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# **Mahāyāna Buddhism**

## *The doctrinal foundations*

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For all my teachers

course, inasmuch as the Buddhas see things correctly, so, as the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* state, no beings are really saved, and there is no *nirvāṇa* to attain. What more do fully enlightened Buddhas have to gain by entering any further state called *parinirvāṇa*? They act tirelessly for the sake of sentient beings, for in Buddhas there are no negative experiences such as tiredness. And from the side of suffering sentient beings themselves the Enjoyment Body Buddhas remain exerting their infinite compassionate deeds so long as a single being remains unenlightened.

## The path of the Bodhisattva

### TIBET AND TANTRA

The Buddhism which came to Tibet from the seventh century onwards came from two directions. On the one hand there were Chinese influences, particularly forms associated with Ch'an (Zen). On the other, and growing progressively in importance until all but eclipsing the Chinese influences, there were the developed forms of Buddhism found in India at the time. It is the Tibetan boast that it alone, of all the countries to which Buddhism spread, received and practises the complete range of teachings found in Indian Buddhism. This includes in pride of place the Tantric forms which mark late Buddhism in India. An extensive discussion of Tantra would take us beyond the scope of this book. It is possible to indicate in a few words, however, the nature of Tantric Buddhism, particularly as it is found in the Highest Yoga class (*anuttarayoga*) given principal place in the Tibetan traditions.

The concern of Tantric Buddhism is largely with ritual and meditative practices. In terms of the Mahāyāna dichotomy of wisdom and means, therefore, the Tantras are primarily concerned with means, that is, the means of becoming fully enlightened and the manifold expression of the Buddha's compassionate ability to help others. Since, as we have seen, the realm of compassion/means is for the Mahāyāna a realm of magical intervention and transformation, so Tantric practices, as practices particularly concerned with means, are seen in Tibetan Buddhism as in

the broadest sense magical practices for transforming mundane reality into a form most suited to help others. More concretely, in Tantric practice the meditator first invokes and visualizes a particular Buddha. After praising the Buddha as an external being he (or she, Tārā, for example) is absorbed into the practitioner's mind which takes on the divine aspect of great bliss. With this blissful mind the mediator reduces the world of experience to what it really is, empty or mind-dependent. Through working on his or her own mind the practitioner is then able to transform the world. The mediator, through visualization, chanting, and perhaps appropriate gestures, intervenes in 'the' world and transforms himself or herself into the appropriate Buddha, and the world of his or her experience into the divine world, the Pure Land of that Buddha, a world within which magic and miracles occur for the benefit of others.

This is perfectly understandable from what we have seen of earlier Mahāyāna in, say, the *Avatāraśaka* tradition.<sup>1</sup> The world is mind-dependent. For the Buddha it is a world of constant magical transformation. In Tantric practice from the beginning – after necessary initiation, for Tantric Buddhism is strictly esoteric – the practitioner tries to see himself as the appropriate Buddha, and the world as a divine, magical realm. Gradually this becomes more real; gradually the mediator brings into play a subtle physiology, a subtle (astral?) body usually dormant or semi-dormant within the gross material body. This subtle body (owing something, I suspect, to ancient Indian medical theories) really becomes a divine body, it is transmuted into that of a Buddha. Gradually also the hold of the gross world of inherently existing separate objects is loosened, and the mediator develops an ability to transform the world, to perform miracles. Tantric Buddhism, Vajrayāna, is thus not seen, in Tibet at least, as a totally different 'vehicle' of Buddhism but is rather a particular form of Mahāyāna practice. It is usually placed squarely within the Mahāyāna framework of emptiness and compassionate motivation.<sup>2</sup> Tibetans will state, moreover, that it is through Highest Yoga Tantra practice alone that a person can become a fully enlightened Buddha in one lifetime – indeed, it is sometimes said that it is only through having final recourse to the highest Tantric practices that one can become a Buddha at all. Hence the reputation of Tibetan Buddhism for magic and mystery! Hence also the complex iconography (for visualization and transformation) and the elaborate ritual (rendering divine, taking upon oneself divine attributes) of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, since these practices require (at least as they are presented in the dGe lugs tradition) prior understanding and training in Mahāyāna thought and

behaviour, an awareness of emptiness and the Bodhisattva path in order to understand the rationale for Tantra, for magical transformation, followed by personal initiation and careful guidance, for the practices have their psychological and perhaps also their social risks, we find in late Indian and Tibetan Buddhism the overriding importance of the teacher, a guru or lama. This is so much a feature of Tibetan Buddhism that it is sometimes called 'Lamaism' – a term offensive, however, to Tibetans, who consider, with a large degree of truth that their Buddhism is simply Indian Buddhism of the type that was transmitted to Tibet from the seventh century onwards.<sup>3</sup>

### BUDDHISM REACHES THE LAND OF SNOWS

The transmission of Buddhism to Tibet appears to have begun in earnest during the reign of the great emperor Srong btsan sgam po (pronounced: Song tsen gam po), who died c. 650 CE. There can be little doubt that Srong btsan sgam po was a remarkable man, who began a period of phenomenal Tibetan expansion which created over the next 200 years a vast empire in Central Asia which repeatedly defeated imperial Chinese armies and at one stage captured the Chinese capital of Ch'ang-an (763) and established a short-lived puppet Chinese emperor. Tibetan imperial expansion led to surplus wealth which could finance the trappings of newly discovered and newly desired civilization. Buddhism was already well established in the areas overrun by Tibetan armies; it was an adaptable, civilizing force with willing missionaries. Among his wives Srong btsan sgam po is said to have married two princesses, one Chinese and one Nepalese, who brought from their homelands Buddhist artefacts and ideas. According to tradition, the king had temples built in Lhasa (then known as Rasa) in order to house the Buddhist statues given by his queens. These are the oldest temples and the earliest statues of Tibetan Buddhism. However, while none of this is very surprising, it scarcely amounts to a wholesale propagation of the Buddhist faith. Later pious Tibetan tradition portrays Srong btsan sgam po (said to be an emanation of Avalokiteśvara) as a Buddhist convert and enthusiastic propagandist for Buddhism, but as far as we can tell the transmission of Buddhism was actually a far slower process. Per Kvaerne has pointed out that contemporary documents make no mention of Buddhism, and King Srong btsan sgam po appears to have died and been buried still adhering to the old pre-Buddhist cult centred on the divinity of the king and

involving blood sacrifice.<sup>4</sup> As late as 727 a Chinese traveller to India commented: 'As far as the country of Tibet in the East is concerned, there are no monasteries there, and the teachings of Buddha are unknown' (quoted in Hoffmann 1975: 127).

Buddhism is first mentioned in official documents during the reign of Khri srong lde brtsan (pr.: Tri song day tsen; 740–c.798 – Kvaerne, or 755–97 – Hoffmann). This king was an enthusiastic supporter of the new faith, and is seen by Tibetan tradition as the second of the three Dharma kings, an emanation of Mañjuśrī. It is clear from surviving records and later tradition that the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet was closely involved with political struggles and controversy between the king and his powerful nobles. Those members of the aristocracy opposed to the king tended to form a faction allied with the priests of the pre-Buddhist cults. This pre-Buddhist religion is often referred to by modern writers as Bon, and is said to be a form of shamanism. On both counts there are problems here. This religion cannot be identified in any simple manner with the Bon religion as it has continued down to the present day. Bon as we know it emerges into history under Buddhist influence perhaps during the eleventh century. Furthermore, the old pre-Buddhist religion of Tibet (which was not necessarily as indigenous religion itself) was a cult mainly connected with royal funeral ceremonies and was not, as far as we can tell, shamanistic in any way.<sup>5</sup>

It is also often stated that the Buddhism of Tibet is some strange hybrid, the result of Indian Buddhism mixing with this pre-Buddhist religion. Again, there is no clear evidence for this. Certainly, Buddhism in each country to which it has spread has absorbed some of the local cults and culture. It happened in China and Japan as much as Tibet. Tibetan texts themselves speak of local deities tamed by Buddhist saints, usually yogins with a strong involvement in Tantric magic, such as Padmasambhava (eighth century). These local deities pledge to protect Buddhism, they are converted, and their cults become part of local Buddhist practice. This absorption of the local cults indicates a Mahāyāna concern to control local forces in order to protect person, property, and religion. It is not uniquely Tibetan. The local deities rarely if ever have any direct connection with the path to Buddhahood – they are worldly (*laukika*) and not supramundane (*lokottara*). Nevertheless, their conversion is essential to the conversion of a country, and reflects a Mahāyāna involvement with the whole of life as a skilful means to benefit beings, and a Tantric involvement in all experience as part of divine expression, a Buddha's Pure Land. Thus, although Buddhism in Tibet has

a local flavour, and reflects the tastes and interests of the Tibetan people, still, this is not unusual in Buddhism and is far from indicating Tibetan Buddhism as a strange hybrid religion. Indeed, many of the features of Tibetan Buddhism which initially strike one as unusual can be traced to forms of Buddhism present in India at the time of transmission to Tibet, particularly the Buddhism of the Pāla dynasties of Bengal/Bihar (eighth to ninth/tenth centuries).

If we follow traditional accounts, King Khri srong lde brtsan invited the great Indian scholar Śāntarakṣita to Tibet. The Indian scholar laid the foundations for the first monastery in Tibet, at bSam yas (pr.: Samyay). Nevertheless, the story runs, Tibetan demons hindered Śāntarakṣita's progress, and he returned to India having advised that the king invite the yogin Padmasambhava to Tibet in order to quell through magic its demons and bind them to the service of the Dharma. This Padmasambhava did with spectacular success. Some scholars have seen in the figures of Śāntarakṣita and padmasambhava two contrasting types of Buddhist adept, models of sainthood, prevalent in Indian Buddhism at this time – the scholarly abbot, and the wandering Tantric yogin, a *siddha*, a magician who cannot be placed in any category, and is free from all external constraints. The *siddha*'s actions may shock, may be antinomian: he or she is a person of power operating for the benefit of beings from the position of a Buddha, behind and beyond all laws. The relationships between monastic Buddhism and the *siddha*, who may or may not be a monk, have not always been easy. Some Tibetan traditions veer more towards the one as a model or towards the other. But these are only types – Śāntarakṣita practised the Tantras as did the great Tibetan monastic scholars such as Sa skyā Paṇḍita (1182–1251) and Tsong kha pa (1357–1419). *Siddhas* such as Padmasambhava and Nāropa (956–1040) did not neglect the study of doctrine as taught in the great monastic universities, and the Tibetan traditions which trace their lineage in particular to these *siddhas*, the rNying ma pa (pr.: Nying ma pa) and bKa' brgyud (pr.: Ka gyer), have also produced great monastic scholars. As the founder of the rNying ma pa tradition, Padmasambhava has been revered from about the fourteenth century onwards as a totally miraculous being, a Second Buddha, eclipsing almost completely Śākyamuni. In the earliest sources, however, there is little evidence for the quite exceptional status of Padmasambhava. Be that as it may, it is said that as a result of Padmasambhava's activities Śāntarakṣita was able to return to Tibet, bSam yas monastery was completed, and the first Tibetan monks were trained. It was also during the reign of King Khri srong lde brtsan that

the bSam yas debates occurred. Because of the direct relevance of these debates to the Buddhist path, however, they will be treated in the next section.

It is clear from the records that Khri strong lde brtsan elevated the monkhood to a very high position indeed, beyond that of his ministers and the other nobility. In so doing he contributed substantially to the alienation of his aristocracy. Much of this was in keeping with Indian precedent (and contrasts with China), but it aggravated still further relationships with the non-Buddhist nobility, and also with the peasantry, who were nevertheless required by law to support the monks. The third Dharma king, Ral pa can (pr.: Rel pa chen; d.838 – Kvaerne, or 836 – Shakabpa), an emanation of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, showed even more enthusiasm for Buddhism. He is said to have tied pieces of string to his long hair, the other ends of which were tied to strips of cloth. These pieces of cloth were spread out on the ground for the monks to sit on. Eventually Ral pa can was murdered by two disaffected ministers, who placed his anti-Buddhist brother, gLang dar ma, on the throne. gLang dar ma instituted a persecution of Buddhism, closing monasteries, confiscating their estates, and forcing monks to marry and become huntsmen or followers of the non-Buddhist cults. At least two monks were executed. gLang dar ma was himself killed by a Buddhist monk and yogin, dPal gyi rdo rje (pr.: Bel gyee dor jay) who, out of skilful means animated by compassion, decided to save the Dharma and also the king by preventing him from carrying out further crimes (842). By the death of gLang dar ma Buddhism had all but perished in Central Tibet. Thus ends the period known as the First Diffusion of the Dharma in Tibet. It also inaugurates the end of Tibetan imperialism. The Tibetan empire eventually fragmented into the clans and countries from which it arose. Buddhism, meanwhile, entered a period of decadence, with lawless 'siddhas' apparently acting out of megalomaniac immorality in the belief that they were already Buddhas and beyond all good and evil.

Slowly, however, the Dharma and monasticism revived. Instrumental in bringing about a Second Diffusion of the Dharma in Tibet was the king of a region in western Tibet, who subsequently became a monk-king, known as Ye shes 'od (pr.: Ye shay er). This king built monasteries and sent youths to India in order to study as monks and train as translators. It is said that Ye shes 'od particularly wanted to invite the great Indian scholar and saint Atiśa to Tibet, and according to a cherished tradition, when the monk-king was captured by a Muslim Turkic tribe and thrown into prison, he insisted that his nephew Byang chub 'od (pr.: Jang chup

er) use the ransom raised for his release to invite Atiśa to revive Buddhism in Tibet. Ye shes 'od accordingly died in prison, a martyr to the Dharma, and Atiśa (982–1054) spent many years in Tibet teaching, translating, and establishing a form of Buddhism firmly based on scholarship, morality, and a strict monastic tradition within which Tantric practice nevertheless had a legitimate place. Atiśa (whose principal disciple was a Tibetan layman, 'Brom ston (pr.: Drom tern)) wrote for his pupils in Tibet a short treatise known as the *Bodhipathapradīpa*, the *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment*, in which he created a system integrating all Buddhist practices as he had received them from his many teachers into a gradual path based on morality and culminating in the development of compassion and wisdom completed through Tantric practice. This treatise, the root text for Atiśa's bKa' gdams pa (pr.: Ka dam pa) school, has been enormously influential in Tibetan religious thought.

During Atiśa's time, Tibetans were also founding schools. The layman-translator Mar pa (1012–96) travelled a number of times to India, and together with his disciple, the famous yogin and poet Mi la ras pa (pr.: Mi la ray pa; 1040–1123), and the latter's disciple sGam po pa (1079–1153), established the bKa' brgyud – a tradition which has subsequently split into several lineages. Among the most famous of these bKa' brgyud lineages is that of the Karma pa (divided itself into the Red Hat Karma pa and the Black Hat Karma pa), which appears to have introduced the idea of succession through reincarnation. It is said that when the second Black Hat Karma pa, head of the Black Hat lineage, died in 1283 a child was recognized as his reincarnation and trained to occupy once more his religious and administrative position. This phenomenon of 'incarnate lamas' was subsequently adopted by other traditions (the Dalai Lama is perhaps the best-known case), and is a feature of the form of Buddhism found in Tibet and Mongolia.

Politically, the period after the collapse of the Tibetan imperial dynasty is marked by the gradual centralization of power in the hands of the one organization which could offer some form of stability in a time of near-anarchy, the monasteries. Even before the arrival of the Mongols Tibet had seen the growth of powerful monastic centres headed by 'prince-abbots' and sometimes allied to local kings. When Tibet hurried to submit to the terrifying Mongol scourge, Prince Godan, who was grandson of Genghis Khan and interested in religion and particularly magic, invited the monk reputed to be the holiest in all Tibet, the head of the Sa skyā tradition, Sa skyā Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (pr.: Kern ga gyel tsen; 1182–1251), to visit him in his camp. Impressed, Godan became his

patron and handed over the whole of Tibet to the learned abbot. Sa skya Paṇḍita was succeeded by his nephew 'Phags pa (pr.: Pak pa; 1235–80), the teacher of Kublai Khan, the Khan who became Mongol emperor of China. This period saw not only the establishment of Sa skya power over Tibet, but also immense Sa skya influence in Mongolia and China. The Tibetans appeared to have replaced a material empire with one of the spirit! Unfortunately the Tibetan lamas were often accused by the Chinese of arrogance and worldliness. Their connection with the barbarian Mongolian conquerors did little to help their popularity in China, and Sa skya power began to wane with the collapse of the Mongol empire. Over the centuries within Tibet Sa skya gradually lost political control (but not spiritual influence) to other 'princely-monastic' traditions, particularly the bKa' brgyud lineage known as the Phag mo gru pa (pr.: Pak mo dru pa).

The preceding traditions of Tibetan Buddhism are sometimes known, following Chinese custom, as 'Red Hats' (the Black Hat Karma pa notwithstanding). This marks a contrast with the most recent of the Tibetan schools, Tsong kha pa's Yellow Hat dGe lugs pa. Tsong kha pa sought to return to the Indian sources, particularly as they had been systematized in Atiśa's synthesis. He stressed monastic austerity and formidable learning. Tsong kha pa founded the first dGe lugs monastery, dGa' ldan (pr.: Gan den), close to Lhasa, in 1409. The other two great dGe lugs monastic universities, 'Bras spungs (pr.: Dre pung) and Sera, were founded also near to Lhasa in 1416 and 1419 respectively. One of Tsong kha pa's pupils, dGe 'dun grub (pr.: Gen dun drup), founded bKra shis lhun po (pr.: Tra she lhun po) monastery some distance south-west of Lhasa. On the death of dGe 'dun grub his reincarnation was discovered in dGe 'dun rgya mtsho (pr.: ... gya tso), and on the latter's death in bSod nams rgya mtsho (pr.: Sir nam gya tso; 1543–88). This bSod nams rgya mtsho reintroduced Buddhism to Mongolia, finally converting the Mongols who ever since have been enthusiastic and often very learned supporters of the dGe lugs tradition. The Mongol khan, Altan Khan, was so impressed with the learning and spirituality of bSod nams rgya mtsho that he called him an 'ocean' (Mongolian: *dalai*), and bSod nams rgya mtsho thus became the Third Dalai Lama, for his two previous incarnations were given the title respectively. When bSod nams rgya mtsho's own reincarnation, the Fourth Dalai Lama, was found in a Mongol family as the great-grandson of Altan Khan, Mongol support for the dGe lugs tradition was complete. Politically, on the other hand, the situation had deteriorated. The growing power of the dGe lugs

monasteries had led to a religio-political rivalry with other political powers, particularly the Karma pa bKa' brgyud. Geographically this rivalry represented an old rivalry between Central Tibet, dominated by Lhasa and the dGe lugs, and southern Tibet (gTsang) whose king supported the Karma pa and resented Lhasa ambitions and pretensions. The situation became most unpleasant, with armed bands, sometimes monks, allied to each side sacking each other's monasteries, although at times both Dalai Lamas and Karma pa hierarchs intervened to mediate and defuse a potentially dangerous situation. Nevertheless, the story is not very edifying. Suffice to say that this anarchy ended when, during the mid-seventeenth century, the Mongol Gushri Khan defeated and killed the king of gTsang and gave political control of Tibet to the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (pr.: Nga wang lo zang gya tso; 1617–82), a learned and yet politically gifted monk and ruler. From that time on the Dalai Lamas, providing they reach maturity, have been in theory at least the political leaders of the Tibetan people.<sup>6</sup>

## THE EIGHTH-CENTURY DEBATES

Let us return now to the time of Khri srong lde brtsan. We have seen that during the first diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet the establishment of Buddhism *vis-à-vis* the non-Buddhist cults was also involved with political rivalry between the king and his powerful nobles. Within Buddhism there were further rivalries, however. King Strong btsan sgam po is said to have had two Buddhist wives, one from Nepal and the other from China. We know that Chinese wives of subsequent kings were associated with Chinese Buddhist missionaries. It seems likely that Indian wives also had their missionaries. This meant that a number of rather different forms of Buddhism were introduced together into Tibet. It seems that partisans of these different traditions were by the time of Khri srong lde brtsan in a state of open antagonism, with advocates of one approach threatening to kill those of another (Houston 1980: 32). In particular, these different approaches polarized into that represented by a Chinese monk (*ho-shang*) named, appropriately enough, Mahāyāna, and the approach of Śāntarakṣita and his disciple Kamalaśīla. The Chinese monk appears to have been a follower of some form of Ch'an, although exactly which form is disputed by scholars. Śāntarakṣita is said to have died some time before the debate (or debates – it is now thought that in reality there may have been a series of controversies lasting, perhaps, for

some years). The side of Śāntarakṣita was represented by Kamalaśīla. Late sources lead us to believe that Kamalaśīla's faction was very much in the minority. The debate was of great importance to later Tibetan thought and its view of its antecedents and development. Accounts are contained in a number of later works which seem to agree in essentials, although this may be because they all depend on the same original. There are also Chinese accounts of the debate. We are told that it was held in the presence of the king, and Mahāyāna was the first to speak:

If you commit virtuous or non-virtuous deeds, because you go to heavens and hells, (you still) are not liberated from *samsāra*. The path to Buddhahood is obscured ... Whoever does not think anything; the one who does not ponder will become completely liberated from *samsāra* ... he is instantaneously enlightened. He is equal to one who has mastered the tenth *bhūmi*.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, enlightenment not only has nothing to do with morality, but it is positively hindered by good and bad deeds, which lead to heaven and hell and bind one still further in the round of rebirth. Enlightenment lies in cutting all thought, all mental activity, and must necessarily be instantaneous (or 'simultaneous' – there are problems of interpretation and translation here). There can be no stages, necessarily conceptual, to non-conceptual awareness.

If we can follow the Tibetan Bu ston (1290–1364), Kamalaśīla replied to Mahāyāna that if his opponent were right then there could be no wisdom (*prajñā*) gained through conceptual activity. But surely liberating wisdom is precisely the *result* of conceptual activity, of analysing to find out whether an entity has or has not inherent existence. In a state of no thought at all how can there be insight? How can there be renunciation of the wrong view if one has not attained to the right view? Moreover, Kamalaśīla's colleagues pointed out, to attain enlightenment suddenly is to abandon the path of gradual cultivation through the six perfections of giving, morality, and so on. And if one accepts a sudden enlightenment which cannot be cultivated then what is to be done? There can be no religious practice at all! Mahāyāna's approach is one which contradicts the scriptures, destroys morality and compassion, and also destroys any possibility of generating actual insight.<sup>8</sup> The king, we are told, was persuaded by these arguments and judged Kamalaśīla's party the winner. Henceforth, he decreed, everyone should follow the teachings of Nāgārjuna and engage assiduously in the practice of morality and the perfections. Mahāyāna and his followers were expelled from Tibet.

It has been suggested that since Khri srong lde brtsan wished to improve the morality of his semi-barbaric people he was likely from the beginning to accept the testimony of Kamalaśīla and his party (Houston 1980: 9). Certainly, it was not in the interests of the king to advocate a position which denied the value of good deeds and placed the spiritual practitioner outside the nexus of moral (and legal) control. Moreover it was also not in his interests to side too closely with Chinese Buddhism, for Tibet was still at war with China. Throughout subsequent Tibetan thought the view of Ho-shang Mahāyāna has frequently been taken as one of the archetypal 'wrong views', a dangerous misinterpretation. Tsong kha pa will often accuse his opponents of falling unintentionally into this heresy, inasmuch as they tend to deny the role of analysis in generating insight into emptiness. It should be clear that some of the tension between the two approaches can be traced to an opposition between the Madhyamaka view of emptiness as an absence of inherent existence in the object under investigation, and the *tathāgatagarbha* perspective on emptiness, so influential in Chinese Buddhism including Ch'an, which sees emptiness as the radiant pure mind empty of its conceptual accretions. This second approach sees concepts, and mental activity which is necessarily conceptual, as obscurations, clouds covering an innate pure radiance (an image which is repeated by Mahāyāna, according to Bu ston, in describing his position). By way of contrast, our first approach divides conceptual activity into profitable and unprofitable. It thus sees emptiness in *samsāra*, rather than in radical contrast to it.

In recent years scholars have gained access to a number of very early fragmentary writings found at the Central Asian oasis site of Tun-huang. This site was under Tibetan imperial control for some time, and the writings, in Tibetan, give perhaps a rather clearer account of what Mahāyāna's views actually were. It is known that as a matter of fact Mahāyāna himself did not ignore morality, but was quite prepared to administer the monastic vows. According to one of these fragments the practitioner should accumulate merit and practise the perfections, although the ultimate is beyond them (Gomez 1983: 118, 127). The picture we get from these fragments is that Mahāyāna saw the root cause of *samsāra* as discrimination (*vikalpa*; ibid, 107). Thus enlightenment comes from cutting the discriminating mind. However, this does not seem to refer to a striving to cut all thoughts altogether, for that too would be a clinging:

When he enters a state of deep contemplation, he looks into his own mind. There being no-mind, he does not engage in thought. If

thoughts of discrimination arise, he should become aware of them.... Whatever thoughts arise, one does not examine.... He does not examine any dharma whatsoever. If he becomes aware in this way of the arising (of thoughts, he perceives) the absence of self-existence.... After sitting (in this manner) for a long time, the mind will become tame, and one will realize that his awareness is also discriminating mind.... Awareness itself is without name or form ... the awareness and place where it occurs cannot be obtained by any search. There is no way of reflecting on the inconceivable. Not to cling even to this absence of thought is (the immediate access of) the Tathagatas.

(Trans. in Gomez 1983: 108–9)

In this way there can be liberation in each moment of thought:

But if one were to experience non-examination and does not act according to these concepts, or accept them, or become attached to them, then every instant of mind is liberated at each moment.

(ibid., 125)

These practices have something in common with Zen, and also with the Tibetan rNying ma pa tradition known as *rDzogs chen* (pr.: Dzok chen), the Great Perfection. They are certainly far subtler than the traditional Tibetan accounts of Mahāyāna's views. But what of Mahāyāna's attitudes to morality and the perfections? In fact he shows a tendency to reinterpret the perfections of giving, morality, and so on in a way consonant with his meditative practice. Thus: 'When one enters non-examination, he brings to perfection great morality, because there is no arising of any faults in any of the three doors (of conduct)' (Gomez 1983: 122). One interpretation of this is that morality etc. have their place *after* one has attained to direct insight through cutting all conceptualization. Such an approach also has Zen parallels – a version of it is held by Dōgen, for example.

According to the traditional Tibetan account, Kamalaśila was subsequently murdered, although it is not clear by whom. Before his sad death, however, he wrote three works, known as the three *Bhāvanākramas*, summarizing the path as he saw and taught it, and also his criticisms of the approach of Ho-shang Mahāyāna. This approach, Kamalaśila observes, is to reject correct analysis which leads to understanding. With no understanding, moral taints and impurities cannot be overcome. Moreover, to attain enlightenment it is necessary to

complete the two collections of merit and wisdom. Merit comes through the means of giving, morality, and so on. These people destroy the Mahāyāna, they over-inflate their own views, are without respect for the wise, and ignore the Buddha's words. Being destroyed themselves, they seek to destroy others. Their words are infected with the poison of contradiction, violate logic and scriptural tradition, and they should be rejected by the wise.<sup>9</sup> Thus Kamalaśila's view of the quietism and antinomianism sometimes associated with Zen! In the first *Bhāvanākrama* in particular Kamalaśila systematically explains the stages of the path as he understands and advocates it. This text together with Atiśa's *Bodhipathapradīpa* and the author's own commentary are among the most important Indian sources for the progressive stages on the path to enlightenment in Tibet. The path begins for the Mahāyāna with compassion, for, say Kamalaśila, 'compassion alone is the root cause of all the qualities of the Buddha'.<sup>10</sup> It is to this path, and compassion in particular, therefore, that we now turn.

## COMPASSION AND THE BODHICITTA

According to Atiśa in his *Bodhipathapradīpa*, beings can be divided in terms of their scope or aspirations into three types – the lesser, the middling, and the superior. Those of lesser scope take as their goal themselves alone – they are selfish – and act simply for the pleasures of *samsāra*, either in this life or in some future rebirth. Other texts will state that as a scope or aspiration this does not deserve the name 'religious' at all. Those in the second category, that of middling aspiration, turn their backs on the pleasures of existence and renounce immoral deeds. They act in order to bring about their own pacification, in other words in order to attain enlightenment as an Arhat. But those of highest, superior scope seek to bring a complete end to all the sufferings of others, since the suffering of others is indeed their own suffering. Atiśa has written the *Bodhipathapradīpa* for this last category, the superior beings who follow the Bodhisattva path of the Mahāyāna.<sup>11</sup>

Thus we have ordinary worldly beings, those who are on the path to the *nirvāṇa* of an Arhat, and finally the Bodhisattva whose aspiration lies in removing the sufferings of all sentient beings. The distinctions between these persons rest on their aspirations. One corollary of this – a corollary Tibetans are quick to point out – is that the distinction between Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna is not as such one of schools, traditions,

Vinaya, robes, or philosophy. It is one of motivation, the reason for following the religious path. As such, there could in theory be a Mahāyānist, one with the highest motivation of complete Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, following the Theravāda tradition.<sup>12</sup> This fits with what we know of the historical origins of the Mahāyāna, embedded firmly within the non-Mahāyāna traditions. One can speak of a particular philosophy, say the Sarvāstivāda or Sautrāntika systems, as a non-Mahāyāna philosophy, and the Madhyamaka and Cittamātra as Mahāyāna philosophies, but one cannot say for certain of a particular person whether he or she is a Mahāyānist, or not without knowing whether that person has developed the Mahāyāna motivation. There are said to be many who hold to Mahāyāna philosophies, and also carry out Mahāyāna rituals, who are not genuine followers of the Mahāyāna. Their real aspiration may be their own liberation, or even worldly goals such as fame or money.

Developing the authentic Mahāyāna motivation is called 'generating *bodhicitta*', the Mind of Enlightenment or Awakening Mind. This *bodhicitta* results from deep compassion for the suffering of others. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said somewhere, speaking from the Madhyamaka perspective, that in Mahāyāna there are no absolutes, but if there were one it would be compassion. Compassion is not an ontological absolute, but it is an ethical absolute for the Mahāyāna. In the first chapter of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, one of the great spiritual poems of mankind, Śāntideva (695–743) praises compassion and the *bodhicitta* in the following terms:

It is like the supreme gold-making elixir,  
For it transforms the unclean body we have taken  
Into the priceless jewel of a Buddha-Form.  
Therefore firmly seize this Awakening Mind.

How can I fathom the depths  
Of the goodness of this jewel of the mind,  
The panacea that relieves the world of pain  
And is the source of all its joy?<sup>13</sup>

This compassion is the basis and motivating force of the Bodhisattva, from it springs the entire edifice of the Mahāyāna. Kamalaśīla states that 'The Buddhas, the Blessed Ones, attained to their omniscience by embracing compassion; and they so rejoice in the welfare of the world that they remain therein, nor do the Blessed Ones abide in nirvana, because of their compassion' (trans. in Beyer 1974: 100). According to the

Dalai Lama,

We should have this [compassion] from the depths of our heart, as if it were nailed there. Such compassion is not merely concerned with a few sentient beings such as friends and relatives, but extends up to the limits of the cosmos, in all directions and towards all beings throughout space.

(T. Gyatso 1979: 111)

Truly generating this deep compassion and the resultant *bodhicitta* is a completely life-transforming experience; one ceases to be an ordinary being and becomes a 'Son or Daughter of the Buddhas' (*Bodhicaryāvatāra* 1: 9). This is not simply an idle thought: 'Wouldn't it be nice to be a Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings?' Rather it results from a very specific and sustained series of meditations.

First, it is presupposed in the Tibetan traditions of the 'graduated path' that very few practitioners are capable of beginning straight away with the Bodhisattva motivation. We all begin with the first scope, that of self-concern with the pleasures of this and other worlds – whether we realize it or not. Preliminary meditations are used, therefore, in order to raise the aspiration of the practitioner from this 'sensual' scope to one of concern for liberation from *samsāra* altogether – in other words, the motivation of the Arhat. More specifically, Tsong kha pa speaks of the 'three principal aspects of the path' – renunciation, compassion, and emptiness. It is necessary to have renunciation before one can truly begin to generate compassion.<sup>14</sup> To this end a series of graded meditations are recommended. One first meditates on the rarity and value of a human rebirth, a birth with time and the ability to understand and practise the Dharma. Next the meditator contemplates impermanence and death, the fact that death comes to everyone and is certain, although the time of death is uncertain. At the time of death only one's spiritual development will be of help. This generates enthusiasm for practising the Dharma straight away, 'as if there were no tomorrow'. One meditates on *karma* and rebirth, which helps to develop the moral basis for spiritual practice. If the meditator practises these meditations systematically then by this stage he or she will have given rise to a spiritual and moral perspective and a genuine concern with virtue which will lead to favourable future rebirths. Next one contemplates the various forms of rebirth and suffering throughout the six realms (gods, titans or anti-gods (*asuras*), humans, hungry ghosts (*pretas*), animals, and hell realms). The practitioner visualizes each of the six destinies and their sufferings, their

ultimate unsatisfactoriness. Only after repeatedly meditating like this will a feeling of complete renunciation for all rebirth in *samsāra*, and a desire for Arhatship, arise. It is then, and only then, that meditation intended to generate *bodhicitta* has any real meaning.<sup>15</sup>

The Third Dalai Lama, bSod nams rgya mtsho, states that:

there is a need to look to the goal of complete Buddhahood, which is ultimate fulfillment from both one's own and others' point of view. Moreover, one should not think to gain Buddhahood merely for one's own benefit. One should want it purely in order to be able to more efficiently and deeply benefit sentient beings. Just as you have fallen into the ocean of samsaric misery, so have all others; and they, like you, know only frustration and misery.

(Trans. by Mullin in S. Gyatso 1982: 109–10)

The causes of generating *bodhicitta* in general, and the meditations in particular, differ somewhat in different texts. In later Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, however, there are frequently said to be two meditations which, practised carefully and repeatedly, will lead eventually to the arising of *bodhicitta*.

The first meditation is called the 'six causes and one effect'. As a preliminary the meditator is required to produce a feeling of equanimity or equality, 'an unbiased attitude' towards all sentient beings. He or she visualizes in front an enemy, a friend, and one to whom feelings are neutral. All are really alike. In the endless series of rebirths each has been a friend, an enemy, and neutral many times, each has helped and hindered. None is really, inherently, a friend or enemy. Each, even in this life, can become enemy or friend, or a person to whom one no longer has any feeling. Thus we generate a feeling of equanimity, of equality towards all. Now, briefly, for the six causes and one effect: (i) Since we have all had infinite births in the past, so each sentient being no matter how lowly has been our mother in this or previous births infinite times (and every other relationship, of course). (ii) As our mothers, beings have been immensely kind to us, undergoing great sufferings and trouble for our sake.<sup>16</sup> (iii) At the present time all our 'mother sentient beings' are undergoing great sufferings. What can we do? We have a duty, an obligation, to repay their kindness by helping them all to the uttermost limit of our ability. The Third Dalai Lama states:

Like members in a drunken procession staggering towards a cliff, they are stumbling over the precipice of evil into the suffering of

cyclic existence and the lower realms. Think, 'If I do not do something for these pathetic, feeble beings, who will? ... Were I to ignore these kind beings and work only for my personal liberation from samsara, what lack of conscience and consideration!'

(S. Gyatso 1982: 116)

(iv) and (v) In the light of this the meditator generates great love, 'May these mother sentient beings have happiness, and may I contribute towards their happiness', and great compassion, 'May they be free of suffering, and may I help them to become free'. (vi) Finally, one decides to take upon oneself the responsibility for helping all sentient beings. However, the next question is whether it is actually possible to do very much to help even a few beings, let alone every single one? Meditating in this way, the practitioner concludes that it is only possible to fulfil one's aspirations and duty to all sentient beings by becoming a fully enlightened Buddha, with all the abilities and powers of a Buddha to help others.

Thus one generates the 'one effect', the *bodhicitta*, the altruistic aspiration to perfect enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The second meditation for developing *bodhicitta* is called 'Exchanging self and others'. First, one meditates that all are equal in that all beings, like me, desire happiness and the avoidance of suffering. Śāntideva says:

Hence I should dispel the misery of others  
Because it is suffering, just like my own,  
And I should benefit others  
Because they are sentient beings, just like myself.

When both myself and others  
Are similar in that we wish to be happy,  
What is so special about me?  
Why do I strive for my happiness alone?<sup>17</sup>

Next, one becomes aware that each person individually is as important as I am, and therefore, objectively, since others are greater in number than I am so, as an aggregate, others are always more important than myself. Thus, in helping, it is rational to help others rather than myself. The meditator may at this point repeat the equanimity meditation given above. Then, he or she meditates on the faults and problems involved in cherishing self rather than others. Śāntideva states that

All misery in the world derives from  
Desiring happiness for oneself;

All happiness in the world arises from  
Desiring the happiness of others.  
(Trans. in T. Gyatso 1979: 139)

The result is that one is able to 'exchange self with others'. The Dalai Lama strongly asserts that "The only purpose of my existence is to be used by others and to serve others". This idea, this attitude, this determination must arise from the depths of one's heart, from the very depths of one's mind' (ibid., 140).

The foregoing is linked with a practice known as 'giving and taking', in which the meditator visualizes in front of him or her beings suffering in various situations or realms, and imagines that he or she is taking on their sufferings with the inhaling breath, and breathing out happiness, which transmutes the negative situation of sentient beings into one of happiness and bliss. Tibetans will often state that when this practice is perfected, a Bodhisattva can genuinely take onto himself or herself the sufferings and illnesses of others.<sup>18</sup>

Thus arises the *bodhicitta*. Atīśa describes a ritual for taking the Bodhisattva vows in front of a suitable master.<sup>19</sup> The original idea appears to have been that one would make a resolution in front of the Buddha himself. According to a later version of the ceremony, three times the aspirant repeats:

May all the buddhas and bodhisattvas abiding in the ten directions deign to take notice of me! May the master deign to take notice of me! I, named so-and-so, by virtue of wholesome roots developed from giving, from morality and from meditation in this and other rebirths – that I have done, had done, or appreciated the doing of – just as previous tathāgata, arhat, completely fulfilled lord buddhas and bodhisattvas great heroes abiding on a high stage, first generated the thought towards supreme, right and full awakening, so likewise, from this time forth until reaching the site of awakening, in order to ferry over the stranded, to release the bound, to revive the breathless, to bring to nirvana those not yet in nirvana, I generate a thought towards supreme, right and full great awakening.

(Trans. by Tatz in Gyaltzen 1982: 30)

With the completion of this ceremony the aspirant is a Bodhisattva, and is deemed to have undertaken certain commitments, including never abandoning any sentient being, or retreating into the lower aspiration of

the Arhat vehicle. The most moving statement of the aspirations and hopes of a Bodhisattva who has generated *bodhicitta* is found, as always, in Śāntideva:

May I be the doctor and the medicine  
And may I be the nurse  
For all sick beings in the world  
Until everyone is healed.

May a rain of food and drink descend  
To clear away the pain of thirst and hunger  
And during the aeon of famine  
May I myself change into food and drink.

I become an inexhaustible treasure  
For those who are poor and destitute;  
May I turn into all things they could need  
And may these be placed close beside them. (3: 8-10)

According to the texts, it is only said to be *bodhicitta* if the compassion is embedded in an awareness of emptiness. Thus *bodhicitta* is said to have the nature of emptiness and compassion. Ever since at least as early as the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, however, it has been asserted that there are two types of *bodhicitta* – the ultimate and the conventional or relative *bodhicittas*. Ultimate *bodhicitta* is, according to the *sūtra*, 'beyond this world, cannot be formulated by concept or speech, is extremely radiant, the image of the Ultimate, immaculate, unshakeable, and very bright like the steady glow of a lamp on a calm night'.<sup>20</sup> Since the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* is a Cittamātra text, it seems likely that ultimate *bodhicitta* (etymology: enlightenment mind) is the pure radiant mind of an enlightened being, possessed of compassion. For Sthiramati, in common with the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, the *bodhicitta* is equal to the *dharmakāya* 'as it manifests itself in the human heart' (Suzuki 1963: 299; cf. the *tathāgatagarbha*). From the point of view of a Prāsaṅgika like Tsong kha pa, too, there is no problem in seeing the ultimate *bodhicitta* as the mind stream of a Bodhisattva or Buddha endowed with compassion and directly cognizing emptiness (cf. Hopkins 1984: 56).

Conventional *bodhicitta*, the moral *bodhicitta*, *bodhicitta* properly speaking, is also of two types – aspiring and engaging *bodhicittas*. Śāntideva says:

As is understood by the distinction

between aspiring to go and (actually) going,  
So the wise understand in turn  
The distinction between these two. (1: 16)

Kamalaśīla does not differ substantially from this:

Now this intention is the initial yearning for Buddhahood: 'Oh, that I might be a Buddha, for the sake of all beings!' And the setting forth [engaging] is the actual making of a vow to become a Buddha, and the actual accumulation of the stocks of merit and knowledge.<sup>21</sup>

Thus the Bodhisattva who truly wishes to help others, or, even better, who spontaneously produces the wish to help sentient beings whenever he or she sees suffering, has generated aspiring *bodhicitta*. Actually engaging in the practices of the Bodhisattva path, the perfections and so forth, with this as a basis, is the engaging *bodhicitta*. It is along this path that we shall now follow.

### BODHISATTVA STAGES, PATHS AND PERFECTIONS

With the arising of the *bodhicitta*, according to the *Sūtra on the Ten Stages*, the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, the Bodhisattva enters the first of the stages (*bhūmi*) on the path to Buddhahood, a stage known as 'Joyous'. It appears, however, that there must have been circulating at one time a number of schemes on the Bodhisattva's path, for a text such as the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* has quite a different plan. As time passed some attempt was made to bring these different schemes into line, and we find this in the systematic plan given, for example, in Kamalaśīla's *Bhāvanākrama* (and briefly by Atiśa), and followed in Tibet by, say, the dGe lugs tradition.

According to the plan of the *Bhāvanākrama*, the Bodhisattva, once *bodhicitta* has arisen, has not yet attained the first Bodhisattva stage, but must strive in wisdom and means, without neglecting either (as does Ho-shang Mahāyāna). 'Means' here refers to the five perfections of giving, morality, patience, effort, and meditative concentration. 'Wisdom' refers to the perfection of wisdom. Thus it is important for the Bodhisattva to combine the three types of wisdom – from study, deep consideration, and meditation – with skilful means which will prevent any neglect of the welfare of others. In particular, Kamalaśīla advocates that the Bodhisattva now devote time to meditative practice and the development, if it has not been developed before, of perfect calm abiding

(*śamatha*). He thus gains the ability to enter the various trances and meditative states familiar from other systems of meditation. With the attainment of calm abiding our Bodhisattva can learn to combine it with analytic insight into emptiness.

Both Kamalaśīla (implicitly) and Atiśa relate this process in the Bodhisattva's development after the arising of *bodhicitta* to a stage known as the Path of Accumulation (*sambhāramārga*). The schema of five 'paths' to enlightenment is known from non-Mahāyāna sources, and seems originally to have marked a different plan of the path from that of the ten stages. In Atiśa's and Kamalaśīla's schemes, and subsequently in Tibet, the two plans of 'paths' and 'stages' are combined in a way which does not always appear very satisfactory.<sup>22</sup>

The Path of Accumulation is entered, according to dGe lugs writers, when there arises a fully developed *bodhicitta*. This path has a number of stages, each of which is indicated by various attainments. For example, during the first stage of the Path of Accumulation one masters the Four Objects of Close Contemplation (*smṛtyupathāna* – trans. from Dhargye 1976: 188). That is, one understands through close meditative examination the body, feelings, the mind, and all *dharmas*. In the third and final stage the meditator is said to develop through cultivating calm abiding the ability to visit celestial realms in order to make offerings and acquire merit, and also the ability to see teachers, and statues of the Buddha, as actual Buddhas.<sup>23</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter 3 on Madhyamaka above, when analytic meditation on emptiness itself generates calm abiding, then one is said to enter the second of the five paths, the Path of Preparation (*prayoga-mārga*). Kamalaśīla makes it clear that while a Bodhisattva at this stage is still technically an ordinary person (*prthagjana*) and not an Arya, a Noble Being, nevertheless he or she is quite beyond the stage and attainments of the average 'man in the street'. The Path of Preparation has four stages, known as heat, peak, patience, and supreme mundane *dharmas*, which indicate progressively deeper understanding and experience of emptiness, refining away all conceptual awareness and dualistic apprehension. Various attainments accompany his progress. He will never take rebirth again in the lower realms.<sup>24</sup> The Bodhisattva at this stage attains five powers of deep faith, armour-like exertion and perseverance, recollection (of the Four Noble Truths and their ramifications), meditative absorption – the combination of calm abiding and insight – and wisdom, the 'ability to examine the void nature of the Four Noble Truths'.<sup>25</sup>

When our Bodhisattva attains direct, non-conceptual, and non-dual

vision of emptiness then he attains the Path of Insight (*darśanamārga*). At this point, according to the systemic account of Kamalaśīla and others, he enters the first Bodhisattva stage (*bhūmi*). At this stage also the Bodhisattva becomes an Arya, a Noble One, and has control over all his future rebirths. He gains many powers and attainments. Indeed, with progressively higher stages the Bodhisattva's attainments are multiplied to multicosmic proportions.<sup>26</sup> For example, it is said of a Bodhisattva at this first stage that he has twelve attainments. After rising from meditation he can, in just one instant:

1. see a hundred Buddhas; 2. receive the blessings of a hundred Buddhas; 3. go to a hundred Buddha Lands; 4. illuminate a hundred lands; 5. vibrate a hundred worldly realms; 6. live for a hundred eons; 7. see with true wisdom the past and future for a hundred eons; 8. enter into and rise from a hundred meditative stabilizations; 9. open a hundred different doors of doctrine; 10. ripen a hundred sentient beings; 11. emanate a hundred of his own body; 12. cause each of the hundred bodies to be surrounded by a hundred bodhisattvas.

(Hopkins 1983: 100)

These twelve attainments are multiplied by powers of ten throughout each subsequent stage. Also onto the different stages of the Bodhisattva path are projected the numerical lists of spiritual practices and acquisitions formulated through the centuries of scholastic contemplation of the Buddha's attainments and path (although one should say that unfortunately there is not always consistency in different texts in attributing these to each stage). Thus at the third *bhūmi* the Bodhisattva attains the four meditations (*dhyāna*), the four non-material meditative absorptions, the four *brahmavihāras* of friendliness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity (surely, in the systematic plan we are looking at, these should have been attained already), and the five supernatural faculties of the divine eye, the divine ear, ability to know the thoughts of others, knowledge of birth and death – the previous births of himself and others – and wonder-working powers such as flying etc. (Dayal 1932: 106 ff.). At the fourth stage the Bodhisattva practises and attains the thirty-seven elements of enlightenment (*ibid.*: 80 ff.). And so on.

If we return now to our Bodhisattva on the first stage, the 'Joyous' stage, we are told that he (or she) is accordingly filled with joy, and makes ten great vows. Briefly, as enumerated by Dayal these are as follows:

- (1) To provide for the worship of all the Buddhas without exception;

(2) To maintain the religious discipline that has been taught by all the Buddhas and to preserve the teaching of the Buddhas; (3) To see all the incidents in the earthly career of a Buddha; (4) To realise the Thought of Enlightenment [*bodhicitta*], to practise all the duties of a bodhisattva, to acquire all the *pāramitās* [perfections] and purify all the stages of his career; (5) To mature all beings and establish them in the knowledge of the Buddha ... (6) To perceive the whole Universe; (7) To purify and cleanse all the buddha-fields; (8) To enter on the Great Way [Mahāyāna] and to produce a common thought and purpose in all bodhisattvas; (9) To make all actions of the body, speech and mind fruitful and successful; (10) To attain the supreme and perfect Enlightenment and to preach the Doctrine.<sup>27</sup>

The Bodhisattva can see many Buddhas and receive teachings from them. He develops various clairvoyances, can pass through objects and manifest in many forms at a time in order to help others (Dhargye 1976: 197). In particular, the Bodhisattva at this first *bhūmi* concentrates on cultivating the perfection of giving (*dānapāramitā*) – although it should on no account be thought that the Bodhisattva only gives at this stage. It is rather a question of emphasis; no perfection is neglected at any stage on his path.

It is one of the features of the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* that it correlates each of the ten stages with a different perfection. The more common scheme of six perfections is perhaps expanded to ten precisely for this purpose. The essence of giving is described as bestowing wealth with an unattached mind. Giving can be classified into three categories: material goods, fearlessness, and the Dharma itself, which is the highest of gifts because it has the highest, most perfect result (sGam po pa 1970: 153 ff.). The gift of fearlessness means to be a refuge to those in fear. According to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (a section of the Cittamātra work, the *Yogācārabhūmi*) 'A bodhisattva, when the proper time has come, gives with confidence and respect, with his own hands, and without harming others' (trans. in sGam po pa 1970: 156). However, the perfections become perfections inasmuch as they are embedded in an awareness of emptiness. The Bodhisattva in giving has no awareness of the inherent existence of giver, recipient, and gift. Among the specific objects which it is said a Bodhisattva might give are wealth, material objects such as food or clothing, his life or limbs, wife, children (but not parents), even poison if it is useful and given with compassion.<sup>28</sup> There are many stories, often incorporating folk legends, known throughout the Buddhist world in

which Śākyamuni in a previous life as a Bodhisattva gives something terribly valuable freely and without question when asked or invited to do so.<sup>29</sup>

It may be worth mentioning at this point the phenomenon known as 'transference of merit'. An important part of Mahāyāna practice, marked at the end of every ceremony, and indeed every event which might be said to create merit for the participants, is the bestowing of whatever merit may have been attained to the benefit of other sentient beings. This appears to contradict the supposed rigidity of the law of *karma*. It is clear from the preceding that the wish of the Mahāyāna practitioner to give away his merit is part of a general wish to give away anything which may be of benefit, and also a constant reminder of the reason for undertaking the long journey to full enlightenment. That journey is solely for the benefit of others. In terms of the Bodhisattva's own motivation and aspirations, the issue of *others'* karmic results is scarcely relevant. The importance is his own intention. Nevertheless, in terms of emptiness and mind-dependence, the magical world of the Mahāyāna, when things are seen to lack inherent existence *karma* does loose its rigidity, and a benevolent intention (backed with insight) can work wonders! Thus the notion of transference of merit fits squarely within the ontology and spirituality of the Mahāyāna. Having said that, however, it should not be thought that the institution of transference of merit is solely or uniquely a Mahāyāna phenomenon. It is found throughout the Buddhist world. Inscriptional evidence in India shows that merit transference was a part of Buddhism from a very early date indeed. Gregory Schopen has clearly indicated that in inscriptions what distinguishes Mahāyāna from non-Mahāyāna transference of merit is that whereas in the latter case the merit is usually transferred to a particular person simply in order that the recipient should have the merit, in Mahāyāna inscriptions merit transference is always for the benefit of all sentient beings, usually in order that they may all attain perfect enlightenment.<sup>30</sup> It is likely that the doctrine of *karma* has rarely in practice been treated in as rigid a manner as some texts would suggest. There are texts which state that *karma* is never lost, no matter what happens, but in the context of Buddhist practice (which is, after all, what Buddhism is all about) it is likely that these texts took on an exhortative character ('Do not do evil deeds and think you can get away with it!'), and were not treated as making rigid doctrinal statements about the nature of things. *Karma* does not entail that a virtuous and generous person cannot give away his or her merit for the benefit of others. Who is to say that this generosity is misplaced in terms of the welfare of the recipient?

The fourth of the five paths is the Path of Cultivation (*bhāvanāmārga*), and all the remaining nine Bodhisattva stages, as well as the other perfections, occur during this path which (short of adopting Tantric practice, which can lead to Buddhahood in one lifetime) is said to take aeons of compassionate activity and striving to follow to its end. At the second *bhūmi*, the Immaculate or Pure, the Bodhisattva is said to be possessed of a perfectly pure morality. He thus practises the second of the perfections, the perfection of morality, and attains to their highest degree the ten good paths of action – three physical: abstention from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; four vocal: abstention from lying, slanderous, insulting, and frivolous speech; and three mental: abstention from greedy desire, malice, and false views. In perfecting these one learns to practise their opposites, cherishing and saving life and so on. Correct behaviour becomes natural. The Bodhisattva also commends this morality to others, and becomes their teacher, guide, and protector. Nevertheless, in spite of this morality, as Tsong kha pa points out, following Candrakīrti, 'if they do not abandon the view that phenomena inherently exist, then their ethics will not be pure but will be faulty though apparently proper' (on *Madhyamakāvatāra* 2:3ab, trans. in Hopkins 1980: 195). That is, the morality of one who does not understand emptiness cannot be pure, even if it appears to be so, for it is not the perfection of morality. Of course, the Bodhisattva at this stage also has the many miraculous meditative attainments that we have already seen, and is becoming progressively more wonderfully extraordinary!

According to Tsong kha pa and Candrakīrti, the third *bhūmi*, Luminous, is so called because when it is attained there appears a fire of wisdom which burns all knowables, and a light which extinguishes all elaborations of duality in meditative absorption, while in the Bodhisattva there appears a 'copper-like splendour' (Hopkins 1980: 204). The Bodhisattva thoroughly understands impermanence, and it is at this stage that the virtue of patience becomes perfected. The Bodhisattva is patient and not disturbed, we are told, even when his body is cut 'not just flesh but also bone, not in large sections but bit by bit, not continually but pausing in between, and not finishing in a short time but cutting over a long period' (ibid., 206)! He is perfectly patient and no anger arises. He views those who do the deed with infinite compassion.

According to sGam po pa, patience is of two sorts. First, the Bodhisattva counteracts any wish for hurting, he does not quarrel, does no harm in retaliation, and is not insistent (sGam po pa 1970: 175). Second, patience puts up with misery – that is to say, it means not being 'fatigued

by hardships involved in realizing unsurpassable enlightenment and to accept them joyfully' (ibid., 178).<sup>31</sup> Besides perfecting patience at this stage, the Bodhisattva completely destroys desire and hatred, and also reaches various higher meditative absorptions. As a result of this, as we have seen, he attains the five supernatural faculties.

At the fourth stage, called Ignited, or Radiant, the Bodhisattva particularly cultivates the thirty-seven elements of enlightenment. These include the Four Objects of Close Contemplation (*smṛtyupasthāna*) of body, feelings, mind, and all *dharmas*, as well as various 'right exertions' and other miraculous abilities, faculties, powers, and so on (for details see Dayal 1932: 80 ff.). Here, we are told, the Bodhisattva's attachment to any sort of self comes to a complete end.<sup>32</sup> Also at this fourth stage the Bodhisattva acquires the perfection of effort (energy, heroism, or strength: *vīrya*). According to sGam po pa, this is the counteracting of laziness, idleness, faintheartedness, and so on – but, of course, on a heroic scale!

The fifth stage is called Difficult to Conquer, since the Bodhisattva is said to be unable to be conquered by any or all demons, the forces of evil. He practises uniformity and purified intention as regards the doctrines of past, present, and future Buddhas and so on.<sup>33</sup> At this stage our Bodhisattva masters the perfection of meditation. According to sGam po pa, the essence of this perfection lies in the 'tranquillity by which the mind abides within itself by the oneness of the good and wholesome' (sGam po pa 1970: 188). That is, the mind is one-pointed. Indeed, it is precisely at this point that treatises on the ten stages describe the attainment of calm abiding. But this provides obvious problems. We have seen that in the schema which combines the five paths and the ten stages calm abiding was a prerequisite to beginning the ten stages, and it seems out of place to introduce it here.<sup>34</sup> In fact we are dealing with a schema which probably originally progressed through six not ten stages, culminating in one-pointed absorption and wisdom. This schema was expanded to ten, and combined with the miraculous, cosmic scale of the *Daśabhūmika* world. Subsequently, it seems, the schema was grafted onto the five-path model. The result tries to include everything!

Through his meditation at this stage the Bodhisattva comes to know truly and correctly the Four Noble Truths, and also any other sort of truth (such as ultimate and conventional). He is aware, of course, that all *dharmas* lack inherent existence and are akin to illusions, but, according to the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, this simply increases his love and compassion all the more (Honda 1968: 176 ff.; Cleary 1986: 49). Since they may be

useful, the Bodhisattva at this stage learns various secular arts such as mathematics and medicine, music and history.<sup>35</sup>

The sixth *bhūmi*, Approaching, is the stage at which our aspirant attains the perfection of wisdom. He is said to be concerned with the correct apprehension of dependent origination (*pratityasamutpāda*). This in itself suggests the antiquity of a schema which culminated in wisdom, for the association of enlightenment with the formulae for dependent origination has been part of Buddhism from early times. Of course, as we have seen, in Madhyamaka dependent origination is associated with the lack of inherent existence. Things are neither born nor do they perish, but they are still involved in the appearance of birth and death. Nevertheless, it is paradoxical to find the Bodhisattva attaining the perfection of wisdom at this point, when direct insight into emptiness, the content of the perfection of wisdom, was a prerequisite to attaining the first *bhūmi*, and all the preceding perfections are only perfections precisely inasmuch as they are underpinned by an awareness of emptiness.

At the sixth *bhūmi* the Bodhisattva, with the mastery of wisdom, could if he so wished abandon the world and enter the peace of (Arhat) *nirvāna*. With wisdom he no longer has attachments. Without attachments, craving, the fuel of *samsāra* should cease. But the Bodhisattva is a Bodhisattva; he has developed great compassion and the *bodhicitta*. He does not practise for his own benefit but in order to fulfil his obligations to sentient beings. Thus, in a sense, we might say that a sliver of holy attachment (although we call it compassion) remains. There are Mahāyāna texts which make precisely this point.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the compassion of the Bodhisattva is not really attachment as a moral or cognitive fault, for the Bodhisattva knows that there is no inherent existence and therefore he cannot have attachment. It is precisely because there is no inherent existence that the Bodhisattva can act in many miraculous ways for the benefit of others. And with no inherent existence, and no more taints, why should the Bodhisattva abandon the world and seek his own peace? Thus the Bodhisattva aims for the non-abiding *nirvāna* which is neither *samsāra* nor *nirvāna*.

Having refrained from entering a selfish *nirvāna* the Bodhisattva spends the remaining stages developing skilful means, entirely devoted to the welfare of others. He is now beyond all Hearers and Pratyekabuddhas, the followers of the non-Mahāyāna traditions.<sup>37</sup> From the eighth stage, the Immovable, the Bodhisattva begins the immense task of eradicating for ever the obscurations to omniscience. From the seventh onwards he practises a further list of four perfections added to the

original group of six: the perfections of skilful means, the vow (supremely highest vow), power, and gnosis or awareness (*jñāna*). At the seventh stage (Gone Afar), also, the Bodhisattva practises fully giving (!), pleasant speech, beneficent conduct, and impartiality. His mind is always absorbed in the Doctrine, even when asleep. He can manifest in whatever form he likes for the benefit of others, including that of an Arhat or, one assumes, a Buddha (cf. Honda 1968: 208; Cleary 1986: 71). Normally by the seventh stage, or the eighth, the progress of the Bodhisattva is said to be irreversible; he is destined for supreme Buddhahood and incapable of reverting to the methods of liberation and aspirations of the Arhats and Pratyekabudhas. He could at any point attain Arhatship, but he refrains, now irreversibly, from doing so.

In entering the Immovable stage the Bodhisattva is said by the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* to be like a man who has awakened from a dream, and who has abandoned all false conceptualizations. He begins to see the world in a new way, even when not meditating, a way which will eventually lead to the omniscient awareness of a Buddha (Honda 1968: 219; Cleary 1986: 77). All his activities at and after this stage are spontaneous or automatic, the results of his immense compassion and wisdom. There is no more striving, no more wanting, not even enlightenment. Events take their course naturally for the benefit of beings. All the Buddhas appear before our Bodhisattva and exhort him to attain Buddhahood (Honda 1968: 220; Cleary 1986: 78). He already appears to have many of the powers of a Buddha. He can split his body into infinite (or near infinite) forms, and can now definitely appear in the form of a Buddha if he so wishes for the benefit of others (Honda 1968: 224–5; Cleary 1986: 79–80). He has immense spiritual attainments, 'the details of which would take forever to tell' (Cleary 1986: 88)!

At the ninth stage, that of Good Intelligence, the Bodhisattva is said to acquire the knowledge and duties pertaining to all the vehicles – Arhats, Pratyekabudhas, Bodhisattvas, and Tathāgatas. He thereby delivers the Buddha's message to all suffering sentient beings. At this stage also, and rather strangely, he finally attains the four analytical knowledge (*pratिसम्बिद्*) of *dharma*s, meaning, grammar, and exposition. In other words, at this rarefied level, with infinite bodies and incomprehensible miracles, the Bodhisattva masters grammar and becomes a wonderful preacher! Nevertheless, as a preacher the Bodhisattva really is quite special, for he can understand different questions from all the different beings in the entire cosmos in one go, and answer them all, each separately and satisfactorily with just one sound (Honda 1968: 244 ff.; Cleary 1986: 92 ff.)!

Finally the Bodhisattva attains the tenth stage, called the Cloud of Dharma. According to sGam po pa, this stage is so called because a Bodhisattva at this *bhūmi* 'lets the Dharma fall like rain and extinguishes the very subtle glow of conflicting emotions still held by sentient beings. Another reason is that it is covered by meditative absorption and mantras like the sky with clouds' (sGam po pa 1970: 250). The Bodhisattva enters into meditation and appears upon a wonderful jewelled lotus seat known as the Great King of Jewels. Many other Bodhisattvas appear, and light rays permeate all the directions which relieve the misery and sufferings of sentient beings. After further miracles and wonders the Tathāgatas consecrate our Bodhisattva to full Buddhahood (Honda 1968: 259 ff.; Cleary 1986: 101 ff.). He can now put into one atom of dust an entire world region, or put innumerable sentient beings into one pore of his skin, without their suffering injury or indeed noticing. He can manifest all the deeds in the earthly life of a Buddha as many times as he wishes throughout innumerable worlds (Honda 1968: 270–1; Cleary 1986: 107–8). sGam po pa observes:

Further, from every pore of his skin he is able to pour out a continual stream of innumerable Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. He can make visible many living beings, gods and men. As Indra, Brahmā, Maheśvara [Hindu gods], a king, a Śrāvaka, a Pratyekabuddha or a Tathāgata he can teach the Dharma as necessary to those who are to be taught.

(sGam po pa 1970: 251)

Such is the tenth stage Bodhisattva. Yet how does this compare with a Buddha? The question is absurd:

Your question seems to me like that of a man who picks up a few pebbles and says, 'Which is bigger, the endless realms of the earth or these pebbles?' How can you compare the state of enlightening beings [Bodhisattvas] to that of buddhas, the completely enlightened, who have measureless knowledge.

(Trans. in Cleary 1986: 110; cf. Honda 1968: 274)

Beyond the tenth stage is the stage of a Buddha, or the fifth of the five paths, that of No-more Learning (*āśaikṣamārga*). According to Tibetan traditions like the dGe lugs, to attain the final goal of complete Buddhahood requires Tantric practice. But then, according to the *tathāgatagarbha* traditions of Sino-Japanese Buddhism, such as Fa-tsang's Hua-yen, since all things interpenetrate, and the Buddha-nature is always

present, one is already a Buddha, and all the stages are contained in the first. As Dōgen puts it, 'only Buddhas become Buddhas' (Cook 1977: 115). All these stages of a gradual path are perhaps confusion! Who is to say who is right?

## CHAPTER TEN

# Faith and devotion: the cults of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

## ON FAITH

If faith is first contrasted with reason, and seen as not just necessary but also sufficient for salvation, then it is true to say that, with the exception of the Shin traditions in Japan, Buddhism is not a religion where faith plays a central and overriding role. This is not to say, however, that faith is unimportant.

Faith is included, with vigour, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, among the five cardinal virtues. In the Abhidharma it is one of the ten virtuous mental states. Defining faith, the *Abhidharmakośa* commentary explains that it is mental clarity (on 2: 25). This definition is not itself very lucid, but it becomes clearer in the light of a discussion contained in a Pāli text, the *Milindapañha*. Faith 'makes serene'. 'When faith arises it arrests the (five) Hindrances, and the heart becomes free from them, clear, serene and undisturbed.' Faith clears the mind of its muddy defilements, as a miraculous gem might clear muddy water for drinking (trans. in Conze 1959: 152).

Thus faith is depicted in terms of its psychological results. It is a mind clear of the five hindrances: sense-desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, excitedness and worry, and last but by no means least, doubt. These are primarily hindrances to meditative attainment. The *Milinda* also adds, however, that faith 'leaps forward':