

CHAPTER 9

Buddhist tradition**TIMELINE**

	BCE	
Gautama, the Buddha	c. 563–483 BCE <i>or d. ca.</i> 411–400 BCE	
Aśoka Maurya reigns	Third century BCE c. 270–232 BCE 29–17 BCE	Jātakas first written Nikāya Buddhist canon written in Pāli language
	First century BCE	Gandhāra art begins
	CE	
	First century CE	Chinese begin translating Indian Buddhist texts
Bodhidharma	Fifth century CE fl. 480–520	Buddhaghosa writes Pāli commentaries
Hui-neng (China)	638–713 668–935	
Padmasambhava travels to Tibet	746	Silla Dynasty (Korea)
	750–800	Pala Dynasty (India)
Kūkai (Japan)	774–835 809–823 845	Emperor Saga reigns (Japan) Persecution of Buddhists (China)
	935–1392	Koryŏ Dynasty (Korea)
Milarepa (Tibet)	1040–1135	
Hōnen (Japan)	1133–1212	
Eisai (Japan)	1141–1215	
Chinul (Korea)	1158–1210 1185–1336	Kamakura period (Japan)
Shinran (Japan)	1173–1261	
Dōgen (Japan)	1200–1253	
Nichiren (Japan)	1222–1282	
Tsong- kha-pa (Tibet)	1357–1419	
Hakuin (Japan)	1685–1768	
Bashō (Japan)	1644–1694	
Sulak Sivaraksa (Thailand)	1933–present	
Tenzin Gyatso (Tibet, India)	1935–present	

Buddhism is named after a man called Gautama. He was given the title Buddha or Awakened One because he woke up to see reality as it is. Gautama Buddha lived in the sixth century BCE during a culturally fertile time when cash flow, trade, cities, and armies were all growing in north India. He Gautama was part of a heterodox *śramaṇa* movement that challenged the authority of the Āryan religious system headed by *brahmin* priests. Gautama established orders of monks and nuns. The social forms of Buddhist monastic life eventually spread throughout Asia. Springing from early Buddhism, the tradition split into two major groups, now known as *Nikāya* and *Mahāyāna*.

The *Nikāya* Buddhist canon was first written in the Pāli language. The tradition is called Southern Buddhism because it took root in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Siam, Kampuchea, and Laos. *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is based on Indian texts written in Sanskrit that were eventually lost in India, but translated into Chinese and later Tibetan. It is called Northern Buddhism because it spread into Tibet, Central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. Both *Nikāya* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism heavily influenced Vietnam.

PART 1 BUDDHIST PLAYERS

THE ULTIMATE PRINCIPLE

Universal dharma and Buddha-dharma

Dharma is the transcendent principle of the universe that upholds all existence. Gautama's teachings are called **Buddha-dharma** because they are based in his discovery of the law of the universe. Buddha boiled down the universal dharma to four great facts, usually called the Four Noble Truths. Buddha discovered in the very fabric of the universe the secret of how to transcend the universe.

IMAGINAL PLAYERS

The concept of what kinds of beings are in the cosmos differs between *Nikāya* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhists.

Nikāya Buddhists limit their discussion to (generally) four Buddhas of past history, and one future buddha named Maitreya who abides in a place known as Tuṣita Heaven. *Mahāyāna* Buddhists completely agree with the *Nikāya* Buddhists with regard to the five buddhas. However, they also speak of several more enlightened beings who are objects of prayer, including the Buddha of Boundless Light (who is the focus of Pure Land *Mahāyāna* practice), and several bodhisattvas (who are very popular in Tibetan Buddhism).

Buddha Amitābha (Amitayus)

The *Mahāyāna* Buddhist theory of the three **buddha bodies** accounts for the appearance of beings in the imaginal realm. A **buddha** or a high-level **bodhisattva** can appear to practitioners in a visionary form known in Sanskrit as the *sambhogakaya*, where *kaya* means body, and *bhoga* is from the root *bhuj*, which means to enjoy – as in a meal. (Not all sects of Buddhism acknowledge or emphasize the *sambhogakaya*. But visionary buddhas and bodhisattvas are important in Northern Buddhism among Pure Land, Shingon, and Tibetan Buddhists.)

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara

Avalokiteśvara is the lord (*īśvara*) who gazes down upon (*avalokita*) suffering living beings with compassion. This bodhisattva specializes in freeing people from pain and teaches them compassion. Avalokiteśvara is known as Chen-re-zig in Tibetan, Kwan-yin in Chinese, and Kannon in Japanese. Faithful Tibetan Buddhists consider that Avalokiteśvara appears in the person of the fourteenth Dalai Lama, as well as in the imaginal realm. The Sanskrit mantra associated with this bodhisattva of compassion is: OM MAṆI PADME HŪM. Pure Land Buddhists of East Asia pray to this visionary bodhisattva for mercy.

Bodhisattva Mañjūśrī

Mañjūśrī is the bodhisattva of wisdom. This bodhisattva is depicted in iconography with a sword in his right hand that symbolizes discriminating wisdom, and a book in his left that symbolizes learning. These items indicate that Mañjūśrī helps dedicated practitioners develop their wisdom. According to the Lotus Sūtra (a



Plate 9.1 "OM MANI PADME HUM." This is the Tibetan mantra of compassion associated with the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. Faithful Tibetan Buddhists consider the Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso to be a human manifestation of this Bodhisattva because he continually meditates to generate compassion for all living beings in this world. This stone carved mantra is found near the Dalai Lama's residence in Dharamsala, India.

Mahāyāna text) Mañjūsī is Gautama Buddha's teacher in a past life. This wisdom bodhisattva also appeared to the Tibetan Buddhist reformer Tsong-kha-pa in the fourteenth century, among other fortunate disciples through the ages. Mañjūsī's Sanskrit **mantra** is: OṂ ARA PACANA DHĪ.

Bodhisattva Tārā

Tārā is a feminine bodhisattva who shows up in twenty-one colors. Her white form symbolizes health and long life, while her green form symbolizes prosperity in life and spiritual practice. Tārā's outstanding feature is a quick response to the plight of others who appeal to her for help. She frees people from fear and clears obstacles. Tārā's mystic lineage demonstrates the mental nature of the imaginal bodhisattvas: Tārā was created from one

of the tears of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. In turn, Avalokiteśvara was created from the mind of Amitābha, the buddha of boundless light. And Amitābha was created from the mind of a personification of the primal ground of awareness known as the Adi Buddha. Tārā's Sanskrit mantra is: OM TĀRE TUTĀRE TURE SVĀHĀ.

Saṃsāra's invisible beings

Buddhist cosmology speaks of many godlings that are not normally seen by human beings. These exist within saṃsāra, which means they are not enlightened and are therefore still subject to rebirth. Buddhists do not worship these godlings, but recognize their existence. There are different imaginal places where godlings live, including: the arena where the proud demi-gods (also

called titans) endlessly fight; the Heaven of the Thirty-three (godlings) headed by Indra; the arena of the godling Yama; **Tuṣita heaven** where Maitreya, the future buddha, abides; and the **Abodes of Brahmā** where (in a realm of pure form) the godling Brahmā manifests the four pure emotions of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

Buddhist cosmology also speaks of two types of beings with forms of life that are lower than humans or animals: hungry ghosts who endlessly crave food and drink; and hell beings who suffer tremendously in either hot or cold regions of hell. Humans do not usually see these lower beings, although on occasion they do appear in visions and dreams. Like the godlings of *saṃsāra*, hungry ghosts and hell beings will be reborn over and over again somewhere in *saṃsāra* until they become enlightened. Some bodhisattvas visit them or live with them so as to be of help. In addition, some people regularly leave a small portion of each meal as an offering for the hungry ghosts.

EXCEPTIONAL PLAYERS

Supreme buddhas

Gautama, the founder of Indian Buddhism, is counted as the fourth or seventh **supreme buddha**. Maitreya, the future buddha, is expected to descend from Tuṣita heaven into our world when all remnants of Gautama's teaching are forgotten. Maitreya is a messiah figure depicted in artwork seated on a Western-style chair with one leg crossed and the other touching the ground, as if poised to come and help worldlings quickly. Twelve acts characterize the life of every supreme buddha beginning with a descent from Tuṣita heaven, culminating in an awakening, and ending with passing away in the town of Kusinagara. (Gautama's biographers were aware of this tradition, and made his life story fit the pattern.)

Arhats

An **arhat** is an exceptional person who sees reality as it is. Due to the realization of **non-self**, arhats escape the round of rebirths. Many of Gautama's disciples became

arhats. Nikāya Buddhists emphasize the goal of becoming an arhat – which is accomplished in four stages as the person becomes a stream-entrant, once-returner, non-returner, and finally arhat. In the course of this spiritual development ten fetters (mental obstacles) are destroyed. (1) Stream-entrants are never again reborn in *saṃsāra*'s lower realms (as animals, hungry ghosts, or hell beings) because they no longer believe in **ātman**, an eternal self; consider that rituals eliminate ignorance; and doubt that Buddha-dharma is a proper guide to **nirvāṇa**. (2) Once-returners are reborn into the human realm at most one more time because they have weakened sensual desires and hatred. (3) Non-returners are reborn into the pure form and formless realms of *saṃsāra*, but never again as human beings because they have destroyed sensual desires and hatred. (4) Arhats are never reborn again after passing away. In their last life they may still experience physical suffering, but it does not cause mental *dukkha* because they have destroyed subtle desire for the pure form and formless realms, pride, restlessness, and finally ignorance.

Bodhisattvas

A person becomes a bodhisattva the moment he or she generates **bodhicitta**, the profound thought to become enlightened based on great compassion for the suffering of others. Bodhisattvas practice the six perfections after vowing to work for the sake of all sentient beings – including animals, hell beings, one's enemies, and so on.

- **Generosity.** This involves giving material aid, freedom from fear, and helpful advice. Bodhisattvas cultivate a keen sense of generosity toward all sentient beings without exception. They work to ever increase their spirit of giving even for those who may try to harm them.
- **Morality.** This involves steps on the Noble Eightfold Path in the category of morality, namely right speech, right action, and right livelihood. Bodhisattvas cultivate loving kindness (giving happiness to others) and compassion (removing the suffering of others) while engaging in these acts.

- **Patience.** This is not a passive withdrawal from the world. It is a courageous practice that gives inner strength and freedom from fear in difficult situations. It involves the forbearance of forgiveness, and enduring hardship.
- **Joyous effort.** This is enthusiasm to persevere in virtuous work. Bodhisattvas adopt a joyful attitude toward religious practice, and never give up. This is opposite to laziness, discouragement, or a sense of inferiority that says: “This will never help.” “How could I possibly do this?”
- **Calm abiding.** This is Right Contemplation on the Noble Eightfold Path. This balanced, flexible, and concentrated mental state (known as *śamatha*) leads to an experience of the pure form and formless realms.
- **Wisdom.** The perfection of wisdom involves seeing the actual nature of phenomena. It is the opposite of ignorance. Bodhisattvas recognize non-self as applied to everything in the universe. This means they see that all phenomena arise depending on causes and conditions, and hence are empty of self-nature. The Sanskrit word for emptiness is *śūnyatā*.

Gautama Buddha (563–483 BCE)

The following story of Gautama’s life is in line with a traditional insider perspective. Many elements are symbolic. Other details are taken from Buddhist scriptures that are supposed to relate Gautama’s words about his experiences and mental development. It is important to keep in mind that Buddhist tradition finds meaning in these events, although they do not always reflect reality from a strictly historical perspective.

Former lives

On occasion Buddha related **Jātaka tales** about his previous lives to inform his audience about their meetings in past lives. The Jātakas were put into writing starting in the third century BCE. They resemble Aesop’s fables, in which a moral encapsulates a brief tale of talking animals or other adventuresome beings. The Jātaka tales are lessons on character development based on the many lives of the bodhisattva Sumedha

(including humans and non-humans) up until his eventual birth as Gautama Buddha. They are grouped according to the moral perfections of: generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness, and equanimity.

The Jātakas begin by illustrating the powerful turn of mind called **bodhicitta**. With this aspiration to become enlightened for the sake of all living beings, Sumedha started on the path to Buddha-hood. It so happened that four innumerable and 100,000 eons ago the ascetic Sumedha left his hermitage in his bark garments and flew through the air (demonstrating a **siddhi**). He noticed a crowd of people, and was told that the path was being cleared for Buddha Dīpaṃkara – one Buddha in a long line of Awakened Ones. Upon hearing the word “buddha,” his heart spontaneously became joyful. Sumedha wanted to help clear the path, not to miss this opportunity to practice virtue. In doing so, he maintained awareness of the sound “buddha, buddha, buddha” in his heart. Sumedha had not finished clearing his part of the path by the time Dīpaṃkara arrived. Seeing this, the ascetic prostrated himself, and spread his long hair for Dīpaṃkara to use as a mat. At that moment, face down in the mud, with Buddha trampling his hair, Sumedha generated a profound thought: He resolved to become a supreme buddha like Dīpaṃkara.

Early life

Gautama was born in the town of Kapilāvastu, capital of the Śākyan confederacy in the Himalayan foothills. His father Śuddhodana was a tribal chieftain who married two sisters in cross-cousin marriages: Prajāpati and Māyā. Māyā, the younger sister, gave birth to Gautama, but died when the prince was just a week old. Therefore Aunt Prajāpati raised the boy whom some texts call Siddhartha. According to custom, brahmin soothsayers were invited to assess the infant’s potential. Traditional stories of Buddha’s life say they agreed that the child would become a great dharma-cakrin or turner of the wheel of law. Yet it was unclear to all but one brahmin whether the child would become a worldly ruler or spiritual teacher. The seer who predicted a religious future for the child kept an

eye on him over the years, and became one of Gautama's earliest disciples. But Śuddhodana resisted the notion that his son would abandon his kṣatriya (warrior) status to adopt the life of a wanderer. Hoping that Gautama would never become disillusioned with power and politics, Śuddhodana provided his son with luxurious meals, musical entertainment, and courtesans. At age 16 Gautama married his cousin Yaśodharā, and thus led a householder's life.

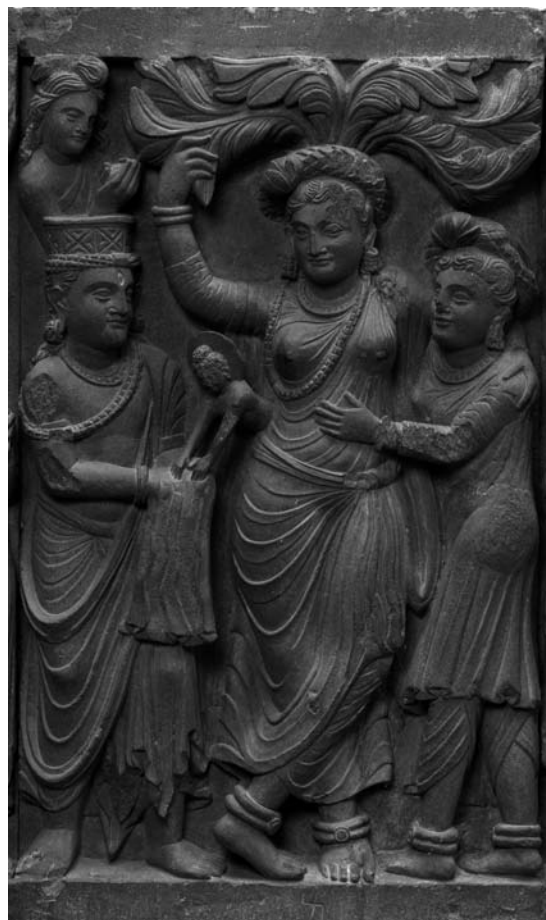


Plate 9.2 "Buddha's mother giving birth." As Buddha's mother Maya Devi conceived, she dreamed of a white elephant who touched her side. The child was born in the Lumbinī Gardens as she was *en route* to her native home. As Maya Devi stood with her right hand stretched out to hold the branch of a tree, it bent down to assist her. Then the future Buddha was born from her right side. Maya Devi died seven days later.

The Great Renunciation

Chieftain Śuddhodana remained apprehensive about his son's fate for nearly three decades. Thus, when Gautama wished to leave the palace compounds at Kapilāvastu to see the spring groves in full bloom, Śuddhodana ordered his son's path to be cleared of anything repulsive. It is said that the worldly godlings were jealous of the city's sparkling beauty with its streamers and garlands, so they made four figures appear to Gautama in turn: one old, one diseased, one dead, and yet another who was dead to the world. The old man had bulging veins, loose teeth, wrinkles, scrawny hair, and patchy skin. The sick man was panting and muttering, with his swollen belly heaving and limp arms dangling. The dead man was hard like a piece of wood, being carried to his funeral pyre with weeping relatives in tow. After witnessing these miserable scenes, Gautama was stunned like a lion jabbed with a poisoned dart.

The shock of the old man, sick man, and corpse abated only when Gautama saw a scrawny śramaṇa wandering around begging alms. At this fourth sight Gautama was moved to renounce his life of luxury and join the śramaṇa movement in search of an end to *duhkḥa*. What passed as ordinary features of life in the Ganges Valley gave Gautama an aesthetic shock. Determined to find an end to suffering, the prince stole away from the palace compound into the forest with one companion and his horse late one night – against the wishes of his father. This rejection of his kṣatriya roots is known as the Great Renunciation. Gautama sent his companion Chandaka home with the horse and jewelry; cut his hair to the length of two inches (a style he kept for the rest of his days because his hair did not grow); and dressed himself in rags. For the next six years the former prince led a śramaṇa's life of poverty and renunciation.

The Ascetic period

The former Śākya prince sought spiritual guidance, and studied under two gurūs who taught him how to transcend the sense desire realm, and enter the pure form and formless realms. He was so avid in his spiritual labors that people called him a *mahaśramaṇa*, great striver. Under Āḷāra Kālma's guidance Gautama passed through the four boundless emotions of the

Brahmā Abodes in the pure form realm, and up to the third level of the realm of no form known as nothing whatsoever. But that was not enough for Gautama, so he sought Udraka Rama's guidance and attained the fourth and highest level – neither perception nor non-perception. This was no small accomplishment. Yet, the great striver was not satisfied because he realized that these high spiritual states were still in the realm of saṃsāra. Gautama found that negative attitudes could still manifest once he descended from the pure form and formless realms. (For instance, although unbounded love characterized experience on the first level in the realm pure form, that love could be corrupted by hatred once the meditation was over.) Even reaching the bounds of experience itself at the level of neither perception nor non-perception, the mahāśramaṇa felt no assurance that ties to the cycle of birth and death were cut. Thus, feeling he could learn no more from any teacher, Gautama struck out on his own. At that point he had five disciples who followed him – one of whom was the brahmin who had predicted his spiritual vocation some three decades earlier.

The Middle Way

Gautama took up a regimen of severe asceticism, thinking it might help him conquer suffering and attain a deathless state. Consuming dirt, herbs, and the soup of one bean a day, he grew emaciated to the point of collapse. Hair fell from his pores; his limbs and hair became discolored; and his spine poked out from the front of his stomach. Then, Gautama dreamed that a woman would offer him food; it would be helpful, and he should accept it. Thus, knocking on death's door, the mahāśramaṇa determined that this extreme practice was opening the way to death, but not to deathless enlightenment. Feeling he could not realize anything more in such a weakened condition, Gautama accepted food when a village girl offered him rice and yogurt. Partaking of this offering reflected a new attitude toward spiritual practice, which involved rejecting the extremes of denial and indulgence. (Buddhists call this the Middle Way.) Then the mahāśramaṇa determined that no matter what happened to him – live or die – he would not budge until he had found a way to conquer dukkha. With such determination, new things started

happening to Gautama as he stayed in what became known as the Immovable Spot.

The enlightenment

Prior to his enlightenment, Gautama experienced a kratophany as he sat under a fig tree near the Nairanjana River determined to escape compulsory rebirth and thus conquer death. Three challenges put to the mahāśramaṇa by a character called Māra, lord of illusion: (1) Māra offered his daughters, but Gautama promptly identified them by name as discontent, delight, and desire. (2) Māra attacked the mahāśramaṇa with his army, but Gautama turned the fiery arrows into flowers by meditating on compassion. (3) Māra tried to snare Gautama with the illusion of self; but the mahāśramaṇa recognized himself to be the actual house builder who constructs the illusion of an independent self.

The night in which Gautama attained enlightenment was divided into three watches:

- **First watch:** 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. Gautama recalled his own past lives including name, family, diet, pleasures, pains, and death. His inner vision was unobstructed as he opened the divine eye.
- **Second watch:** 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. The universe appeared as though in a spotless mirror as Gautama's divine eye opened further. He saw the past lives of countless beings, disappearing and reappearing over eons, and generated great compassion. He understood the law of karma and its fruits: harmful deeds produce suffering, while kind deeds produce happiness.
- **Third watch:** 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. Gautama's divine eye was fully opened, and he awakened by gaining wisdom and ending sorrow. He realized the Four Great Facts, which posit that suffering ends (nirvāṇa) with the cessation of birth, old age, and death. He comprehended the chain of dependent arising devolving from enlightenment to ignorance.

Gautama invented a mindfulness meditation that involved careful attention to his mind–body process. He initiated this meditation from the fourth dhyāna of equanimity in the realm of pure form (see Table 9.1). Through it, he deeply understood the **three marks of**

existence: impermanence, suffering, and lack of intrinsic self. Thus Gautama became a buddha. He woke up, and would not be subject to rebirth again. After awakening to the nature of reality, he remained in

contemplation for seven weeks. Then, prompted by a godling, the new buddha overcame an initial reluctance to teach, and declared that the path to transcendence was open to all.

BOX: 9.1 SYMBOLS: MĀRA'S CHALLENGES

The character Māra, lord of illusion, functions as a religious symbol in Buddha's biography. In Buddhist cosmology he is situated at the highest level of saṃsāra, acting like a guardian whose job is to incite desire so that beings will remain in the cycle of becoming. Ironically, Māra's appearance seems to inspire Gautama to clarify the terms of his own search for enlightenment. In Buddha's life story Māra appears at critical moments when Gautama is at a turning point:

- Māra asks Gautama to turn back when the prince leaves home to embark on the Great Renunciation.
- Māra appears immediately prior to Gautama's enlightenment, and tries three times to dissuade the mahāśramaṇa from going forward with enlightenment by offering his daughters, attacking with his army, and presenting the illusion of self.

- After Gautama awakens, Māra appears to persuade him to pass away without teaching; but the new Buddha promises to pass away only after the fourfold **saṃgha** of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen is fully established.
- Three months before Buddha passes away Māra appears to collect upon Gautama's promise made some forty-five years earlier. At that point, since the saṃgha was fully established and neither Ānanda nor any other disciple requested that their teacher live to his full complement of years, Buddha agreed to pass away after three months.

Past the scuse desire realm ruled by Māra are two higher realms of saṃsāa. The three realms of saṃsāra involve a range of experiences for sentient beings – from hot hells to rarified mental states where there is no form whatsoever. The trouble with all these states is that beings are bound to cycle around from one type to another endlessly – unless they attain enlightenment by seeing the true nature of reality.

Table 9.1 Realms of saṃsāra

8th <i>dhyāna</i>	Abstract States	Neither perception nor non-perception	No form
7th <i>dhyāna</i>		Nothing whatsoever	No form
6th <i>dhyāna</i>		Boundless consciousness	No form
5th <i>dhyāna</i>		Boundless space	No form
4th <i>dhyāna</i>	Brahmā Abodes	Boundless equanimity	Pure form
3rd <i>dhyāna</i>		Boundless joy	Pure form
2nd <i>dhyāna</i>		Boundless compassion	Pure form
1st <i>dhyāna</i>		Boundless love	Pure form
High rebirth	High	Worldly godlings (Devas)	Sense desire
High rebirth		Titans	Sense desire
High rebirth		Humans	Sense desire
Low rebirth	Low	Animals	Sense desire
Low rebirth		Hungry ghosts	Sense desire
Low rebirth		Hell beings	Sense desire

Establishing the Saṃgha

The Buddhist saṃgha was fourfold, comprising monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. But the establishment of a saṃgha for women seemed to cause Gautama some hesitation. After her husband Śuddhodana (Gautama's father) died, Prajāpati came with "five hundred" Śākya women to see the new Buddha. Gautama was her sister's child, whom she had raised from early infancy. She asked him to found a spiritual community for women – but only after being asked three times did he consent. On the third try, Buddha admitted that nothing inherent in a woman would prevent her from awaken-

ing. Thus, having articulated the egalitarian potential of all women, and seeing his aunt's single-mindedness, Buddha established a **bhikkṣuṇī** order. Members of the early saṃgha included members of Gautama's family, other members of the Śākya clan, and people from neighboring clans.

While the new śramaṇa tradition was quite successful, there were detractors – not the least of whom was Devadatta, the jealous cousin who twice tried to kill Buddha. Some laypeople accused Buddha of splitting up families by drawing not only men but also women away from their household lives. Under such lines of attack Buddha and his renunciate saṃgha came up

BOX 9.2 INTERPRETATIONS: ADVICE ON LISTENING

A Buddhist is advised to approach the Buddha-dharma in three stages, by: (1) listening to the teachings, (2) thinking about them, and (3) meditating upon them (Tsong-kha-pa 2000: 55–63).

Listening. A person should be very attentive when listening to religious teachings, so that the meaning can be understood. Listening involves contemplating the benefits that come from hearing the Buddha-dharma. The benefits include understanding how to lead one's life. To help one listen more closely, the person is advised to respect the teacher. A metaphor is used to illustrate three faults of listening that a person should avoid. The person should avoid being like three pots: one that is turned upside-down, one that is dirty inside, and one that has a hole in it. The upside-down pot indicates that one should be receptive to the teachings. The dirty pot suggests that one should have a pure mind (free of arrogance or contempt) while listening. The pot with a hole points out that one should not be forgetful or distracted when hearing religious teachings.

Thinking. It is not enough to just hear the words of Buddha's teachings. After listening, a person

should consider the meaning of the texts, asking questions like: What sense do the teachings make? How might contradictions in the teachings be resolved? How could these teachings be applied?

Meditating. After intellectually analyzing the spiritual teachings, a person must meditate on what one has discerned by thinking. This involves "mixing one's mind with dharma" by taking a realization and contemplating it deeply. For example, a teaching on the virtue of patience might be first heard, and then analyzed with questions such as: What are the benefits of patience? What are the ill-effects of anger? Then, for example, once the person has a slight inkling that there might be a benefit to patience, that inkling is held steady in clear awareness so that the insight can deepen.

There are two levels of truth to the Buddha-dharma: ultimate and provisional. Thus most of Buddha's teachings are interpretable – meaning they are not absolutely true from the most profound point of view. Only passages speaking of no sentient beings, no composition, and no production are definitive, because they speak about the ultimate nature of reality. Statements that refer to living beings, self, and humans are provisional. This is because such things are dependently arising and do not exist independently (Tsong-kha-pa 2002: 112–113).

with rules that were at once respectful to society, and conducive to awakening. To avoid scandal and distraction, bhikshus and bhikṣunīs did not live together during the rainy seasons, and they observed a rule that forbade one man and one woman śramaṇa to sit alone together. While some training precepts were to prevent moral collapse among the renunciates, the rule that assured the seniority of every male over every female member of the saṃgha seemed to reinforce a misogynist cultural habit. At the end of her life Prajāpati asked Buddha to drop the extra rules for women – but he did not. Yet at the end of his life Buddha stated that unimportant rules of conduct might be omitted. Apparently, because the *Tathāgata* did not specify which rules were unimportant, the early saṃgha did not amend any. And though some customs observed by members of the saṃgha were modified according to cultural circumstances, the rules that pertain to perpetual lack of a woman's seniority over a man's has never been changed.

Initially, the bhikṣus and bhikṣunīs assembled for the duration of the rainy season, and wandered for the rest of each year. They were not to frequent the same houses over and over again, and were to eat what was given to them. This meant a small handful of the food prepared for the family – not anything special for the almsmen and almswomen. They were allowed to eat meat if it was offered, as long as no animal was killed for them and they had not asked for meat or chosen the animal. At times Gautama and some of the renunciates would accept a dinner invitation – which according to their custom should be completed before noon. Devadatta initiated a saṃgha reformist movement, arguing that the rules were too lax. He siphoned off a group of disciples from the **bhikṣu** saṃgha. They began to live by more stringent rules – sleeping under trees instead of in huts, not eating meat, refusing dinner invitations, and so forth. Gautama persisted in his Middle Way approach to spiritual life, and condemned Devadatta's efforts to cause schism in the saṃgha. It is said that Devadatta's followers left him and returned to the main fold. (To this day, causing schism in the saṃgha is considered among the most heinous of non-virtuous acts.) Devadatta's ambitions came to a bitter end with an untimely death, however.

Laypeople supported the renunciate saṃgha through almsgiving as bhikṣus and bhikṣunīs arrived

before noon at their doors. Those with more wealth donated land and resources for the establishment of rain retreat residences. The courtesan Amrapali is well known for her donation of a mango grove to support the fledgling Buddhist community. (She actually became a bhikṣunī later in life.) Her gift allowed Buddha's disciples to reside safely during the rainy season when travel was prohibited, due to the injury to living beings caused by trampling about in the mud. Gradually as the renunciate saṃgha grew, the land and property dedicated for them needed maintenance. King Bimbisūra had donated land that turned into a whole village establishment. Eventually, this accumulation of resources laid the foundations for the Buddhist monastic institution. Monasticism became a hallmark of Buddhist life as it spread from India throughout Asia – and it continues until today.

Buddha's Parinirvāṇa and Legacy

On the full moon day in the month of Vaisaka (April/May) Gautama attained **parinirvāṇa**. This was exactly eighty years after his birth, and forty-five years after waking up. Buddha left no successor. His son the bhikṣu Rāhula had passed away – as had his mother, Gautama's former wife. Furthermore, his two chief disciples Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana had also passed away. In any case there was no indication that Gautama intended to appoint a successor. Instead, he instructed the disciples to use the Buddha-dharma as their guide. When the *Tathāgata* attained parinirvāṇa, his body was cremated and the relics were distributed. These were enshrined in simple stupas, funeral monuments.

Monks and nuns who were Gautama's disciples did not use images. They were free of all possessions except ten items: three robes (outer garment, undergarment, cloak), a food bowl, a belt, a razor, a needle, a water strainer, a staff, and a toothpick. The earliest surviving images widely used in the Buddhist tradition were **aniconic**, including an empty throne, tree of enlightenment, wheel of the law, and footprints. These symbols represented the fact that Buddha left no trace of his physical self after the parinirvāṇa. As the Buddhist lay form of worship developed, pictorial representations of Buddha's life story became a popular means of decorating the stupas. The Mahayanist emphasis on bodhisattvas also inspired figural representations of

those beings who purposefully take rebirth in the world to rid others of suffering. Buddha was even given a Greek-looking face from the artists of Gandhāra.

A Buddhist council was called during the first rainy season after Gautama passed away. The arhats gathered to recite the vinaya and sūtra material, to consolidate their knowledge. But in the years that followed, the Buddhist tradition fragmented. About a century after Buddha's parinirvāṇa, a second Buddhist council was held. In the prosperous city of Vaiśālī participants were polarized into two main camps: (1) a liberal group called the Mahāsāṃghikas, or Great Saṃgha, and (2) over a dozen splinter groups of traditionalists that can be called Nikāya Buddhists. These Nikāya Buddhists spread throughout India and Southeast Asia. Among them, only the Sthaviravada group survives today as the Theravāda or Way of the Elders school. Meanwhile, the Great Saṃgha group became the basis of the numerous Mahāyāna schools of central and east Asia. About a century after the initial main break into two camps, King Aśoka called a third Buddhist council. He was the first Buddhist king of India, and wanted to bring doctrinal clarity to the religion. From an outsider perspective, this move may be viewed as an attempt to make Buddhism a status quo religion that would reinforce the political structure of the Mauryan Empire.

HISTORICAL PLAYERS

Aśoka Maurya (c. 270–232 BCE)

In Gautama's lifetime, Magadha had become the most powerful among sixteen territories in the Ganges valley. After decades of warring, Magadha absorbed the smaller territories, including Buddha's own native region that had been democratically ruled by the Śākya clan. Buddha's old stomping ground became the center of the first Indian Empire shortly after Alexander the Great's arrival and precipitous departure from the Indus Valley. A young, capable, and ambitious man named Candragupta Maurya seized the Magadhan throne and extended the boundaries of this powerful state, forming India's first empire. His grandson Aśoka Maurya (274–236 BCE) became the first Buddhist king. Aśoka's empire was the largest ever before

established in India, extending from Gandhāra in the west to Bihar in the east. Yet, after Aśoka's death the Mauryan Empire atrophied. In the course of Aśoka's first (and only) armed conquest, the king experienced a radical change of heart. While he initially enacted the more aggressive administrative policies of his father and grandfather, the shock of seeing 100,000 people slain in the Kalinga war on the eastern seaboard prompted the emperor to adopt a policy of non-violence.

Aśoka had edicts inscribed on boulders at the borders of Mauryan territory that broadcast details of his social, judicial, and administrative policies to assure outsiders of the benevolence of his reign. He aimed to impress upon neighboring regions that his policies were non-aggressive by declaring that Mauryan officials were to administer the empire according to dharma. Moreover, he had dharma teachings carved on rocks, pillars, and cave walls to instill morality into people of the empire. Aśoka considered the people's welfare his greatest duty, so he composed the edicts in the common people's language to achieve maximum exposure. In the edicts, the Aśoka made broad use of the word dharma or duty, combining it with other words showing his subjects where to focus their morality: for example, giving (dharma-dana), distributing wealth (dharma-samvibhaga), kinship (dharma-sambandha), moral pleasure (dharma-rati). Through these edicts, his subjects were taught to respect the authority of their parents, elders, and teachers. Following the king's example, they were also encouraged to consider the needs of religious ascetics, as well as the poor, infirm, and aged. Aśoka situated massive stone pillars, identified by the royal insignia, along prominent roadways, urban sites, and places of pilgrimage; while cave edicts dedicated their hallowed spaces to monks for use during the rainy season.

In the tenth year of Aśoka's reign, two years after the aggression on Kalinga, the king gave up his royal pleasure tours in favor of dharma tours. He began preaching to people of all social stations, distributing gifts to brāhmaṇas and śramaṇas, and making pilgrimages. He provided welfare subsidies and built roads lined with rest houses, watering sheds, medicinal herbs, and shade trees. To promote happiness here and in the hereafter, Aśoka instituted a government position for moral supervisors (dharma-mahamatra). The officers were to assure the support of all religious sects within

the empire, and promote religious toleration among the people. They were also charged to distribute honors, impose penalties, and supervise public morality, including the humane treatment of animals. The king specifically named animals that had the right to life in his territory including those with two feet, four feet, birds, and aquatic creatures. Rock Edict I states that no living creature should be killed in Pataliputra, his capital. Pillar Edict V tells people that

twenty-six years after his coronation, the king made it illegal to kill parrots, wild geese, pigeons, squirrels, and household animals . . . just to name a few! Aśoka's inscriptions probably became indecipherable fairly shortly after his reign, as his empire shrunk and policies were reversed. The edicts were not deciphered again until 1837.

In gestures of goodwill, and perhaps for self-assurance, the king provided medicine to neighboring

BOX 9.3 CULTURE CONTRAST: CROSSING THE SILK ROUTES – CHINA MEETS INDIA

Buddhism crossed the Silk Routes and entered China during the second half of the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The Chinese already had two long-established complementary traditions, Confucianism and Taoism. But there was some degree of psychological readiness among the elite as well as the peasants for a new perspective on life. Peasants were interested in the prospect of help from bodhisattvas, while the elite were curious about the personal charisma and power of Buddhist monks. In spite of this, it took about three centuries for the alien tradition to be accepted into scholarly circles. Texts had to be translated – and ironing out the incompatibilities between Indian and Chinese worldviews required some finesse.

Language. As if it were not enough of a problem fitting Indian thought into Chinese culture, the very project of literally translating concepts from Sanskrit into Chinese posed challenges. Sanskrit uses an alphabet, and has a detailed grammar, while Chinese uses characters without systematic and elaborate grammatical rules. Given this foundation, sophisticated philosophical concepts became even more difficult to render. (Some Indian abstract notions are put into very concrete terms with Chinese cultural nuances – such as “round” for “perfection.”)

Perspective. Buddhist thought is very psychological, while Confucian thought was politically minded, and classical Daoist thought was nature-oriented. Yet Confucians became interested in Buddhist ethics, which seemed to reinforce their native values in many respects. On the other hand, Daoists became fascinated by the meditative skills of Buddhist monks. (Chinese culture creatively assimilated features of Buddhism that were culturally compatible.)

Afterlife. The Indian and Chinese goals for the afterlife are at odds. The Indian worldview places human beings in a nearly endless cycle of past and future rebirths – holding the ultimate value of removing oneself from the compulsory cycle of rebirth. The Chinese worldview places human beings in a long line of ancestors – awarding high status to those who are powerful and long-lived. From the Chinese point of view ancestors must be kept in the loop of communication, and the prospect of an uncertain rebirth rips the social fabric.

Family values. Indian culture dealt with the discomfort of supporting a population of religious wanderers who rejected family life. The option of renouncing the world had already been deeply inculcated into India's value system before Buddhism made its way to China. By contrast, the Chinese could not easily justify a lifestyle of alms begging and celibacy. Thus in Confucian cultures the Buddhist altar included reminders of the ancestors, and celibate clergy were understood as bringing spiritual rewards to their families.

territories, and preached respect for their traditions. Aśoka's influence is felt to this day not only within India, but also in greater India. He sent emissaries to five Hellenistic empires, including Syria and Macedonia. In addition, in line with his enthusiasm for dharma, he sent his son and daughter to establish a Buddhist lineage for monks and nuns in Sri Lanka. The lineage of monks established by Aśoka's son persists in Sri Lanka to this day, but the line of bhikṣunīs was eliminated centuries ago under the pressure of warfare. Today, women in Sri Lanka take the novice vows and wear white garments to show their commitment to the Buddhist dharma. Sri Lanka remains the country with the longest continuous history of Buddhism in the world.

Bodhidharma (c. 5–6 CE)

The Chinese received Buddhism in bits and pieces, with no overarching structure, as texts, clergy, and artwork trickled in along with the merchants. The Chinese had three basic approaches to Buddhism: (1) Some tried to copy Indian Buddhism; these did not pan out over the long run. (2) Some arranged the diverse Indian texts hierarchically (for example, Tiantai and Hua-yan); these were spiritually effective, intellectually challenging, and grew into elaborate institutions, but they had difficulty surviving the persecution of 845. (3) Some developed new religious forms that carried the essence of Buddhism (Chan and Pure Land). These had the most widespread staying power.

Chan is one Buddhist school that focused on what its proponents felt was the essence of Buddha-dharma, namely meditation. Thus it is named as such. Dhyāna, the Sanskrit word for meditation, was transliterated as Chan in China, Seon in Korea, Thiên in Vietnam, and Zen in Japan. The meditation school of Buddhism took root and flowered in East Asian soil from Indian seeds. It originated in the spark of an encounter between Śākyamuni Buddha and the Great Kāśyapa during the so-called Flower Sermon, but it never grew up as a separate school on Indian soil.

One day Buddha came to teach on Vulture Peak in north India, but on this particular day he said no word whatsoever. After a long silence, Buddha lifted up a flower. Of all those assembled, only Kāśyapa smiled.

At that moment, Kāśyapa's mind and Buddha's mind were not two, but one. Kāśyapa's smile was Buddha's smile. At that moment Kāśyapa received the silent transmission that initiated the meditation lineage. Subsequently, one by one, this wordless lineage was transmitted through history, without words. In turn Kāśyapa provoked the same enlightening realization in Buddha's cousin Ānanda just before the first Buddhist council. From Ānanda the transmission of silent wisdom was passed down all the way to Bodhidharma, who was the twenty-eighth person to receive the silent transmission of this meditation lineage sparked when Gautama quietly lifted up a flower.

Bodhidharma was one of the greatest meditators in Buddhist history – though his life story remains largely legendary. He brought the meditation method known as wall-gazing over the Silk Road from India to China in the sixth century CE. When Bodhidharma met the Chinese emperor Wu-di, they had a weird conversation that was adopted as an early kōan of the Chan school (paraphrased as follows):

<i>Emperor:</i>	What merit is mine for building many monasteries?
<i>Bodhidharma:</i>	None whatsoever.
<i>Emperor:</i>	What's the heart of Buddha dharma?
<i>Bodhidharma:</i>	There's not any.
<i>Emperor:</i>	Who stands before me now?
<i>Bodhidharma:</i>	Don't know! (No idea!)

Wu-di, emperor of the Northern Wei Dynasty, commissioned the translation of Buddhist texts from the classical Indian Sanskrit language into Chinese characters. He built a Buddhist temple in the remains of a forest on Songshan, one of China's five holy mountain peaks in Henan province in central China. Buddhist monks involved in this translation project lived at the Shaolin (new forest in Mandarin) temple, so named because new trees were planted around the edifice. When Bodhidharma went to see them, he was turned away from Shaolin. He settled in a nearby cave and wall-gazed for nine years – boring a hole in the side of the cave with his unswerving gaze. The Shaolin monks were taken aback, and admitted Bodhidharma to the temple. Finding the Shaolin monks in poor health, unable to protect themselves from bandits and

wild animals, Bodhidharma developed a movement meditation for strength, speed, and agility based upon the movement of animals, such as the tiger, cobra, leopard, and dragon. Though Bodhidharma did not create the exercises as a martial art, over time the Shaolin movement meditation developed into a distinctive style within an ancient system of Chinese martial art.

Daoists were the first Chinese sages to take an interest in Bodhidharma's rigorous style of meditation. Indian teachings offered techniques, a lineage, and generations of experience in the development of mental awareness; and many Daoists found that these Buddhist teachings enhanced their own. Because the early Chan practitioners were Daoists, the Indian tradition took on Daoist coloration. Although no formal dhyāna school evolved in India, the lineage that Gautama passed to the Great Kāśyapa flourished in East Asia, and profoundly impacted upon the artistic culture of China. The early Chan Buddhists recognized Bodhidharma as the twenty-eighth in line from Buddha Śākyamuni, and identified him as the first Chan patriarch. After Bodhidharma, the mind-to-mind transmission was received by Hui-ko, then Seng-t's'an, and down to Hui-neng, the sixth Chan patriarch. Thereafter, the lineage branched out, and was taken to Japan some six centuries later. The Shaolin monastery where Bodhidharma taught is about two hours by bus from the modern-day city of Zhengzhou. In 1985 it became possible for tourists to visit, and to participate in some daily trainings. Nearby is a cave in which Bodhidharma is said to have meditated.

Hui-neng (638–713 CE)

The *Platform Sūtra*, a Mahāyāna text, tells Hui-neng's story. It is thanks to this text, and one of Hui-neng's able and ambitious disciples, that the sixth patriarch's influence coalesced in the Chan tradition. Hui-neng himself appears to have been quite humble. Having lost his father at a young age, he resorted to gathering wood to sell in the Cantonese markets. One auspicious day, when he was in his teens, Hui-neng by chance heard a monk reading from a Prajñāpāramitā text known as the *Diamond Sūtra*. These penetrating words gave him an aesthetic shock that was a moment of sudden enlightenment: "Allow mind to flow without dwelling on a thing." Hui-neng determined then and

there to seek an enlightened teacher. According to the custom of filial piety, he first made provisions for his aged mother. Then, after considerable difficulties, Hui-neng located the fifth Chan patriarch in the mountains of present-day Hupei. Being from southern China and illiterate, Hui-neng was considered a barbarian by the students of his teacher Hung-ren (602–675), who made him do menial work in the monastery.

The fifth patriarch realized the depth of Hui-neng's insight in the course of a poetry contest he set up for disciples at the monastery. The challenge was to write a verse of illumination. Hung-ren publicly praised the verse composed by foremost student Shen-xiu – though it was inadequate:

The body is the Bodhi tree [enlightenment].
The mind is like a clear mirror standing.
Take care to wipe it all the time,
Allow no grain of dust to cling.

(Shen-xiu: Dumoulin 1979: 44)

Hui-neng heard this verse, which was inscribed on the temple wall, and requested someone to write a contrary thought. While Shen-xiu's verse indicated the perspective of gradual enlightenment, Hui-neng's verse cut through to sunyata. He asked someone to write these words, which Hung-ren saw the next morning:

The Bodhi is not like a tree,
The clear mirror is nowhere standing.
Fundamentally not one thing exists;
Where, then, is a grain of dust to cling?

(Hui-neng: Dumoulin 1979: 44)

The fifth patriarch recognized that his illiterate disciple had realized emptiness. But he erased the poem, and declared publicly that its author lacked enlightenment. Privately, however, Hung-ren passed on to Hui-neng the bowl and robe that had belonged to Bodhidharma. He then insisted that Hui-neng flee to the south with these tokens of initiation, crossing the Yangtze River to escape repercussions from jealous disciples.

Chan Buddhism permeated Chinese culture of the Tang Dynasty. Over time masters of the formidable Chan lineage traced themselves back to Hui-neng the sixth patriarch, and promoted the concept of sudden enlightenment. The atmosphere of Chan during the

Tang period was anti-intellectual, and stories of Hui-neng portrayed him as illiterate. They considered too much learning to be a hindrance to spiritual development, and so the notion that enlightenment need not be based on a gradual course of learning appealed to them. Practitioners in Hui-neng's lineage expected bodhi to arise suddenly through personal encounters between a disciple and a master, based on the model of Gautama's Flower Sermon. Any particularly potent exchange between a Chan master and a disciple was later formulated as a *kung'an* or *kōan*. The words and gestures then constituted a public record or case study of the enlightened mind to be contemplated by generations of practitioners thereafter. Hui-neng's life underscores for the Chan tradition the notion that enlightenment strikes all of a sudden, and it can happen anywhere, any time.

Tantric adepts

Tantra is a form of Buddhist practice that originated in India among Hindu and Buddhist yogis who visualized the body's inner geography with its winds, channels, and centers made of prana or subtle energy. The history of tantra is peculiar, because at once it is an esoteric science passed on by oral tradition. On the other hand, because of its expertise at manipulating energy, it developed an elaborate ritualistic aspect. This almost magical quality of tantra attracted the attention of ruling families, who were interested in any protection for themselves and their domains that it might provide. For example, rulers of the Pala Dynasty favored tantric ritual. The Palas established a Buddhist empire that encompassed north India between 750 and 800 CE.

Perhaps tantra would have had a more long-standing and illustrious future in India had the Palas survived, or had another Buddhist dynasty followed after them. However, after the Palas, India had no more Buddhist rulers. The tradition lost patronage when the Sena rulers came into power. Once it lost royal patronage, tantric Buddhism reverted to a low profile in India, and maintained itself as an esoteric science among the **siddhas**. Meanwhile, tantric forms of Buddhist practice made their way into other parts of Asia. Tantra assumed an entirely new life in Tibet, where it became an integral part of the Tibetan Mahāyāna approach to Buddhism known as Mantrayana or Vajrayāna.

The Tibetans became fascinated with the tantric approach to spiritual practice, and eventually Tibetan scholars systematically developed tantra into four categories. They wrote detailed commentaries on tantric practice dealing with matters ranging from the external placement of a vase, down to the movement of subtle energy coursing through the body's inner landscape. Beyond the Tibetan interest in tantra, esoteric Buddhism was favored by the Chinese court of the Tang Dynasty. There it was called *Chen-yen* (Sanskrit: *mantra*). And at the highpoint of the Tang, the newly established Japanese royal household under Emperor Saga (r. 809–823) also became attracted to the elaborate ceremony and magical power of tantric ritual, known in Japan as *Shingon*.

Kūkai (774–835)

Kūkai (Kōbo-daishi) was the Japanese founder of the tantric Shingon sect in Japan. He was an artist who committed himself to the Buddhist path when he was 24 years old. He had studied the Confucian classics, but in his search of a deeper spiritual experience turned his attention to the Buddha-dharma. Instead of pursuing studies that would suit him for government work, he began a program of austerities, and thereby drummed up magical powers. At age 31 Kūkai went to China, but though he had intended to spend two decades there, he came back after thirty months. He sought the meaning of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra, discourse on the Great Vairocana.

In China Kūkai's studies combined the best of Indian and Chinese culture: Sanskrit language and the Indian forms of Buddhism as well as Chinese poetry and calligraphy. There he also became immersed in *Chen-yen*, the esoteric tantric Buddhism brought from India by the people of the Chinese royal court. He met the Chinese master Hui-kuo (746–805), and was made the eighth patriarch of the *Chen-yen* lineage. Kūkai delved deeply into tantric Buddhism, and seems to have found the meaning of the Mahāvairocana Sūtra that he sought. Kūkai remarked:

The essence of Esoteric Buddhism is not to be obtained from written words but to be transmitted from mind to mind; the written words are mere less and dregs; they are bricks and pebbles.

(Kūkai: Hakeda 1972: 43–44)

Shingon is called esoteric Buddhism because a person must be initiated into the practice in order to establish a personal relationship with the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Kūkai was especially connected with the dhyanī Buddha Vairocana – the Cosmic Sun Buddha, featured in the sūtra that had so captivated him. He was convinced that the sūtra on the Great Vairocana contained the whole Buddha-dharma, but with a kind of in-built depth not easily attained elsewhere. The tantric form of spiritual practice involves much ritual, including **mandalas** and mantras – and these provided access to the deeper levels of realization than is apparent on the surface. Kūkai especially appreciated the artistic aspects of tantra, and found aesthetic value in religious practice.

Padmasambhava (8th century)

Padmasambhava is a somewhat mysterious tantric practitioner. He is considered to be the historical founder of the oldest Tibetan Buddhist school, the Nyingma. Yet information about him is infused with mythic, symbolic elements – such as the description of his birth from a lotus (padma) flower. He came from the area in northern Pakistan known as Swat, and traveled northward to Tibet from there in 746 CE. Padmasambhava was reputed to have been a magician; this is not surprising because he was an accomplished tantric yogi. He is credited with transmitting a lineage of tantric yoga to Tibet, and wrote commentaries on esoteric works such as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. His stay in Tibet caused controversy, and he probably had to escape to save his life. Before leaving, Padmasambhava is said to have buried precious objects and texts. These were on occasion discovered at appropriate times, just when they were needed. Such objects are revered in the Nyingma school, and the strange claims regarding how they were deposited and discovered are taken with great seriousness in the tradition.

Milarepa (1052–1135)

Milarepa was a tantric master who was born in Tibet, and became one of its most accomplished poets. He practiced tantra within the Kagyu school, and sang songs of enlightenment to villagers, scholars, and whomever he encountered – even demons. He liked to

use metaphors to describe points of Buddha's teaching as well as tantric experiences involving energy centers, channels, and winds of the subtle body. Milarepa practiced highest yoga tantra, which did not involve outer rituals. His tantric practice was strictly based on an inner geography. As part of his inner landscape, Milarepa had many encounters with fairy-like beings known as *dākinīs*, who inspired his yoga practice. His approach to mental transformation was based on a space-like meditation practice known as Mahāmudra:

A wise man knows how to practice
The space-like meditation.
In all he does by day
He attaches himself to nothing.
With a liberated spirit,
He desires nor wealth nor beauty.

One should see that all appearance
Is like mist and fog;
Though one has vowed to liberate all living
beings,
He should know that all manifestations
Are like reflections of the moon in water.
(Milarepa: Chang 1962: 102)

Chinul (1158–1210)

Buddhism was officially brought to Korea in the fourth century CE to provide ritual protection for the ruling clan. Thereafter, the tradition proved to be a convenient aid for political unification of the clans. At the same time as the Tang Dynasty flourished in China, the three Korean kingdoms were merged under the victorious Silla Dynasty (668–935). During the Silla period five Buddhist schools came to the fore, and maintained themselves through subsequent centuries. The Silla Dynasty ended in economic decline, and as in China Seon (Chinese: Chan) and Pure Land proved to be the variants of Buddhism with sufficient resilience to survive. After the Unified Silla Dynasty came the Koryŏ Dynasty (935–1392), which maintained Buddhism as the state religion. Over time, corruption crept into the Korean Buddhist saṃgha, as the monastic institutions controlled increasingly more land. The government pressured the monks to stay out of business and politics, proponents of the five schools

vied against each other, and generally it became clear that some kind of reform was needed. Right in the middle of the Koryŏ period came an ambitious young man who responded to the needs of the times.

Chinul was ill as a child. According to a “Buddhist” cultural custom, his father’s solution was to dedicate the boy to the monastery should his child survive. Indeed, at age 7 a healthy Chinul went to live among the monks, and became a novice when he was 15. He studied diligently and, when the time came to do so, took the required Seon exams. He passed the exams, but he felt they could not possibly measure a person’s degree of enlightenment. Success in the exams was thus of limited value, and misleading. More than that, the elaborate lifestyle of the city monks disturbed him.

Chinul and his cohort of young monks were disappointed by the current Seon establishments, which were embroiled in wealth and politics. Some of them began to travel in search of a deeper religious experience, and a more modest lifestyle. At the time, Korea had two rival orientations to Buddhist practice: to attain sudden enlightenment through Seon, or awaken gradually through study of Buddha’s discourses. Chinul traveled throughout Korea, educating himself in both Seon and Hua-yan Buddhist perspectives. He never made it to China, but was deeply influenced by the work of Chan master Ta-hui (pinyin: Dahui Zonggao) (1089–1163).

Chinul considered the various forms of Buddhism available to him in Korea as complementary. He integrated aspects of them into his main tradition of Seon. The foundation for Chinul’s reform teachings was based on three awakenings that came in reaction to *The Platform Sūtra*, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, and *The Records of Ta-hui*. The *Avatamsaka Sūtra* is a key text from the Hua-yan (Korean: Hwa-om) school, while the other two are classic Chan texts. This indicates Chinul’s commitment to both study (characteristic of Hua-yan, which classifies Buddha-dharma into five levels), and meditation (characteristic of Chan).

Monks of the sūtra schools would spend decades studying sūtras, thinking that by doing so they gradually came closer to enlightenment. This was in contrast to the Seon schools which taught that everyone is already Buddha by virtue of the original mind. Chinul harmonized the two views. Buddha Nature is the original mind within one’s own body that

can be glimpsed through a sudden awakening, as promoted by Hui-neng. This sudden awakening matures into full awakening through the cultivation of samadhi (meditation) and prajna (wisdom), as promoted in sūtra schools such as Hua-yan. According to Chinul, a practitioner must gradually reduce habitual patterns of body, speech, and mind because the seeds of these patterns are not destroyed merely through the penetrating initial awakening. Ultimately, however, concepts derived from scripture or anywhere else must be transcended through sudden insight.

Chinul maintained Seon as his fundamental Buddhist orientation, and developed the method of **hwadu** practice used by the Chinese Lin-chi (Japanese: Rinzai) master Ta-hui (1089–1163). This involves meditation on kōans through a focus on the critical word or phrase that is its essential point. Chinul established a new monastic center as well as the new school of Korean Seon. Both were named Chogye after the mountain on which the sixth patriarch Hui-neng lived in south China. The Chogye Order is the main form of Buddhism practiced in Korea to this day. It involves sudden awakening and gradual practice, stressing the balance between meditation and scriptural study. Along with the cultivation of meditation and wisdom, the Chogye school emphasizes the hwadu.

Thirteenth-century Japanese reformers

Tendai Buddhism (Chinese: Tian-tai) was named after the sacred mountain in southeast China. Tian-tai is a Mahāyāna school that systematized the Buddha-dharma as received into China by the sixth century CE. It gives primary focus to the Lotus Sūtra, and takes to heart the three Pure Land sūtras – promoting meditation as well as devotional practice. Tian-tai was popularized in China by Chih-i (538–597) and in Japan by Saichō (767–822). By the thirteenth century in Japan, it had become thoroughly established and seasoned. So comfortable had Tendai become that a number of its most thoughtful monks began to question its relevance.

The thirteenth century was an enormously creative time for the arts and spiritual traditions in Japan. It was a transitional time between the Heian and the Kamakura periods, during which several Buddhist reformers made original contributions to the history

of religious ideas. Eisai, Dōgen, Hōnen, Shinran, and Nichiren were all disappointed with the Buddhism of their day – principally Tendai and Shingon. Each rejected the elite monastic lifestyle that had grown up over the generations in Japan since Saichō and Kūkai first established these Buddhist schools in the ninth century. In place of the complex Tendai literature and esoteric Shingon ritual, the forward-looking monks were drawn to the simpler Chinese forms of Buddhism that had evolved on the mainland particularly after the persecution of Buddhism in 845 CE: the Chan and Pure Land schools.

The simplicity sought by the reform-minded Japanese practitioners was achieved in one of two ways: through *jrīki*, self-power, or through *tariki*, other power. The Japanese invented these categories to distinguish between religious practice that relies on one's own efforts, and those that surrender to the compassion of an enlightened being. Zen is characterized as *jrīki* because it calls for strict personal discipline with consistent effort devoted to meditation. Pure Land is designated as other power, as practitioners rely on the all-pervasive compassion of Amida Buddha.

Eisai (1141–1215)

Eisai was a Tendai monk who traveled to China to see its original home monastery on the Tian-tai mountain. He returned with scriptures, green tea, and a new perspective on religious practice. He brought Chan back from China, and started the Rinzai sect. Eisai found the most receptivity for the meditation school in northern Japan at Kamakura. This was on account of the samurai warriors who heartily accepted meditative discipline to gain focus and fearlessness. Eisai favored use of the *kōan*, and adopted the spiritual technique of meditating on the public records (Chinese: *kung-an*) of the great Tang masters as a centerpiece of Rinzai training.

Dōgen (1200–1253)

Dōgen was born into a noble Japanese family. He was orphaned at age 7, ordained as a novice Buddhist monk at 13, and traveled to China at the age of 23, where he realized his Buddha Nature. On his return from the mainland, people asked Dōgen what he brought back; he declared: “Empty hands.” When asked about realizing the Buddha-dharma, he gave a very Zen

response: “Eyes horizontal! Nose vertical!” Dōgen was talking about something that became his signature style of Zen practice: *shikan-taza* . . . just sitting. *Shikan-taza* represented the highest form of meditation. In advocating simple sitting with total attention and awareness, Dōgen returned to Gautama Buddha's emphasis on mindfulness training: what is heard is just heard; what is felt is just felt.

Dōgen did not compose a systematic study of Zen. He wrote lectures and poetic verses that were brilliant and original interpretations of Gautama Buddha's insights. Dōgen spoke much about Buddha Nature, the inherent enlightened condition of all living beings. Japanese Tendai Buddhists had already taken cognizance of the natural world, claiming that plants, animals, and geographical formations *had* Buddha Nature. Dōgen's original insight was that everything did not *have* – but everything *was* – an expression of Buddha Nature. Dōgen noticed that mountains flowed, and grass was enlightened. This meant that at the most profound level of perception there is no distinction between mind and entities. He then continued to ponder the implications of this non-dualism.

At a young age Dōgen felt a nagging question that he spent years trying to resolve: “If as the sūtras say, our essential nature is enlightened (*bodhi*), why did all the Buddhas have to strive to awaken?” Finally, he concluded that an enlightened person should continue to practice meditation because *zazen* sitting practice is none other than enlightenment itself. Even after attaining *satori*, one should practice meditation.

Dōgen founded the Soto school of Zen Buddhism in Japan, which persists today. In contrast to the methods of the Rinzai Zen sect founded by Eisai, Dōgen did not formally emphasize *kōans*. In Soto training *shikan-taza* was used as the key to discovering Buddha Nature. In spite of the tremendous discipline required for Zen practice, Dōgen realized that the most difficult practice is none other than the most simple. Dōgen's legacy could well extend beyond the confines of Zen, and form the basis of a modern Buddhist environmentalism. Dōgen teaches us that people are not as separate from nature as they might think. Embroiled in a profound interdependency, nature actually responds to the virtue of human beings. Things of nature – in their own way – are aware of those who love them. Moreover, things of nature (such as moun-

tains) actually impel living beings to participate in life with them.

Hōnen (1133–1212)

Hōnen was a Tendai monk at the prestigious Mount Hiei. He eventually became disillusioned with the standard Buddhist practice in Japan, and entered a period of seclusion and study. After delving deeply into the Pure Land sūtras, and giving deep consideration to Amida Buddha's forty-eight vows to save all beings, Hōnen became a Pure Land missionary and founded Jōdo-shū, the Pure Land sect. He believed that ordinary people should have the opportunity to participate in Buddhist practice despite their lack of sophistication. He taught that rebirth into the Pure Land was the most suitable goal for people of his time. Due to Amida's great compassion, rebirth into the Western Paradise was attainable through simple measures of faith, rather than the complicated approach of elite Tendai priests.

Nichiren (1222–1282)

Nichiren became very interested in Hōnen's Pure Land reforms. He followed suit with perspective on Pure Land spirituality that proved to be immensely popular inside as well as outside of Japan. Nichiren studied widely the old and emerging forms of Buddhism in Japan. His Buddhist education started early with Tendai, and later he lived as a Tendai monk on Mount Hiei, the prestigious Tendai center, and studied at Mount Kōya, center of the tantric Shingon sect. Beyond that, Nichiren studied Zen and Pure Land Buddhism. After this, he rejected all their approaches and put total stock in the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana text available to them, but, in his view, not sufficiently emphasized. While Pure Land practitioners recited the name of Amida Buddha, Nichiren taught his disciples to revere the Lotus Sutra itself as the heart of Buddha's teaching: *Namu myōhō rēngyē kyo* (Adoration to the Lotus of the True Law). In his view the Lotus Sutra was the only relevant teaching among those contained in the Buddhist tradition at large. On 23 April 1253 he publicly denounced all forms of Buddhism except Nichirenshū, the one he was propagating based on the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren's Buddhist teachings have been taken up by the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) organization,

founded in 1930. This "society for the creation of values" is now established in 190 countries with an estimated twelve million members, including the American superstar vocalist-performer Tina Turner. The SGI separated from an older organization called Nichiren Shoshu. The former is a layperson's organization, while the original has a priestly base.

Shinran (1173–1262)

A tradition of reciting the name of Amitābha began in India. Shinran's lineage traces back to seven Pure Land patriarchs, beginning with two of India's foremost philosophers: Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, founders of the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools of Mahāyāna thought. But meditation on the Buddha of Boundless Light was never formalized as a separate school there. On the other hand, Pure Land Buddhism became the most prominent of all forms of Buddha-dharma practice in East Asia.

Shinran was a temple priest on Mount Hiei. In 1201 he joined Hōnen's group of Pure Land seekers for six years. Hōnen had already gone back to lay life, and Shinran took him as a mentor and renounced his monastic vows. Under Hōnen's guidance, Shinran studied the Pure Land sūtras and began the practice of repeating Amida Buddha's name. His period of study ended when both were charged with irreligious behavior and forced into exile. While in exile, Shinran separated from Hōnen, married, and began to raise a family of five or six children. In the midst of this lay life, he came to a new understanding of the Mahāyāna Buddhist notion that "saṃsāra is nirvāṇa." Shinran became convinced that even a family man could attain the peace of nirvāṇa. This was done through Amida's compassion, which brought ordinary people steeped in the suffering of saṃsāra to rebirth in the Western Paradise.

Shinran taught that we live in a degenerate age when there are no buddhas in the world, and people labor heavily under the three poisons of desire, hatred, and ignorance. The age will last until the human life span decreases to ten years, and the best response to this cosmic misfortune is an appeal to Amida's compassion. Shinran had faith that a sincere, faithful hearing of Amida's name, even once, brings rebirth into Amida's Western Paradise. The mantra of Amida's name is like

a wish-granting gem that helps everything it touches. Thus, Shinran taught that Jodo Shinshu devotees need not rid themselves of the human passions to be saved. Rather than try to abandon all passions (which is so difficult in this degenerate age), they should cultivate a sincere heart, deep faith in Amida's bodhisattva vows, and a wish to be reborn into the Pure Land.

In the midst of a fertile period of Japan's religious history, Shinran established the True Pure Land sect, which complemented the Pure Land sect of his teacher Hōnen. Jōdo-shū and Jodo Shinshu became the main Amida sects in Japan. To this day, Shinran's True Pure Land sect inspires a vital practice of Buddhism devoted to the Buddha of Boundless Light. The Pure Land schools of Shinran and Hōnen represent the tariki spiritual orientation whereby adherents rely on the compassion of Amida for salvation from the ills of this world.

Tenzin Gyatso (1935–present)

Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, is a spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, and head of the Tibetan Government in Exile. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for advocating a non-violent solution to the problems of the Tibetan people whose country was invaded by the Chinese army during Mao Tse-tung's cultural revolution. In November 1950, an estimated 80,000 soldiers of the People's Liberation Army marched on Tibet. Early in the following decade, Tenzin Gyatso fully took up his position as head of state in Tibet, and attempted diplomatic negotiations with Mao Tse-tung on behalf of the Tibetan people. These talks were to little or no avail, because Mao considered religion to be a cultural poison. Dissatisfaction among the Tibetan people grew on account of the severe repression of religious freedom imposed during the cultural revolution, including widespread destruction of monasteries, disrobing of monks, and restrictions on the practice of Buddhist ritual and meditation. In 1958 Tibetans staged large public demonstrations. At that point the Dalai Lama determined to escape from the country to save his life and continue work from abroad.

The Dalai Lama has become a visible figure on the world stage since escaping from Tibet. He proposed a five-point peace plan for cooperation between the

Tibetan autonomous region and China, for which he won the Nobel Peace Prize. In his acceptance speech, the Dalai Lama bore witness on behalf of the Tibetan people noting, "more than one sixth of Tibet's population of six million died as a direct result of the Chinese invasion and occupation," but he "[did] not wish to dwell on this point" (Piburn 1990: 40). Overall, the Dalai Lama adopts the Buddhist perspective of interdependence, and personal responsibility.

Specifically, Tenzin Gyatso takes a bodhisattva's perspective with regard to the Chinese government, and the plight of the Tibetan people. Although the Chinese could be considered to be an "enemy" of the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama daily meditates on compassion for them. He practices a meditation known as the Exchange of Self and Other that involves visualization on the breath. He imagines breathing in the troubles, suffering, and ignorance of even the individuals assigned to torture Tibetans in the prisons. In turn, he imagines breathing out happiness, and sincerely giving it to them. The premise behind this meditation is that all living beings want happiness and do not want suffering. It acknowledges that people often try to achieve their happiness in ways that involve harming others. But according to an optimistic Buddhist view of human nature, the Dalai Lama believes that when people are truly happy, they will act according to their fundamental beneficence. Tenzin Gyatso has been teaching this meditation, along with other aspects of Buddha-dharma to people in many countries over the past several decades.

Sulak Sivaraksa (1933–present)

Sulak Sivaraksa is a Thai Buddhist who is working to implement the principles of Buddhist economics. He was educated in England, but returned to his native land to promote prosperity for the downtrodden. Buddhism is Sivaraksa's native tradition, and he finds it suitable to the enterprise of bringing happiness to suffering living beings. He considers that Buddhism provides a sound ethical framework within which sound and socially responsible economic policies can be developed. Sivaraksa works from the conviction that successful economic life is grounded in an active spiritual life. He started the Thai NGO movement, and inspired many socially progressive initiatives.



Plate 9.3 "Two peace activists." Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), the fourteenth Dalai Lama and Maha Ghosananda (1913–2007), the Supreme Patriarch of Buddhism in Cambodia are seated here at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky (July 1996). Both monks have done extensive work on behalf of refugees (Tibetan, Cambodian) and world peace. Tenzin Gyatso won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and Maha Ghosananda was a nominee for the prize in 1996. Here Tenzin Gyatso is seated on Maha Ghosananda's right side. Note the similarities between the Tibetan Mahāyāna and Cambodian Theravada (Nikāya) monks in their mode of dress and facial expressions.

Sivaraksa rejects what he considers an excessive consumerism that tends to arise in Western culture. He feels that small-scale cultures can effectively create economic models based on their indigenous values when rooted in sound ethical principles. Along these lines he instituted two branches of social development, which have potential for wider application beyond Thai society.

- *Alternatives to Consumerism.* This is an international network devoted to finding ways based in Buddhist values to develop sustainable economic models that de-emphasize unchecked consumption and emotions of deprivation that motivate people to consume.
- *The Spirit in Education Movement.* Sivaraksa is founding a new college in Thailand based in the bodhisattva ethic of working for the sake of suffering beings. The educational mission is to

facilitate research on non-violence, and to come up with alternative economic, political, and social policies that are non-violent. Specifically, Sivaraksa wants to understand the impact of violence entrenched at various levels of society on the health, education, and welfare of the people. This involves the development of an alternative model of education.

Sivaraksa has inspired other socially minded Buddhists to apply the Buddha-dharma from below – that is, from the grass roots of Buddhist societies instead of from the elite monastic institutions. Sivaraksa has brought Buddhism back to square one. Buddha himself did not write down his teachings. But if he could have done so, Gautama probably would have spelled Buddhism with a small “b.”

PART 1 BUDDHIST TEXTURE

FOUNDATIONAL TEXTURE

Tripitaka is the term used for the body of Buddha's teachings in both Nikāya and Mahāyāna Buddhism. These three (tri) baskets (pitaka) are the: (1) **vinaya** that includes training precepts for the order, and related stories; (2) **sūtras**, which are direct teachings from the Tathāgata; and (3) **abhidharma** texts that systematically present a technical material from the sūtras. The Nikāya (Theravāda) and Mahāyāna canons have the same fundamental teachings, and overlap considerably. However, Mahayanists have some sūtras which are found unacceptable by Theravādins. As might be expected, their abhidharma commentaries sometimes have a different emphasis, and the slant on commentarial literature reflects the character of the particular school of thought.

Vinaya: Buddhist training for monks and nuns

Rules for the monks

When Buddha's community was still relatively small, training rules were made up as occasions demanded.

They were formulated by a democratic process patterned on tribal customs used by the Śākya and other small clans of the middle Ganges basin where Gautama grew up. The number of rules gradually amounted to some 227 for monks, and the pratimoksha portion of the vinaya basket classifies these rules according to their importance. Four rules if broken bring “defeat” or expulsion from the spiritual community. According to the Buddha-dharma, killing a human being is the worst thing any human being can do.

The rules of less consequence instruct a monk (and most of these also apply to nuns) on how to comport himself. A monk may not raise his fist, should not urinate standing up, not speak with his mouth full, not laugh loudly in places that are inhabited, and so forth. Even the color of the mendicant’s robe is specified in the training rules: “When a bhikkhu has acquired a new robe, one of three kinds of discolouring must be applied by him, that is, green or mud or dark brown” (Thera 1969: 108).

Eight special rules for nuns

About a year after Gautama attained enlightenment, his aunt requested that an order for nuns be established. Buddha complied with this request, but on the condition that eight special rules be observed by women mendicants.

- 1 Monks are senior to nuns, regardless of when they entered the order.
- 2 Nuns must not spend the rainy season in a place without monks.
- 3 Nuns must do their bimonthly service under the direction of monks.
- 4 Nuns must report to both monks and nuns after the rains retreat.
- 5 Nuns who break a rule must be disciplined by both monks and nuns.
- 6 Both monks and nuns must be present to ordain new nuns.
- 7 Nuns must never admonish monks.
- 8 Monks may admonish nuns.

All together bhikṣuṇīs have 311 rules. Truly, some rules were intended to protect women from being exploited by men. For example, a monk cannot ask a nun to repair his robe for him if she is not a blood relative.

Buddhist texts acknowledge that there is ultimately no difference between women and men. Women can attain enlightenment. But due to cultural conditions, it may be more difficult in many cases for women to gain the leisure and opportunity to lead an ascetic or monastic life. Indeed, a number of training precepts developed for nuns had to do with the overall position of women in ancient Indian society.

A woman named Soma attained enlightenment. But she had to tell Māra off when this personification of negativity appeared to try to dissuade her from gaining deep realization. Māra said:

That which sages may attain,
the Firm State [steady mind] very hard to reach,
a woman with two fingers’ worth
of wisdom cannot win.

In response to this put-down, Soma answered snappily:

What’s it to do with a woman’s state
when the mind is well-composed
with knowledge after knowledge born
sees into Perfect Dhamma clear?
For who indeed conceives it thus:
a woman am I, a man am I
of what indeed then am I –
it’s worthwhile Māra’s speech.

(Samyutta Nikāya verse 2:
Khantipalo 1979: 143)

Naturally Māra, the lord of illusion whose job is to keep living beings on the wheel of rebirth, might advertise the differences between a woman and a man. But any enlightened being knows for sure that the mind is free of the body’s accidental properties. Being a woman or a man is due to karma, and perhaps has relevance in the world. But as for enlightenment, wisdom has no sexual orientation and is not tied to bodily form.

Gautama is said to have declined twice his aunt’s request to establish a saṃgha for nuns. He agreed only the third time Mahaprajapati made her request. To some, the first two refusals make Buddha appear to be negative toward women. In recent times with the challenge from women’s movements, Buddhists are coming to terms with this apparent misogyny. At the First International Conference on Buddhist Nuns the

Fourteenth Dalai Lama spoke of the cultural conditioning of Buddhist texts, and feels that women should not be discriminated against in the tradition.

[I]n certain Buddhist texts, for example in the **Vinaya** texts, bhikshus are accorded a higher position than the bhikshunis. Similarly, if one has created a certain fruitional karma and is sure to remain as a bodhisattva, it is taught that one must necessarily take a male body. Many of these explanations came about in relation to the times, the place, and the social conditions, and most probably were not the original thought of the Dharma itself.

(Tenzin Gyatso, Fourteenth Dalai Lama: Tsomo 1988: 42)

Gautama's discourses: the poisoned arrow

Over forty-five years Gautama gave many discourses. One of them includes the parable of the poisoned arrow, which shows that Buddha was an intensely practical teacher. The sūtras normally tell a story, and set the context in a specific location in north India. An anthropologist reading about Gautama's conversation with Mālunkyaputta would be thrilled to know the many details it provides about bows and arrows in ancient India. In fact, most of the earliest historical evidence pertaining to life during the period of Gautama's mission is taken from the Buddhist Scriptures. Presumably they were transmitted orally from Gautama's own mouth through his disciples for some three centuries. And as might be expected – when the oral tradition was committed to writing, views of the current religious climate may have entered into the texts. Nevertheless, historians rely heavily on the Buddhist scriptural materials for insights about life in the centuries surrounding Gautama's life. In any case, the conversation between Buddha and Mālunkyaputta gives insight into what kind of teacher Buddha was.

One day Buddha's disciple Mālunkyaputta was alone in meditation and seemed to become a little annoyed with the lack of information he was getting from the Tathāgata. It struck him that Buddha should answer certain questions. Or at least the enlightened one should admit that he did not know their answers, if that was the case. He decided to quit being Buddha's

disciple if the Tathāgata did not either answer his questions or admit ignorance. So he approached Buddha in a respectful manner, and said:

Here, venerable sir, while I was alone in meditation, the following thought arose in my mind: "These speculative views have been undeclared by the Blessed One. . . . If he does not declare these to me, then I will abandon the training and return to the low life." If the Blessed One knows "the world is eternal," let the Blessed One declare to me "the world is eternal"; if the Blessed One knows "the world is not eternal," let the Blessed One declare to me "the world is not eternal." If the Blessed One does not know either "the world is eternal" or "the world is not eternal," then it is straightforward for one who does not know and does not see to say, "I do not know, I do not see."

(*Cūlamālunkya Sutta* 63: Nanamoli and Bodhi 1995: 533–534)

Mālunkyaputta continued in this manner, putting a long list of questions to Buddha: Is the world finite or infinite? Is the soul the same as the body or is it one thing and the body another? After death does a Tathāgata exist or not? After death does a Tathāgata both exist and not exist? After death does a Tathāgata not exist and not not-exist? The Buddhist tradition has since called these questions "unanswerables." No one will ever know whether Buddha could have answered them.

Buddha replied to Mālunkyaputta first by asking if he had ever promised to teach these things. The disciple had to admit that Buddha never promised to address these questions. Then Buddha gave a kind of "answer." He told a parable about a man injured by a poisoned arrow.

Suppose, Mālunkyaputta, a man were wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives brought a surgeon to treat him. The man would say: "I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble or a brahmin or a merchant or a worker." And he would say: "I will not let the

surgeon pull out this arrow until I know the name and the clan of the man who wounded me.

(*Cūlamālunkya Sutta* 63: Nanamoli and Bodhi 1995: 534)

The Tathāgata continued to elaborate numerous objections brought up by the poor man. Before he would allow the surgeon to remove the arrow he wanted to know if the man was tall, short, or of middle height; dark, brown, or golden-skinned; if the man lived in a village, town, or city; if the bow from which the arrow was shot was a long bow or a crossbow; whether the bowstring was fiber, reed, sinew, hemp, or bark; whether the shaft was wild or cultivated; what kinds of feathers were on the arrow's shaft, whether vulture, crow, hawk, peacock, or stork; what kind of sinew the shaft had as a binding, whether ox, buffalo, lion, or monkey; and what kind of arrow wounded him, whether hoof-tipped, curved, barbed, calf-toothed, or oleander.

As for the poor man in the parable . . . he would die before having his questions answered. Through the parable, the Tathāgata drew a parallel between the man shot with a poisoned arrow and Mālunkyaputta. Knowing whether an arrow in one's back had the feather of crow would not save the man's life. Just so, knowing whether the world is eternal or not will not save a person from the continual round of rebirth, old age, suffering, and death. Therefore, Buddha left his disciple's questions unresolved. Finally, Buddha simply reminded Mālunkyaputta that he did resolve the problem of suffering. Buddha's refusal to answer Mālunkyaputta's speculative religious questions is known as the Noble Silence.

Abhidharma: karma and its fruits

The subject of **karma** runs throughout Buddha's teachings. Karma is from a Sanskrit root *kr*, meaning to do or to make. Any action of body, speech, or mind associated with the mental formation of intention will bear fruit. The fruit matches the deed in kind. Acts of harming bring harm in return. Acts of kindness bring happiness in return. The fruits of karma can come within the same lifetime in which the deed was performed, or in a future lifetime. A person's motivation in committing the act determines the weight of

the karma, and the intensity of its fruit. Buddha taught that the law of karma is as much a part of the workings of the universe as the laws governing material things. A mango pit will, under appropriate conditions, produce a mango tree – not a lemon tree. Just so, actions of hatred will produce suffering – never happiness.

The fruit of karma will be heavy or light depending upon how often the act is done, whether the act is completed, who is the object of the action, and the motivation with which the act was committed. For example, the repercussion for killing a human being is greater than for killing an animal. A harsher fruit comes when the act is done with hatred, than when it is done accidentally, and so forth. To lighten the painful effects of negative karma, a person can develop **four opponent powers** by doing the following:

- 1 Take refuge in the **Three Jewels**.
- 2 Confess one's sins.
- 3 Counteract the non-virtuous deed with its opposite (called the antidote).
- 4 Vow to make an effort not to repeat the act.

The Four Noble Truths (Four Great Facts)

- *The fact of suffering.* Dukkha means suffering. It includes physical and emotional distress; the unhappiness of losing things that one likes; and the unease that comes from dealing with the fundamentally impermanent condition of all phenomena, including our bodies. Dukkha is inherent in existence because birth, old age, sickness, and death are all infused with suffering.
- *The fact of the cause of suffering.* Gautama identified three poisons that cause dukkha: ignorance, hatred, and greed. In any situation where one person inflicts harm on another, one finds one of the three poisons. Hatred and greed are rooted in ignorance about the nature of reality, **tathata**.
- *The fact of the end of suffering.* The end of suffering is called nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa is the opposite of saṃsāra, and can be attained when the three poisons are removed. The obstacle standing in the way of universal happiness is the fact that each sentient being has the responsibility to eliminate his or her own ignorance.

- *The fact of the path to end suffering.* Buddha prescribed an eightfold path to help people free themselves from suffering. Each step on the path is called a “right” activity, indicating that it should be done thoroughly, correctly, and with kind consideration of all other living beings.

Mahāyāna sūtra literature

Mahāyānists accepted a handful of texts that Theravādins found unacceptable. These were originally written in Sanskrit, and appear to have come into India’s culture after Buddha passed away. They were

BOX 9.4 A SPIRITUAL PATH: THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Gautama declared the Great Fact that eight steps could be taken to end suffering. The Noble Eightfold Path is divided into three categories: wisdom, mental cultivation, and moral conduct. The path is like a loop, because the practice of one step helps a person to grow stronger in the practice of another step.

Right view (wisdom). A person understands the Four Great Facts, which become the foundation for every act of body, speech, and mind. This wisdom involves right understanding of the nature of reality as characterized by the three marks of existence: non-self, impermanence, and suffering. Right view is the specifically Buddhist step on the path. All other steps are familiar to many religions. But a Buddhist uses the three marks to inform the other activities on the eightfold path.

Right aim (wisdom). A person has thoughts of love and non-violence aimed at all living beings. This right thought lacks the selfish motivation involved in all unwholesome mental formations, such as ill-will, jealousy, and hypocrisy.

Right speech (moral conduct). A person speaks no lies, slander, gossip, or abusive words toward others, including enemies. Words are used to encourage living beings (including animals) to perform helpful activities that bring happiness to oneself and others. Words are used to tactfully speak truthfully and constructively.

Right action (moral conduct). A person promotes honorable, peaceful conduct that respects all life. Basic aspects of morality are included in right

action, such as no sexual misconduct, no destruction of life, and so forth.

Right livelihood (moral conduct). A person makes a living in a job that brings happiness, education, health, and socially constructive ends. Someone engaged in right livelihood avoids work that involves harming, cheating, or misleading other living beings, such as selling weapons sales, dealing in harmful drugs, charging inordinate amounts of interest, and so forth.

Right effort (mental cultivation). A person is energetic in developing wholesome states of mind, and eliminating unwholesome states of mind. The virtuous attitudes already present are cultivated, and the non-virtuous attitudes are diminished. With right effort, doing things that help other living beings becomes a joy, and is not experienced as troublesome.

Right mindfulness (mental cultivation). A person pays close attention to his or her physical and mental condition. This is done so that constructive reactions can be made in response to events that happen. Right recollection is practiced in terms of four Foundations of Mindfulness, namely the body, feelings, states of mind, and mental formations.

Right contemplation (mental cultivation). A person keeps attention unwavering on an object, be it a Buddha statue, a virtuous mental state such as patience, the breath, and so on. This concentrated activity – occurring with (con) a center or focal point – naturally leads to eight mental absorptions: four in the realm of subtle form, and four in the realm of no form. (See page 000.)

never part of the Nikāya Buddhist canon. Here are a few of the most prominent.

Prajñāpāramitā

The *Prajñāpāramitā* or perfection of wisdom sūtras comprise a set of teachings composed in Sanskrit that have sunyata as their fundamental subject matter. When sunyata is realized, prajna (wisdom) is perfect. *Prajñāpāramitā* is personified as a feminine, akin to the gnostic Sophia. There are several *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtras of various lengths, from 100,000 verses to a single line or word. The date of their composition is uncertain, but sometime early in the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism – between the second centuries BCE and CE – is a likely range.

Vimalakīrti

This text is unusual because a householder is the main character, rather than a monk. For this it became very popular in Asia. His name is *Vimalakīrti*, a wealthy businessman from the beautiful Ganges Valley town of *Vaiśālī*. He had an encounter with *Mañjūśrī*, the imaginal bodhisattva of wisdom. *Mañjūśrī* asked a question about the nature of reality to various of Gautama's disciples. *Vimalakīrti* remained silent while other disciples used many words about non-duality. His silence is interpreted as a profound display of wisdom, as the true nature of reality cannot be spoken. Otherwise, *Vimalakīrti* comments profoundly on the relationship between emptiness and form – the preferred subject of the text.

Infinite Life Sūtra (Sukhāvativyūha)

This is a key text of Pure Land Buddhism that relates a story told by Gautama Buddha one day on Vulture Peak in India. It is about a person named Dharmakāra who, in the distant past, generated bodhicitta, or the mind of enlightenment intent on relieving the suffering of all living beings. The story incorporates a list of forty-eight vows that Dharmakāra (Jap: *Hōzo*) spontaneously uttered, which established him as a bodhisattva. Of the forty-eight vows made by Dharmakāra, the twentieth declares his determination that all beings should have access to the Pure Land just hearing his name, and meritoriously wishing for rebirth with him.

By the force of the bodhisattva's vows, it became possible for all beings to achieve liberation from *saṃsāra* through rebirth into the Pure Land. This Pure Land text further declares how Dharmakāra worked for aeons to fulfill his vows. Through his efforts a Pure Land was created, and Dharmakāra became the Buddha named for infinite light, *Amitābha*.

SUPPORTIVE TEXTURE

Nikāya commentary

Buddhaghosa (fifth century CE) is thought to have been a Hindu brahmin convert to Buddhism. He was ordained as a monk and became a great scholar of Nikāya Buddhism, and was affiliated with the Great Monastery in Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. In the Pāli language he compiled and translated the Nikāya canon; translated Sinhalese exegetical literature; wrote commentaries on each of the “three baskets” of the Buddhist canon; and drew upon oral and written sources to compose an extensive compendium of Buddhist practice known as the *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*.

The monumental *Path of Purification* is divided into three parts that represent the standard segmentation of Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path: virtue, mental discipline, and wisdom. Buddhaghosa sprinkled stories and verses into his painstaking description of methods by which practitioners can purify their moral action, meditation, and insight. As a Theravādin, Buddhaghosa emphasized the goal of becoming an arhat. This is attained once the wisdom of non-self is realized. In turn, wisdom depends upon the cultivation of virtue and mental discipline.

On virtue

To illustrate the guarding of the eye faculty in the practice of virtue, Buddhaghosa wrote of an elder who encountered on the road a lovely woman all decked out, running away from her husband. When she laughed out loud, the elder looked up and attained arhatship, because he suddenly saw bare reality. He saw only what was there, and not the signs of a woman, or a man, or beauty, or ugliness. Buddhaghosa says:

'He saw the bones that were her teeth,
'And kept in mind his first perception'
'And standing on that very spot
'The Elder became an Arhat'.

(Buddhaghosa: Buddhaghosa
1976: 22 [I, 55])

When the woman's husband came after her, he asked the elder, "Venerable sir, did you by any chance see a woman?" To this, the now-arhat replied:

'Whether it was a man or woman
'That went by I noticed not;
'But only that on this high road
'There goes a group of bones'.

(Buddhaghosa: Buddhaghosa
1976: 22 [I, 55])

On mental discipline

Buddhaghosa named forty objects upon which meditators can focus attention to develop calmness. These include fire, water, blue flowers, a Buddha image, a rotting corpse, the Abodes of Brahmā, and the immaterial states in the realm of no form. He specified appropriate objects for meditators of different temperaments, and advised on how to distinguish one type of person from another by their manner of walking, eating, sleeping, and so on. According to Buddhaghosa, the benefits of concentration include various siddhis, such as walking on water; traveling in space like a winged bird while in a seated cross-legged position; gaining knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings using the divine eye; and recollecting one's past lives in great detail. To train in recollecting one's past lives, he advised:

So a bhikkhu [monk] who is a beginner and wants to recollect in this way should go into solitary retreat . . . [H]e should advert to all the things done during the whole night and day in reverse order. . . . And so, in reverse order too, he should advert to the things done on the second day back, and on the third, fourth and fifth day, and in the ten days, and in the fortnight, and as far back as a year. . . . When by these means he adverts to ten

years, twenty years, and so on as far back as his own rebirth-linking in this existence, he should advert to the mentality-materiality occurring at the moment of death in the preceding existence.

(Buddhaghosa: Buddhaghosa 1976:
453–454)

Gautama Buddha recalled his past lives on the night of his enlightenment, and regularly made use of other siddhis, such as traveling through space, to aid in his teaching. As the siddhis are part of the science of yoga, Buddhaghosa included them in his treatise.

On wisdom

The purification of morality and concentration prepares a person for gaining wisdom that realizes non-self and the dependently arising nature of the world. One gains wisdom through analysis of various matters included in Buddha's teaching of the Four Great Facts. This may be done through an analytical vipaśyanā meditation. For example, meditating on the five *skandhas* (heaps of conditioning) is a very effective means of realizing non-self. After attaining a certain level of quiescence through *śamatha*, the meditator can practice mindfulness of mental formations with a focus on these five heaps:

- 1 *Forms* – includes the five sense organs (for seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling) plus the physical basis of thinking (sometimes considered to be the heart, the brain, or the whole body).
- 2 *Feelings* – includes the recognition of what is pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
- 3 *Perceptions* – includes the categories used to label our experience.
- 4 *Mental formations* – includes intention, the five hindrances, seven factors of enlightenment, and other mental contents.
- 5 *Minds* – includes the consciousnesses associated with each of the forms (eye, ear, tongue, skin, nose, heart/mind/body).

Through contemplating the *skandhas* that make up a person, it becomes evident that living beings are: (1) not stable, (2) provoke suffering, and (3) ultimately have no inherent existence. With the direct experience of non-self the meditator achieves *nirvāṇa* or the peace of

no more suffering. Nirvāṇa can be attained while the meditator is still alive (nirvāṇa with the body), or at the point of passing away (nirvāṇa without the body). Nirvāṇa in the body can occur for a maximum of seven days at a time, without danger to the meditator. On the other hand, nirvāṇa realized at the moment of death results in no more compulsory rebirth, hence no more dukkha. Realization of non-self is the crux of Buddhist wisdom. After realizing non-self one can choose no more rebirth (as does an arhat), or choose to return to saṃsāra and be in it, but not of it (as does a bodhisattva).

CROSS-OVER TEXTURE

Songs of the early Buddhist nuns

The earliest known anthology of women's writing in India and possibly in the world is the *Therīgāthā* (verses of the Therīs, or elders) written around 80 BCE. The *Therīgāthā* is a collection of 522 verses composed by women who were Buddhist renunciates. Thoughts about the Therīs' lives and songs circulated orally for centuries. They were finally compiled in the *Paramatta Dipani*, a commentary dating from the 500s CE (Tharu and Lalita 1990: 68). Generally, the Therīs sang of the sorrow in their lives, and the breakthrough insights that gave them freedom from worldly cares. Joining the Buddhist saṃgha allowed women to move out of the householder stage of life. They could be relieved of the drudgery that the life at home could bring to a woman in India of Buddha's day. But happiness did not come automatically to those who renounced the world. Happiness was guaranteed only after each had realized for herself the import of the Buddha's teachings. The gathas sung by Therīs named Ubbiri, Sungalamata, and Mettika make clear that the sufferings of women came from many sources – loss of a child, an “unscrupulous man,” poverty, household drudgery, or old age.

Ubbiri mourned the loss of her daughter, crying heart-broken in the charnel ground for Jiva. At some point in her despair Ubbiri realized the profound truth of impermanence. In these verses the Theī told how the Buddha's dharma called her back to her senses.

“O Ubbiri, who wails in the wood
‘O Jiva! Dear daughter!’

Return to your senses. In this charnel field
Innumerable daughters, once as full of life as Jiva,
Are burnt. Which of them do you mourn?”
The hidden arrow in my heart plucked out,
The dart lodged there, removed.
The anguish of my loss,
The grief that left me faint all gone,
The yearning stilled,
To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṃgha
I turn, my heart now healed.

(Quoted in Tharu and Lalita 1990: 68–69;
translated by Uma Chakravarti and
Kumkum Roy)

Sungalamata was the mother of a boy who became a Buddhist monk. After living the householder's life, she too longed to gain the same kind of freedom and insight that was available to her child. She sang:

A woman well set free! How free I am,
How wonderfully free, from kitchen drudgery.
Free from the harsh grip of hunger,
And from empty cooking pots.
Free too of that unscrupulous man,
The weaver of sunshades.
Calm now, and serene I am,
All lust and hatred purged.
To the shades of the spreading trees I go
And contemplate my happiness.

(Quoted in Tharu and Lalita 1990: 69;
translated by Uma Chakravarti
and Kumkum Roy)

Mettika had grown old. She had been born to an eminent brahmin family, but eventually took up the nun's life. As an enlightenend member of the nun's saṃgha, Mettika would have taught other women the Buddha-dharma. Here is her teaching on the noble truth of the suffering of old age.

Though I am weak and tired now,
And my youthful step long gone,
Leaning on this staff,
I climb the mountain peak.
My cloak cast off, my bowl overturned,
I sit here on this rock.
And over my spirit blows

The breath
Of liberty.
I've won, I've won the triple gems.
The Buddha's way is mine.

(Quoted in Tharu and Lalita 1990: 69–70;
translated by Uma Chakravarti
and Kumkum Roy)

Mettika's verses come from the mind and heart of a woman of India. Yet her sentiments express a Buddhist insight and the happiness of liberation that could easily have been spoken by a Zen Buddhist in Japan centuries later.

Coping with starvation in a Thai village

Food has never been taken for granted by the majority of people on this planet. Some people die of hunger, some flee from famine, and some perform rituals to stave off disaster. The Therī Sungalamata spoke of freedom from the suffering of “empty cooking pots” and the “harsh grip of hunger” that came with Buddhist realization. Wisdom and meditation can combat hunger to some extent. Yet wisdom is not always enough. Recall the famine that drove the early Jain leader Bhadrabāhu in the third century BCE to leave the Ganges basin area (where Sungalamata also lived) with his disciples (see page 000). And even when times are good, religious people remember from where their food comes. In a Thai village, people who call themselves Buddhists perform ceremonies that pre-date the Buddhist religion. A veneer of Buddhist lore is added to something more fundamental – worship of Nang Phrakosob, the goddess of rice.

Nang Phrakosob is the feminine rice spirit who gave herself for the sake of life and the dharma (religion) from time immemorial. Villagers in Thailand tell a story of the four cosmic ages when four Buddhas came to earth along with rice. As in India, the Thai people believe that with every age (each lasting thousands of years) the spiritual and material condition of humankind degenerates. The present age is the worst of all and everyone awaits the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya to usher in a golden age. At that wonderful time fragrant rice will again be plentiful, and people will have great spiritual capacity to live according to the Buddha-dharma.

A keen sense of the relationship between ecology and spirituality comes through the story of Nang Phrakosob. Thai Buddhists feel that rice is a gift from the worldly gods that helps human beings to sustain their lives and their religious practice. The feminine rice spirit came to human beings four times; and four times she left. At the start of each age a Buddha partook of the rice, and it is said that the first Buddha actually introduced rice to the region of India where he lived and taught. Yet whenever people mishandled the rice over the ages, Nang Phrakosob became upset and withdrew from the human community. Once it was only through the persuasion of animals (a fish, golden deer, and parrot who were some form of beneficent spiritual beings in disguise) that she agreed to return to human civilization. Another time she was moved to return only because people recited sacred mantras.

In the first age a grain of rice was a bright, silvery color the size of seven human fists. At that time rice carried the amazing fragrance of coconut and cow's milk. In the second age a grain of rice was the size of four human fists. It became smaller in the following two ages having the girth of three fists, and then shrank to half that size. Why? Because human beings acted in a non-virtuous manner and harmed her. The manner in which human beings harmed and insulted Nang Phrakosob tells much about the ethical sensibilities of the Thai Buddhists. People beat the rice and harmed her; they tried to grab her and broke the stalk in two down the middle; and they began to sell her. Eventually human beings had to do the very hard labor of planting and harvesting rice themselves. It was no longer given freely as in the beginning. In addition, the Thai people had rituals they needed to perform to gain the cooperation of the local spirits (*phi*).

The story of Nang Phrakosob has many references to folk beliefs that are in line with an ancient cosmology. It refers to the gods Indra and Brahmā, the snake king, local spirits, and a mythical ruler. According to Buddhist teachings none of these imaginal players knows the path to enlightenment. Yet they are players in the Thai folk religious drama. Buddhist monks do not require the Thai people to give up these ancient agricultural beliefs. Yet Buddhist values have found their way into the story. And in the end the story's message is that a person's very life goes hand in hand with the practice of religion. They see from the

reaction of Nang Phrakosob that if people are non-virtuous they will starve. The story makes several references to starvation and enumerates the various kinds of rice that became available over time. Thus it not only gives a moral teaching, but also provides a folk history of the people of Northeast Thailand. The final message of the story about rice in Thailand is that people should try to become as patient as Maitreya, the future Buddha himself. The ceremony (called the *sukhwan khaw*) that calls the rice spirits into the fields ends with this blessing:

Anyone who eats this rice, may he have a long life, may he become as wise as Phraa Chao Mahosot [Gautama Buddha in a former life] and be as patient as Phraa Mettai [Maitreya, the future Buddha]. Let everyone's wished be fulfilled as I have said.

(Tambiah 1970: 364)

PART 3 BUDDHIST PERFORMANCE

MEDITATION

Gautama saw the nature of reality and escaped from the compulsion to be reborn over and over again in *saṃsāra*. He attained enlightenment while meditating. Thus meditation became the key practice of Buddhism – because the ultimate aim of every Buddhist is to awaken as Buddha did. Consequently, when we think of the backdrop of the stage upon which characters in the Buddhist tradition enact their drama, we think of meditation. The Buddhist tradition adjusted to the society and needs of people as it traveled through South, Central, and East Asia. In this process of cultural transformation, several styles of meditation developed.

Nikāya Buddhist *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation: Four applications of mindfulness

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, discourse on the foundation of mindfulness (Pāli: *sati*), is a widely used *sūtra* (Pāli: *sutta*) from the Nikāya canon. In this lecture Buddha taught four ways to apply mindfulness. Any one of

these four foundations of mindfulness can lead the meditator to realize the three marks of existence: non-self, impermanence, and suffering. In modern times such application of mindfulness is often called *vipāśyanā* meditation. These four topics on which a Buddhist meditates form the basis of all other Buddhist styles of meditation. Here are some typical instructions from the Nikāya scriptures:

- *Mindfulness of the body.* Contemplate the “body in the body.” Become aware of the process of breathing, mindful of the continuous alternation of the in breath and out breath. Doing so, notice the impermanence of the breath. Next, apply mindfulness to various small actions involved in sitting, lying down, standing, and walking. In addition to noticing things like the lifting of one’s arm or blinking, also become mindful of the hotness or coolness of one’s internal organs, and so forth. Thus, becoming aware of the body’s condition, notice how pain and pleasure are associated with the body. These observations take one into the next category in which mindfulness is applied to feelings.
- *Mindfulness of feelings.* Be mindful of one’s reactions to sense impressions, and note whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Gain a realistic impression of one’s likes and dislikes in response to things seen, heard, touched, smelled, tasted, and thought. Now apply awareness of the three types of feelings to better shape actions that stem from them. For example, if responding to a feeling of annoyance (which is unpleasant), make the choice to practice patience and not react with anger. On the other hand, take a pleasant feeling of love for one’s cat and extend it to all cats in the universe!
- *Mindfulness of state of mind.* Now become mindful of one’s general mental condition be it tense, excited, bored, stressed, balanced, calm, loving, patient, greedy, angry, dull, concentrated, and so forth. Then notice that these conditions do not persist. They change and can be changed. Anger can be transformed into calmness; greed can be transformed into expansiveness; balance can be enhanced; and so forth. The image of eating stew may be helpful here. Being mindful of

ones “state of mind” is like tasting the soup of a stew. Being mindful of “mental formations” (see the next paragraph) is like tasting the carrots, potatoes, onions, etc. in the stew.

- **Mindfulness of mental formations.** Some Buddhist philosophers name fifty-two mental formations. Some of them (such as intention) occur with every mental event, while others are associated with either wholesome or unwholesome attitudes. Some (such as sleep) can even be positive, negative, or neutral. The point is to become aware of them. Then enhance the positive ones and eliminate the negative ones. Two lists of mental formations are often given for contemplation: five hindrances that work against enlightenment, and seven factors that are conducive to enlightenment. Buddha gave suggestions on how all the negative mental formations can be reduced and eliminated. Likewise he taught how to develop and perfect the positive mental formations.

Tibetan Buddhist *lam-rim* meditation: Stages of the path to enlightenment

Nyingma, Śākya, Kagyu, and Geluk are the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Each composed *lam-rim* (stages of the path) texts that include these basic instructions as a means to attain enlightenment.

- **Take refuge.** Bow down, making offerings, and take refuge with a deep conviction that Buddha taught a suitable path to enlightenment. Refuge is taken in the Three Jewels: Buddha, dharma, and spiritual community.
- **Recognize human potential.** Contemplate the preciousness of human life. Develop a sense of gratitude and urgency by contemplating the lives of less fortunate beings who live in *saṃsāra*, including animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. Consider how human life is favorable for enlightenment because it includes enough suffering to motivate one to end suffering for oneself and others. Think how worldly godlings are less fortunate than human beings in the sense that their lives are almost too privileged.
- **Contemplate death.** Maintain an awareness of death, to feel motivated to use one's precious

human life wisely. Think how one's death will certainly come, but the time of that death is uncertain (and could be at any time). Consider how the only thing one can take at the time of death is the mental impact of spiritual practice. Resolve to practice dharma to prepare for death and a favorable rebirth, or freedom from *saṃsāra*.

- **Remember karma and its fruits.** Consider how one's acts of body, speech, and mind will bear fruit. Think how virtuous action brings happiness, while non-virtuous action brings *duhkḥa*.
- **Generate bodhicitta.** Establish the bodhisattva motivation to meditate for the benefit of all living beings. Think about how kind living beings have been to one. (They are like one's mothers.) Over the course of many lifetimes, all beings have been at one time or another very kind to one. Therefore, generate the feeling to help them.
- **Realize sunyata.** Go deeply into consideration about the true nature of reality – *tathata*. Do this by analyzing the five heaps, or the impermanent character of various objects.

Zen *kōan* meditation: *Does a dog have Buddha nature?*

A famous Zen *kōan* goes like this:

A monk once asked Master Joshu, “Has a dog the Buddha Nature or not?” Joshu said, “Mu!”
(Shibayama 1974: 19)

What is the meaning of the case? One commentary goes like this:

In studying Zen, one must pass the barriers set up by ancient Zen Masters. For the attainment of incomparable *satori*, one has to cast away his discriminating mind. . . . Now tell me, what is the barrier of the Zen Masters? Just this “Mu” – it is the barrier of Zen. . . . Those who have passed the barrier will not only see Joshu clearly, but will go hand in hand with all the Masters of the past, see them face to face. You will see with the same eye that they see with and hear with the same ear. Wouldn't it be wonderful? Don't you want to pass the barrier? Then concentrate yourself into this

“Mu,” with your 360 bones and 84,000 pores, making your whole body one great inquiry. Day and night work intently at it. Do not attempt nihilistic or dualistic interpretations. It is like having bolted a red hot iron ball. You try to vomit it but cannot.

(Shibayama 1974: 19)

Whoever can give this answer with *complete conviction* passes through the gateless barrier of Zen, because answering in such a way can only be done with an enlightened mind. The peculiar thing about this kōan is the meaning of “NO!”

Supposedly everything has Buddha Nature. Then, why is the answer, “MU!”? Whatever the practitioner decides . . . “MU!” must be delivered with 100 percent certainty. “MU!” contains the whole universe and the whole person. “MU!” is delivered from the hara, and with body–mind not separated by a single iota.

There are some variations of answers recorded in Zen literature. Here the master recited a traditional verse, and waits for an answer.

MASTER:

The song on “mu,” written by Zen master Ryofu, says:

“Joshu’s dog has no Buddha-nature,
Ten thousand green mountains are hidden in an ancient mirror,
The one-footed Persian goes into China,
And the eight-armed Nata carries out administrative orders.”
How about this?

ANSWER:

First the pupil says, “Mu.” Then, making a fist, he punches the base of his master’s skull. In this case, the master says, “Explain!” and the pupil answers, “This is called the hit-in-the-base-of-the-skull.”

(Hoffman 1975: 63)

Chan master Hui-neng, the sixth patriarch of the meditation school, taught that the nature of mind is pure, and that original mind could be suddenly recognized. Hui-neng did not teach ways to attain sudden enlightenment, but the eighth patriarch Ma-tsu (709–788) developed tactics of aesthetic shock for doing so. With

sudden gestures that involved hitting, shouting, and surprising his disciples, Ma-tsu prompted them to recognize the gap in their stream of thought. Ma-tsu used the method of direct pointing to lead students to face the non-dual, now-consciousness of their don’t know, beginner’s mind. This beginner’s mind is the Buddha’s silence. It is the gap in thought that allows one to recognize the relationship between sunyata and forms. It is the key to freedom from suffering. A great Zen master Hakuin (1685–1768) liked to speak of the Great Doubt that kōan meditation generated in the mind. He told disciples that the puzzle should continually intensify, creating greater and greater doubt, through an ever deeper and more pressing question. The question becomes like a red hot iron ball in the belly. The more intense the Doubt becomes, the more explosive the enlightenment experience is when the Doubt is overcome. Awakening comes in a flash of silence.

Pure Land meditation: visualizing Amitābha

Pure Land Buddhists practice a set of visualizations recorded in the *Meditation on Buddha of Infinite Life Sūtra* with the aim of being reborn with Buddha Amitābha into the Western Paradise. The text contains instructions that Gautama Buddha gave to Queen Vaidehi who (along with King Bimbisūra) had been imprisoned by their son. After her husband was starved to death, the queen appealed mentally to Buddha who was living nearby at the time. He appeared in a hierophanic vision as a response to her heartfelt prayer, and taught her to meditate on Amitābha and the Pure Land. As the Pure Land tradition evolved, these teachings became known as Settled Mind and Dispersed Mind practices because they include variant guidelines for people of greater and lesser spiritual development. The text instructs Pure Land practitioners to ground their meditation in three pure actions: (1) care for parents, serve elders, and so on; (2) take refuge in the Three Jewels, observe proper decorum, and so on; and (3) generate the mind of enlightenment, believe in the cause and effect of karma, and so forth.

Pure Land meditators should sit facing West and observe the sun “which is like a drum suspended above the horizon” until the image becomes clear with eyes open or closed (Hisao 1995: 97). Next they imagine



Plate 9.4 “Buddha Amitābha.” Pure Land Buddhists visualize Buddha Amitābha with streaming rays of light. This Buddha brings people into his paradise with a hook of compassion that draws their hearts upward toward him. Amitābha is popular in East Asia where Pure Land Buddhism developed.

clear water that becomes bright, transparent ice, which turns into lapis lazuli. Gradually that base is decorated with numerous golden ropes, jewels, colored lights, banners, and musical instruments. Meditators are instructed to be constantly mindful of this visualization, except when sleeping. Upon the lapis lazuli ground more beautiful things are visualized, such as seven rows of tall jeweled trees with flowers and leaves, nets of pearls – all shining with lights, and so forth. After some time, Pure Land practitioners feel they are seeing the Pure Land.

In the course of Pure Land visualizations Buddha Amitābha appears with a bodhisattva on either side. The figures are huge, and so must be mentally entered from a small mark such as a white curl of hair situated between the eyebrows of Amitābha. From a single sign like that, numerous other marks spontaneously emerge. Through this type of concentration the meditator enters a state of samadhi. While in this rarified state of one-pointed concentration, the meditator should aspire to be reborn into the Western Paradise. At this point Pure Land practitioners may feel that their bodies are illuminated with lights of 500 colors. They may feel their spiritual eye opening up. Sometimes the body of Amitābha seems to fill the sky completely. At other times it may be some sixteen or eighteen feet tall. In any case, faithful Pure Land practitioners have faith that their practice of such visualizations will become useful at the moment of death. At that time, they sincerely aim to take rebirth in the Western Paradise and be drawn up by Amitābha’s hook of compassion. The experience of being reborn will feel as quick as the snapping of one’s fingers.

KEY POINTS

- Gautama was born in what is today Nepal, in the sixth century BCE during a speculative period of Indian history when new questions were being asked about karma, rebirth, and escape from saṃsāra.
- After waking up to the nature of reality – thus meriting the title Buddha – Gautama spent forty-five years teaching four Great Facts or Noble Truths about suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the eightfold path to freedom from suffering.

226 *Buddhist tradition*

- Gautama rejected the absolute authority of the Vedic scriptures; denied the validity of the Āryan caste system (although he was born into it); discounted the tradition mandating the procreation of sons (although he had a son); and overrode the Āryan asrama system that reserved intensive spiritual practice for the elderly (by starting early). Besides that, he rejected the dearly held notion of an eternal, unchanging ātman.
 - The Buddhist tradition is divided into two main branches that have the same philosophical foundation: (1) Nikāya, which spread through South Asia, emphasizes the goal of the arhat who gains freedom from rebirth. (2) Mahāyāna, which spread through Central and East Asia, emphasizes the goal of the bodhisattva who continually returns to the world for the sake of living beings.
 - Buddhist scripture is divided into three “baskets” including (1) stories and training rules, (2) Gautama’s discourses, and (3) systematic discussions of the key teachings. Beyond that, many commentaries have been written on these three baskets.
 - Gautama was a practical man who did not confirm or deny the existence of God. He did not discuss abstract cosmology, or spell out points of doctrine for others to believe. Everything the Buddha taught is said to be “interpretable” – except for his observation on the emptiness of persons and phenomena.
 - Although Buddhism disappeared from India for over six centuries (from about 1200 to 1800 CE) it adapted to new cultural circumstances. Several styles of meditative practice developed among practitioners of the Nikāya, Tibetan, Pure Land, and Zen schools of Buddhism.
- 4 What are the basic teachings of Buddha-dharma? (Hint: See the Four Great Facts with the Eightfold Path, and the Six Perfections.)
 - 5 Describe the realms of saṃsāra according to Buddhist cosmology. What is the relationship between mental states of meditation and places that exist?
 - 6 Identify some styles of meditation that developed in the Buddhist tradition.
 - 7 Contrast the life and aspirations of Buddhist monks and nuns with those of laypeople such as villagers in Thailand.

GLOSSARY

Abodes of Brahmā Four levels of meditation or dhyāna in the realm of pure form of saṃsāra in Buddhist cosmology; each abode is associated with a boundless social emotion: love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity; where the god Brahmā dwells.

Adi Buddha (Sanskrit) Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of the ground of awareness personified through this metaphor.

aniconic Not involving figural representations (icons) of extraordinary persons, such as prophets, buddhas, and so forth.

arhat (Sanskrit) Person who has realized non-self and need not take rebirth after passing away; goal of Theravāda Buddhist practice.

ātman the soul or eternal self; some Hindus strive to realize that ātman is none other than brahman (i.e., the living essence of the universe).

bhikṣu (Sanskrit) Buddhist monk.

bhikṣuṇī (Sanskrit) Buddhist nun.

bodhicitta (Sanskrit) Mind of enlightenment; compassionate mental decision to bring all living beings out of suffering; with this in mind the practitioner starts along the bodhisattva path.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1 List the various kinds of imaginal and exceptional players according to whether they are more involved in Nikaya or Mahayana Buddhism.
- 2 Distinguish mythic, historical, and philosophical elements in the story of Buddha’s life. Why do you think the Buddhist tradition mixes these elements?
- 3 Name several historical persons, and state their

bodhisattva (Pāli: **bodhisatta**) Theravādins typically use the word bodhisattva with reference to Gautama Buddha before he became enlightened – including past lifetimes from the time he was an ascetic named Sumedha. Mahayanists use the word with reference to practitioners (at different levels of spiritual development) who seek enlightenment and vow to return to the world endlessly to free sentient beings from suffering.

buddha bodies Buddhist concept referring to the forms in which an enlightened being can appear to people. (1) The form body is a flesh and blood person, such as the human Gautama who lived in India. (2) The communion body is the subtle form body that appears in the dreams and contemplative visions of skilled meditators and faithful people. (3) The dharma body is the mind of an enlightened being, seen when someone realizes the deepest point of Buddha's teachings. Theravāda Buddhists do not discuss the communion body.

dharma (Sanskrit) Duty (Hinduism); Buddha's teaching, as in Buddha-dharma. From a Sanskrit root dhri, meaning to bear or uphold. This represents the law of the universe that upholds or maintains existence.

dhyāna (Sanskrit) Meditation; any of eight high states of consciousness within saṃsāra reached through śamatha meditation; jhana in Pāli; basic term used for Buddhist meditation school (see Zen).

dokusan (Japanese) Interview with the roshi in Zen Buddhism.

duhkḥa (Sanskrit) Suffering, dissatisfaction, alienation; Buddha's first Great Fact says this characterizes life before enlightenment.

four opponent powers Four Buddhist ways to minimize the effects of negative karma: take refuge, confess, apply an antidote, and vow not to repeat the act.

hwadu (Korean) Buddhist meditation practice involving focus on the question or key point of a kōan.

Jātaka tales Birth tales about Buddha's past lives.

jiriki (Japanese) Self-power; refers to Buddhist practice in which personal discipline and effort plays a major role, as in Zen. (See also tariki.)

karma (Sanskrit) Actions of body, speech, or mind that bear fruit of similar type; a key tenet in the liberation traditions of India.

kōan (Japanese) Mental puzzle based on enlightened words and actions of Buddhist masters of the Meditation schools, especially Chan masters who lived during the Tang Dynasty (c. 600–900) in China.

lam-rim (Tibetan) Stages of the path; genre of Tibetan Buddhist literature outlining meditations according to topics designed to lead to realization of emptiness and generation of compassion.

Mahāyāna Northern Buddhism. Culturally progressive branch of Buddhism found primarily in East and Central Asian countries: Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (which has both Mahāyāna and Theravāda), as well as pre-Communist China and Tibet holds bodhisattva ideal, and includes dhyani buddhas.

mandala (Sanskrit) Mystic diagram representing the universe as a microcosm correlated with a mental state of spiritual value such as compassion, peace, and so forth; used in tantric Buddhism.

mantra (Sanskrit) Mystic syllables whose vibration facilitates perception of beings in the imaginal realm; used in religions from India.

mudra (Sanskrit) Mystic hand gestures that symbolize various spiritual states, such as freedom from fear; many correlate with beings in the imaginal realm; used in religions from India; important to Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu iconography.

Nikāya Term for the Theravāda Buddhist tradition or any of about 18 early Buddhist schools (all of which are now extinct except Theravāda); term brought into use by contemporary scholars of Buddhism to replace the negative-sounding "Hinayāna" ("lesser vehicle") found in classic Mahāyāna texts with reference to the early Buddhist schools industry including Theravāda.

nirvāṇa (Sanskrit) Blown out, Buddhist enlightenment whereby rebirth into saṃsāra stops.

Noble Eightfold Path The eight steps which Buddha recommended as the way to attain enlightenment; these constitute the fourth Great Fact (Noble Truths); divided into three categories: wisdom, moral conduct, and mental cultivation.

non-self Lack of intrinsic self; translation of anātman (Sanskrit) or amatta (Pali); term Buddhists use to indicate that sentient beings have a dynamic stream of consciousness rather than an eternal soul (ātman); Buddhist tradition names non-self as one of the three marks of existence.

parinirvāṇa (Sanskrit) A Buddha's final nirvāṇa, which occurs at the time of death.

prajna (Sanskrit) Wisdom; in Buddhism realization of sunyata or anātman.

refuge Standard prayer that orients a Buddhist's mind toward the Three Jewels: Buddha, dharma, saṃgha.

roshi (Japanese) Zen master.

śamatha (Sanskrit) quiescence, calmness; a branch of Buddhist meditation leading to the dhyānas, but not to enlightenment.

saṃsāra (Sanskrit) The cycle of birth and death characterized by suffering; until one attains nirvāṇa (Buddhism), moksha (Hinduism), or kevala (Jainism) one is reborn into saṃsāra.

saṃgha (Sanskrit) Buddhist fourfold spiritual community; monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen; typically refers to monks and nuns.

satori (Japanese) Zen Buddhist term for enlightenment.

sesshin (Japanese) Zen retreat.

shikan-taza (Japanese) Just-sitting; represents the highest form of meditation for Zen Buddhists of Dōgen's Soto school.

siddha (Sanskrit) Indian yogi who practices tantra.

siddhis (*iddhi*: Pāli) Supernormal powers such as: traveling in space like a winged bird, while in a seated, cross-legged position; gaining the divine eye, whereby one gains knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings; and recollecting one's past lives in great detail.

six perfections Buddhist spiritual path of a bodhisattva, involving the practice of: generosity, morality, patience, joyous effort, calm abiding, and wisdom.

skandhas (Sanskrit) Five heaps of conditioning making up the person, according to Buddhist theory: forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and minds.

śramaṇa (Sanskrit) Wandering ascetic.

sunyata (Sanskrit) Emptiness, lack of inherent existence; deepest nature of reality as dependently arising according to Buddhist philosophy.

supreme buddha Specialized term with reference only to buddhas who come into the world to show the path to enlightenment when it has become defunct; examples are Dīpaṃkara, Gautama, and Maitreya (the future Buddha).

tantra (Sanskrit) Form of yogic practice involving mantras, mudras, and mandalas; called Vajrayāna Buddhism in India and Tibet, and Shingon in Japan.

tariki (Japanese) Other power; refers to Buddhist practice in which reliance on the compassion of Amida Buddha plays a key role, as in the Pure Land schools (see also jiriki).

Tathāgata (Sanskrit) Thus-gone; title that Gautama Buddha liked to apply to himself.

tathata (Sanskrit) Thusness; reality as it is; Buddhist concept telling how things appear when a person is enlightened: just so.

Theravāda Southern Buddhism. Culturally conservative branch of Buddhism found primarily in South Asian countries: Sri Lanka, Kampuchea, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (which has both Theravāda and Mahāyāna). Holds arhat ideal, and emphasizes historical Buddha.

Three Jewels Buddhist way of talking about the three complementary aids to spiritual transformation: Buddha, dharma, and saṃgha.

three marks of existence Non-self, impermanence, and suffering (Sanskrit: anātman, anitya, dukkha). Buddhist teachings typically involve a discussion of these.

three poisons Three mental afflictions that cause suffering and rebirth into saṃsāra, according to Buddhist theory: ignorance, greed, hatred.

tripiṭaka (Pāli) Three baskets of Buddha's teaching: vinaya (including the monastic saṃgha training precepts), sūtras (discourses), and abhidharma (systematic commentaries).

Tuṣīta heaven A realm of existence in Buddhist cosmology, where Maitrey, the future Buddha, waits to descend to earth. Buddha's mother was reborn here.

vipaśyanā (Sanskrit) Branch of Buddhist meditation leading to insight into the three marks of existence. See also śamatha.

zazen (Japanese) Discipline of sitting meditation, emphasized by Zen Buddhists.

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