welfare of the world; but what I have done has been done that men may conform to Righteousness.

All the good deeds that I have done have been accepted and followed by the people. And so obedience to mother and father, obedience to teachers, respect for the aged, kindliness to brāhmans and ascetics, to the poor and weak, and to slaves and servants, have increased and will continue to increase. . . . And this progress of Righteousness among men has taken place in two manners, by enforcing conformity to Righteousness, and by exhortation. I have enforced the law against killing certain animals and many others, but the greatest progress of Righteousness among men comes from exhortation in favor of noninjury to life and abstention from killing living beings.[5]

I have done this that it may endure . . . as long as the moon and sun, and that my sons and my great-grandsons may support it; for by supporting it they will gain both this world and the next.

[From the Seventh Pillar Edict]

[5] For all his humanitarianism, Ashoka did not abolish the death penalty, as was done by some later Indian kings.

De Bary II

2 ❁

THE LIFE OF BUDDHA AS A WAY OF SALVATION

INTRODUCTION

One of the great themes of Buddhism is the Buddha himself. As man, as teacher, as savior, and as a being with many attributes of divinity, he remained a central figure in the development of the religion and an important link between the so-called Lesser Vehicle (Hīnayāna) and Greater Vehicle (Mahāyāna). In the previous chapter our discussion of early Buddhism focused on the founder's basic teachings concerning the sufferings and illusions of human existence and the path by which deliverance might be attained. Nirvāna, not the Buddha, was the ultimate goal of the religious quest.

We have also seen how little can be said about the Buddha's life with historical certainty. That we have so few reliable records, however, does not indicate a lack of interest in the life and activities of the Buddha. The sense of history and the practice of historiography may have been relatively weak in India, but the Buddha as an inspiring example of his own teachings was much in the minds of his followers. A process of euhemerization set in very early. Already by the first century A.D. myths and legends concerning the life and previous existences of the Buddha abounded. Many of these reflected popular religious attitudes that had essentially nothing to do with Buddhism itself, but others celebrated and enhanced what must have been a central core of tradition

concerning the life and teachings of Gotama Buddha himself.

The *Deeds of the Buddha* (*Buddhacarita*), attributed to Ashvaghosha, was written between the first and second centuries A.D. It combines a strong pietistic approach with a concern for preserving the essentials of the traditional faith. Ashvaghosha drew on what he believed to be standard and authoritative accounts of the Buddha's life, rejecting the more extravagant stories that had grown up. At the same time there is here an element of religious awe and devotion expressed through a fertile poetic imagination. The *Buddhacarita* is a masterpiece of Sanskrit poetry, written in the courtly *kāvya* style. Its emotional tone and delight in nature strongly resemble the later poetry of Kālidāsa in the same style. Thus it is not an historical account but religious and poetic truth that Ashvaghosha reveals to us in the *Buddhacarita*.

Worth noting also is Ashvaghosha's concern for the basic moral and spiritual teachings of the Buddha, rather than for any particular philosophical interpretation of them. Although the work was composed in the same religious atmosphere in which the Mahāyāna arose, the characteristic metaphysical doctrines of the Mahāyāna are missing. Ashvaghosha seeks only to convey the established tradition in a popular and appealing form. The explicitly didactic portions confine themselves to such fundamental doctrines as the Four Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Chain of Causation, etc., while the work as a whole stresses devotion to Buddha and the importance of meditation (especially yogic trance) as an essential practice.

In this respect Ashvaghosha presents a kind of common denominator among the various schools and sects. More fundamentally still he is concerned with the common denominator in human experience. The central experiences of the Buddha's life he sees as relevant to every human life, and this is reflected in the structure of the *Buddhacarita*, as we are led along the path of the Buddha's spiritual pilgrimage.

The translation which follows is mainly based on a Sanskrit manuscript of the thirteenth or fourteenth century A.D. from Nepal with missing sections supplied from a Chinese version of the fifth century. Though it is much abridged and

lacks the richness of descriptive detail and narrative incident which adorns the original, the reader may still appreciate why this text should have gained such popularity in later times, especially among Mahāyāna Buddhists of the Far East. The Chinese pilgrim I-ching said of it: "The *Buddhacarita* is widely read or sung throughout the five regions of India and the countries of the Southern Sea. Its author clothes manifold meanings and ideas in a few words, which rejoice the heart of the reader, so that he never tires of reading the poem. Besides it may be considered meritorious for one to read this book, inasmuch as it contains the noble doctrine in a concise form."

THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

His Birth and the Sages' Prophecies

The Buddha's appearance in the world takes place in splendid surroundings and the most auspicious circumstances. Supernatural elements and fanciful features are freely employed to engage the reader's imagination and heighten his expectations. From many, no doubt, this glorified setting evoked a sense of religious awe, but its deeper meaning becomes apparent with the predictions that the Buddha, heir to so much power and wealth and glory, is destined to renounce all of these for something greater.

The significance of this setting may be appreciated too in the light of the widespread, but shallow, view that Buddhism's preoccupation with suffering must reflect a deep-seated pessimism over the miserable conditions of life in ancient India. Not only is the historical basis for this questionable, but in terms of the traditional Buddhist view there are certainly no grounds for taking poverty or misfortune as the starting point of its inquiry into the nature of human existence. On the contrary the Buddha starts with everything in his favor, and if in spite of this, he must reckon with suffering in this world, then there is no one, no people, no realm and no age, however well-circumstanced, that can avoid this confrontation.

There was a king of the unconquerable Shākya race, descended from Ikshavāku, named Shuddhodana. Endowed with wealth and virtue, he was loved and esteemed by his people, as the moon in autumn.

This king, as powerful as Indra, had a queen comparable to Shachī, Indra's spouse. As steadfast as the earth and as pure in heart as a lotus flower, she was called Māyā. . . .

In her sleep, Māyā saw a white elephant entering her womb and thereby conceived; yet she was free from anxiety and illusion.

She longed however for the peace of a secluded wood, and as the Lumbinī grove, with its fountains, flowers, and fruit trees, was quiet and suitable for contemplation, she asked the king to let her go there.

Knowing her intention, the king, in delight, ordered his followers to accompany the queen to the grove.[1]

In that lovely grove, the queen became aware that the time of her delivery was near; thousands of waiting-girls greeted her as she proceeded to a couch overspread with an awning.

Then, when the constellation Pushya was most clear and serene,[2] from the side of the queen, who was purified by her vows, a son was born for the well-being of the world without causing her any pain or illness. . . .

He shone in splendor and steadfastness, as the morning sun coming down upon the earth; he was exceedingly radiant and drew others' eyes toward him like the moon. . . .

Gazing at the four quarters with the bearing of a lion, he uttered a speech prophesying his auspicious attainment in the future: "I am born to be enlightened for the well-being of the world; this is my last birth." . . .

Present at the grove were dignified and learned brāhmans, experts in reading omens and noted for their eloquence. They were exceedingly delighted on seeing the omens, and revealed the truth to the king who they knew was apprehensive . . .

"Auspicious signs found on his body, such as its golden color and the exquisite radiance of its luster, indicate that

[1] Since the Sanskrit manuscript is missing, the translation thus far has been based on the Chinese text in *Taishō daizōkyō*, IV, 1a.

[2] In Chinese translation, the day is specified as April 8, which has traditionally been celebrated as the date of his birth throughout the Far East.

he is certain to be the perfectly Enlightened One, or a universal monarch if he takes pleasure in worldly affairs.

"Should he be a great, earthly sovereign, he will rule the entire world with courage and righteousness, leading all kings, as the light of the sun leads the lights of the world.

"If he seeks deliverance by living in a forest, he will acquire true wisdom and illumine the entire world, standing aloft like Mt. Meru, the king of mountains.

"As gold is the best of metals; the ocean, of waters; the moon, of planets; the sun, of lights; so is your son the noblest of all men in the world." [3]

The king, pleased, courteously offered gifts to the brāhmans, hoping that his son might become lord of the earth as prophesied and then retire to the forest upon reaching old age.

Then, the great seer Asita, learning by means of signs and ascetic power, of the birth of the prince who would put an end to birth, came to the palace of the Shākya king, thirsting for the true teaching. . . .

When Asita saw the prince on the nurse's lap, as had the son of Agni lain on the lap of Devī (Pārvatī), tears flickered on his eyelashes and he looked up to heaven with a sigh. . . .

Seeing Asita's eyes brimming with tears, the king trembled with affection for his son, and choking with emotion asked him . . .

"Is this young shoot of my family, just born, destined to wither without blooming? Tell me quickly, Venerable One, for I am disturbed; you know the love of a father for his son."

The sage understood the king's agitation, caused by his foreboding of misfortune, and said: "Oh King, be not disturbed. What I have said about the prince admits of no doubt.

"I am distressed not because of anything untoward to befall him, but out of sorrow for myself that I am to be disappointed. It is now time for me to depart this life, just

[3] The preceding five verses have been translated from the Chinese, *Taishō IV*, 1c–2a.

when he is born who will attain the Enlightenment so hard to achieve, which brings rebirth to an end.

"He will abandon the kingdom in his indifference to worldly pleasures; he will obtain the Truth (*tattva*) through diligent effort; he will shine forth, like the sun of knowledge, to expel the darkness of delusion in the world." . . .

Then the sage Asita, after telling the prince's true destiny to the king, fearful for his son, went away as he had come by the path of the wind, while all gazed up at him in reverence. . . .

Infancy passed and in due time the young prince received the initiation ceremony. The sciences proper to his family which would ordinarily take many years to learn, he mastered in a few days.

But the king of the Shākya, having heard from the sage Asita that the goal of the prince was to attain supreme bliss, sought to engage the prince in sensual pleasures, lest he should wish to go off to the forest.

Thereupon, the king summoned for his son a famous maiden named Yashodharā, who was endowed with beauty, modesty, and decorum, like the reincarnation of the Goddess of Beauty, from a family of long standing and good character. . . .

And so, in palaces like celestial mansions brought to earth, as white as the clouds of autumn and comfortable in all seasons, the prince spent his time listening to refined music performed by lovely maidens. . . .

In time, the shapely Yashodharā, bearing her own fame, gave in birth to the son of Shuddhodana, a son named Rāhula, whose face resembled the moon.

His Excursions from the Palace

Despite the considerable means at the King's disposal and his strenuous efforts to shield his son from the sufferings of life, the Prince's natural curiosity and the restless search for new pleasures lead him finally to venture forth from the palace. Outside, for the first time, he encounters genuine and irremediable suffering. It is a shocking experience, repeated on three subsequent occasions, as if to emphasize an ever deepening realization of the full implications of suffering. Ashvaghosha, well aware that many men appear insensitive to it, seems to be stressing a point: sooner or later every one must reckon with unmitigated sorrow or loss. The problem ignored does not disappear, but on the other hand a merely passive intellectual recognition avails nothing either. Unless the problem is felt in the core of one's being, there will not be the urgency, the determined motivation, to find a solution.

On one occasion, however, the Prince heard about woods filled with songs, abounding in fresh grass, with trees in which the cuckoos sounded, adorned with many lotus ponds.

And having learned of the attractions of the city's grove, in which the women took delight, the prince like a pent-up elephant, entertained the thought of going out to it.

The king, learning the desire of his dear son, arranged an excursion befitting his affection, majesty, and his son's age.

Yet he ordered that all commoners suffering any affliction should be kept off the royal road lest the tender-hearted prince be distressed at the sight of them.

Thus, those whose limbs were missing or maimed, and those who were old, sick, or wretched, were gently cleared from the royal route. . . .

Whereupon the prince mounted a golden chariot, to which were harnessed four well-trained steeds with golden trappings, driven by a manly, honest and skillful charioteer.

And, as the moon ascending the sky amidst the constellations, he proceeded with fitting retinue on the roads bestrewn with heaps of bright flowers, decorated with garlands and fluttering banners. . . .

When, for the first time, the prince saw the royal way filled with well-behaved citizens wearing clean and simple clothes, he was delighted and felt as if he were a different person.

Seeing that the city was joyful as paradise, however, the Shuddhādhivāsa gods, to incite the prince's renunciation of the world, created an old man.

The prince saw the man overcome with old age, different in form from other people, and his curiosity was aroused. With his eyes fixed on the man, he asked the charioteer:

"Oh, charioteer! Who is this man with gray hair, supported by a staff in his hand, his eyes sunken under his eyebrows, his limbs feeble and bent? Is this transformation a natural state or an accident?"

The charioteer, when he was thus asked, his intelligence being confused by the gods, saw no harm in telling the prince its significance, which should have been discreetly withheld from him:

"Old age, it is called, the destroyer of beauty and vigor, the source of sorrow, the depriver of pleasures, the slayer of memories, the enemy of sense organs. That man has been ruined by old age.

"He, too, in his infancy had taken milk and, in due time, had crawled on the ground; he then became a handsome youth, and now he has reached old age."

The prince, moved, asked the charioteer: "Will this evil come upon me also?" The charioteer then replied:

"Advanced age will certainly come upon you through the inescapable force of time, no matter how long you may live. People in the world are aware of old age, the destroyer of beauty; yet, they seek [pleasures]." . . .

For a long while, the prince kept his gaze on the decrepit man, sighing and shaking his head. Looking at the excited group of people, he said despondently:

"Thus, old age indiscriminately destroys memory, beauty, and strength, yet people in the world are not disturbed at seeing such a sight before them.

"This being so, turn back the horses, charioteer; go home quickly. How can I enjoy myself in the garden when the fear of death is revolving in my mind?"

At the command of the prince, the charioteer turned the chariot back. But when the prince had returned to the palace, struck by anxiety, he felt as if it were empty.

Even there he was unable to find peace of mind; therefore he went out again with the permission of the king, on the same arrangement as before.

Thereupon the gods created a man whose body was afflicted by disease. The son of Shuddhodana fixed his eyes on the man and asked the charioteer:

"Who is this man whose abdomen is swollen and whose body quivers as he breathes? His shoulders and arms are limp, his legs are pale and emaciated. Leaning on another for support, he is crying out, 'Mother!' "

To this the charioteer answered: "Lord, this is the great misfortune called disease, developed from a disorder of elements, by which this man, though he had been strong, has become disabled."

Eyeing him again compassionately, the prince said: "Is this evil peculiar to him or is this [danger of] disease common to all men?"

The charioteer replied: "Prince, this evil is common to all; yet the world filled with suffering seeks enjoyment, however oppressed it is by disease."

On hearing its meaning, the prince became despondent and trembled like the moon reflected on the waves of water. Filled with compassion, he spoke these words in a somewhat subdued tone:

"This is the calamity of disease in all men; yet, people in the world are unconcerned as they watch it. Indeed, vast is the ignorance of people who laugh when they themselves have not been released from the danger of sickness.

"Charioteer, go no farther, but direct the chariot back to the palace. Learning the danger of disease, my mind has been shocked and deflected from pleasures." . . .

[The young prince, however, takes yet another ride out of the palace and again, despite his father's precautions, encounters a distressing sight:]

As the prince rode on, the same gods produced a man's corpse, which the charioteer and the prince could see being carried on the road, though it was visible to no one else.

The prince asked the charioteer: "Who is the man being carried by four others, followed by persons in distress? He is well adorned, yet being mourned."

The charioteer, whose mind was overcome by the Shuddhādhivāsa gods of pure soul, told the Lord what should not have been revealed:

"This is someone bereft of intellect, senses, breath, and powers, lying unconscious like a bundle of grass or a log of wood. He had been raised and guarded with much care and affection, but now he is being abandoned."

Having heard the words of the charioteer, the prince became frightened and asked: "Is this state of being peculiar to this man, or is such the end of all men?"

The charioteer then said to him: "This is the last state

of all men. Death is certain for all, whether they be of low, middle, or high degree."

Though he was a steadfast man, the prince felt faint as soon as he heard about death. Leaning his shoulders against the railing, he said in a sad tone:

"This is the inescapable end for all men; yet, people in the world harbor no fear and seem unconcerned. Men must be hardened indeed to be so at ease as they walk down the road leading to the next life.

"Charioteer, turn back, for this is not the time for the pleasure-ground. How can a man of intelligence, aware of death, enjoy himself in this fateful hour?" . . .

[*On his final excursion the prince is overwhelmed by the misery of existence as he watches the pitiful toil of men in the fields. Then:*]

Longing for solitude, the prince kept his followers back and approached a lonely spot at the foot of a Jambū-tree, covered all over with beautiful fluttering leaves.

His First Meditation

In contrast to the overwhelming sense of misery which arises from his contacts with suffering, is the immediate reassurance which the prince derives from solitary meditation. Thus the pessimistic view of life is overcome by the mustering of one's own inner resources to deal with it. In the most fundamental sense withdrawal and concentration is a means available to anyone at any time. Here, however, the experience is described in terms of the yogic disciplines which were the common property of the Indian religious traditions.

There he sat on the clean ground where the soft grass glittered like beryl. Contemplating the birth and death of beings, he undertook to steady his mind in meditation.

In no time his mind became firm; he was released from mental distractions, such as the desire for objects of sense, and attained the first trance of calmness, which was characterized by non-defilement and accompanied by distinct cognition and reflection.

Having acquired the concentration of mind which springs from solitude, the prince was filled with extreme joy and

bliss; then meditating on the course of the world, he thought that this state was indeed supreme.

Alas, wretched is he who, out of ignorance and the blindness of pride, ignores others who are distressed by old age, sickness, or death, though he himself, being likewise subject to disease, old age, and death, is helpless! . . .

As he thus perceived clearly the evils of disease, old age, and death in the world, the false pride in self, arising from a belief in one's strength, youth, and life, left him instantly.

He became neither excited nor distressed; free from doubt, sloth, and drowsiness, he was unaffected by sensual pleasures; and untouched by hatred or contempt of others.

While this passionless, pure insight of that great-souled one grew, a man in mendicant's clothes approached him without being seen by others.

The prince asked, "Tell me, who are you?" The man replied, "Oh, best of men, I am a mendicant who, in fear of birth and death, has renounced the world for the sake of deliverance.

"In this world which is characterized by destruction, I eagerly search for the blessed and indestructible state. I regard both kinsmen and strangers as equals, and I am free from the evils of passion arising from objects of sense.

"Living wherever I happen to be—at the foot of a tree, in a deserted house, in the mountains, or in the woods—I wander about, living on the alms I receive, without ties to person or place and with no expectation save for the attainment of the ultimate goal."

Saying this, the mendicant flew to the sky as the prince watched. . . . The latter now knew what he should do, and began thinking of a way to leave his home. . . .

His Departure from Home and Family

On returning to the palace, the prince informs his father of his decision to take up the life of a religious mendicant. The king, of course, is determined to prevent this. Significantly, however, he does not contest the validity of the search for religious salvation, but argues from the traditional Brāhmanical standpoint that a man must first fulfill his responsibilities in life; only when these have been discharged will he have the freedom, maturity and self-mastery to engage in the solitary pursuit of religious emancipation. In this

crucial dialogue then, the confrontation is not simply between the worldly and spiritual, the secular and religious, but between two opposing views of life recognizing in different ways the ultimacy of the religious claim. The prince, for his part, insists not only on the primacy but also the immediacy of dealing with one's own spiritual problem. His decision to leave home and family thus becomes the prototype of the religious vocation in Buddhism.

"Dear son, give up this idea. The time for you to devote yourself to dharma has not yet come. For, they say the practice of dharma entails much danger when one is young and his mind is unsteady. . . .

"Therefore, give up this resolution. Meanwhile devote yourself to the duties of a householder. Entering the grove of ascetic practice will be agreeable enough after a man has enjoyed the pleasures of youth."

Hearing these words of the king, the prince replied. . . . "Oh king, if I were given a guarantee on four matters, I would not go to the grove of ascetic practice:

"That my life would not be committed to death; that my health would not be overcome by disease; that my youth would not be marred by old age; and that prosperity would not be taken away by disaster."

To his son who had proposed such difficult questions, the Shākya king replied, "Give up this idea which goes too far. Such a fantastic wish is ridiculous and improper."

Then the prince, whose gravity was as imposing as Mt. Meru, said to his father, "If there be no means of solution, I should not be detained; it is not right to hold by force a man who is anxious to escape from a burning house.

"Since for men separation is inescapable, is it not better for me to separate on my own accord for the sake of dharma? Will not death separate me, who am helpless and unsatisfied, without my being able to fulfill my aim?"

Though the king had heard the determined prince, who was anxious to seek deliverance, he said, "The prince must not go." He ordered additional guards around him and provided him with the most pleasurable of entertainments. . . .

Then the loveliest of women waited on him. . . . but even music played on instruments like those of the celestial beings failed to delight him. The ardent desire of that noble

prince was to leave the palace in search of the bliss of the highest good.

Whereupon the Akanistha Gods, who excelled in austerities, noting the resolution of the prince, suddenly cast the spell of sleep on the young women, leaving them in distorted postures and shocking poses. . . .

One lay leaning against the side of a window, her slender body bent like a bow, her beautiful necklace dangling. . . .

Another, with loose and disorderly hair, lay like the figure of a woman trampled by an elephant, her ornaments and garments having slipped from her back, her necklace scattered.

And another, of great natural beauty and poise, was shamelessly exposed in an immodest position, snoring out loud, with her limbs tossed about.

Another, with her ornaments and garlands falling off and garments unfastened, lay unconscious like a corpse, with her eyes fixed and their whites showing.

Another with well-developed legs lay as if sprawling in intoxication, exposing what should have been hidden, her mouth gaping wide and slobbering, her gracefulness gone and her body contorted. . . .

Seeing this . . . the prince was disgusted. "Such is the real nature of women in the world of the living—impure and loathsome; but deceived by dress and ornaments, man is stirred to passion for them." . . .

Thus arose in the prince a determination to leave that night. The Gods understood his mind and opened the doors of the palace.

[*Unnoticed, the prince goes out of the palace on the white horse Kanthaka, led by the quick-footed groom Chandaka.*]

He went out from his father's city with firm determination, leaving behind his father who had been so attached to him, his young son, his joyful people, and his most beautiful princess, suppressing his concerns for all of them.

The prince, whose eyes were long like spotless lotuses, looked back at the city and uttered a lion's roar: "I will not enter the city of Kapila until I have seen the other shore of birth and death." . . .

The Failure of Asceticism

After many wanderings in search of a teacher, overcoming numerous obstacles and temptations, the prince finally joins some ascetics by the bank of a river.

Engaged in much difficult fasting, over six years his body became steadily emaciated. . . . But tormenting his body through such austerities availed nothing.

"This is not the way to achieve passionlessness, enlightenment, liberation. Better and surer the way I found before beneath the Jambū-tree.

"Nor can that be attained by one who is weak. . . . How can it be reached by a man who is not calm and at ease, who is so exhausted by hunger and thirst that his mind is unbalanced?"

[*Just then, on divine inspiration, the daughter of a cowherd appears to offer the prince some milk-rice, which he accepts. So nourished, he is strengthened for his attainment of Enlightenment, and, as the other mendicants abandon him for having broken his fast, he goes alone to sit beneath the Tree of Wisdom. Taking up the immovable, cross-legged posture for sitting in meditation, he vows: "I shall not rise from this position until I have achieved my goal." When Māra the Tempter seeks to destroy the prince's resolution by all manner of tempting and terrifying sights, the latter remains steadfast.*]

Enlightenment

Having mastered perfectly all the methods of trance, the prince recalled, in the first watch of the night, the sequence of his former births. . . .

[*He next meditates on the twelve-link chain of causation, leading from "ignorance" to "old age and death":*]

The Rightly-Illumined One perceived all of these things and thus was decisively awakened: when birth is destroyed, old age and death ceases; when "becoming" is destroyed, then birth ceases;[1]

[1] From here on the translation is based on the Chinese text, *Taishō daizōkyō*, IV, 28a–30c.

When attachment is destroyed, "becoming" ceases; when craving is destroyed, attachment ceases; when sensations are destroyed, craving ceases;

When contact is destroyed, sensation ceases; when the six sense organs are destroyed, contact ceases; when the physical form is destroyed, the six sense organs cease;

When consciousness is destroyed, physical form ceases; when psychic constructions are destroyed, consciousness ceases; when ignorance is destroyed, psychic constructions cease.

Reflecting his right understanding, the great hermit arose before the world as the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

He found self (*ātman*) nowhere, as the fire whose fuel has been exhausted. [Then he conceived] the eightfold path, the straightest and safest path to the attainment of this end. . . .

For seven days, the Buddha with serene mind contemplated [the Truth that he had attained] and gazed at the Bodhi tree without blinking: "Here on this spot I have fulfilled my cherished goal; I now rest at ease in the dharma of selflessness."

His Compassion on the World

At this point a question arises as to whether the Buddha's enlightenment should be shared with others. From the standpoint of ordinary logic, his freedom of all attachments and concerns in the world should mean that he feels no obligation or responsibility to help others, and insofar as they would not be seen to have any true selfhood or individuality, their sufferings would be as transient and illusory as they themselves. There is also the problem of communicating the ineffable truth of Enlightenment or Nirvāna to those whose spiritual receptivity may be limited.

Here the poet implies that the Buddha considers both preaching to others and not preaching to them. In his freedom he can do either and remain at peace with himself; in both cases his transcendent insight would enable him to remain essentially disengaged from their sufferings. As to their ability to comprehend, he teaches others according to their respective levels of receptivity.

Note that the question of "helping" or "saving" others is presented specifically as a question of teaching, i.e. of sharing Enlightenment. Since suffering partakes of illusion, the only way to deal with it is inwardly, not outwardly. External remedies, whether per-

sonal, social, political, etc., are relevant and of value only to the extent that they contribute to this inner change. Hence they are all subordinate to the basic function of "teaching," "preaching," "enlightening."

Observing all sentient beings with the eyes of a Buddha, he felt deep compassion for them; he wished to purify those whose minds had been lost in false views arising from hatred, greed, and folly.

But how could liberation, which is so exquisite and profound, be expressed in words? It may be better not to give out my thoughts [he said to himself], and so he remained silent and at peace,

Then remembering his former vow to save others, he again began to think of preaching. . . .

The god Brahmā, learning of this, came to the Buddha, radiant with light, asking him to preach for the sake of the suffering beings. . . .

"I entreat you to save those who have sunk in the ocean of suffering. As in the world a righteous man distributes the profit he gains, so must you who have gained the dharma impart it to people that they may be saved.

"Innumerable are those common men who will be benefited. Difficult though it may be to share this gain with others, pray have compassion on the world and attempt this most arduous task."

After begging him earnestly, Brahmā returned to his heaven, while Buddha, moved by the god's solicitation and ever more compassionate toward the sentient beings, was prompted to preach [the dharma].

[*With this intention, slowly and serenely, he proceeds to Vārānasī and there comes upon the five mendicants who had deserted him before.*]

With much compassion the Buddha spoke to them, but out of ignorance they did not believe that he had attained the perfect enlightenment, saying:

"In vain you devoted yourself to ascetic practices, and then indulged in the pleasures of body and mouth. How could it be possible for you to attain Buddhahood?

"Because of such doubts we cannot believe that you have become the Tathāgata, or that you have obtained Buddhahood by realizing the ultimate Truth, or that you have been endowed with omnipotence." The Buddha, therefore, preached briefly the essentials to them.

"Ignorant people practice austerities; those who seek pleasures gratify their senses. As neither method leads people to liberation, these two extremes are utterly wrong: they are not the right ways.

"Devoting oneself to ascetic practices with an exhausted body only makes one's mind more confused. It produces not even a worldly knowledge, not to speak of transcending the senses. It is like trying to light a lamp with water; there is no chance of dispelling the darkness.

"Just as one cannot start a fire by [rubbing] rotten pieces of wood, so one cannot destroy one's ignorance by trying to light the lamp of wisdom with an emaciated body. It is a vain waste of energy. . . .

"To indulge in pleasures also is not right; this merely increases one's foolishness, which obstructs the light of wisdom. . . .

"It is as if a sick man is eating harmful food. How can a disease as grievous as ignorance be cured by clinging to sensual pleasures? Who can extinguish a blaze in a dry field by stirring up a strong wind? Lust is the same.

"I stand above these two extremes, though my heart is kept in the Middle. Sufferings in me have come to an end; having been freed of all errors and defilements, I have now attained peace."

[*The Buddha then preaches to the mendicants the doctrines of the Eightfold Path, the Four Noble Truths, and the Middle Way.*]

Among the mendicants, Kaundinya, along with eight-thousand heavenly beings, thoroughly understood the doctrines which the Buddha preached, and, being free from defilements, obtained the pure eyes of the dharma. . . .

He heard the chorus of the earth gods voicing their triumph: "Well done! We have witnessed the revelation of the profound Truth. The Tathāgata has turned the unprecedented wheel of doctrines.

"For gods and men, far and wide, he has opened the gate of immortality. Of the true wheel of dharma the spokes are pure precepts, the axle is well-controlled meditation, the fell, indestructible wisdom, and the hub, wedged with a sense of shame, is right mindfulness. . . ."

Then the gods of the various heavens, up to the highest Brahma heaven, all joined in the eulogy. . . .

"A Buddha has arisen in the world! Far and near we hear that he has turned the wheel of doctrine that gives peace to the world for the sake of all sentient beings."

[From the *Buddhacarita*, Sanskrit text as edited by E. H. Johnson, Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1935. pp. 1–18, 20–29, 46–48, 49–57, 140–142, 157]

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"THE GREATER VEHICLE" OF MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM

INTRODUCTION

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