffering as the result of desire. If one asks, "Whence did desire, ignorance, birth, and selfhood begin?" The answer is both that a beginning is imperceivable and the inquiry is not fruitful. It is imperceivable because a being caught up in becoming is unable to see beyond his or her own creation. It is not fruitful to so inquire, because the question is abstract, purely speculative, and does not effectively relate to the existential situation of suffering, its cause, and destruction. Seeking an answer to such a question is, again, comparable to a man wounded by a poisoned arrow who demands to know who shot it before he will have his wound attended to. Dharma addresses itself to the immediate human predicament—there is suffering, it has a cause, it can be destroyed, and there is a path by which to destroy it.

If one asks, "If there is no self, no soul, what is reborn? What experiences desire and the rest?" the answer is that it is simply the Five Aggregates that are constantly arising and ceasing, like a flickering flame. Each flicker is momentary, arising out of the previous flicker and giving rise to the next by its own extinction. Birth and death occur every moment in what we call life; the final flicker of the present gross body is no different from any one moment in the life of this body.

THE CESSATION OF DESIRE

This is the Noble Truth concerning the Cessation of Suffering: verily, it is passionlessness, cessation without remainder of this very craving; the laying aside of, the giving up, the being free from, the harboring no longer of, this craving.³⁶

Stated simply, the third noble truth is that if desire (the whole complex chain of becoming) is the cause of suffering, then the cessation of desire is the cessation of suffering. Cessation of suffering is nirvana, "blowing out," "extinction" of the flame of greed, hate, and delusion.

Enraptured with lust (*raga*), enraged with anger (*dosa*), blinded by delusion (*moha*), overwhelmed, with mind ensnared, man aims at his own ruin, at the ruin of others, at the ruin of both, and he experiences mental pain and grief. But if lust, anger and delusion are given up, man aims neither at his own ruin, nor at the ruin of others, nor at the ruin of both, and he experiences no mental pain and grief. Thus is nirvana visible in this life, immediate, inviting, attractive, and comprehensible to the wise.³⁷

Nirvana is freedom from future rebirth, old age, and death. It may be said to be blissful, but not in any sense of worldly pleasure or, for that matter, any pleasure defined by other than the absence of suffering. The aggregates may linger, but not with any sense of self, and when one's accumulated karma finally flickers totally out, one cannot be said to have gone anywhere—to a heaven, for instance. The aggregates simply cease, go out, not to arise again.

Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found; The deed is, but no doer or the deed is there; Nirvana is, but not the man that enters it; The Path is, but no traveler on it is seen.³⁸

THE PATH

Nirvana is to be realized by treading the Eightfold Path:

This is the Noble Truth concerning the Path which leads to the Cessation of Suffering: verily, it is this Noble Eightfold Path, that is to say,

right views, right intent, right speech, right conduct, right means of livelihood, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right meditation.³⁹

The Eightfold Path consists of three dimensions:

Wisdom (*prajna*), which consists of right views and right intent;

Morality (*sila*), which consists of right speech, conduct, and livelihood;

Mental Discipline (*samadhi*), which consists of right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

Wisdom as right views is, to begin with, an intellectual acceptance of the Four Noble Truths. In the end, it is the full realization, the full penetration of these truths. Right intent is intent free of sensuous desire, ill will, and violence. Positively stated, it is goodwill (*maitri*) toward all living beings, compassion (*karuna*) for all suffering beings, sympathetic joy (*mudita*) in the success and happiness of other beings, and equanimity (*upeksa*) in all states of affairs.

Morality may be summarized by the **Five Precepts**: not to lie, not to kill, not to steal, not to engage in illicit sex, and not to partake of intoxicating drink. Right speech is abstaining from lying, slander, harsh or malicious talk, and idle gossip. Right conduct is abstaining from taking life, stealing, and unlawful sexual activity. Right livelihood is abstaining from making a living by activities that bring harm to other beings—trafficking in weapons or alcoholic drink, the killing of animals, prostitution, and the like.

In the Buddhist ethic and in accordance with belief in the Law of Karma, concern for the welfare of others is essentially concern for one's own welfare. Wrongdoing is not sin in the sense of being subject to judgment and punishment by another being; it is self-inflicted punishment by the fact of its bringing suffering upon oneself, if not immediately, in later life or some future existence. This is not to say that some immoral acts are not subject to punishment under civil or monastic law; but it is to say that the motivation for behavior should come from within rather than from fear of punishment by society.

A monk is walking along the narrow embankment that separates the muddy rice fields. He is pushed off into the mire by a careless man hurrying to pass him. The man rushes on without saying anything or stopping. Another man, seeing this incident, runs up to

help the monk out of the muddy field. Back on the embankment, the monk quietly proceeds, without comment to or about either of the other men's actions. When asked about his behavior by the second man, who desires praise for his assistance, the monk calmly replies, "I have learned to be even-minded in all circumstances; you and the other man have your reward."

Mental development must proceed hand in hand with morality to produce right views and right intent. Right effort is essentially the exertion to rid oneself of unwholesome states of mind and to cultivate wholesome states of mind. It, like all other dimensions of the Path, critically depends upon right mindfulness:

This is the sole way, monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destroying of pain and grief, for reaching the right path, for the realization of Nirvana, namely the four Foundations of Mindfulness. What are the four? Herein (in this teaching) a monk dwells practicing body-contemplation on the body, ardent, clearly comprehending the mindful, having overcome covetousness and grief concerning the world; he dwells practicing feeling—contemplation on feelings, . . . mind-contemplation on the mind, . . . mind-object—contemplation on mind-objects . . .⁴⁰

Mindfulness is the heart of Buddhist meditation. It is practiced by giving close attention to the functioning of the body, the feelings, the mental processes, and conceptual patterns like those found in the teachings of the Buddha. In practicing mindfulness of breathing, for example, one should sit with the body erect and mind alert and simply watch one's breathing:

Breathing in a long breath, he knows "I breathe in a long breath"; breathing out a long breath, he knows "I breathe out a long breath"; breathing in a short breath, he knows "I breathe in a short breath"; breathing out a short breath, he knows "I breathe out a short breath."⁴¹

By directing the mind solely to the breathing over longer and longer periods of time, one becomes more and more keenly aware of this bodily process, calming the body and objectifying the process so as to depersonalize it—to strip it of any sense of ego or selfhood.

We may see more clearly how mindfulness affects ego if we consider the mindfulness of feelings, such as a feeling of anger. Turning one's attention to the anger feeling itself and away from its object or activity that might follow from anger, one "defuses" or depersonalizes the feeling by seeing it for what it essentially is—just another psychophysical process that now disperses as quickly as it has arisen. This practice of mindfulness is to be extended to all bodily functions, all feelings (pleasant as well as painful), all states of mind, and all particular ways of thinking about body and mind. Once the mind is trained in solitude, one is able to practice mindfulness in the course of ordinary daily activity—mindfulness of walking, sitting, eating, and so on. In every activity one undertakes one should carefully consider and clearly comprehend its purpose relative to one's goals and its suitability or potential effectiveness toward achieving those goals; then one should apply mindfulness to the action while engaging in it, gradually stripping it of all sense of self, all personal attachment.

In looking forward, or in looking round; in stretching forth his arm, or in drawing it in again; in eating or drinking, in masticating or swallowing, in obeying the calls of nature, in going or standing or sitting, in sleeping or waking, in speaking or in being still, he keeps himself aware of all it really means.⁴²

Mindfulness enhances one's capacity to live in accord with the moral precepts. It builds insight toward wisdom (right view and right intent) by allowing one to more and more thoroughly realize the impermanence, suffering, and impersonality of life, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering—in short, to realize the Four Noble Truths and to see things as they really are.

The capacity for mindfulness may be enhanced by developing right concentration. The purpose of practicing concentration is to quiet or tranquilize the mind by experiencing radically altered states of consciousness, states of deep absorption. To accomplish this one focuses the mind on one or another of some forty recommended objects of concentration, suitable to one's ability and personal disposition. For instance, a beginner sitting quietly may take a circle of light red clay the size of a dish as an object. By focusing upon it

intensely, the person produces a mental image, which then becomes the object—one that he or she may hold before the mind even while interrupting the sitting for some other activity. By occupying the mind entirely with this mental object, one excludes all other sensory-mental awareness and enters the first of a series of trance states:

Detached from sensual objects, detached from unwholesome states of mind, the monk enters the first absorption, which is accompanied by thought-conception and discursive thinking, concentration, rapture and joy.⁴³

With the passing away of thought conception and discursive thinking, the person enters a second absorption characterized by concentration, rapture, and joy. The third absorption is characterized by only concentration and joy, and the fourth simply by equanimity. One dismisses each successive absorption by practicing mindfulness on its contents—seeing there impermanence, suffering, and impersonality. By the insight of this mindfulness, one may gain special powers:

Being one he becomes many; having become many, he again becomes one; he appears and disappears; unhindered he goes through walls, fences and mountains as through the air; he submerges and emerges in the earth as in water; without sinking he walks on the water as on the earth; cross-legged he flies through the air like a winged bird; he touches and strokes with his hand the sun and the moon . . .⁴⁴

The Buddha discouraged his disciples from using these powers, even though much is made of them in the literature and the Buddha himself is portrayed as having used them on several occasions. The experience of such power should serve only to confirm the level of attainment in concentration. They are incidental to the progress toward enlightenment; exercising them may lead one astray from insight to nirvana; they should not be employed by way of impressing others as to the validity of the teaching.

There are other powers that are directly instrumental to cessation of desire and enlightenment. Having attained the highly rarefied levels of consciousness through concentration, one may experience superhuman hearing and sight: the divine ear, the capacity to see

into other persons' minds; and the divine eye, the ability to perceive one's own former lives and the sufferings and births of other beings. Finally, through applying mindfulness to each of the four absorptions, one may attain the knowledge-power by which to extinguish the three cankers (*asavas*): sensuous desire, the desire for existence, and ignorance. This is nirvana, deliverance from birth and death.

The progress from mindfulness to nirvana is described as a seven-fold attainment: the attainment of mindfulness leads to the investigation of reality, to the rise of extraordinary energy, rapture, tranquility, concentration, and finally equanimity.

Progress on the Path is also described as gradually overcoming ten binding obstacles: the belief in self, doubt, attachment to rules and ritual, sensuous craving, ill will, the craving for rebirth among the gods of subtle form, the craving for rebirth in the formless realms, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. The one who has overcome the first three obstacles has become a Stream-entrant, that is, one who has definitively entered the stream flowing toward nirvana. A Stream-winner dying at this level of attainment will never again be reborn in a realm lower than the human. A disciple who is nearly free of obstacles four and five—sensuous craving and ill will—becomes a Once-returner, that is, one who will return to this world only once more and in that life attain nirvana. The disciple who is totally free of the first five obstacles is a Non-returner, that is, one who will be reborn in a realm higher than human and will reach nirvana from that realm. One who conquers all ten obstacles attains nirvana in this very life; he or she becomes an *arhat*, a Holy One.

THE PATH IN VARIOUS TRADITIONS

The Mahayana develops the teaching of "no-self." To say that there is no unchanging personal identity is to say that a life form is empty (*shunya*), devoid of an essential nature; it is incessant process or energy flow. This is true of things as well as persons. To see the world as it really is, the goal of moral discipline and meditation, is to realize its emptiness (*shunyata*). This does not mean to see that the world does not exist; it means to see that everything that exists exists in a relation of dependence and, therefore, in an essential unity.

Nirvana is not a negation of the world, but a seeing of the world such as it is, without the imposition of personal selfhood upon it.

The unity of life is called Buddha-nature; thus, it is said that everything has Buddha-nature and to realize the essential unity of life is to realize one's Buddha-nature. This is the perfection of wisdom (*prajna-paramita*).

Logically, emptiness is the necessary implication of the dependent origination of all phenomena. If, in a series of factors identifying a phenomenon (e.g., the twelve factors of the Wheel of Becoming), the first factor causes the second, the second causes the third, and so on to the last factor, which causes the first, then the existence of any factor depends upon another factor—it has no existence of its own, no existence apart from relationship; it is empty of self-nature; it has only relational nature.

The larger implication is that the existence and well-being of a life form is dependent upon the existence and well-being of every other life form. A life form has true existence only by existing in harmony with and for the welfare of other life forms. A *bodhisattva* exists solely for the sake of others.

The *bodhisattva* strives on the same Eightfold Path as those who seek arhatship. The key difference is two fold: first, the *bodhisattva* strives for the perfection of wisdom that is the perfect enlightenment of a Buddha and not simply cessation of suffering (nirvana); second, the *bodhisattva* vows to strive for the release from suffering of all beings and vows to forego personal nirvana in order, life after life, to share his or her merit with others. The hallmark of the *bodhisattva* is compassion.

Monks striving on the Theravada path are a field of merit for others, although their intent is the conquest of suffering in their own lives. *Bodhisattvas* realize that in a universe in which life forms are totally interdependent there is no release for one without the release of all. They see also that the means must be compatible with the end. If the end is selflessness, then the means must be an emptying of self for others, existing only for others. Those who strive only for their own happiness will never attain selflessness.

Bodhisattvas strive for six perfections (*parami*): perfection in giving, morality, patience, vigor, meditation, and wisdom. It is the same path as that taken by Theravada monks, but the intention is different. After many lives of deeds of charity, they give without any thought of self or reward. Their giving is informed by the realization of the emptiness of self and others and, therefore, their identity;

their giving is perfected. Then they are able to arouse "the thought of enlightenment" (*bodhi-citta*), from which they will never thereafter lapse. They vow to strive for perfection in morality, patience, and so on, for the sake of all beings. It is the force of this vow that distinguishes their striving from that of those striving to become *arhats*; indeed, their energy is the much greater because they strive for others and not for self.

The *bodhisattva* is endowed with wisdom of a kind whereby he looks on all beings as though victims going to the slaughter. And immense compassion grips him. His divine eye sees . . . innumerable beings, and he is filled with great distress at what he sees, for many bear the burden of past deeds which will be punished in purgatory, others will have unfortunate rebirths which will divide them from the Buddha and his teachings, others must soon be slain, . . . others have gained a favorable rebirth only to lose it again.

So he pours out his love and compassion upon all those beings, and attends to them, thinking, "I shall become the savior of all beings, and set them free from their sufferings."⁴⁵

Zen monks pursue a different discipline of meditation than that prescribed by the Eightfold Path. In the Soto (Zen) tradition, simply sitting (Jap., *zazen*) without focusing the mind anywhere is the basic technique:

To study the way of the Buddha is to study your own self. To study your own self is to forget yourself. To forget yourself is to have the objective world prevail in you. To have the objective world prevail in you, is to let go of your "own" body and mind as well as the body and mind of "Others."

In the pursuit of the Way the prime essential is sitting. . . . Just to pass the time in sitting straight, without thought of acquisition, without any sense of achieving enlightenment.⁴⁶

This sitting is intended to have the same result as mindfulness meditation—a progressive emptying of the mind resulting in immediacy with the flow of life. Rinzai Zen advocates a more active meditation, active both in the sense of focusing the mind on an object rather than simply sitting passively and in the sense of doing such medi-

tation in the course of ordinary daily activity as well as in formal sitting. The meditation object, called a *koan*, is a riddle or puzzling story given the student by the master that defies intellectual solution. Persistent meditation upon its meaning produces mental exhaustion and occasions a sudden, intuitive insight—a disjunction in the flow of ordinary, purposeful thought. Solving the *koan* may be assisted by a well-timed shout or blow of the hand or a stick administered by the master.

The Power of Dharma as Sound

Every word of the Buddha is charged with merit. Certain of his discourses, by reason of the occasion on which they were given or by the fact that they summarize the essence of the teaching/truth, are considered to be especially powerful. In the Theravada tradition, these are called *parittas*, "protective blessings." In the Mahayana, they are called *dharanis*, "those (words) which hold (power)."

In the *Vinaya* collection of the *Tripitaka*, there is report of an occasion on which a monk was bitten by a snake and died. The Buddha reportedly said:

I allow you, O monks, to make use of a safeguard [*paritta*] for yourselves for your security and protection, by letting your love flow out over the four royal breeds of serpents. And thus, O monks, are you to do so:

I love live things that have no feet, the bipeds too I love. I love four-footed creatures, and things with many feet. . . . Let no footless thing do hurt to me, nor thing that has two feet . . .

Infinite is the Buddha, infinite the Dharma, infinite the Sangha. Finite are creeping things. . . . Made is my safeguard, made my defense. Let living things retreat, whilst I revere the Blessed One . . .⁴⁷

This authorization of the use of *paritta* applies only to protection from wild animals and it assumes that the one using the formula is, indeed, full of love (*maitri*, "loving-kindness"). That is to say, the power of the exhortation lies in the merit of the exhorter and not simply in the formula as a magical spell or charm. These and other words of the Buddha came to be used in a variety of circumstances

(to promote general prosperity as well as specific protection) and only by persons who were assumed to be highly meritorious. In the Theravada tradition the *paritta* is chanted by monks or exmonks, and in the Mahayana by monks or masters, whether monastic or lay.

The Mangala Sutra, "the Discourse on Auspiciousness," is the *paritta* most frequently used in Theravada practice. In it the Buddha summarizes the moral principles of lay Buddhism. This *paritta* is invoked on all occasions in which there is merit making and sharing between monks and laity. The *Angulimala paritta*, on the other hand, is used to allay the pain of childbirth. It is the word of the Buddha to the monk Angulimala, who was desirous of easing the pain of a woman giving birth:

Go to the place and say, "I have never knowingly put any creature to death since I was born; by the virtue of this observance may you be free from pain."⁴⁸

In the twenty-second chapter of the Mahayana *Sutra of the Lotus of the True Dharma*, it is said that anyone who hears this sutra "will produce an accumulation of pious merit the term of which is not to be arrived at even by Buddha-knowledge."⁴⁹ *The Sutra of the Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom*, which summarizes the wisdom on emptiness, is also considered a most powerful *dharani*.

The Sangha

In the Theravada, the Sangha is the community of monks. It may also have the more limited sense of "the community of saints"—all those who, through the ages, achieved arhatship and are, like the Buddha fit objects of prayer and meditation. In the Mahayana, the Sangha includes all who are striving in the way of the Buddha, lay devotees as well as monks.

Those who undertake the way of the monk are ordained to a life of poverty and strict discipline. Theravada monks are ordained by a body of senior monks, a minimum of five for the novitiate ordination and ten for the higher ordination. They vow to keep the Ten Precepts:

1. Not to take life;
2. Not to lie;
3. Not to steal;
4. Not to engage in sexual activity;
5. Not to drink alcohol;
6. Not to take food from noon to the next morning;
7. Not to adorn their bodies with anything other than the three robes;
8. Not to participate in or be spectator to public entertainments;
9. Not to use high or comfortable beds;
10. Not to use money.

In addition, those of the higher ordination commit themselves to keep the 227 rules of the monastic code (*Pratimoksha*) and to regularly (twice monthly) recite these rules and confess any infraction thereof in the company of other monks. They are to keep to themselves in study and meditation, except when they go into the village or city to receive food offerings or perform a merit ceremony for the laity.

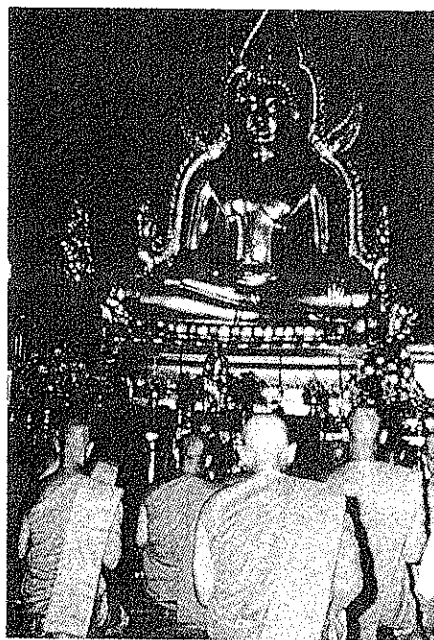
The preferred and usual time for ordination is in May and June, just prior to the rainy season. On the Theravada mainland of Southeast Asia, it is customary for all young men to receive the lower or novitiate ordination and many also undertake the higher ordination. Monks are free to leave the monastic life at any time. The great majority of those ordained spend only a short period in the order, typically the four months of the rainy season. In Sri Lanka, fewer take ordination and the expectation is that those who do will remain in the order for life.

Ordination is an option for any male at any age. It, of course, serves as the mode of entrance into the monastic life; but typically it is undertaken between the ages of ten and eighteen. It is then like confirmation or bar mitzvah, a rite of passage from youth to adult responsibility. The ordinand ritually dies and is reborn; he gives up family and friends and all former associations; he leaves off his old clothes, has his head shaved, undergoes a ritual bath, and receives a new name.

Ordination is not an option for women. As we noted in chapter II, the Buddha authorized the formation of an order of nuns. This



A young man being escorted to the monastery by friends and family for ordination. Dressed like a prince and "riding" a friend as his "horse," he follows the example of the Great Renunciation of Siddhartha Gautama.



Thai monks reciting the monastic code (pratimoksha) in the ceremonial hall of the Marble Temple, Bangkok.

order flourished for several centuries, but later declined for unknown reasons. In the mid-fifth century C.E., for want of sufficient nuns to perform the ceremony (a minimum of ten is required), the ordination line lapsed. Women are permitted to take novitiate vows, wear the monastic robe, and live in or near a monastery, but such persons are not considered to be full-fledged nuns and are not given the respect that is given to monks. The few who take this option are usually older women without family. They live in relative seclusion and perform menial tasks for the monks.

Ordination is a communal act. Above all, it brings merit to the community in which it occurs, especially to the parents of the ordinand and those of his ancestors who may be suffering in hell or as hungry ghosts. It is commonly said that the lower ordination benefits primarily the mother, the higher ordination the father. The ordinand is a sacrifice for society. He renounces all worldly pleasures, particularly sexual pleasure, thereby becoming a storehouse of spiritual power for others to draw upon. In some communities, it is believed that the renunciation of sexual activity releases energy or adds to the total fertility potential in the environment, so as to stimulate rainfall. This is one reason for performing ordinations just prior to the rainy season.

In the Mahayana, for example, in the Japanese Zen, monks are usually ordained in the presence of other monks, but the ordination is essentially the act of a *roshi*, "venerable teacher/master," rather than a community of monks. An established, personal relationship between the candidate and a *roshi* is a necessary prerequisite for ordination. The candidate may be ordained immediately upon entering training or only after some months or years of training, depending upon the *roshi*'s perception of his readiness. Ordination is not a puberty rite or a rite of sharing merit with family and the larger lay community. It is a personal commitment and one that is assumed to be for life. The vows of ordination are the same as those for a Theravada monk, with the important exception that the Zen monk does not take a vow of celibacy. Most Zen monks undergo a period of training at a monastery temple and thereafter serve as priests to a local congregation. They marry, live with their family at the temple, and spend most of their time performing rituals for families who belong to the temple. The temples they serve do not have a resident body of monks. Even those monks who, like the *roshi*, stay on in a monastery, may be married.

Ordination to the monastic life is an option for women as well as men in the Mahayana. There has been a continuous tradition of female orders in China, Korea, and Japan since the ordination for women was introduced in China in the fifth century C.E. Nuns are ordained in the same way as monks and commit themselves to the Pratimoksha code as anciently defined. In China, nuns live in seclusion, separate from the monks, and little is known of their way of life. Korean and Japanese nuns function in society in the same way as monks; in Japan, a nun may serve as priest for a community temple.

The monastic practice of Buddhism is ultimately aimed at the attainment of enlightenment for individuals. But in both the Theravada and the Zen traditions, the monk is seen to have an obligation to society. In Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, the great majority of the people adhere to Theravada Buddhism. Most monasteries are an integral part of local communities. Theravada monks have extensive contact with the laity, in receiving daily food, at ordinations, on Observance days, in receiving new robes during the Kathina festival, in giving blessings at funerals, birthday celebrations, occasions of the start of new business ventures, and public celebrations.

Japanese Buddhism is pluralistic. The relationship between monk and society has a different configuration from that in Theravada countries. Zen monasteries and temples have patrons dispersed among the general population. Monks in training beg for food in the village but rely primarily on their patrons. They perform merit-making rituals by and large only for their patrons. Those monks who serve local temples minister regularly to a group of families residing in the vicinity of the temple.

The way of the laity as practiced in Theravada Buddhism consists of keeping the Five Precepts (to the extent possible in pursuit of the lay life), showing respect for and supporting the monks, spending Observance days at the monastery under the strict **Eight Precepts**, and generally taking every opportunity to gain merit at the hands of the monk. The farmer inevitably takes the life of small insects and animals in tilling the fields and protecting his crop. Lay people take the life of animals for food. Husband and wife necessarily engage in sexual relations to produce children. The demerit of such acts is outweighed by the merit of offering food to the monks and produc-

ing a son who becomes ordained as a monk. The lay man or woman may attain the status of a Stream-entrant even in the lay life and someday or in some later life be able to join the Sangha. In the short run, he or she looks to a harmonious and prosperous life and a more favorable rebirth, perhaps in one of the heavens of great enjoyment.

Theravada Buddhism essentially "works" by the mutual dependence of Sangha and lay society. Monks most exemplify the ideal of self-discipline, enlightenment, and nirvana. They are holy persons; their renunciation makes for purity and wisdom; their self-control gives them power over the forces of disease, the destructive forces of nature, and the physical and mental forces that make for pain and stress in human life. At the same time, the monastic life of moral purity and meditation is not possible without gifts of food, clothing, and housing from the laity. These gifts, essential to the material well-being of the monks, are the vehicle by which the laity benefit from the monks' purity and power. The mere presence of the monks is inspiring and auspicious. They are worthy of reverence and gifts. Their reception of gifts conveys merit to the givers. Their ritual chanting of the Buddha's word generates power to heal and protect the laity, to stimulate rain for the crops, and to dispel malicious spirits. The monks' power is a by-product of their striving toward nirvana. The laity provide material support to the monks; the monks exercise their power to bring prosperity to the laity so that they may provide material support. Buddhism is the path to nirvana; it is also the path to the material prosperity that makes the pursuit of nirvana possible.

In the Zen Mahayana, lay Buddhists partake of the merit of the monks through material support of the monastic life and by presence at ceremonies performed by the monks, on the same principle as that functional in Theravada practice, but in a context that places less emphasis upon merit sharing. It is equally important for the Zen laity as well as the monks to meditate. The Mahayana emphasizes that a person's Buddha-nature may be realized in the lay life as well as in the pursuit of monasticism. Zen, in particular, fosters realization in the midst of ordinary life activity.

In the Pure Land Mahayana (Jap., *Jodo* and *Jodo-shin*), there is no monastic Sangha. The way is faith in the power of Amida Buddha who has stored up tremendous merit over the course of eons of time as a *bodhisattva* and who founded the Pure Land. Since Amida

has accumulated enough merit for the salvation of the whole world and this merit is available directly to any devotee, there is no need for monks. One has assurance of being admitted to the Pure Land after death by surrender to Amida, expressed by chanting his name with all one's heart. This chant, called the *nembutsu*, is *Namu Amida Butsu*, "Reverence to Amida Buddha." Pure Land Buddhists strive to keep the precepts, earnestly desiring to live a life of compassion, but not as a means of making merit. The pure and compassionate life is to be lived simply in gratitude for what Amida has done.

The Rituals and Festivals of the Buddhist Life

Daily and Periodic Rituals

Merit is made and shared through daily, periodic, and special rituals and yearly festivals. Morning and evening services of chanting or worship take place in every monastery, temple, and home. With the placing of flowers and the lighting of candles and incense before a Buddha-image or some other symbol of the presence of the Buddha, monks chant together and the lay family offers a prayer. The flowers, beautiful one moment and wilted the next, remind the offerers of the impermanence of life; the odor of the incense calls to their mind the sweet scent of moral virtue that emanates from those who are devout; the candleflame symbolizes enlightenment.

The central daily rite of lay Buddhism is the offering of food. Theravada laity make this offering to the monks. Mahayana laity make it to the Buddha as part of the morning or evening worship. In both settings merit is shared.

The weekly Observance Day rituals at the Theravada monastery are opportunities for both laity and monks to quicken faith, discipline, and understanding and make and share merit. On these occasions, twice each month, the monks chant and reaffirm the code of discipline. On all of these days, they administer the eight precepts to the gathered laity—the laity repeating them after the monks—and offer a sermon on the Dharma. The monks pour water to transfer merit to the laity; the laity pour water to share this merit with their ancestors.

Zen monks twice each month gather in the Buddha-hall of their head temple and chant for the welfare of the Japanese people. Pure