

Though by Western standards its rule was rigid, involving continuous movement from place to place for eight months of the year and the consumption of only one meal a day, which was to be obtained by begging, it was light in comparison with the discipline of most other orders, the members of which were often compelled to take vows of total nudity, were not permitted to wash, and had to undergo painful penances. It is evident that between the death of the Buddha and the advent of Ashoka, the first great Buddhist emperor, over two hundred years later, there was considerable development of doctrine. Some sort of canon of sacred texts appeared, though it was probably not at this time written down, and the Buddhists acquired numerous lay followers. For the latter, and for the less spiritually advanced monks, the sect adapted popular cults to Buddhist purposes—notably the cult of stūpas, or funeral mounds, and that of the sacred pipal tree. We have seen that these had probably been worshiped in the Ganges valley from time immemorial, and with such cults both Hinduism and Buddhism had to come to terms. Buddhist monks began to overlook the rule that they should travel from place to place except in the rainy season and took to settling permanently in monasteries, which were erected on land given by kings and other wealthy patrons, and were equipped with pipal trees and stūpas, theoretically commemorating the Buddha's enlightenment and death respectively.

Quite early in the history of Buddhism sectarian differences appeared. The tradition tells of two great councils of the Buddhist order, the first soon after the Buddha's death, the second a hundred years later. At the latter a schism occurred, and the sect of *Mahāsaṅghikas* ("members of the Great Order") is said to have broken away, ostensibly on account of differences on points of monastic discipline, but probably on doctrinal grounds also. The main body, which claimed to maintain the true tradition transmitted from the days of the founder, took to calling their system *Theravāda*³ ("The Teaching of the Elders"). By little over a century after this schism the whole of India except the southern tip had been unified politically by Magadha, after a long and steady process of expansion, which culminated in the rise of the first great Indian imperial dynasty, that of the Mauryas. The third and greatest of the Mauryas, Ashoka, became a Buddhist. According to his own testimony he was so moved by

³In Sanskrit *Sthaviravāda*, but the Pali form is generally used, as Pali was the official language of the sect.

remorse at the carnage caused by an aggressive war which he had waged that he experienced a complete change of heart and embraced Buddhism. His inscriptions, the earliest intelligible written records to have survived in India, testify to his earnestness and benevolence.

Buddhism seems to have received a great impetus from Ashoka's patronage. He erected many stūpas, endowed new monasteries, and enlarged existing Buddhist establishments. In his reign the message of Buddhism was first carried over the whole of India by a number of missionaries, sent out, according to tradition, after a third council which met at Pāṭaliputra (the modern Patna) in order to purify the doctrine of heresy. It was in Ashoka's reign that Ceylon first became a Buddhist country, after the preaching of the apostle Mahinda, said to have been Ashoka's son, who had become a monk. From that day onwards Ceylon has remained a stronghold of the Buddhism of the Theravāda school; Mahāyāna and other Buddhist sects, though they have at times been influential, have never seriously shaken the hold of the form of Buddhism which Ceylon looks on as particularly its own.

It is probable that, by the end of the third century B.C., the doctrines of Theravāda Buddhism were in essentials much as they are now. The monks taught a dynamic phenomenalism, maintaining that everything in the universe, including the gods and the souls of living beings, was in a constant state of flux. Resistance to the cosmic flux of phenomena, and craving for permanence where permanence could not be found, led to inevitable sorrow. Salvation was to be obtained by the progressive abandonment of the sense of individuality, until it was lost completely in the indescribable state known as Nirvāna (Pali, *Nibbāna*, "blowing out"). The Buddha himself had reached this state, and no longer existed as an individual; nevertheless he was still rather inconsistently revered by his followers, and the less-learned Buddhist layfolk tended to look on him as a sort of high god.

The fundamental truths on which Buddhism is founded are not metaphysical or theological, but rather psychological. Basic is the doctrine of the "Four Noble Truths": 1) that all life is inevitably sorrowful; 2) that sorrow is due to craving; 3) that it can only be stopped by the stopping of craving; and 4) that this can only be done by a course of carefully disciplined and moral conduct, culminating in the life of concentration and meditation led by the Buddhist monk. These four truths, which are

the common property of all schools of Buddhist thought, are part of the true Doctrine (Pali, *dhamma*; Skt. *dharma*), which reflects the fundamental moral law of the universe.⁴

All things are composite. Buddhism would dispute the Hegelian theory that units may organize themselves into greater units which are more than the sum of their parts. As a corollary of the fact that all things are composite they are transient, for the composition of all aggregates is liable to change with time. Moreover, being essentially transient, they have no eternal Self or soul, no abiding individuality. And, as we have seen, they are inevitably liable to sorrow. This threefold characterization of the nature of the world and all that it contains—sorrowful, transient, and soulless—is frequently repeated in Buddhist literature, and without fully grasping its truth no being has any chance of salvation. For until he thoroughly understands the three characteristics of the world a man will inevitably crave for permanence in one form or another, and as this cannot, by the nature of things, be obtained, he will suffer, and probably make others suffer also.

All things in the universe may also be classified into five components, or are composed of a mixture of them: form and matter (*rūpa*), sensations (*vedanā*), perceptions (*saññā*), psychic dispositions or constructions (*samkhārā*), and consciousness or conscious thought (*viññāna*). The first consists of the objects of sense and various other elements of less importance. Sensations are the actual feelings arising as a result of the exercise of the six senses (mind being the sixth) upon sense-objects, and perceptions are the cognitions of such sensations. The psychic constructions include all the various psychological emotions, propensities, faculties, and conditions of the individual, while the fifth component, conscious thought, arises from the interplay of the other psychic constituents. The individual is made up of a combination of the five components, which are never the same from one moment to the next, and therefore his whole being is in a state of constant flux.

The process by which life continues and one thing leads to another is

⁴ The word *dharma* is employed in Buddhism a little differently from its use in Hinduism and is strictly untranslatable in English. One leading authority has translated it as "the Norm"; in our extracts it is translated "the Doctrine," "Righteousness," or "The Law of Righteousness" according to context. The term *dharma* in Buddhism has also other connotations. Phenomena in general are dharmas, as are the qualities and characteristics of phenomena. Thus the Buddha's last words might be translated: "Growing old is the dharma of all composite things."

explained by the Chain of Causation (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*, lit. Dependent Origination). The root cause of the process of birth and death and rebirth is ignorance, the fundamental illusion that individuality and permanence exist, when in fact they do not. Hence there arise in the organism various psychic phenomena, including desire, followed by an attempt to appropriate things to itself—this is typified especially by sexual craving and sexual intercourse, which are the actual causes of the next links in the chain, which concludes with age and death, only to be repeated again and again indefinitely. Rebirth takes place, therefore, according to laws of karma which do not essentially differ from those of Hinduism, though they are explained rather differently.

As we have seen, no permanent entity transmigrates from body to body, and all things, including the individual, are in a state of constant flux. But each act, word, or thought leaves its traces on the collection of the five constituents which make up the phenomenal individual, and their character alters correspondingly. This process goes on throughout life, and, when the material and immaterial parts of the being are separated in death, the immaterial constituents, which make up what in other systems would be called the soul, carry over the consequential effects of the deeds of the past life, and obtain another body accordingly. Thus there is no permanent soul, but nevertheless room is found for the doctrine of transmigration. Though Buddhism rejects the existence of the soul, this makes little difference in practice, and the more popular literature of Buddhism, such as the *Birth Stories* (*Jātaka*), takes for granted the existence of a quasi-soul at least, which endures indefinitely. One sect of Buddhism, the *Sammitiya*, which admittedly made no great impression on the religious life of India, actually went so far as to admit the existence of an indescribable substratum of personality (*pudgala*), which was carried over from life to life until ultimately it was dissipated in Nirvāna, thus fundamentally agreeing with the pneumatology of most other Indian religions.

The process of rebirth can only be stopped by achieving Nirvāna, first by adopting right views about the nature of existence, then by a carefully controlled system of moral conduct, and finally by concentration and meditation. The state of Nirvāna cannot be described, but it can be hinted at or suggested metaphorically. The word literally means "blowing out," as of a lamp. In Nirvāna all idea of an individual personality

or ego ceases to exist and there is nothing to be reborn—as far as the individual is concerned Nirvāna is annihilation. But it was certainly not generally thought of by the early Buddhists in such negative terms. It was rather conceived of as a transcendent state, beyond the possibility of full comprehension by the ordinary being enmeshed in the illusion of selfhood, but not fundamentally different from the state of supreme bliss as described in other non-theistic Indian systems.

These are the doctrines of the Theravāda school, and, with few variations, they would be assented to by all other schools of Buddhism. But the Mahāyāna⁵ and quasi-Mahāyāna sects developed other doctrines, in favor of which they often gave comparatively little attention to these fundamental teachings.

Of the Lesser Vehicle only one sect survives, the Theravāda, now prevalent in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. There were several others in earlier times, some of which had distinctive metaphysical and psychological systems which approached more closely to those of the Greater Vehicle than did that of the Theravāda. The most important of these sects was perhaps that of the Sarvāstivādins, which stressed the absence of any real entity passing through time in transmigration, but on the other hand maintained the ultimate reality of the chain-of-events which made up the phenomenal being or object. A sub-sect of the Sarvāstivādins, the Sautrāntikas, emphasized the atomic nature of the component elements of the chain—every instant a composite object disappeared, to be replaced by a new one which came into being as a result of the last. This view of the universe, which appears in the systems of other Buddhist sects in a less emphatic form, is akin to the quantum theory of modern physics.

Another very interesting sect of the Lesser Vehicle was the Mahāsaṅghika, said to have been the first to break away from the main body of Buddhism. Subdivided into numerous schools, its chief characteristic was the doctrine that the things of the phenomenal world were not wholly real; thus it paved the way for the idealist world-view of Mahāyāna philosophy. Buddhas, on the other hand, according to the fully developed

⁵ With the rise of the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism, Buddhist sects became divided into two major groups. The newer sects referred to their doctrine as the "Mahāyāna," the Greater Vehicle (to salvation), and to their rivals as the "Hīnayāna," the Lesser Vehicle. We have generally preferred to call the latter group Theravāda from the name of its major sect.

doctrine of the Mahāsaṅghikas, had full reality, as heavenly beings in a state of perpetual mystic trance, and earthly Buddhas such as the historical Gautama were mere docetic manifestations of the Buddhas in their true state. It is possible that gnostic doctrines from the Middle East influenced this form of Buddhism, which came very close to Mahāyānism, differing only in the doctrine of bodhisattvas.

Buddhism also taught an advanced and altruistic system of morality, which was a corollary to its metaphysics, since one of the first steps on the road to Nirvāna was to do good to others, and thereby weaken the illusion of egoity which was the main cause of human sorrow. Buddhism set itself strongly against animal sacrifice and encouraged vegetarianism, though it did not definitely impose it. It tended towards peace, even if Ashoka's successors did not heed his injunctions to avoid aggression. Its attitude to the system of class and caste is not always definite; while passages in the Buddhist scriptures can be found which attack all claims to superiority by right of birth, the four great classes seem to have been recognized as an almost inevitable aspect of Indian society; but the Buddhist classification of these classes varies significantly from that of the Hindus, for in Buddhist sources the warrior is usually mentioned before the brahman.

The total literature of Buddhism is so large that it is quite impossible for a single individual to master it in his lifetime. Each of the numerous sects of Buddhism had its version of the sacred scriptures written either in a semi-vernacular Prakritic language or in a form of Sanskrit with peculiar syntax and vocabulary, generally known as "Buddhist Sanskrit." Besides these there was a great body of commentarial literature, and much philosophical and devotional writing of all kinds. Much of the literature of the sects other than the Theravāda has been lost, or only survives in Chinese or Tibetan translations, but the complete canon of Theravāda Buddhism has been fully preserved in Ceylon. It is therefore of fundamental importance in any study of Buddhism. It is written in Pali, a language related to Sanskrit, and based on an ancient vernacular, probably spoken in the western part of India.

The canon is generally known as *Tripitaka* (the *Three Baskets*) after the three sections into which it is divided, namely *Conduct (Vinaya)*, *Discourses (Sutta)*, and *Supplementary Doctrines (Abhidhamma)*. The first *Pitaka* contains the rules of conduct of the Buddhist order of

monks and nuns, usually in connection with narratives which purport to tell the circumstances in which the Buddha laid down each rule. The second *Piṭaka* is the most important; it contains discourses, mostly attributed to the Buddha, divided into five sections: the *Long Group* (*Dīgha Nikāya*) containing long discourses; the *Medium Group* (*Majjhima Nikāya*) with discourses of shorter length; the *Connected Group* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya*), a collection of shorter pronouncements on connected topics; the *Progressive Group* (*Anguttara Nikāya*), short passages arranged in eleven sections according to the number of topics dealt with in each—thus the three types of sin, in act, word and thought, occur in section three, and so on; and finally the *Minor Group* (*Khuddaka Nikāya*), a number of works of varying type, including the beautiful and very ancient Buddhist poems of the *Way of Righteousness* (*Dhammapāda*) and a collection of verses which are filled out by a lengthy prose commentary to form the *Birth Stories* (*Jātaṅka*) relating the previous births of the Buddha.

The third *Piṭaka*, the *Supplementary Doctrines*, is a collection of seven works on Buddhist psychology and metaphysics, which are little more than a systematization of ideas contained in the *Discourses*, and are definitely later than the main body of the canon.

There is considerable disagreement about the date of the canon. Some earlier students of Buddhism believed that the *Conduct* and *Discourse Baskets* existed in much the same form as they do now within a hundred years of the Buddha's death. Later authorities are inclined to believe that the growth of the canon was considerably slower. On the other hand many of the discourses may look back to the Buddha himself, though all have been more or less worked over, and none can be specified with certainty as being his own words. The orthodox tradition itself admits that the *Basket of Supplementary Doctrines* (*Abhidhamma Piṭaka*) is later than the other two, and was not completed until the time of Ashoka. Sinhalese tradition records that the canon was not committed to writing until the reign of King Vattagāmaṇi (89-77 B.C.), and it may not have finished growing until about this time. Thus it is possible that it is the product of as many as four centuries.

There are numerous other works in Pali which are not generally considered canonical. Perhaps the most important of these works are the standard commentaries on the books of the canon, most of which, it is

said, were compiled in Ceylon by the great doctor Buddhaghosa, of the fifth century A.D., from earlier commentaries. As well as passages of explanatory character, the commentaries contain much ancient Buddhist tradition not to be found elsewhere, and the elucidation of the *Jātaṅka* verses, in plain and vigorous prose, contains some of the finest narrative literature of the ancient world. Buddhaghosa is also the reputed author of a valuable compendium of Buddhist doctrine, *The Way of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*). Another very important Pali work of early date is *The Questions of King Menander* (*Milindapañha*), from which several passages are translated here. The inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka (c. 273-232 B.C.) must also be included in any survey, since they are inspired by Buddhism and are at least in part intended to inculcate the morality of Buddhism.

BASIC DOCTRINES OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

The Four Noble Truths

According to Buddhist tradition this was the first sermon preached by the Buddha. After gaining enlightenment under the Tree of Wisdom at Gayā he proceeded to Vārāṇasī¹, where, in a park outside the city, he found five ascetics who had formerly been his associates, and who had left him in disgust when he gave up self-mortification and self-starvation as useless in his quest for supreme wisdom. In the presence of these five the Buddha "set in motion the Wheel² of the Law" by preaching this sermon, which outlines the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Middle Way, three of the most important concepts of Buddhism.

[From *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, 5.421 ff.³]

Thus I have heard. Once the Lord was at Vārāṇasī, at the deer park called Isipatana. There he addressed the five monks:

There are two ends not to be served by a wanderer. What are these two? The pursuit of desires and of the pleasure which springs from de-

¹ The ancient name of Banaras, now officially revived by the Indian government.

² The chariot wheel in ancient India symbolized empire and hence this phrase may be paraphrased as: "embarked on his expedition of conquest on behalf of the Kingdom of Righteousness."

³ In all quotations from the Pali scriptures, except where specified, reference is made to the Pali Text Society's edition of the text.

sire, which is base, common, leading to rebirth, ignoble, and unprofitable; and the pursuit of pain and hardship, which is grievous, ignoble, and unprofitable. The Middle Way of the Tathāgata⁴ avoids both these ends. It is enlightened, it brings clear vision, it makes for wisdom, and leads to peace, insight, enlightenment, and Nirvāna. What is the Middle Way? . . . It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness,⁵ and Right Concentration. This is the Middle Way. . . .

And this is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow; contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow—in short all the five components of individuality⁶ are sorrow.

And this is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow. It arises from craving, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure now here, now there—the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for continued life, the craving for power.

And this is the Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that craving, so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.

And this is the Noble Truth of the Way which Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The Nature of Consciousness and the Chain of Causation

The following *Discourse*, though it purports to be a single utterance of the Buddha, is evidently a conflation of separate passages, bearing on the character of consciousness. It contains a short statement of the contingent nature of consciousness or conscious thought, an appeal for an objective and clear realization that everything whatever is dependent on causes outside itself, an enumeration of the elements of the Chain of Causation, given first in reverse order, an exhortation to the monks not to bother unduly about the question of the survival of the personality and to realize the facts of the Doctrine for themselves, not taking them from the lips of the Teacher, and finally an impressive passage

⁴ "He who has thus attained," one of the titles of the Buddha.

⁵ *Sati*, lit. "memory." At all times the monk should as far as possible be fully conscious of his actions, words, and thoughts, and be aware that the agent is not an enduring individual, but a composite and transitory collection of material and psychic factors.

⁶ Forms, sensations, perceptions, psychic dispositions, and consciousness.

comparing the life of the ordinary man with that of the Buddha, which we have not space to give here.

[From *Majjhima Nikāya*, 1.256 ff.]

Once a certain monk named *Sāti*, the son of a fisherman,¹ conceived the pernicious heresy that, as he understood the Lord's teaching, consciousness continued throughout transmigration. When they heard this several monks went and reasoned with him . . . but he would not give in, but held firm to his heresy. . . . So they went to the Lord and put the matter to him, and he sent a monk to fetch *Sāti*. When *Sāti* had come the Lord asked him if it was true that he held this heresy . . . and *Sāti* replied that he did hold it.

"What, then," asked the Lord, "is the nature of consciousness?"

"Sir, it is that which speaks and feels, and experiences the consequences of good and evil deeds."

"Whom do you tell, you foolish fellow, that I have taught such a doctrine? Haven't I said, with many similes, that consciousness is not independent, but comes about through the Chain of Causation, and can never arise without a cause? You misunderstand and misrepresent me, and so you undermine your own position and produce much demerit. You bring upon yourself lasting harm and sorrow!" . . .

Then the Lord addressed the assembled monks:

"Whatever form of consciousness arises from a condition is known by the name of that condition; thus if it arises from the eye and from forms it is known as visual consciousness . . . and so with the senses of hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind, and their objects. It's just like a fire, which you call by the name of the fuel—a wood fire, a fire of sticks, a grass fire, a cowdung fire, a fire of husks, a rubbish fire, and so on."²

"Do you agree, monks, that any given organism is a living being?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you agree that it is produced by food?" "Yes, sir."

"And that when the food is cut off the living being is cut off and dies?"

"Yes, sir."

¹ In theory the origins of a monk, once he had become a full member of the Order, were irrelevant, but the authors of the Pali scriptures often mention the fact that a given monk was of humble birth. It would seem that they were not altogether free from class-consciousness.

² The implication is that just as fire is caused by fuel and varies according to the fuel used, so consciousness is caused by the senses and their objects, and varies accordingly.

"And that doubt on any of these points will lead to perplexity?" "Yes, sir."

"And that Right Recognition is knowledge of the true facts as they really are?" "Yes, sir."

"Now if you cling to this pure and unvitiated view, if you cherish it, treasure it, and make it your own, will you be able to develop a state of consciousness with which you can cross the stream of transmigration as on a raft, which you use but do not keep?" "No, sir."

"But only if you maintain this pure view, but don't cling to it or cherish it . . . only if you use it but are ready to give it up?"³ "Yes, sir."

"There are four bases which support all organisms and beings, whether now existing or yet to be. They are: first, food coarse or fine, which builds up the body; second, contact; third, cogitation; and fourth, consciousness. All four derive and originate from craving. Craving arises from sensation, sensation from contact,⁴ contact from the six senses, the six senses from physical form, physical form from consciousness, consciousness from the psychic constructions, and the psychic constructions from ignorance. . . . To repeat: Ignorance is the cause of the psychic constructions, hence is caused consciousness, hence physical form, hence the six senses, hence contact, hence sensations, hence craving, hence attachment, hence becoming, hence birth, hence old age and death with all the distraction of grief and lamentation, sorrow and despair. This is the arising of the whole body of ill. . . . So we are agreed that by the complete cessation of ignorance the whole body of ill ceases.

"Now would you, knowing and seeing this, go back to your past, wondering whether you existed or didn't exist long ago, or how you existed, or what you were, or from what life you passed to another?" "No, sir."

"Or would you look forward to the future with the same thoughts?"

"No, sir."

"Or would you, knowing and seeing this, trouble yourselves at the

³ Buddhism is a practical system, with one aim only, to free living beings from suffering. This passage apparently implies that even the most fundamental doctrines of Buddhism are only means to that end, and must not be maintained dogmatically for their own sake. It suggests also that there may be higher truths, which can only be realized as Nirvāṇa is approached.

⁴ Here we are told that craving arises from contact, through sensation, while in the previous sentence contact arises from craving. There is no real paradox, because the chain is circular, and any one link is the cause of any other.

present time about whether or not you really exist, what and how you are, whence your being came, and whither it will go?" "No, sir."

"Or would you, possessing this knowledge, say, 'We declare it because we revere our teacher'?" "No, sir."

"Or would you say, 'We don't declare it as from ourselves—we were told it by a teacher or ascetic'?" "No, sir."

"Or would you look for another teacher?" "No, sir."

"Or would you support the rituals, shows, or festivals of other ascetics or brāhmins?" "No, sir."

"Do you only declare what you have known and seen?" "Yes, sir."

"Well done, brethren! I have taught you the doctrine which is immediately beneficial, eternal, open to all, leading them onwards, to be mastered for himself by every intelligent man."

False Doctrines About the Soul

The early Buddhists never ceased to impress upon their hearers the fact that the phenomenal personality was in a constant state of flux, and that there was no eternal soul in the individual in anything like the Hindu sense. On the other hand the perfected being had reached Nirvāṇa, and nothing could be meaningfully predicated about him. The following passage, attributed to the Buddha himself, criticizes the soul theories of other sects.

[From *Dīgha Nikāya*, 2.64 ff.]

It is possible to make four propositions concerning the nature of the soul—

"My soul has form and is minute," "My soul has form and is boundless,"

"My soul is without form and is minute," and "My soul is without form and boundless." Such propositions may refer to this life or the next. . . .

There are as many ways of not making propositions concerning the soul, and those with insight do not make them.

Again the soul may be thought of as sentient or insentient, or as neither one nor the other but having sentience as a property. If someone affirms that his soul is sentient you should ask, "Sentience is of three kinds, happy, sorrowful, and neutral. Which of these is your soul?" For when you feel one sensation you don't feel the others. Moreover these sensations are impermanent, dependent on conditions, resulting from a cause or causes, perishable, transitory, vanishing, ceasing. If one experiences a happy sensation and thinks "This is my soul," when the happy sensa-

tion ceases he will think "My soul has departed." One who thinks thus looks on his soul as something impermanent in this life, a blend of happiness and sorrow with a beginning and end, and so this proposition is not acceptable.

If someone affirms that the soul is not sentient, you should ask, "If you have no sensation, can you say that you exist?" He cannot, and so this proposition is not acceptable.

And if someone affirms that the soul has sentience as a property you should ask, "If all sensations of every kind were to cease absolutely there would be no feelings whatever. Could you then say 'I exist'?" He could not, and so this proposition is not acceptable.

When a monk does not look on the soul as coming under any of these three categories . . . he refrains from such views and clings to nothing in the world; and not clinging he does not tremble, and not trembling he attains Nirvāna. He knows that rebirth is at an end, that his goal is reached, that he has accomplished what he set out to do, and that after this present world there is no other for him. It would be absurd to say of such a monk, with his heart set free, that he believes that the perfected being survives after death—or indeed that he does not survive, or that he does and yet does not, or that he neither does nor does not. Because the monk is free his state transcends all expression, predication, communication, and knowledge.

The Simile of the Chariot

This passage from the *Questions of King Menander* is among the best known arguments in favor of the composite nature of the individual. The Greek king Milinda, or Menander, ruled in northwestern India about the middle of the second century B.C. According to the text he was converted to Buddhism by Nāgasena, and the wheel which appears on some of his numerous coins would suggest that he was in fact influenced by the Indian religion. The style of the *Questions* is in some measure reminiscent of the Upanishads, but some authorities have thought to find traces of the influence of Plato and have suggested that the author or authors knew Greek. Though in its present form the work may be some centuries later, its kernel may go back to before the Christian era.

[From *Milindapañha* (Trenckner ed.) pp. 25 f.]

Then King Menander went up to the Venerable Nāgasena, greeted him respectfully, and sat down. Nāgasena replied to the greeting, and the

King was pleased at heart. Then King Menander asked: "How is your reverence known, and what is your name?"

"I'm known as Nāgasena, your Majesty, that's what my fellow monks call me. But though my parents may have given me such a name . . . it's only a generally understood term, a practical designation. There is no question of a permanent individual implied in the use of the word."

"Listen, you five hundred Greeks and eighty thousand monks!" said King Menander. "This Nāgasena has just declared that there's no permanent individuality implied in his name!" Then, turning to Nāgasena, "If, Reverend Nāgasena, there is no permanent individuality, who gives you monks your robes and food, lodging and medicines? And who makes use of them? Who lives a life of righteousness, meditates, and reaches Nirvāna? Who destroys living beings, steals, fornicates, tells lies, or drinks spirits? . . . If what you say is true there's neither merit nor demerit, and no fruit or result of good or evil deeds. If someone were to kill you there would be no question of murder. And there would be no masters or teachers in the [Buddhist] Order and no ordinations. If your fellow monks call you Nāgasena, what then is Nāgasena? Would you say that your hair is Nāgasena?" "No, your Majesty."

"Or your nails, teeth, skin, or other parts of your body, or the outward form, or sensation, or perception, or the psychic constructions, or consciousness?" "Are any of these Nāgasena?" "No, your Majesty."

"Then are all these taken together Nāgasena?" "No, your Majesty."

"Or anything other than they?" "No, your Majesty."

"Then for all my asking I find no Nāgasena. Nāgasena is a mere sound! Surely what your Reverence has said is false!"

Then the Venerable Nāgasena addressed the King.

"Your Majesty, how did you come here—on foot, or in a vehicle?"

"In a chariot."

"Then tell me what is the chariot? Is the pole the chariot?" "No, your Reverence."

"Or the axle, wheels, frame, reins, yoke, spokes, or goad?" "None of these things is the chariot."

"Then all these separate parts taken together are the chariot?" "No, your Reverence."

"Then is the chariot something other than the separate parts?" "No, your Reverence."

The five components of individuality (see p. 96).

"Then for all my asking, your Majesty, I can find no chariot. The chariot is a mere sound. What then is the chariot? Surely what your Majesty has said is false! There is no chariot! . . ."

When he had spoken the five hundred Greeks cried "Well done!" and said to the King, "Now, your Majesty, get out of that dilemma if you can!"

"What I said was not false," replied the King. "It's on account of all these various components, the pole, axle, wheels, and so on, that the vehicle is called a chariot. It's just a generally understood term, a practical designation."

"Well said, your Majesty! You know what the word 'chariot' means! And it's just the same with me. It's on account of the various components of my being that I'm known by the generally understood term, the practical designation Nāgasena."

Change and Identity

After convincing Menander of the composite nature of the personality by the simile of the chariot, Nāgasena shows him by another simile how it is continually changing with the passage of time, but possesses a specious unity through the continuity of the body.

[From *Milindapañha* (Trenckner ed.), p. 40]

"Reverend Nāgasena," said the King, "when a man is born does he remain the same [being] or become another?"

"He neither remains the same nor becomes another."

"Give me an example!"

"What do you think, your Majesty? You were once a baby lying on your back, tender and small and weak. Was that baby you, who are now grown up?"

"No, your Reverence, the baby was one being and I am another."

"If that's the case, your Majesty, you had no mother or father, and no teachers in learning, manners, or wisdom. . . . Is the boy who goes to school one [being] and the young man who has finished his education another? Does one person commit a crime and another suffer mutilation for it?"

"Of course not, your Reverence! But what do you say on the question?"

"I am the being I was when I was a baby," said the Elder . . . "for

through the continuity of the body all stages of life are included in a pragmatic unity."

"Give me an illustration."

"Suppose a man were to light a lamp, would it burn all through the night?" "Yes, it might."

"Now is the flame which burns in the middle watch the same as that which burned in the first?" "No, your Reverence."

"Or is that which burns in the last watch the same as that which burned in the middle?" "No, your Reverence."

"So is there one lamp in the first watch, another in the middle, and yet another in the last?"

"No. The same lamp gives light all through the night."

"Similarly, your Majesty, the continuity of phenomena is kept up. One person comes into existence, another passes away, and the sequence runs continuously without self-conscious existence, neither the same nor yet another."

"Well said, Reverend Nāgasena!"

The Process of Rebirth

In this little passage Nāgasena presses the analogy of the lamp further, and shows Menander how rebirth is possible without any soul, substratum of personality, or other hypothetical entity which passes from the one body to the other.

[From *Milindapañha* (Trenckner ed.), p. 71]

"Reverend Nāgasena," said the King, "is it true that nothing transmigrates, and yet there is rebirth?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"How can this be? . . . Give me an illustration."

"Suppose, your Majesty, a man lights one lamp from another—does the one lamp transmigrate to the other?"

"No, your Reverence."

"So there is rebirth without anything transmigrating!"

Karma

Buddhism accepted the prevailing doctrine of karma, though it had an original explanation of the process whereby karma operated. In this passage from the

Questions of King Menander karma is adduced as the reason for the manifest inequalities of human fate and fortune. Had Nāgasena been disputing with an Indian king instead of with a Greek one the question would not have been asked, for the answer would have been taken for granted.

[From *Milindapañha* (Trenckner ed.), p. 65]

"Venerable Nāgasena," asked the King, "why are men not all alike, but some short-lived and some long, some sickly and some healthy, some ugly and some handsome, some weak and some strong, some poor and some rich, some base and some noble, some stupid and some clever?"

"Why, your Majesty," replied the Elder, "are not all plants alike, but some astringent, some salty, some pungent, some sour, and some sweet?"

"I suppose, your Reverence, because they come from different seeds."

"And so it is with men! They are not alike because of different karmas. As the Lord said . . . 'Beings each have their own karma. They are . . . born through karma, they become members of tribes and families through karma, each is ruled by karma, it is karma that divides them into high and low.'"

"Very good, your Reverence!"

Right Mindfulness

The following passage is of interest as showing the means which the monk should take in order thoroughly to realize the transience and otherness of all things, and thus draw near to Nirvāṇa. The *bhāvanās*, or states of mind, are practiced by Buddhist monks to this day, and are part of "Right Mindfulness," the seventh stage of the Noble Eightfold Path. The translation is considerably abridged.

[From *Majjhima Nikāya*, 1.420 ff.]

The Lord was staying at Sāvattī at the monastery of Anāthapindaka in the Grove of Jeta. One morning he dressed, took his robe and bowl, and went into Sāvattī for alms, with the Reverend Rāhula¹ following close behind him. As they walked the Lord, . . . without looking round, spoke to him thus:

"All material forms, past, present, or future, within or without, gross or subtle, base or fine, far or near, all should be viewed with full understanding—with the thought 'This is not mine, this is not I, this is not my soul.'"²

¹ The Buddha's son, who, after his father's enlightenment, became a monk.

² Or "self" (*atta*).

"Only material forms, Lord?"

"No, not only material forms, Rāhula, but also sensation, perception, the psychic constructions, and consciousness."³

"Who would go to the village to collect alms today, when he has been exhorted by the Lord himself?" said Rāhula. And he turned back and sat cross-legged, with body erect, collected in thought.

Then the Venerable Sāriputta,⁴ seeing him thus, said to him: "Develop concentration on inhalation and exhalation, for when this is developed and increased it is very productive and helpful."

Towards evening Rāhula rose and went to the Lord, and asked him how he could develop concentration on inhalation and exhalation. And the Lord said:

"Rāhula, whatever is hard and solid in an individual, such as hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, and so on, is called the personal element of earth. The personal element of water is composed of bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, and so on. The personal element of fire is that which warms and consumes or burns up, and produces metabolism of food and drink in digestion. The personal element of air is the wind in the body which moves upwards or downwards, the winds in the abdomen and stomach, winds which move from member to member, and the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. And finally the personal element of space comprises the orifices of ears and nose, the door of the mouth, and the channels whereby food and drink enter, remain in, and pass out of the body.⁵ These five personal elements, together with the five external elements, make up the total of the five universal elements. They should all be regarded objectively, with right understanding, thinking 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my soul.' With this understanding attitude a man turns from the five elements and his mind takes no delight in them."

"Develop a state of mind like the earth, Rāhula. For on the earth men throw clean and unclean things, dung and urine, spittle, pus and blood, and the earth is not troubled or repelled or disgusted. And as you grow like the earth no contacts with pleasant or unpleasant will lay hold of your mind or stick to it."

"Similarly you should develop a state of mind like water, for men

³ The five components of individuality.

⁴ One of the Buddha's chief disciples.

⁵ This interesting passage will give the reader some notion of ancient Indian ideas of anatomy and physics, as it would have been assented to by most schools of thought. In

throw all manner of clean and unclean things into water and it is not troubled or repelled or disgusted. And similarly with fire, which burns all things, clean and unclean, and with air, which blows upon them all, and with space, which is nowhere established.

"Develop the state of mind of friendliness, Rāhula, for, as you do so, ill-will will grow less; and of compassion, for thus vexation will grow less; and of joy, for thus aversion will grow less; and of equanimity,⁶ for thus repugnance will grow less.

"Develop the state of mind of consciousness of the corruption of the body, for thus passion will grow less; and of the consciousness of the fleeting nature of all things, for thus the pride of selfhood will grow less.

"Develop the state of mind of ordering the breath, . . . in which the monk goes to the forest, or to the root of a tree or to an empty house, and sits cross-legged with body erect, collected in thought. Fully mindful he inhales and exhales. When he inhales or exhales a long breath he knows precisely that he is doing so, and similarly when inhaling or exhaling a short breath. While inhaling or exhaling he trains himself to be conscious of the whole of his body, . . . to be fully conscious of the components of his mind, . . . to realize the impermanence of all things, . . . or to dwell on passionlessness . . . or renunciation. Thus the state of ordered breathing, when developed and increased, is very productive and helpful. And when the mind is thus developed a man breathes his last breath in full consciousness, and not unconsciously."⁷

The Last Instructions of the Buddha

The following passage occurs in the *Discourse of the Great Passing-away* (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*) which describes the last days and death of the Buddha. The Master, an old and ailing man, is on the way to the hills where he was born, and where soon he is to die. These are among his last recorded instructions to his disciples. Unfortunately we cannot be sure of their authenticity; the fine phrases concerning "the closed fist of the teacher" are particularly suspect, for they are just the sort of interpolation which an earnest Theravāda monk would be likely to make, in order to discredit

many passages Buddhist texts admit only four elements, rejecting space, which is looked on as an element in orthodox Hindu theory.

⁶ Friendliness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism.

⁷ The state of mind in the last moments before death was considered extremely important in its effect on the next birth. Some of the Chinese and Japanese Buddhist sects perform rites at the deathbed similar to the Roman Catholic extreme unction.

the doctrines of schismatics of a Mahāyānist type, who claimed to possess the esoteric teachings of the Master. But, whether authentically the Buddha's words or not, the following passage perhaps gives the quintessence of Theravāda Buddhism, with its call for self-reliant striving against all that seems base and evil.

[From *Digha Nikāya*, 2.99 f., 155-56]

Soon after this the Lord began to recover, and when he was quite free from sickness he came out of his lodging and sat in its shadow on a seat spread out for him. The Venerable Ānanda went up to him, paid his respects, sat down to one side, and spoke to the Lord thus:

"I have seen the Lord in health, and I have seen the Lord in sickness; and when I saw that the Lord was sick my body became as weak as a creeper, my sight dimmed, and all my faculties weakened. But yet I was a little comforted by the thought that the Lord would not pass away until he had left his instructions concerning the Order."

"What, Ānanda! Does the Order expect that of me? I have taught the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrines; for . . . with the Tathāgata there is no such thing as the closed fist of the teacher who keeps some things back. If anyone thinks 'It is I who will lead the Order,' or 'The Order depends on me,' he is the one who should lay down instructions concerning the Order. But the Tathāgata has no such thought, so why should he leave instructions? I am old now, Ānanda, and full of years; my journey nears its end, and I have reached my sum of days, for I am nearly eighty years old. Just as a worn out cart can only be kept going if it is tied up with thongs, so the body of the Tathāgata can only be kept going by bandaging it. Only when the Tathāgata no longer attends to any outward object, when all separate sensation stops and he is deep in inner concentration, is his body at ease.

"So, Ānanda, you must be your own lamps, be your own refuges. Take refuge in nothing outside yourselves. Hold firm to the truth as a lamp and a refuge, and do not look for refuge to anything besides yourselves. A monk becomes his own lamp and refuge by continually looking on his body, feelings, perceptions, moods, and ideas in such a manner that he conquers the cravings and depressions of ordinary men and is always strenuous, self-possessed, and collected in mind. Whoever among my monks does this, either now or when I am dead, if he is anxious to learn, will reach the summit." [p. 99 f.]

THE LAST WORDS OF THE BUDDHA

"All composite things must pass away. Strive onward vigilantly." [pp. 155-56]

The Buddha in Nirvāna

This brief passage from the *Questions of King Menander* illustrates the Theravāda conception of Nirvāna. It is not total annihilation, but at the same time it involves the complete disintegration of the phenomenal personality—a paradox which cannot be explained in words.

[From *Milindapañha* (Trenckner, ed.), p. 73]

"Reverend Nāgasena," said the King, "does the Buddha still exist?"

"Yes, your Majesty, he does."

"Then is it possible to point out the Buddha as being here or there?"

"The Lord has passed completely away in Nirvāna, so that nothing is left which could lead to the formation of another being. And so he cannot be pointed out as being here or there."

"Give me an illustration."

"What would your Majesty say—if a great fire were blazing, would it be possible to point to a flame which had gone out and say that it was here or there?"

"No, your Reverence, the flame is extinguished, it can't be detected."

"In just the same way, your Majesty, the Lord has passed away in Nirvāna. . . . He can only be pointed out in the body of his doctrine, for it was he who taught it."

"Very good, Reverend Nāgasena!"

The City of Righteousness

This fine passage, from the latter part of the *Questions of King Menander*, is probably the work of a hand different from that which composed the dialogues which we have already quoted. In it the Buddha almost takes on the character of a savior god, who, like Amitābha in the developed Mahāyāna mythology, built a heaven for his followers. Nirvāna is not described in negative terms, but in very positive ones, and the metaphor of the busy, populous, and prosperous city hardly suggests the rarified Nirvāna of the previous passage, but a heaven in which personality is by no means lost. It suggests in fact to the Western reader the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation. Clearly this passage is the work of a writer whose attitude approached closely to that of

Mahāyāna, but it must be remembered that Theravāda Buddhists look on the text from which it is taken as semi-canonical.

[From *Milindapañha* (Trenckner ed.), pp. 330 ff.]

The builder of a city . . . first chooses a pleasant and suitable site; he makes it smooth, and then sets to work to build his city fair and well proportioned, divided into quarters, with ramparts round about it. . . . And when the city is built, and stands complete and perfect, he goes away to another land. And in time the city becomes rich and prosperous, peaceful and happy, free from plague and calamity, and filled with people of all classes and professions and of all lands . . . even with Scythians, Greeks, and Chinese. . . . All these folk coming to live in the new city and finding it so well planned, faultless, perfect, and beautiful exclaim: "Skilled indeed must be the builder who built this city!"

So the Lord . . . in his infinite goodness . . . when he had achieved the highest powers of Buddhahood and had conquered Māra¹ and his hosts, tearing the net of false doctrine, casting aside ignorance, and producing wisdom, . . . built the City of Righteousness.

The Lord's City of Righteousness has virtue for its ramparts, fear of sin for its moat, knowledge for its gates, zeal for its turrets, faith for its pillars, concentration for its watchman, wisdom for its palaces. The *Basket of Discourses* is its marketplace, the *Supplementary Doctrines* its roads, the *Conduct* its court of justice, and earnest self-control is its main street. . . .

The Lord laid down the following subjects for meditation: the ideas of impermanence, of the nonexistence of an enduring self, of the impurity and of the wretchedness of life, of ridding oneself of evil tendencies, of passionlessness, of stopping the influx of evil tendencies, of dissatisfaction with all things in the world, of the impermanence of all conditioned things, of mindful control of breath, of the corpse in disintegration, of the execution of criminals with all its horrors; the ideas of friendliness, of compassion, of joy, of equanimity,² the thought of death, and mindfulness of the body. . . . Whoever wishes to be free from age and death takes one of these as a subject for meditation, and thus he is set free from passion, hatred, and dullness,³ from pride and from false views; he crosses

¹ The spirit of the world and the flesh, the Buddhist Satan.

² The four cardinal virtues of Buddhism.

³ The three "influxes" (*āśava*), the cardinal sins of Buddhism.

the ocean of rebirth, dams the torrent of his cravings, is washed clean of the threefold stain [of passion, hatred, and dullness], and destroys all evil within him. So he enters the glorious city of Nirvāṇa, stainless and undefiled, pure and white, unaging, deathless, secure and calm and happy, and his mind is emancipated as a perfected being.

THE ETHICS OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

In the sphere of personal relations Buddhism inculcated a morality gentler and more humanitarian than the stern early Hindu ethic, based chiefly on duty rather than fellowship. The four cardinal virtues of Buddhism—friendliness, compassion, joy, and equanimity—are extolled in many passages of the scriptures. The *Birth Stories* teach friendly relations between man and man and between man and animal, and encourage the warm virtues of family love, brotherhood, and honesty (not to speak of shrewdness) in one's dealings with others. Though the surviving Buddhist religious literature is chiefly intended for the monastic community Buddhism certainly had, and still has, a message going far beyond the monastery to the millions of ordinary believers who have no hope of Nirvāṇa until after many lives, but who may yet rise in the scale of being by faith in the teaching of the Buddha, by service to the Buddhist Order, and by fair dealing with their fellows.

In this connection we would draw attention to the most important passage on lay morality in the Pali scriptures—the *Discourse of Admonition to Singāla* (*Singālovāda Sutta*). It is a solid bourgeois morality that this text encourages. Like many older writings of Protestant Christianity it stresses the virtue of thrift—expensive ceremonies and domestic rituals are wasteful as well as useless; fairs and festivals lead men to squander precious time and wealth; from the layman's point of view drink and gambling are evil chiefly for the same reasons; to increase the family estates is a meritorious act. But there is more in the *Discourse* than this. In modern terms the ideal it sets forth is of a society in which each individual respects the other's personality, an intricate network of warm and happy human relationships, where parents and children, teachers and pupils, husbands and wives, masters and servants, and friends and friends look on one another as ends in themselves, and dwell together in mutual

respect and affection, each helping the other upward in the scale of being through a cosmos which, though theoretically a vale of tears, yet contains pleasant places and gives many opportunities for real if transient happiness in fellowship with friends and kin. And the inevitable sorrow of all who are born only to grow old and pass away, the lonely anguish of the individual being who finds himself at odds with an unfriendly universe, can only be lessened, at least for the ordinary layman, by brotherhood.

The Morals of the Monk

The following extract is part of a long panegyric of the Buddha, leading up to a description of his perfect wisdom. The moral virtues attributed to him in the earlier part of the passage, which is quoted here, are those after which every monk should strive; and, allowing for their different circumstances, the monk's example should be followed as far as possible by the layman.

[From *Digha Nikāya*, 1.4 ff.]

The monk Gautama has given up injury to life, he has lost all inclination to it; he has laid aside the cudgel and the sword, and he lives modestly, full of mercy, desiring in compassion the welfare of all things living.

He has given up taking what is not given, he has lost all inclination to it. He accepts what is given to him and waits for it to be given; and he lives in honesty and purity of heart. . . .

He has given up unchastity, he has lost all inclination to it. He is celibate and aloof, and has lost all desire for sexual intercourse, which is vulgar. . . .

He has given up false speech, he has lost all inclination to it. He speaks the truth, he keeps faith, he is faithful and trustworthy, he does not break his word to the world. . . .

He has given up slander, he has lost all inclination to it. When he hears something in one place he will not repeat it in another in order to cause strife. . . . but he unites those who are divided by strife, and encourages those who are friends. His pleasure is in peace, he loves peace and delights in it, and when he speaks he speaks words which make for peace. . . .

He has given up harsh speech, he has lost all inclination to it. He speaks only words that are blameless, pleasing to the ear, touching the heart, cultured, pleasing the people, loved by the people. . . .

He has given up frivolous talk, he has lost all inclination to it. He



CHAPTER VII

MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM: "THE GREATER VEHICLE"

From about the first or second century A.D. onwards, a new and very different kind of Buddhism arose in India. The new school, which claimed to offer salvation for all, styled itself *Mahāyāna*, the Greater Vehicle (to salvation), as opposed to the older Buddhism, which it contemptuously referred to as *Hīnayāna*, or the Lesser Vehicle. The *Mahāyāna* scriptures also claimed to represent the final doctrines of the Buddha, revealed only to his most spiritually advanced followers, while the earlier doctrines were merely preliminary ones. Though *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, with its pantheon of heavenly buddhas and bodhisattvas and its idealistic metaphysics, was strikingly different in many respects from the Theravāda, it can be viewed as the development into finished systems of tendencies which had existed long before—a development favored and accelerated by the great historic changes taking place in northwestern India at that time. For over two hundred years, from the beginning of the second century B.C. onwards, this region was the prey of a succession of invaders—Bactrian Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, and a Central Asian people generally known to historians of India as Kushānas. As a result of these invasions Iranian and Western influences were felt much more strongly than before, and new peoples, with backgrounds very different from those of the folk among whom the religion arose, began to take interest in Buddhism.

A tendency to revere the Buddha as a god had probably existed in his own lifetime. In Indian religion, divinity is not something completely transcendent, or far exalted above all mortal things, as it is for the Jew, Christian, or Muslim, neither is it something concentrated in a single unique, omnipotent, and omniscient personality. In Indian religions godhead manifests itself in so many forms as to be almost if not quite ubiquitous, and every great sage or religious teacher is looked on as a

special manifestation of divinity, in some sense a god in human form. How much more divine was the Buddha, to whom even the great god Brahmā himself did reverence, and who, in meditation, could far transcend the comparatively tawdry and transient heavens where the great gods dwelt; enter the world of formlessness, and pass thence to the ineffable Nirvāna itself? From the Buddhist point of view even the highest of the gods was liable to error, for Brahmā imagined himself to be the creator when in fact the world came into existence as a result of natural causes. The Buddha, on the other hand, was omniscient.

Yet, according to theory, the Buddha had passed completely away from the universe, had ceased in any sense to be a person, and no longer affected the world in any way. But the formula of the "Three Jewels"—"I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Doctrine, I take refuge in the Order"—became the Buddhist profession of faith very early, and was used by monk and layman alike. Taken literally the first clause was virtually meaningless, for it was impossible to take refuge in a being who had ceased to exist as such. Nevertheless the Buddha was worshiped from very early times, and he is said to have himself declared that all who had faith in him and devotion to him would obtain rebirth in heaven. In some of the earliest Buddhist sculpture, such as that of the stūpa of Bharhut (second or first century B.C.), crowds of worshipers are depicted as ecstatically prostrating themselves before the emblems of the Buddha—the wheel, the footprints, the empty throne, or the trident-shaped symbol representing the Three Jewels. At this time it was evidently not thought proper to portray the Buddha or to represent him by an icon; but in the first century A.D., whether from the influence of Greco-Roman ideas and art forms or from that of indigenous popular cults, the Buddha was represented and worshiped as an image.

A further development which encouraged the tendency to theism was the growth of interest in the *bodhisattva*. This term, literally meaning "Being of Wisdom," was first used in the sense of a previous incarnation of the Buddha. For many lives before his final birth as Siddhārtha Gautama the Bodhisattva did mighty deeds of compassion and self-sacrifice, as he gradually perfected himself in wisdom and virtue. Stories of the Bodhisattva, known as *Birth Stories* (*Jātaka*) and often adapted from popular legends and fables, were very popular with lay Buddhists, and numerous illustrations of them occur in early Buddhist art.

It is probable that even in the lifetime of the Buddha it was thought that he was only the last of a series of earlier Buddhas. Later, perhaps through Zoroastrian influence, it came to be believed that other Buddhas were yet to come, and interest developed in *Maitreya*, the future Buddha, whose coming was said to have been prophesied by the historical Buddha, and who, in years to come, would purify the world with his teaching. But if Maitreya was yet to come the chain of being which would ultimately lead to his birth (or, in the terminology of other sects, his soul) must be already in existence. Somewhere in the universe the being later to become Maitreya Buddha was already active for good. And if this one, how many more? Logically the world must be full of bodhisattvas, all striving for the welfare of other beings.

The next step in the development of the new form of Buddhism was the changing of the goal at which the believer aimed. According to Buddhist teaching there are three types of perfected beings—*Buddhas*, who perceived the truth for themselves and taught it to others, *Pratyekā-buddhas*, "Private Buddhas," who perceived it, but kept it to themselves and did not teach it, and *Arhants*,¹ "Worthies," who learned it from others, but fully realized it for themselves. According to earlier schools the earnest believer should aspire to become an Arhant, a perfected being for whom there was no rebirth, who already enjoyed Nirvāna, and who would finally enter that state after death, all vestiges of his personality dissolved. The road to Nirvāna was a hard one, and could only be covered in many lives of virtue and self-sacrifice; but nevertheless the goal began to be looked on as selfish. Surely a bodhisattva, after achieving such exalted compassion and altruism, and after reaching such a degree of perfection that he could render inestimable help to other striving beings, would not pass as quickly as possible to Nirvāna, where he could be of no further use, but would deliberately choose to remain in the world, using his spiritual power to help others, until all had found salvation. Passages of Mahāyāna scriptures describing the self-sacrifice of the bodhisattva for the welfare of all things living are among the most passionately altruistic in the world's religious literature.

The replacement of the ideal of the Arhant by that of the bodhisattva is the basic distinction between the old sects and the new, which came to

¹ Pali, *arahant*, usually translated "perfect being" in our extracts.

be known as *Mahāyāna*. Faith in the bodhisattvas and the help they afforded was thought to carry many beings along the road to bliss, while the older schools, which did not accept the bodhisattva ideal, could save only a few patient and strenuous souls.

The next stage in the evolution of the theology of the new Buddhism was the doctrine of the "Three Bodies" (*Trikāya*). If the true ideal was that of the bodhisattva, why did not Siddhārtha Gautama remain one, instead of becoming a Buddha and selfishly passing to Nirvāna? This paradox was answered by a theory of docetic type, which again probably had its origin in popular ideas prevalent among lay Buddhists at a very early period. Gautama was not in fact an ordinary man, but the manifestation of a great spiritual being. The Buddha had three bodies—the Body of Essence (*Dharmakāya*), the Body of Bliss (*Sambhogakāya*) and the Body of Magic Transformation (*Nirmāṇakāya*). It was the latter only which lived on earth as Siddhārtha Gautama, an emanation of the Body of Bliss, which dwelled forever in the heavens as a sort of supreme god. But the Body of Bliss was in turn the emanation of the Body of Essence, the ultimate Buddha, who pervaded and underlay the whole universe. Subtle philosophies and metaphysical systems were developed parallel with these theological ideas, and the Body of Essence was identified with Nirvāna. It was in fact the World Soul, the *Brahman* of the Upanishads, in a new form. In the fully developed Mahāyānist cosmology there were many Bodies of Bliss, all of them emanations of the single Body of Essence, but the heavenly Buddha chiefly concerned with our world was *Amitābha* ("Immeasurable Radiance"), who dwelt in *Sukhāvati*, "the Happy Land," the heaven of the West. With him was associated the earthly Gautama Buddha, and a very potent and compassionate Bodhisattva, *Avalokiteshvara* ("the Lord Who Looks Down").

The older Buddhism and the newer flourished side by side in India during the early centuries of the Christian era, and we read of Buddhist monasteries in which some of the monks were Mahāyānist and some Hīnayānist. But in general the Buddhists of northwestern India were either Mahāyānists or members of Hīnayāna sects much affected by Mahāyānist ideas. The austere forms of Hīnayāna seem to have been strongest in parts of western and southern India, and in Ceylon. It was from northwestern India, under the rule of the great Kushāna empire

(first to third centuries A.D.) that Buddhism spread throughout central Asia to China; since it emanated from the northwest, it was chiefly of the Mahāyāna or near-Mahāyāna type.

We have already outlined the typical Mahāyāna teaching about the heavenly Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is a matter of theology rather than of metaphysics. But Mahāyāna also produced philosophical theories which were argued with great ability, and which were influential on the thought of Hinduism, as well as on that of the Far East. The two chief schools of Mahāyāna philosophy were the *Mādhyamika* (Doctrine of the Middle Position) and the *Vijñānavāda* (Doctrine of Consciousness) or *Yogācāra* (The Way of Yoga). The former school, the founder of which was Nāgārjuna (first to second centuries A.D.), taught that the phenomenal world had only a qualified reality, thus opposing the doctrine of the Sarvāstivādins. A monk with defective eyesight may imagine that he sees flies in his begging bowl, and they have full reality for the percipient. Though the flies are not real the illusion of flies is. The Mādhyamika philosophers tried to prove that all our experience of the phenomenal world is like that of the short-sighted monk, that all beings labor under the constant illusion of perceiving things where in fact there is only emptiness. This Emptiness or Void (*Sūnyatā*) is all that truly exists, and hence the Mādhyamikas were sometimes also called *Sūnyavādins* ("exponents of the doctrine of emptiness"). But the phenomenal world is true pragmatically, and therefore has qualified reality for practical purposes. Yet the whole chain of existence is only real in this qualified sense, for it is composed of a series of transitory events, and these, being impermanent, cannot have reality in themselves. Emptiness, on the other hand, never changes. It is absolute truth and absolute being—in fact it is the same as Nirvāna and the Body of Essence of the Buddha.

Nāgārjuna's system, however, went farther than this. Nothing in the phenomenal world has full being, and all is ultimately unreal. Therefore every rational theory about the world is a theory about something unreal evolved by an unreal thinker with unreal thoughts. Thus, by the same process of reasoning, even the arguments of the Mādhyamika school in favor of the ultimate reality of Emptiness are unreal, and this argument against the Mādhyamika position is itself unreal, and so on in an infinite regress. Every logical argument can be reduced to absurdity by a process such as this. The ontological nihilism of Mādhyamika dialectic led to

the development of a special sub-school devoted to logic, the *Prāsaṅgika*² which produced works of great subtlety.

The effect of Mādhyamika nihilism was not what might be expected. Skeptical philosophies in the West, such as that of existentialism, are generally strongly flavored with pessimism. The Mādhyamikas, however, were not pessimists. If the phenomenal world was ultimately unreal, Emptiness was real, for, though every logical proof of its existence was vitiated by the flaw of unreality, it could be experienced in meditation with a directness and certainty which the phenomenal world did not possess. The ultimate Emptiness was here and now, everywhere and all-embracing, and there was in fact no difference between the great Void and the phenomenal world. Thus all beings were already participants of the Emptiness which was Nirvāna, they were already Buddha if only they would realize it. This aspect of Mādhyamika philosophy was specially congenial to Chinese Buddhists, nurtured in the doctrine of the *Tao*, and it had much influence in the development of the special forms of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, which often show a frank acceptance of the beauty of the world, and especially of the beauty of nature, as a vision of Nirvāna here and now.

The *Vijñānavāda* school was one of pure idealism, and may be compared to the systems of Berkeley and Hume. The whole universe exists only in the mind of the perceiver. The fact of illusion, as in the case of the flies in the short-sighted monk's bowl, or the experience of dreams, was adduced as evidence to show that all normal human experience was of the same type. It is possible for the monk in meditation to raise before his eyes visions of every kind which have quite as much vividness and semblance of truth as have ordinary perceptions; yet he knows that they have no objective reality. Perception therefore is no proof of the independent existence of any entity, and all perceptions may be explained as projections of the percipient mind. *Vijñānavāda*, like some Western idealist systems, found its chief logical difficulty in explaining the continuity and apparent regularity of the majority of our sense impressions, and in accounting for the fact that the impressions of most people who are looking at the same time in the same direction seem to cohere in a remarkably consistent manner. Bishop Berkeley, to escape this dilemma,

²So called from its preoccupation with *prasaṅga* the term used in Sanskrit logic for the *reductio ad absurdum*.

postulated a transcendent mind in which all phenomena were thoughts. The Vijñānavādins explained the regularity and coherence of sense-impressions as due to an underlying store of perceptions (*ālayavijñāna*) evolving from the accumulation of traces of earlier sense-impressions. These are active, and produce impressions similar to themselves, according to a regular pattern, as seeds produce plants. Each being possesses one of these stores of perception, and beings which are generically alike will produce similar perceptions from their stores at the same time. By this strange conception, which bristles with logical difficulties and is one of the most difficult of all Indian philosophy, the Vijñānavādins managed to avoid the logical conclusion of idealism in solipsism. Moreover they admitted the existence of at least one entity independent of human thought—a pure and integral being without characteristics, about which nothing could truly be predicated because it was without predicates. This was called "Suchness" (*Tathatā*) and corresponded to the Emptiness or Void of the Mādhyamikas, and to the Brahman of Vedānta. Though the terminology is different the metaphysics of Mahāyāna Buddhism has much in common with the doctrines of some of the Upanishads and of Shankara. The latter probably learned much from Buddhism, and indeed was called by his opponents a crypto-Buddhist.

For the Vijñānavāda school salvation was to be obtained by exhausting the store of consciousness until it became pure being itself, and identical with the Suchness which was the only truly existent entity in the universe. The chief means of doing this, for those who had already reached a certain stage of spiritual development, was yogic praxis. Adepts of this school were taught to conjure up visions, so that, by realizing that visionary and pragmatically real perceptions had the same vividness and subjective reality, they might become completely convinced of the total subjectivity of all phenomena. Thus the meditating monk would imagine himself a mighty god, leading an army of lesser gods against Māra, the spirit of the world and the flesh. The chief philosophers of the school were Asanga (fourth century A.D.) and Vasubandhu,³ of about the same period. According to tradition Dinnāga, the greatest of the Buddhist logicians, was a disciple of Vasubandhu.

The canons of the Mahāyāna sects contain much material which also

³ There may have been two Vasubandhus, one the approximate contemporary of Asanga and the other about a century later.

occurs in Pali, often expanded or adapted, but the interest of the Mahāyānists was largely directed to other scriptures, of which no counterparts exist in the Pali canon, and which, it was claimed, were also the pronouncements of the Buddha. These are the *Vaipulya Sūtras*, or "Expanded Discourses," of greater length than those in the Pali *Basket of Discourses* (*Sutta Piṭaka*), and written in Buddhist Sanskrit; in them the Buddha is supposed to have taught the doctrine of the heavenly Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Of these Mahāyāna sūtras pride of place must be taken by *The Lotus of the Good Law* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*), which propounds all the major doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism in a fairly simple and good literary style with parables and poetic illustrations. In translation it is the most popular Buddhist scripture in China and Japan, the Japanese Buddhists of the Nichiren sect making it their sole canonical text. An important group of Mahāyāna texts is the *Discourses on the Perfection of Wisdom* (*Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*), of which several exist, generally known by the number of verses⁴ they contain, ranging from 700 to 100,000. The primary purpose of these is to explain and glorify the ten perfections (*pāramitā*) of the Bodhisattva, and especially the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā*), but they contain much of importance on other aspects of Buddhism. Other Mahāyāna sūtras are too numerous to mention.

The Bodhisattva

The essential difference between Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism is in the doctrine of the bodhisattva, who, in Mahāyāna, becomes a divine savior, and whose example the believer is urged to follow. It must be remembered that all good Buddhists, from the Mahāyāna point of view, are bodhisattvas in the making, and the many descriptions of bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna texts provide ideals for the guidance of monk and layman alike. One of the chief qualities of the bodhisattva is his immense compassion for the world of mortals.

[From *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, 22.402-3]

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

⁴ Or more correctly the number of verses of 32 syllables each which they would contain if they had been versified. They are actually in prose.

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 are caught in the net of false doctrine, others cannot find the path (of salvation), while 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."

The Mahāyāna Ideal Is Higher Than That of the Theravāda

Mahāyāna teachers claimed that the ideal of the Theravādins—complete loss of personality as perfected beings in Nirvāna—was fundamentally selfish and trivial. The truly-perfected being should devote all his powers to saving suffering mortals. The following passage elucidates this point. It purports to be a dialogue between the Buddha and one of his chief disciples, Shāriputra (Pali *Sāriputta*).

[From *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, pp. 40-41]

"What do you think, Shāriputra? Do any of the disciples¹ and Private Buddhas² ever think, 'After we have gained full enlightenment we will bring innumerable beings . . . to complete Nirvāna?'"

"Certainly not, Lord!"

"But," said the Lord, "the bodhisattva (has this resolve). . . . A firefly . . . doesn't imagine that its glow will light up all India or shine all over it, and so the disciples and Private Buddhas don't think that they should lead all beings to Nirvāna . . . after they have gained full enlightenment. But the disc of the sun, when it has risen, lights up all India and shines all over it. Similarly the bodhisattva, . . . when he has gained full enlightenment, brings countless beings to Nirvāna."

The Suffering Savior

In many passages of the Mahāyāna scriptures is to be found what purports to be the solemn resolve made by a bodhisattva at the beginning of his career. The following fine passage will appear particularly striking to Western readers, for in it the bodhisattva not only resolves to pity and help all mortal beings,

¹ *Śrāvaka*, literally "hearer," a term often applied by Mahāyāna writers especially to adherents of Theravāda.

² *Pratyeka-buddha*, one who has achieved full enlightenment through his own insight, but does not communicate his saving knowledge to others.

but also to share their intensest sufferings. Christians and Jews cannot fail to note resemblances to the concept of the suffering Savior in Christianity and to the "Servant Passages" of Isaiah (53:3-12). It is by no means impossible that there was some Christian influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism, for Christian missionaries were active in Persia very early, and it became a center from which Nestorian Christianity was diffused throughout Asia. From the middle of the third century A.D. Persian influence in Afghanistan and Northwestern India, which had always been felt, was intensified with the rise of the Sāsānian Empire; and it was in these regions that Mahāyāna Buddhism developed and flourished. Thus Christian influence cannot be ruled out. But it is equally possible that the similarities between the concepts of the suffering savior in Buddhism and Christianity are due to the fact that compassionate minds everywhere tend to think alike.

The work from which the following passage is taken, Shāntideva's *Compendium of Doctrine*, dates from the seventh century. It is extremely valuable because it consists of lengthy quotations from earlier Buddhist literature with brief comments by the compiler, and many of the passages quoted are from works which no longer survive in their original form. The following passages are quoted from two such works, the *Instructions of Akṣayamati* (*Akṣayamati Nidāna*) and the *Sūtra of Vajradhvaṇa* (*Vajradhvaṇa Sūtra*).

[From *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, pp. 278-83]

The bodhisattva is lonely, with no . . . companion, and he puts on the armor of supreme wisdom. He acts himself, and leaves nothing to others, working with a will steeled with courage and strength. He is strong in his own strength . . . and he resolves thus:

"Whatever all beings should obtain, I will help them to obtain. . . . The virtue of generosity is not my helper—I am the helper of generosity. Nor do the virtues of morality, patience, courage, meditation and wisdom help me—it is I who help them.³ The perfections of the bodhisattva do not support me—it is I who support them. . . . I alone, standing in this round and adamant world, must subdue Māra, with all his hosts and chariots, and develop supreme enlightenment with the wisdom of instantaneous insight!" . . .

³ These six, generosity (*dāna*), moral conduct (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), courage or energy (*vīrya*), meditation (*dhyāna*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) are the *Pāramitās*, or virtues of the bodhisattva, which he has developed to perfection. Many sources add four further perfections—"skill in knowing the right means" to take to lead individual beings to salvation according to their several characters and circumstances (*upāyakaṇṭhalāya*), determination (*brahmāṇa*), strength (*bala*), and knowledge (*jñāna*). Much attention was concentrated on these perfections, especially on the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajñāpāramitā*), which was personified as a goddess, and after which numerous Buddhist texts were named.

Just as the rising sun, the child of the gods, is not stopped . . . by all the dust rising from the four continents of the earth . . . or by wreaths of smoke . . . or by rugged mountains, so the bodhisattva, the Great Being, . . . is not deterred from bringing to fruition the root of good, whether by the malice of others, . . . or by their sin or heresy, or by their agitation of mind. . . . He will not lay down his arms of enlightenment because of the corrupt generations of men, nor does he waver in his resolution to save the world because of their wretched quarrels. . . . He does not lose heart on account of their faults. . . .

"All creatures are in pain," he resolves, "all suffer from bad and hindering karma . . . so that they cannot see the Buddhas or hear the Law of Righteousness or know the Order. . . . All that mass of pain and evil karma I take in my own body. . . . I take upon myself the burden of sorrow; I resolve to do so; I endure it all. I do not turn back or run away, I do not tremble . . . I am not afraid . . . nor do I despair. Assuredly I must bear the burdens of all beings . . . for I have resolved to save them all. I must set them all free, I must save the whole world from the forest of birth, old age, disease, and rebirth, from misfortune and sin, from the round of birth and death, from the toils of heresy. . . . For all beings are caught in the net of craving, encompassed by ignorance, held by the desire for existence; they are doomed to destruction, shut in a cage of pain . . . ; they are ignorant, untrustworthy, full of doubts, always at loggerheads one with another, always prone to see evil; they cannot find a refuge in the ocean of existence; they are all on the edge of the gulf of destruction.

"I work to establish the kingdom of perfect wisdom for all beings. I care not at all for my own deliverance. I must save all beings from the torrent of rebirth with the raft of my omniscient mind. I must pull them back from the great precipice. I must free them from all misfortune, ferry them over the stream of rebirth.

"For I have taken upon myself, by my own will, the whole of the pain of all things living. Thus I dare try every abode of pain, in . . . every part of the universe, for I must not defraud the world of the root of good. I resolve to dwell in each state of misfortune through countless ages . . . for the salvation of all beings . . . for it is better that I alone suffer than that all beings sink to the worlds of misfortune. There I shall give myself into bondage, to redeem all the world from the forest of purgatory,

from rebirth as beasts, from the realm of death. I shall bear all grief and pain in my own body, for the good of all things living. I venture to stand surety for all beings, speaking the truth, trustworthy, not breaking my word. I shall not forsake them. . . . I must so bring to fruition the root of goodness that all beings find the utmost joy, unheard of joy, the joy of omniscience. I must be their charioteer, I must be their leader, I must be their torchbearer, I must be their guide to safety. . . . I must not wait for the help of another, nor must I lose my resolution and leave my tasks to another. I must not turn back in my efforts to save all beings nor cease to use my merit for the destruction of all pain. And I must not be satisfied with small successes."

The Lost Son

One of the reasons for including this passage is its remarkable resemblance to the famous parable of St. Luke's Gospel (15:11-32). As the *Lotus of the Good Law*, from which the Buddhist story is taken, was probably in existence well before Christian ideas could have found their way to India via Persia, it is unlikely that this parable owes anything to the Christian one. Similarly it is unlikely that the Christian parable is indebted to the Buddhist. Probably we have here a case of religious minds of two widely separated cultures thinking along similar lines, as a result of similar, though not identical, religious experience. For this reason the resemblances and differences of the two stories are most instructive.⁴

The Prodigal of the Christian story squanders his patrimony in riotous living. The son in the Buddhist story is a wretched creature who can only wander about begging. His fault is not so much in squandering his property as in failing to acquire wealth (i.e., spiritual merit). The Prodigal returns to his father by his own free choice, after repenting his evil ways. In the Buddhist story it is only by chance that the son meets his father again; moreover the son does not recognize the father, though the father recognizes his son—thus the heavenly Buddha knows his children and works for their salvation, though they do not recognize him in his true character, and, if they get a glimpse of him, are afraid and try to avoid him—they feel much more at ease among their own earthbound kind, in "the poor quarter of the town," where their divine father sends his messengers (perhaps representing the Bodhisattvas) to find

⁴ The text itself purports to give an interpretation of the parable in which the son toiling as a menial in his father's house is compared to the Hinayāna monk, who is unaware of the true glory of the enlightenment to which he is heir. There is little doubt, however, that the story here turned to purposes of sectarian propaganda was originally meant to have a wider significance, and we believe our interpretation to be that demanded by the spirit of the parable.