"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]

3 ❁

"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

whom the religion arose, began to take interest in Buddhism.

A tendency to revere the Buddha as a god had probably existed in his own lifetime. In Indian religion, divinity is not something completely transcendent, or far exalted above all mortal things, as it is for the Jew, Christian, or Muslim, neither is it something concentrated in a single unique, omnipotent, and omniscient personality. In Indian religions godhead manifests itself in so many forms as to be almost if not quite ubiquitous, and every great sage or religious teacher is looked on as a special manifestation of divinity, in some sense a god in human form. How much more divine was the Buddha, to whom even the great god Brahmā himself did reverence, and who, in meditation, could far transcend the comparatively tawdry and transient heavens where the great gods dwelt, enter the world of formlessness, and pass thence to the ineffable Nirvāna itself? From the Buddhist point of view even the highest of the gods was liable to error, for Brahmā imagined himself to be the creator when in fact the world came into existence as a result of natural causes. The Buddha, on the other hand, was omniscient.

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

from that of indigenous popular cults, the Buddha was represented and worshiped as an image.

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

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

The next step in the development of the new form of Buddhism was the changing of the goal at which the believer aimed. According to Buddhist teaching there are three types of perfected beings—*Buddhas*, who perceived the truth for themselves and taught it to others, *pratyeka-buddhas*, "private buddhas," who perceived it, but kept it to themselves and did not teach it, and *arhants*,[1] "Worthies," who learned it from others, but fully realized it for themselves. According to earlier schools the earnest believer should aspire to become an arhant, a perfected being for whom there was no rebirth, who already enjoyed Nirvāna, and who would finally enter that state after death, all vestiges of his personality dissolved.

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

The road to Nirvāna was a hard one, and could only be covered in many lives of virtue and self-sacrifice; but nevertheless the goal began to be looked on as selfish. Surely a bodhisattva, after achieving such exalted compassion and altruism, and after reaching such a degree of perfection that he could render inestimable help to other striving beings, would not pass as quickly as possible to Nirvāna, where he could be of no further use, but would deliberately choose to remain in the world, using his spiritual power to help others, until all had found salvation. Passages of Mahāyāna scriptures describing the self-sacrifice of the bodhisattva for the welfare of all things living are among the most passionately altruistic in the world's religious literature.

The replacement of the ideal of the arhant by that of the bodhisattva is the basic distinction between the old sects and the new, which came to be known as *Mahāyāna*. Faith in the bodhisattvas and the help they afforded was thought to carry many beings along the road to bliss, while the older schools, which did not accept the bodhisattva ideal, could save only a few patient and strenuous souls.

The next stage in the evolution of the theology of the new Buddhism was the doctrine of the "Three Bodies" (*Trikāya*). If the true ideal was that of the bodhisattva, why did not Siddhārtha Gautama remain one, instead of becoming a Buddha and selfishly passing to Nirvāna? This paradox was answered by a theory of docetic type, which again probably had its origin in popular ideas prevalent among lay Buddhists at a very early period. Gautama was not in fact an ordinary man, but the manifestation of a great spiritual being. The Buddha had three bodies—the Body of Essence (*Dharmakāya*), the Body of Bliss (*Sambhogakāya*) and the Transformation Body (*Nirmānakāya*). It was the latter only which lived on earth as Siddhārtha Gautama, an emanation of the Body of Bliss, which dwelled forever in the heavens as a sort of supreme god. But the Body of Bliss was in turn the emanation of the Body of Essence, the ultimate Buddha, who pervaded and underlay the whole universe. Subtle philosophies and metaphysical systems were developed parallel with these theological ideas, and the Body of Essence was identified with Nirvāna. It was in fact the World Soul, the *Brahman* of the Upanishads, in a new form. In the fully developed

Mahāyānist cosmology there were many Bodies of Bliss, all of them emanations of the single Body of Essence, but the heavenly Buddha chiefly concerned with our world was *Amitābha* ("Immeasurable Radiance"), who dwelt in *Sukhāvatī*, "the Happy Land," the heaven of the West. With him was associated the earthly Gautama Buddha, and a very potent and compassionate Bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara ("the Lord Who Looks Down").

The older Buddhism and the newer flourished side by side in India during the early centuries of the Christian era, and we read of Buddhist monasteries in which some of the monks were Mahāyānist and some Hīnayānist. But in general the Buddhists of northwestern India were either Mahāyānists or members of Hīnayāna sects much affected by Mahāyānist ideas. The austerer forms of Hīnayāna seem to have been strongest in parts of western and southern India—and in Ceylon. It was from northwestern India, under the rule of the great Kushāna empire (first to third centuries A.D.) that Buddhism spread throughout central Asia to China, since it emanated from the northwest, it was chiefly of the Mahāyāna or near-Mahāyāna type.

We have already outlined the typical Mahāyāna teaching about the heavenly Buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is a matter of theology rather than of metaphysics. But Mahāyāna also produced philosophical theories which were argued with great ability, and which were influential on the thought of Hinduism, as well as on that of the Far East. The two chief schools of Mahāyāna philosophy were the *Mādhyamika* (Doctrine of the Middle Position) and the *Vijñānavāda* (Doctrine of Consciousness) or *Yogācāra* (The Way of Yoga). The former school, the founder of which was Nāgārjuna (first to second centuries A.D.), taught that the phenomenal world had only a qualified reality, thus opposing the doctrine of the Sarvāstivādins. A monk with defective eyesight may imagine that he sees flies in his begging bowl, and they have full reality for the percipient. Though the flies are not real the illusion of flies is. The Mādhyamika philosophers tried to prove that all our experience of the phenomenal world is like that of the short-sighted monk, that all beings labor under the constant illusion of perceiving things where in fact there is only emptiness. This Emptiness

or Void (*Śūnyatā*) is all that truly exists, and hence the Mādhyamikas were sometimes also called *Śūnyavādins* ("exponents of the doctrine of emptiness"). But the phenomenal world is true pragmatically, and therefore has qualified reality for practical purposes. Yet the whole chain of existence is only real in this qualified sense, for it is composed of a series of transitory events, and these, being impermanent, cannot have reality in themselves. Emptiness, on the other hand, never changes. It is absolute truth and absolute being—in fact it is the same as Nirvāna and the Body of Essence of the Buddha.

Nāgārjuna's system, however, went farther than this. Nothing in the phenomenal world has full being, and all is ultimately unreal. Therefore every rational theory about the world is a theory about something unreal evolved by an unreal thinker with unreal thoughts. Thus, by the same process of reasoning, even the arguments of the Mādhyamika school in favor of the ultimate reality of Emptiness are unreal, and this argument against the Mādhyamika position is itself unreal, and so on in an infinite regress. Every logical argument can be reduced to absurdity by a process such as this. The ontological nihilism of Mādhyamika dialectic led to the development of a special sub-school devoted to logic, the *Prāsaṅgika*[2] which produced works of great subtlety.

The effect of Mādhyamika nihilism was not what might be expected. Skeptical philosophies in the West, such as that of existentialism, are generally strongly flavored with pessimism. The Mādhyamikas, however, were not pessimists. If the phenomenal world was ultimately unreal, Emptiness was real, for, though every logical proof of its existence was vitiated by the flaw of unreality, it could be experienced in meditation with a directness and certainty which the phenomenal world did not possess. The ultimate Emptiness was here and now, everywhere and all-embracing, and there was in fact no difference between the great Void and the phenomenal world. Thus all beings were already participants of the Emptiness which was Nirvāna, they were already Buddha if only they would realize it. This aspect of

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

Mādhyamika philosophy was specially congenial to Chinese Buddhists, nurtured in the doctrine of the *Tao*, and it had much influence in the development of the special forms of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, which often show a frank acceptance of the beauty of the world, and especially of the beauty of nature, as a vision of Nirvāna here and now.

The Vijñānavāda school was one of pure idealism, and may be compared to the systems of Berkeley and Hume. The whole universe exists only in the mind of the perceiver. The fact of illusion, as in the case of the flies in the short-sighted monk's bowl, or the experience of dreams, was adduced as evidence to show that all normal human experience was of the same type. It is possible for the monk in meditation to raise before his eyes visions of every kind which have quite as much vividness and semblance of truth as have ordinary perceptions; yet he knows that they have no objective reality. Perception therefore is no proof of the independent existence of any entity, and all perceptions may be explained as projections of the percipient mind. Vijñānavāda, like some Western idealist systems, found its chief logical difficulty in explaining the continuity and apparent regularity of the majority of our sense impressions, and in accounting for the fact that the impressions of most people who are looking at the same time in the same direction seem to cohere in a remarkably consistent manner. Bishop Berkeley, to escape this dilemma, postulated a transcendent mind in which all phenomena were thoughts. The Vijñānavādins explained the regularity and coherence of sense impressions as due to an underlying store of perceptions (*ālayavijñāna*) evolving from the accumulation of traces of earlier sense-impressions. These are active, and produce impressions similar to themselves, according to a regular pattern, as seeds produce plants. Each being possesses one of these stores of perception, and beings which are generically alike will produce similar perceptions from their stores at the same time. By this strange conception, which bristles with logical difficulties and is one of the most difficult of all Indian philosophy, the Vijñānavādins managed to avoid the logical conclusion of idealism in solipsism. Moreover they admitted the existence of at least one entity independent of human thought—a pure and integral being without characteristics, about which nothing could

truly be predicated because it was without predicates. This was called "Suchness" (*Tathatā*) and corresponded to the Emptiness or Void of the Mādhyamikas, and to the Brahman of Vedānta. Though the terminology is different the metaphysics of Mahāyāna Buddhism has much in common with the doctrines of some of the Upanishads and of Shankara. The latter probably learned much from Buddhism, and indeed was called by his opponents a crypto-Buddhist.

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

The canons of the Mahāyāna sects contain much material which also occurs in Pali, often expanded or adapted, but the interest of the Mahāyānists was largely directed to other scriptures, of which no counterparts exist in the Pali canon, and which, it was claimed, were also the pronouncements of the Buddha. These are the *Vaipulya Sūtras*, or "Expanded Discourses," of greater length than those in the Pali *Basket of Discourses* (*Sutta Piṭaka*), and written in Buddhist Sanskrit; in them the Buddha is supposed to have taught the doctrine of the heavenly Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Of these Mahāyāna sūtras pride of place must be taken by *The Lotus of the Good Law* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarika*), which pro-

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

pounds all the major doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism in a fairly simple and good literary style with parables and poetic illustrations. In translation it is the most popular Buddhist scripture in China and Japan, the Japanese Buddhists of the Nichiren sect making it their sole canonical text. An important group of Mahāyāna texts is the *Discourses on the Perfection of Wisdom* (*Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*), of which several exist, generally known by the number of verses[4] they contain, ranging from 700 to 100,000. The primary purpose of these is to explain and glorify the ten perfections (*pāramitā*) of the bodhisattva, and especially the perfection of wisdom (prajnā), but they contain much of importance on other aspects of Buddhism. Other Mahāyāna sūtras are too numerous to mention.

THE BODHISATTVA

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

The bodhisattva is endowed with wisdom of a kind whereby he looks on all beings as though victims going to the slaughter. And immense compassion grips him. His divine eye sees . . . innumerable beings, and he is filled with great distress at what he sees, for many bear the burden of past deeds which will be punished in purgatory, others will have unfortunate rebirths which will divide them from the Buddha and his teachings, others must soon be slain, others are caught in the net of false doctrine, others cannot find the path [of

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

salvation], while others have gained a favorable rebirth only to lose it again.

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

[From Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, 22.402–3]

The Mahāyāna Ideal Is Higher Than That of the Theravāda

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

"What do you think, Shāriputra? Do any of the disciples[1] and private buddhas[2] ever think, 'After we have gained full enlightenment we will bring innumerable beings . . . to complete Nirvāna'?"

"Certainly not, Lord!"

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

[From Pañcaviṃsatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, pp 40–41]

[1] *Śrāvaka*, literally "hearer," a term often applied by Mahāyāna writers especially to adherents of Theravāda.
[2] *Pratyeka-buddha*, one who has achieved full enlightenment through his own insight, but does not communicate his saving knowledge to others.

The Suffering Savior

In many passages of the Mahāyāna scriptures is to be found what purports to be the solemn resolve made by a bodhisattva at the beginning of his career. The following fine passage will appear particularly striking to Western readers, for in it the bodhisattva not only resolves to pity and help all mortal beings, but also to share their intensest sufferings. Christians and Jews cannot fail to note resemblances to the concept of the suffering Savior in Christianity and to the "Servant Passages" of Isaiah (53:3–12). It is by no means impossible that there was some Christian influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism, for Christian missionaries were active in Persia very early, and it became a center from which Nestorian Christianity was diffused throughout Asia. From the middle of the third century A.D. Persian influence in Afghanistan and Northwestern India, which had always been felt, was intensified with the rise of the Sāsānian Empire; and it was in these regions that Mahāyāna Buddhism developed and flourished. Thus Christian influence cannot be ruled out. But it is equally possible that the similarities between the concepts of the suffering savior in Buddhism and Christianity are due to the fact that compassionate minds everywhere tend to think alike.

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

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

"Whatever all beings should obtain, I will help them to obtain. . . . The virtue of generosity is not my helper—I am the helper of generosity. Nor do the virtues of morality, patience, courage, meditation and wisdom help me—it is I who help them.[1] The perfections of the bodhisattva do not

[1] These six, generosity (*dāna*), moral conduct (*śila*), patience

support me—it is I who support them. . . . I alone, standing in this round and adamantine world, must subdue Māra, with all his hosts and chariots, and develop supreme enlightenment with the wisdom of instantaneous insight!" . . .

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

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

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

they are ignorant, untrustworthy, full of doubts, always at loggerheads one with another, always prone to see evil; they cannot find a refuge in the ocean of existence, they are all on the edge of the gulf of destruction.

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

"For I have taken upon myself, by my own will, the whole of the pain of all things living. Thus I dare try every abode of pain, in . . . every part of the universe, for I must not defraud the world of the root of good. I resolve to dwell in each state of misfortune through countless ages . . . for the salvation of all beings . . . for it is better that I alone suffer than that all beings sink to the worlds of misfortune. There I shall give myself into bondage, to redeem all the world from the forest of purgatory, from rebirth as beasts, from the realm of death. I shall bear all grief and pain in my own body, for the good of all things living. I venture to stand surety for all beings, speaking the truth, trustworthy, not breaking my word. I shall not forsake them. . . . I must so bring to fruition the root of goodness that all beings find the utmost joy, unheard of joy, the joy of omniscience. I must be their charioteer. I must be their leader. I must be their torchbearer. I must be their guide to safety. . . . I must not wait for the help of another, nor must I lose my resolution and leave my tasks to another. I must not turn back in my efforts to save all beings nor cease to use my merit for the destruction of all pain. And I must not be satisfied with small successes."

[From *Śikṣāsamuccava*, pp. 278–83]

The Lost Son

One of the reasons for including this passage is its remarkable resemblance to the famous parable of St. Luke's Gospel (15:11–32). As the Lotus of the Good Law, from which the Buddhist story is taken, was probably in existence well before Christian ideas could have found their way to India via Persia, it is unlikely that this parable owes anything to the Christian one. Similarly it is unlikely that the Christian parable is indebted to the Buddhist. Probably we

have here a case of religious minds of two widely separated cultures thinking along similar lines, as a result of similar, though not identical, religious experience. For this reason the resemblances and differences of the two stories are most instructive.[1]

The Prodigal of the Christian story squanders his patrimony in riotous living. The son in the Buddhist story is a wretched creature who can only wander about begging. His fault is not so much in squandering his property as in failing to acquire wealth (i.e., spiritual merit). The Prodigal returns to his father by his own free choice, after repenting his evil ways. In the Buddhist story it is only by chance that the son meets his father again; moreover the son does not recognize the father, though the father recognizes his son—thus the heavenly Buddha knows his children and works for their salvation, though they do not recognize him in his true character, and, if they get a glimpse of him, are afraid and try to avoid him—they feel much more at ease among their own earthbound kind, in "the poor quarter of the town," where their divine father sends his messengers (perhaps representing the bodhisattvas) to find them, bringing them home by force if need be. Here there is no question of a positive act of repentance, as in the Christian parable.

Unlike the Prodigal's father in the Christian story, who kills the fatted calf for his long-lost son, the father in the Buddhist story makes his son undergo a very long period of humble probation before raising him to the position which he merits by his birth. The heavenly Buddha cannot raise beings immediately from the filth and poverty of the earthly gutter to the full glory of his own heavenly palace, for they are so earthbound that, if brought to it at once, they would suffer agonies of fear, embarrassment, and confusion, and might well insist on returning to the gutter again. So they must undergo many years of preparation for their high estate, toiling daily among the material dross of this world, earnestly and loyally striving to make the world a tidier place. Like the father in the story, the heavenly Buddha will cover his glory with earthly dust and appear to his children as a historical Buddha to encourage and instruct them. Thus the Buddha shows the perfection of "skill in means," that is to say, in knowing the best means to take to lead each individual to the light according to the circumstances in which he is placed.

Gradually the son grows more and more familiar with the father, and loses his former fear of him, but still he does not know that he is his father's child. So men, even though pious and virtuous, and earnestly carrying out the Buddha's will, do not know that they are already in Heaven; their lives are still to some extent earthbound, and though the Buddha offers them all his wealth of bliss long habit keeps them from enjoying it.

Only when the father is near death does he reveal himself to his son. This seems at first to weaken the analogy, for heavenly Buddhas do not die. But in fact the conclusion of the parable is quite appropriate, for when man has fulfilled his tasks and carried out his stewardship, that is to say when he has reached the highest stage of self-development, he finds that the heavenly Buddha has ceased to exist for him, that nothing is truly real but the great Emptiness which is peace and Nirvāna.

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

A man parted from his father and went to another city; and he dwelt there many years. . . . The father grew rich and the son poor. While the son wandered in all directions [begging] in order to get food and clothes, the father moved to another land, where he lived in great luxury . . . wealthy from business, money-lending, and trade. In course of time the son, wandering in search of his living through town and country, came to the city in which his father dwelled. Now the poor man's father . . . forever thought of the son whom he had lost . . . years ago, but he told no one of this, though he grieved inwardly, and thought: "I am old, and well advanced in years, and though I have great possessions I have no son. Alas that time should do its work upon me, and that all this wealth should perish unused! . . . It would be bliss indeed if my son might enjoy all my wealth!"

Then the poor man, in search of food and clothing, came to the rich man's home. And the rich man was sitting in great pomp at the gate of his house, surrounded by a large throng of attendants . . . on a splendid throne, with a footstool inlaid with gold and silver, under a wide awning decked with pearls and flowers and adorned with hanging garlands of jewels; and he transacted business to the value of millions of gold pieces, all the while fanned by a fly-whisk.

. . . When he saw him the poor man was terrified . . . and the hair of his body stood on end, for he thought that he had happened on a king or on some high officer of state, and had no business there. "I must go," he thought, "to the poor quarter of the town, where I'll get food and clothing without trouble. If I stop here they'll seize me and set me to do forced labor, or some other disaster will befall me!" So he quickly ran away. . . .

But the rich man . . . recognized his son as soon as he saw him; and he was full of joy . . . and thought: "This is wonderful! I have found him who shall enjoy my riches. He of whom I thought constantly has come back, now that I am old and full of years!" Then, longing for his son, he sent swift messengers, telling them to go and fetch him quickly. They ran at full speed and overtook him; the poor man trembled with fear, the hair of his body stood on end . . . and he uttered a cry of distress and exclaimed, "I've done you no wrong!" But they dragged him along by force . . . until . . . fearful that he would be killed or beaten, he fainted and fell on the ground. His father in dismay said to the men, "Don't drag him along in that way!" and, without saying more, he sprinkled his face with cold water—for though he knew that the poor man was his son, he realized that his estate was very humble, while his own was very high.

So the householder told no one that the poor man was his son. He ordered one of his servants to tell the poor man that he was free to go where he chose. . . . And the poor man was amazed [that he was allowed to go free], and he went off to the poor quarter of the town in search of food and clothing. Now in order to attract him back the rich man made use of the virtue of "skill in means." He called two men of low caste and of no great dignity and told them: "Go to that poor man . . . and hire him in your own names to do work in my house at double the normal daily wage; and if he asks what work he has to do tell him that he has to help clear away the refuse-dump." So these two men and the poor man cleared the refuse every day . . . in the house of the rich man, and lived in a straw hut nearby. . . . And the rich man saw through a window his son clearing refuse, and was again filled with compassion. So he came down, took off his wreath and jewels and rich clothes, put on dirty garments, covered his body with dust, and, taking a basket in his hand, went up to his son. And he greeted him at a distance and said, "Take this basket and clear away the dust at once!" By this means he managed to speak to his son. [And as time went on he spoke more often to him, and thus he gradually encouraged him. First he urged him to] remain in his service and not take another job, offering him double wages, together with any small extras that he might require, such as the price of a cooking-pot . . . or food and clothes. Then he offered him his own cloak, if he should want it. . . . And at last he said: "You must be cheerful, my good fellow, and think of me as a father . . . for I'm older than you and you've done me good service in clearing away my refuse. As long as you've worked for me you've shown no roguery or guile. . . . I've not noticed one of the vices in you that I've noticed in my other servants! From now on you are like my own son to me!"

Thenceforward the householder called the poor man "son," and the latter felt towards the householder as a son feels towards his father. So the householder, full of longing and love for his son, employed him in clearing away refuse for twenty years. By the end of that time the poor man felt quite at home in the house, and came and went as he chose, though he still lived in the straw hut.

Then the householder fell ill, and felt that the hour of his death was near. So he said to the poor man: "Come, my dear man! I have great riches . . . and am very sick. I need someone upon whom I can bestow my wealth as a deposit, and you must accept it. From now on you are just as much its owner as I am, but you must not squander it." And the poor man accepted the rich man's wealth . . . but personally he cared nothing for it, and asked for no share of it, not even the price of a measure of flour. He still lived in the straw hut, and thought of himself as just as poor as before.

Thus the householder proved that his son was frugal, mature, and mentally developed, and that though he knew that he was now wealthy he still remembered his past poverty, and was still . . . humble and meek. . . . So he sent for the poor man again, presented him before a gathering of his relatives, and, in the presence of the king, his officers, and

the people of town and country, he said: "Listen, gentlemen! This is my son, whom I begot. . . . To him I leave all my family revenues, and my private wealth he shall have as his own."

[From *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, 4.101 ff.]

Joy in All Things

Joy is one of the cardinal virtues of Buddhism, and the bodhisattva, who is the example which all Mahāyāna Buddhists are expected to follow as far as their powers allow, has so trained his mind that even in the most painful and unhappy situations it is still full of calm inner joy. The following passage is from the Compendium of Doctrine; *the first paragraph is the work of the author, Shāntideva, while the second is quoted from a lost sūtra, the* Meeting of Father and Son (Pitṛputrasamāgama).

Indeed nothing is difficult after practice. Simple folk, such as porters, fishermen and plowmen, for instance, are not overcome by depression, for their minds are marked by the scars of the many pains with which they earn their humble livings, and which they have learned to bear. How much the more should one be cheerful in a task of which the purpose is to reach the incomparable state where all the joys of all beings, all the joys of the bodhisattvas are to be found. . . . Consciousness of sorrow and joy comes by habit; so, if whenever sorrow arises we make a habit of associating with it a feeling of joy, consciousness of joy will indeed arise. The fruit of this is a contemplative spirit full of joy in all things. . . .

So the bodhisattva . . . is happy even when subjected to the tortures of hell. . . . When he is being beaten with canes or whips, when he is thrown into prison, he still feels happy.[1] . . . For . . . this was the resolve of the Great Being, the bodhisattva: "May those who feed me win the joy of tranquillity and peace, with those who protect me, honor me, respect me, and revere me. And those who revile me, afflict me, beat me, cut me in pieces with their swords, or take my life—may they all obtain the joy of complete enlightenment, may they be awakened to perfect and sublime enlightenment." With such thoughts and actions and resolves

[1] Here a long list of the most gruesome tortures is omitted.

he cultivates . . . and develops the consciousness of joy in his relations with all beings, and so he acquires a contemplative spirit filled with joy in all things . . . and becomes imperturbable—not to be shaken by all the deeds of Māra.

[From *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, 181 f.]

The Good Deeds of the Bodhisattva

We have seen that the bodhisattva has ten "Perfections." A further list of good qualities is sometimes attributed to him. Notice that the emphasis is on the positive virtues of altruism, benevolence, and compassion.

There are ten ways by which a bodhisattva gains . . . strength: . . .
He will give up his body and his life . . . but he will not give up the Law of Righteousness.
He bows humbly to all beings, and does not increase in pride.
He has compassion on the weak and does not dislike them.
He gives the best food to those who are hungry.
He protects those who are afraid.
He strives for the healing of those who are sick.
He delights the poor with his riches.
He repairs the shrines of the Buddha with plaster.
He speaks to all beings pleasingly.
He shares his riches with those afflicted by poverty.
He bears the burdens of those who are tired and weary.

[From *Tathāgataguhya Sūtra*, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, p. 274]

The Evils of Meat-Eating

According to the scriptures of the Theravāda school the Buddha allowed his followers to eat flesh if they were not responsible for killing the animal providing the meat, and if it was not specially killed to feed them. To this day most Buddhists in Ceylon and other lands where Theravāda prevails eat meat and fish, which are supplied by Muslim or Christian butchers or fishermen. Like the great Ashoka, however, many Buddhists have felt that meat-eating of any kind is out of harmony with the spirit of the Law of Righteousness, and have been vegetarians. The following passage criticizes the Theravāda teaching on meat-eating, and enjoins strict vegetarianism. The words are attributed to the Buddha.

Here in this long journey of birth-and-death there is no living being who . . . has not at some time been your mother or father, brother or sister, son or daughter. . . . So how can the bodhisattva, who wishes to treat all beings as though they were himself . . . eat the flesh of any living being? . . . Therefore, wherever living beings evolve, men should feel toward them as to their own kin, and, looking on all beings as their only child, should refrain from eating meat. . . .

The bodhisattva . . . desirous of cultivating the virtue of love, should not eat meat, lest he cause terror to living beings. Dogs, when they see, even at a distance, an outcaste . . . who likes eating meat, are terrified with fear, and think, "They are the dealers of death, they will kill us!" Even the animalculae in earth and air and water, who have a very keen sense of smell, will detect at a distance the odor of the demons in meat-eaters, and will run away as fast as they can from the death which threatens them. . . .

Moreover the meat-eater sleeps in sorrow and wakes in sorrow. All his dreams are nightmares, and they make his hair stand on end. . . . Things other than human sap his vitality. Often he is struck with terror, and trembles without cause. . . . He knows no measure in his eating, and there is no flavor, digestibility, or nourishment in his food. His bowels are filled with worms and other creatures, which are the cause of leprosy; and he ceases to think of resisting diseases. . . .

It is not true . . . that meat is right and proper for the disciple when the animal was not killed by himself or by his orders, and when it was not killed specially for him. . . . Pressed by a desire for the taste of meat people may string together their sophistries in defense of meat-eating . . . and declare that the Lord permitted meat as legitimate food, that it occurs in the list of permitted foods, and that he himself ate it. But . . . it is nowhere allowed in the sūtras as a . . . legitimate food. . . . All meat-eating in any form or manner and in any circumstances is prohibited, unconditionally and once and for all.

[From *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, pp. 245 ff.]

The Gift of Food

From the Buddhist point of view, as Ashoka said, there is no greater gift than the gift of the Law of Righteousness; but Buddhism never disparaged the value or merit of practical acts of kindness and charity. The Buddhists, as we have seen, set much store on physical well-being. The passage which follows will show that poverty and hunger, unless voluntarily undertaken for a worthy cause, were looked on as unmitigated evils, liable to lead to sin and hence to an unhappy rebirth.

This passage is from the Tamil classic Manimēgalai, perhaps of the sixth century A.D., which is wholly Buddhist in inspiration, and concludes with an exposition of Mahāyāna logic and the doctrine of the Chain of Causation. The poem tells of Manimēgalai, a beautiful girl who, after many adventures, realized the uselessness and sorrow of the world and became a Buddhist nun. Here, led by a demi-goddess, she finds a magic bowl, which gives an inexhaustible supply of food.

The bowl rose in the water and . . . moved toward her hand. She was glad beyond measure, and sang a hymn in praise of the Buddha:

"Hail the feet of the hero, the victor over Māra!
Hail the feet of him who destroyed the path of evil!
Hail the feet of the Great One, setting men on the road of Righteousness!
Hail the feet of the All Wise One, who gives others the eye of wisdom!
Hail the feet of him whose ears are deaf to evil!
Hail the feet of him whose tongue never uttered untruth!
Hail the feet of him who went down to purgatory to put an end to suffering. . . .
My tongue cannot praise you duly—All I can do is to bend my body at your feet!"

While she was praying thus Tīvatilagai told her of the pains of hunger and of the virtue of those who help living beings to satisfy it. "Hunger," she said to Manimēgalai, "ruins good birth, and destroys all nobility; it destroys the love of learned men for their learning, even though they

previously thought it the most valuable thing in life: hunger takes away all sense of shame, and ruins the beauty of the features; and it even forces men to stand with their wives at the doors of others. This is the nature of hunger, the source of evil craving, and those who relieve it the tongue cannot praise too highly! Food given to those who can afford it is charity wasted,[1] but food given to relieve the hunger of those who cannot satisfy it otherwise is charity indeed, and those who give it will prosper in this world, for those who give food give life. So go on and give food to allay the hunger of those who are hungry."

"In a past life," said Manimēgalai, "my husband died . . . and I mounted the pyre with him. As I burned I remembered that I had once given food to a Buddhist monk named Sādusakkāra; and I believe it is because of this virtuous thought at the moment of death that this bowl of plenty has come into my hands. Just as a mother's breast begins to give milk at the mere sight of her hungry baby, so may this bowl in my hand always give food . . . at the sight of those who suffer hunger and wander even in pouring rain or scorching sun in search of food to relieve it."

[From Manimēgalai, 11.55–122]

The Three Bodies of the Buddha

The following passage expounds the doctrine of the Three Bodies (Trikāya). It is taken from Asanga's Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras, a versified compendium of Mahāyāna doctrine, with a prose commentary. The latter is quoted where it throws light on the difficult and elliptical verses.

The Body of Essence, the Body of Bliss,[1] the Transformation Body—these are the bodies of the Buddhas.
The first is the basis of the two others.
The Body of Bliss varies in all the planes of the Universe, according to region,

[1] This may be a criticism of the Hindu virtue of *dāna*, which is usually translated "charity," but includes feasts given to brāhmans who may be much richer than the donor.
[1] *Sambhoga*, more literally "enjoyment"; in some contexts it implies little more than "experience."

In name, in form, and in experience of phenomena.
But the Body of Essence, uniform and subtle, is inherent in the Body of Bliss,
And through the one the other controls its experience, when it manifests itself at will.

Commentary: The Body of Essence is uniform for all the Buddhas, because there is no real difference between them. . . .

The Transformation Body displays with skill birth, enlightenment, and Nirvāna,
For it possesses much magic power to lead men to enlightenment.
The Body of the Buddhas is wholly comprised in these three bodies. . . .
In basis, tendency, and act they are uniform.
They are stable by nature, by persistence, and by connection.

Commentary: The Three Bodies are one and the same for all the Buddhas for three reasons: *basis*, for the basis of phenomena[2] is indivisible: *tendency*, because there is no tendency particular to one Buddha and not to another; and *act*, because their actions are common to all. And the Three Bodies have a threefold stability: by *nature*, for the Body of Essence is essentially stable; by *persistence*, for the Body of Bliss experiences phenomena unceasingly; and by *connection*, for the Transformation Body, once it has passed away, shows its metamorphoses again and again.

[From Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra, 9.60–66]

Emptiness

The doctrine of Śūnyatā, "Emptiness" or "the Void," is aptly expressed in these fine verses from the Multitude of Graceful Actions, *a life of the Buddha in mixed verse and prose, replete with marvels and miracles of all kinds, which formed the basis of Sir Edwin Arnold's famous poem,* The Light of Asia.

[2] *Dharmadhātu*, the Absolute.

All things conditioned are unstable, impermanent,
  Fragile in essence, as an unbaked pot.
Like something borrowed, or a city founded on sand,
  They last a short while only.

They are inevitably destroyed,
  Like plaster washed off in the rains,
Like the sandy bank of a river—
  They are conditioned, and their true nature is frail.

They are like the flame of a lamp,
  Which rises suddenly and as soon goes out.
They have no power of endurance, like the wind
  Or like foam, unsubstantial, essentially feeble.

They have no inner power, being essentially empty,
  Like the stem of a plantain, if one thinks clearly,
Like conjuring tricks deluding the mind,
  Or a fist closed on nothing to tease a child. . . .

From wisps of grass the rope is spun
  By dint of exertion.
By turns of the wheel the buckets are raised from the well,
  Yet each turn of itself is futile.

So the turning of all the components of becoming
  Arises from the interaction of one with another.
In the unit the turning cannot be traced
  Either at the beginning or end.

Where the seed is, there is the young plant.
  But the seed has not the nature of the plant,
Nor is it something other than the plant, nor is it the plant—
  So is the nature of the Law of Righteousness, neither
    transient nor eternal.

All things conditioned are conditioned by ignorance,
  And on final analysis they do not exist,
For they and the conditioning ignorance alike are Emptiness
  In their essential nature, without power of action. . . .

The mystic knows the beginning and end
  Of consciousness, its production and passing away—
He knows that it came from nowhere and returns to no-
    where,
  And is empty [of reality], like a conjuring trick.

Through the concomitance of three factors—
  Firesticks, fuel, and the work of the hand—
Fire is kindled. It serves its purpose
  And quickly goes out again.

A wise man may seek here, there, and everywhere
  Whence it has come, and whither it has gone,
Through every region in all directions,
  But he cannot find it in its essential nature. . . .

Thus all things in this world of contingence
  Are dependent on causes and conditions.
The mystic knows what is true reality,
  And sees all conditioned things as empty and powerless.

[From *Lalitavistara*, 13.175–77]

Faith in Emptiness

The following passage needs little comment. Belief in Śūnyavāda, the doctrine of Emptiness, encourages a stoical and noble equanimity.

He who maintains the doctrine of Emptiness is not allured by the things of the world, because they have no basis. He is not excited by gain or dejected by loss. Fame does not dazzle him and infamy does not shame him. Scorn does not repel him, praise does not attract him. Pleasure does not please him, pain does not trouble him. He who is not allured by the things of the world knows Emptiness, and one who maintains the doctrine of Emptiness has neither likes nor dislikes. What he likes he knows to be only Emptiness and sees it as such.

[From *Dharmasaṅgīti Sūtra*, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, p. 264]

Karma and Rebirth

In an illusory world, rebirth is also illusory. The things a man craves for have no more reality than a dream, but he craves nevertheless, and hence his illusory ego is reborn in a new but equally illusory body. Notice the importance of the last conscious thought before death, which plays a very decisive part in the nature of the rebirth. The chief speaker in the following dialogue is said to be the Buddha.

"The senses are as though illusions and their objects as dreams. For instance a sleeping man might dream that he had made love to a beautiful country girl, and he might remember her when he awoke. What do you think— . . . does the beautiful girl he dreamed of really exist?"

"No, Lord."

"And would the man be wise to remember the girl of his dreams, or to believe that he had really made love to her?"

"No, Lord, because she doesn't really exist at all, so how could he have made love to her—though of course he might think he did under the influence of weakness or fatigue."

"In just the same way a foolish and ignorant man of the world sees pleasant forms and believes in their existence. Hence he is pleased, and so he feels passion and acts accordingly. . . . But from the very beginning his actions are feeble, impeded, wasted, and changed in their course by circumstances. . . . And when he ends his days, as the time of death approaches, his vitality is obstructed with the exhaustion of his allotted span of years, the karma that fell to his lot dwindles, and hence his previous actions form the object of the last thought of his mind as it disappears. Then, just as the man on first waking from sleep thinks of the country girl about whom he dreamed, the first thought on rebirth arises from two causes—the last thought of the previous life as its governing principle, and the actions of the previous life as its basis. Thus a man is reborn in the purgatories, or as an animal, a spirit, a demon, a human being, or a god. . . . The stopping of the last thought is known as decease, the appearance of the first thought as rebirth. Nothing passes from life to life, but decease and rebirth take place nevertheless. . . . But the last thought, the actions (karma), and the first thought, when they arise come from nowhere and when they cease go nowhere, for all are essentially defective, of themselves empty. . . . In the whole process no one acts and no one experiences the results of action, except by verbal convention.

[From *Pitrputrasamāgama, Śikṣāsamuccaya*, pp. 251–52]

Suchness

The Vijnānavādin school called their conception of the Absolute Tathatā *or "Suchness," in which all phenomenal appearances are lost in the one ultimate being.*

The following passage is taken from a text which was translated into Chinese in the seventh century from a recension more interesting than the extant Sanskrit form. The whole passage considers the "Suchness" of the five components of being in turn. Here we give only the passage relating to the first of these.[1]

What is meant by . . . knowing in accordance with truth the marks of form? It means that a bodhisattva . . . knows that form is nothing but holes and cracks and is indeed a mass of bubbles, with a nature that has no hardness or solidity. . . .

What is meant by . . . knowing in accordance with truth the origin and extinction of form? It means that a bodhisattva . . . knows . . . that when form originates it comes from nowhere and when it is extinguished it goes nowhere, but that though it neither comes nor goes yet its origination and extinction do jointly exist. . . .

What is meant by . . . knowing in accordance with truth about the Suchness of form? It means that a bodhisattva . . . knows . . . that Suchness of form is not subject to origination or extinction, that it neither comes nor goes, is neither foul nor clean, neither increases nor diminishes, is constant in its own nature, is never empty, false or changeful, and is therefore called Suchness.

[From *Mahāprajñāpāramitā*, ch. 29, 1]

[1] Translated by Dr. Arthur Waley from the Chinese version of Hsüan-tsang. Reprinted by permission of Messrs. Bruno Cassirer, Oxford, from *Buddhist Texts through the Ages*, ed. by Edward Conze, Oxford, 1954, p. 154 f.

All Depends on the Mind

The following passage expresses the idealism of Mahāyāna thought.

All phenomena originate in the mind, and when the mind is fully known all phenomena are fully known. For by the mind the world is led . . . and through the mind karma is piled up, whether good or evil. The mind swings like a firebrand,[1] the mind rears up like a wave, the mind burns like a forest fire, like a great flood the mind bears all things away. The bodhisattva, thoroughly examining the nature of things, dwells in everpresent mindfulness of the activity of the mind, and so he does not fall into the mind's power, but the mind comes under his control. And with the mind under his control all phenomena are under his control.

[From *Ratnamegha Sūtra*, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, pp. 121–22]

Nirvāna Is Here and Now

The two following passages, the first Mādhyamika, and the second Vijnānavādin in tendency, illustrate the Mahāyāna doctrine that Nirvāna, the highest state, Pure Being, the Absolute, the Buddha's Body of Essence, is present at all times and everywhere, and needs only to be recognized. Thus the older pessimism of Buddhism is replaced by what is almost optimism. With this change of outlook comes an impatience with the learned philosophers and moralists who repeat their long and dreary sermons on the woes of samsāra, the round of birth-and-death. Though this attitude may have contributed to the antinomian tendencies of tantric Buddhism, it will probably stir an answering chord in many Western minds. Most people are like the man in the parable of the Lost Son, who year after year cleared away the refuse of his father's house without knowing that he was the son and heir.

That which the Lord revealed in his perfect enlightenment was not form or sensation or perception or psychic constructions or thought; for none of these five components come into being, neither does supreme wisdom come into being . . . and how can that which does not come into being know

[1] An allusion to a famous simile. The world is like a firebrand which, when swung round in the hand, resembles a solid wheel of flame.

that which also does not come into being? Since nothing can be grasped, what is the Buddha, what is wisdom, what is the bodhisattva, what is revelation? All the components are by nature empty—just convention, just names, agreed tokens, coverings. . . .

Thus all things are the perfection of being, infinite perfection, unobscured perfection, unconditioned perfection. All things are enlightenment, for they must be recognized as without essential nature—even the five greatest sins[1] are enlightenment, for enlightenment has no essential nature and neither have the five greatest sins. Thus those who seek for Nirvāna are to be laughed at, for the man in the midst of birth-and-death is also seeking Nirvāna.

[From *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, p. 257]

Those who are afraid of the sorrow which arises from . . . the round of birth-and-death seek for Nirvāna; they do not realize that between birth-and-death and Nirvāna there is really no difference at all. They see Nirvāna as the absence of all . . . becoming, and the cessation of all contact of sense-organ and sense-object, and they will not understand that it is really only the inner realization of the store of impressions.[2] . . . Hence they teach the three Vehicles,[3] but not the doctrine that nothing truly exists but the mind, in which are no images. Therefore . . . they do not know the extent of what has been perceived by the minds of past, present, and future Buddhas, and continue in the conviction that the world extends beyond the range of the mind's eye. . . . And so they keep on rolling . . . on the wheel of birth-and-death.

[From *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, pp. 61–62]

[1] Murdering one's mother, murdering one's father, murdering a perfected being (*arhant*), trying to destroy the Buddhist Order, and maliciously injuring a Buddha.

[2] *Ālayavijñāna*.

[3] The two "Lesser Vehicles" (to salvation) of the older Buddhism —namely, those of the disciples and of private buddhas—and the vehicle of the bodhisattva.

Praise of Dharma

Dharma, the cosmic Law of Righteousness proclaimed by the Buddha, was revered quite as highly by the Mahāyānists as by the Theravādins. The ultimate body of the Buddha, which was roughly equivalent to the World-Soul of the Hindus, was called the Dharma-body, and the basic element of the universe was also often known as Dharmadhātu, "the Raw-material of the Law," especially by the Vijñānavāda.[1] The following passage, perhaps originally intended for liturgical purposes, exemplifies the mystical attitude toward Dharma, which was widespread in later Buddhism. Here Dharma seems to have much in common with the Tao of Lao Tzu. Notice that it is prior to the heavenly Buddhas themselves.

The blessed Buddhas, of virtues endless and limitless, are born of the Law of Righteousness; they dwell in the Law, are fashioned by the Law; they have the Law as their master, the Law as their light, the Law as their field of action, the Law as their refuge. They are produced by the Law . . . and all the joys in this world and the next are born of the Law and produced by the Law. . . .

The Law is equal, equal for all beings. For low or middle or high the Law cares nothing.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law has no regard for the pleasant. Impartial is the Law.
So must I make my thought like the law.
The Law is not dependent upon time. Timeless is the Law. . . .
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law is not in the lofty without being in the low. Neither up nor down will the Law bend.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law is not in that which is whole without being in that which is broken. Devoid of all superiority or inferiority is the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.

[1] Or, as many philosophers of this school would have interpreted it, "the Raw-material of Phenomena," since dharma in Buddhism had also a special philosophical connotation.

The Law is not in the noble without being in the humble. No care for fields of activity has the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law is not in the day without being in the night. . . . Ever firm is the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law does not lose the occasion of conversion. There is never delay with the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law has neither shortage nor abundance. Immeasurable, innumerable is the Law. Like space it never lessens or grows.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law is not guarded by beings. Beings are protected by the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law does not seek refuge. The refuge of all the world is the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law has none who can resist it. Irresistible is the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law has no preferences. Without preference is the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.
The Law has no fear of the terrors of birth-and-death, nor is it lured by Nirvāna. Ever without misgiving is the Law.
So must I make my thought like the Law.

[From *Dharmasaṅgīti Sūtra*, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, pp. 322–23]

Perfect Wisdom Personified

Prajñāpāramitā, the Perfection of Wisdom, is praised in many passages of Mahāyāna literature. As with the early Jews, the divine Wisdom was personified,[1] but the process went much further with the Buddhists than with the Jews, for in India Prajñāpāramitā became a goddess worshiped in the form of an icon. She was especially cultivated in the Vajrayāna, but by no means neglected in Mahāyānist sects.

Perfect Wisdom spreads her radiance . . . and is worthy of worship. Spotless, the whole world cannot stain her. . . . In

[1] Compare especially Proverbs 8 and 9:1–6.

her we may find refuge; her works are most excellent; she brings us to safety under the sheltering wings of enlightenment. She brings light to the blind, that all fears and calamities may be dispelled . . . and she scatters the gloom and darkness of delusion. She leads those who have gone astray to the right path. She is omniscience; without beginning or end is Perfect Wisdom, who has Emptiness as her characteristic mark; she is the mother of the bodhisattvas. . . . She cannot be struck down, the protector of the unprotected, . . . the Perfect Wisdom of the Buddhas, she turns the Wheel of the Law.

[From Aṣṭasāhasrikā *Prajñāpāramitā*, 7 170–71]

The Blessings of Peace

The following passage is one of the few in the literature of early India which call upon the many kings of the land to forget their quarrels and live together in peace. It seems to contain an implicit criticism of the Hindu ideals of kingship, which encouraged kings to aim at territorial aggrandizement, and to attack their neighbors without good reason, in order to gain homage and tribute.

In the sixth section of the Sūtra of the Excellent Golden Light, the four great kings Vaishravana, Dhritarāshtra, Virūdhaka, and Virū pāksha, who are the gods guarding the four quarters of the earth and correspond to the Lokapālas or world-protectors of Hindu mythology, approach the Buddha and declare that they will give their special protection to those earthly kings who patronize monks who recite the sūtra, and encourage its propagation in their domains. The Buddha replies with the words which follow. The sūtra probably belongs to the third or fourth century A.D., before the full expansion of the Gupta empire, when warfare was widespread. The reference to the title devaputra, "Son of the Gods," in the passage quoted after the following suggests that it emanated from northwestern India, where devaputra was a royal title of the Kushāna kings.

Protect all those royal families, cities, lands, and provinces, save them, cherish them, guard them, ward off invasion from them, give them peace and prosperity. Keep them free from all fear, calamity, and evil portent. Turn back the troops of their enemies and create in all the earthly kings of India a desire to avoid fighting, attacking, quarreling, or disputing with their neighbors. . . . When the eighty-four thousand

kings of the eighty-four thousand cities of India are contented with their own territories and with their own kingly state and their own hoards of treasure they will not attack one another or raise mutual strife. They will gain their thrones by the due accumulation of the merit of former deeds; they will be satisfied with their own kingly state, and will not destroy one another, nor show their mettle by laying waste whole provinces. When all the eighty-four thousand kings of the eighty-four thousand capital cities of India think of their mutual welfare and feel mutual affection and joy, . . . contented in their own domains . . . India will be prosperous, well-fed, pleasant, and populous. The earth will be fertile, and the months and seasons and years will all occur at the proper time.[1] Planets and stars, moon and sun, will duly bring on the days and nights. Rain will fall upon earth at the proper time. And all living beings in India will be rich with all manner of riches and corn, very prosperous but not greedy.

[From Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Sūtra, 6, pp. 73–75]

The Divine Right (and Duty) of Kings

As we have seen, the early Buddhists evolved the story of the first king Mahāsammata, which implies a doctrine of social contract. In Hinduism, however, ideas of a different kind developed, and from early in the Christian era it was widely proclaimed in Hindu religious literature that the king was "a great god in human form," made of eternal particles of the chief gods of the Hindu pantheon. It became usual to address the king as Deva or "god," and the older ideas of Buddhism on kingship were, at least in Mahāyāna circles, modified in consequence.

The Sūtra of the Excellent Golden Light, as well as the striking call for peace previously quoted, contains one of the few passages in the Mahāyāna scriptures in which problems of government are discussed. It is not admitted that the king is a god in his own right, but he holds his high estate by the authority of the gods, and

[1] Note that, as we have seen elsewhere, the welfare of the whole land, and even the regularity of the calendar and of heavenly phenomena generally, were believed to be dependent on the morality of men, and more especially on the morality of ruling kings. This idea, which is also found in Hinduism, was well known in China, where it developed independently.

therefore is entitled to be addressed as Deva, and as "Son of the Gods." This doctrine of divine appointment may be compared with that widely proclaimed in England during the Stuart period, and it is also closely akin to the Chinese doctrine of the "mandate of Heaven." Like the Son of Heaven in imperial China, the Indian "Son of the Gods" held his title on condition of fulfilling his function properly, and might incur the anger of his divine parents. The verses quoted implicitly admit the moral right of revolt against a wicked or negligent king, for in conspiring against him his subjects are serving the heavenly purpose, and plotting the overthrow of one who no longer enjoys the divine blessing on which his right to govern depends. This too is a doctrine well known in China.

This poem on government, in Buddhist Sanskrit, purports to be a speech of the high god Brahmā, delivered to the four Great Kings, whom we have met in the previous extract.

How does a king, who is born of men, come to be called divine?
Why is a king called the Son of the Gods?
If a king is born in this world of mortals,
How can it be that a god rules over men?

I will tell you of the origin of kings, who are born in the world of mortals,
And for what reason kings exist, and rule over every province.
By the authority of the great gods a king enters his mother's womb.
First he is ordained by the gods—only then does he find an embryo.

What though he is born or dies in the world of mortals—
Arising from the gods he is called the Son of the Gods.

The thirty-three great gods assign the fortune of the king.
The ruler of men is created as son of all the gods.
To put a stop to unrighteousness, to prevent evil deeds,
To establish all beings in well-doing, and to show them the way to heaven.
Whether man, or god, or fairy, or demon,
Or outcaste, he is a true king who prevents evil deeds.
Such a king is mother and father to those who do good.

He was appointed by the gods to show the results of karma. . . .

But when a king disregards the evil done in his kingdom,
And does not inflict just punishment on the criminal,
From his neglect of evil, unrighteousness grows apace,
And fraud and strife increase in the land.

The thirty-three great gods grow angry in their palaces
When the king disregards the evil done in his kingdom.

Then the land is afflicted with fierce and terrible crime,
And it perishes and falls into the power of the enemy.
Then property, families, and hoarded wealth all vanish,
And with varied deeds of deceit men ruin one another.

Whatever his reasons, if a king does not do his duty
He ruins his kingdom, as a great elephant a bed of lotuses.

Harsh winds blow, and rain falls out of season,
Planets and stars are unpropitious, as are the moon and sun,
Corn, flowers, and fruit and seed do not ripen properly,
And there is famine, when the king is negligent. . . .

Then all the kings of the gods say one to another,
"This king is unrighteous, he has taken the side of unrighteousness!"
Such a king will not for long anger the gods;
From the wrath of the gods his kingdom will perish. . . .

He will be bereft of all that he values, whether by brother or son,
He will be parted from his beloved wife, his daughter will die.
Fire will fall from heaven, and mock-suns also.
Fear of the enemy and hunger will grow apace.
His beloved counselor will die, and his favorite elephant;
His favorite horses will die one by one, and his camels. . . .

There will be strife and violence and fraud in all the provinces;
Calamity will afflict the land, and terrible plague.

The brāhmans will then be unrighteous,
The ministers and the judges unrighteous.

The unrighteous will be revered,
And the righteous man will be chastised. . . .
Where the wicked are honored and the good are scorned
There will be famine, thunderbolts, and death . . .
All living beings will be ugly, having little vigor, very weak;
They will eat much, but they will not be filled.
They will have no strength, and no virility—
All beings in the land will be lacking in vigor. . . .

Many ills such as these befall the land
Whose king is partial [in justice] and disregards evil deeds. . . .

But he who distinguishes good deeds from evil,
Who shows the results of karma—he is called a king.
Ordained by the host of gods, the gods delight in him.
For the sake of himself or others, to preserve the righteousness of his land,
And to put down the rogues and criminals in his domains,
Such a king would give up [if need be] his life and his kingdom. . . .

Therefore a king should abandon his own precious life,
But not the jewel of Righteousness, whereby the world is gladdened.

[From Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Sūtra, 12 (cento)]

Magical Utterances

It would be wrong to depict Mahāyāna Buddhism as simply a system of idealist philosophy, with a pantheon of benevolent and compassionate deities and an exalted and altruistic ethical system. It contained many elements from a lower stratum of belief, as will be made clear from the following extract from the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, one of the most important sacred texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism, from which we have already given two quotations.

Belief in the magical efficacy of certain syllables, phrases, and verses is as old as the Rig Veda. The Pali scriptures, however, pay little attention to this aspect of popular religion, and it would seem

that the early Buddhists who were responsible for the compilation of these texts took a comparatively rationalistic view of the world. The criticism of vain and useless rituals contained in the Pali texts and in Ashoka's edicts was probably intended to cover the vain repetition of mantras or magical utterances. But from early in the Christian era onwards, such things became more and more closely associated with Buddhism, especially with the Mahāyāna sects. Hinduism and Buddhism alike developed schools which taught that the constant repetition of mantras was a sure means of salvation. The following passage is not strictly Tantric, for it does not attribute to the mantras it quotes any efficiency other than in the dispelling of evil spirits; but the importance given to the mantras, and the fact that they are attributed to the Buddha himself, show that Mahāyāna Buddhism was, by the fourth or fifth century A.D., *permeated with the ideas which were to lead to fully developed Tantricism.*

Then the Lord addressed the Great Being, the Bodhisattva Mahāmati thus:

Mahāmati, hold to these magic syllables of the *Laṅkāvatāra*, recited . . . by all the Buddhas, past, present, and future. Now I will repeat them, that those who proclaim the Law of Righteousness may keep them in mind:

Tuṭṭe tuṭṭe vuṭṭe vuṭṭe paṭṭe paṭṭe kaṭṭe kaṭṭe amale amale vimale vimale nime nime hime hime vame vame kale kale kale kale aṭṭe maṭṭe vaṭṭe tuṭṭe jñeṭṭe spuṭṭe kaṭṭe kaṭṭe laṭṭe paṭṭe dime dime cale cale pace pace bandhe bandhe añce mañce dutāre dutāre patāre patāre arkke arkke sarkke sarkke cakre cakre dime dime hime hime ḍu ḍu ḍu ḍu ḍu ḍu ḍu ru ru ru ru phu phu phu phu svāhā. . . .

If men and women of good birth hold, retain, recite, and realize these magical syllables, nothing harmful shall come upon them—whether a god, a goddess, a serpent-spirit, a fairy, or a demon.[1] . . . If anyone should be in the grip of misfortune, let him recite these one hundred and eight times, and the evil spirits, weeping and wailing, will go off in another direction.

[From *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, pp. 260–61]

[1] The names of many other supernatural beings follow.