BUDDHISM IN PRACTICE

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There is a remarkable diversity and range among the practices of persons who over the course of 2,500 years have been identified, by themselves or by others, as Buddhists. In this diversity there are often contradictions, such that the practices of a Buddhist community of one time might seem strange or unfamiliar to a Buddhist community elsewhere. Indeed, one of the questions that must be raised is whether one can accurately speak of something called "Buddhism" or "the Buddhist tradition," or whether those terms are better rendered in the plural. At the same time, there is evidence of often surprising parallels among the practices of Buddhist cultures widely separated by both history and topography, parallels to be accounted for in large part by a constant retrospection to the figure of the Buddha, making Buddhism less the inevitable unfolding of a distinct and self-identical entity and more a dynamic process of borrowing, conflict, and interaction between and within traditions that have been identified as Buddhist.

This introduction is meant to serve two purposes. First, it will provide a brief historical sketch of the history of Buddhism. Second, it will provide a description of some of the Buddhist doctrines that have come to be considered fundamental by the tradition of scholars, both Buddhist and Western.

The life and teachings of the Buddha as they recorded in traditional sources are recounted in some detail below.[1] After the death of the Buddha, the community of his followers is said to have met in a series of councils, each sponsored by a different king, to settle disputes regarding what the Buddha had taught and what rules the monastic order should follow. The Buddha had preached for over forty years to a wide variety of audiences, and there was a concern that those teachings be remembered and preserved before they could be forgotten. This preservation was done orally, with different groups of monks responsible for the memorization and retention of what evolved into a variety of oral canons. None of these was committed to writing until the last decades before the common era, and not in India but in Sri Lanka, some four hundred years after the Buddha's death. Despite the sophisticated mnemonic devices that Buddhist monks employed in preserving these teachings, there can be little certainty as to which of them, if any, were actually the words of the Buddha; there remains debate even

about which language the Buddha spoke. Thus, it is no longer tenable to accept the assumption shared by both early Western scholars of Buddhism and Buddhist figures in Southeast Asia (often under Western influence) that what is known as the Theravāda tradition (the tradition of the Elders) found in the Pāli language represents an original Buddhism from which all other forms of Buddhism derived (and sometimes deviated). The original teachings of the historical Buddha are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to recover or reconstruct.

The Buddhist community flourished in India during the Mauryan dynasty (324–187 B.C.E.), especially during the reign of the emperor Aśoka, whose rule extended over most of the Indian subcontinent and who, in a series of rock edicts, professed his faith in the Buddha, his teaching, and the monastic community. Although Aśoka's edicts set forth a generalized morality that allowed him to support many religious groups in his vast kingdom, he is remembered in Buddhist legends as the ideal Buddhist king, deeply devoted to the propagation of the Buddha's teaching and to the support of the monastic community. By the end of Aśoka's reign, Buddhist monks and nuns were established in monasteries throughout the Indian subcontinent, monasteries that were often located near cities and that relied on state support. From this point on, the fortunes of Buddhism in India waxed and waned largely in dependence on the policies of local rulers.

In the first centuries of the common era, a movement, or series of movements, occurred in India that came to be referred to as the *Mahāyāna,* the Great Vehicle. This seems to have begun as a disparate collection of cults centered around newly composed texts and their charismatic expositors, the dharmabhāṇaka. These texts, although composed centuries after the Buddha's death, were accepted by their devotees as sūtras (discourses attributed to the Buddha or spoken with his sanction). Some of the texts, like the *Lotus Sūtra* (discussed below), in addition to proclaiming their own unique potency as the means to salvation, would also praise the veneration of stūpas, the reliquaries in which the remains of the Buddha were enshrined. Other texts, like much of the early Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) corpus, would proclaim their superiority to stūpas, declaring themselves to be substitutes for the body and speech of the absent Buddha, equally worthy of veneration and equally efficacious.

It is perhaps best to regard the Mahāyāna as a social movement of monks, nuns, and lay people that began in reaction against the controls exercised by a powerful monastic institution. This movement was responsible for the production and dissemination of a body of literature that challenged the authority of that institution by having the Buddha proclaim a superior and more inclusive path and a more profound wisdom. In subsequent centuries, during which sūtras continued to be composed, the Mahāyāna became not merely a collection of cults of the book but a self-conscious scholastic entity. Adherents of the Mahāyāna devoted a good deal of energy to surveying what was by then a rather large corpus and then attempting, through a variety of hermeneutical machinations, to craft the myriad doctrines into a philosophical and doctrinal system. In short, it is in this later period that

the sūtras, which seem at first to have been recited and worshiped, became the object also of scholastic reflection. The fact that these treatises commonly contain a defense of the Mahāyāna as the authentic word of the Buddha—even treatises composed a millennium after the composition of the first Mahāyāna sūtras—may provide evidence of the minority status of the Mahāyāna in India.

These new movements came to designate themselves by the term "Mahāyāna," the "Great Vehicle" to enlightenment, in contradistinction from the earlier Buddhist schools who did not accept their new sūtras as authoritative (that is, as the word of the Buddha). They disparagingly referred to these earlier schools with the term "Hīnayāna," often rendered euphemistically as the "Lesser Vehicle," although *hīna* means also "inferior," "base," and "vile." Members of these earlier schools, of course, never thought of or referred to themselves as passengers on the Hīnayāna. It has thus become common in Western writing about Buddhism to avoid this term by replacing it with "Theravāda." But the terms "Hīnayāna" and "Theravāda" do not designate the same groups; there is a traditional list of some eighteen Hīnayāna schools with diverse doctrines, only one of which has survived into the present, the Theravāda of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, whose works are preserved in the Pāli language.

The term "Mahāyāna" is less objectionable for the reason that it was used self-referentially. Most anthologies provide selections from the Pāli texts followed by a sampling from Mahāyāna sūtras, suggesting that with the rise of the Mahāyāna the earlier traditions were both superseded and eclipsed. This is, however, historically inaccurate. The reports of Chinese pilgrims to India in the seventh century indicate that followers of the Mahāyāna and the "Hīnayāna" lived together in monasteries (*vihāras*) and that they all maintained the same "Hīnayāna" monastic vows. The reports further indicate that in many monasteries adherents of the Hīnayāna outnumbered those of the Mahāyāna. Thus, as an alternative to the polemical "Hīnayāna," the term "foundational Buddhism" may be used, referring to the members of Buddhist monastic communities and their supporters who did not accept the legitimacy of the new scriptures composed by followers of the Mahāyāna. As the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Yijing observed about India, "those who worship bodhisattvas and read Mahāyāna sūtras are called Mahāyāna, while those who do not do this are called the Hīnayāna." The foundational nature and persistence of the Hīnayāna schools in India is often forgotten because of the domination of the Mahāyāna in China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and Tibet.

Some five centuries after the rise of the Mahāyāna, another major movement occurred in Indian Buddhism, which was retrospectively designated as the Vajrayāna (the Thunderbolt or Diamond Vehicle). Its origins are even less clearly understood than those of the Mahāyāna. Like "Hīnayāna" and "Mahāyāna," "Vajrayāna" is a retrospective designation, in this case coined to describe a rather disparate set of practices by which the long path to buddhahood could be traversed more quickly than was possible via the Mahāyāna, a path on which various supernormal powers were gained in the process. Some of these practices, such as engaging in behaviors that broke caste taboos, appear to have been borrowed

from ascetic movements current in India at the time. Others were developments of themes long present in Buddhist texts, such as the possibility of coming into the presence of the Buddha through visualization practices. Despite the efforts of generations of Buddhist thinkers, it remains exceedingly difficult to identify precisely what it is that sets the Vajrayāna apart. And this difficulty of identifying distinguishing features applies more generally to the issue of distinguishing the Buddhist vehicles, the Hīnayāna, the Mahāyāna, and the Vajrayāna. Adherents of this or that vehicle have much invested in claims to uniqueness. However, these three vehicles share more than is usually assumed.

Anthologies of Buddhist texts have often been organized according to vehicle. One difficulty with such an approach is the almost unavoidable propensity to see the Hīnayāna-Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna sequence as a value-laden development of one kind or another, in which one member of the triad is exalted above the others. According to one view (found especially among European scholars of Buddhism in the nineteenth century), the Hīnayāna (what they called "original Buddhism") was a simple ethical creed of self-reliance, free of ritual elements. In the rise of Mahāyāna, they saw a concession to the masses, in which the Buddha was deified and became an object of worship, and salvation became possible not through diligent practice but through faith in a dizzying pantheon of buddhas and bodhisattvas. The Vajrayāna was an even later development in which, they believed, debased Hindu practices polluted Buddhism until any kind of licentious behavior became accepted.

Another view (found particularly among scholars of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism) also sees the Hīnayāna as an ethical creed, which became an institution of self-satisfied and complacent monks who cared only about their own authority. The Mahāyāna, they believe, was a popular lay movement that sought to restore to the tradition the Buddha's original compassion through the ideal of the bodhisattva, the person who sacrifices his or her own welfare in order to lead all sentient beings in the universe to nirvāṇa. The bodhisattva path is a long one, and requires many millions of lifetimes of practice. According to this view, the Vajrayāna was again a late development, coming at a time when people were no longer interested in dedicating themselves to this protracted path to enlightenment for the sake of others, and imagined that the Vajrayāna provided a shortcut.

Finally, there is the view that sees the Vajrayāna as the pinnacle in the evolution of Buddhism, moving from the austere individualism of the Hīnayāna to the relatively simple compassion of the Mahāyāna, which sees salvation only in the ever-distant future, and finally to the culmination in the Vajrayāna, where buddhahood is possible in this very body and in this very lifetime, not through a suppression of desire and the sensual but through the discovery of ultimate reality even there.

The processes by which Buddhist practices developed through Asia are far more complex than any of these three models suggests. For example, the first model ignores the wealth of rituals and devotional practices found in the Theravāda. The second model ignores the important role played by monks and nuns throughout

the history of the Mahāyāna. And the third model places far too much emphasis on the claim of buddhahood in this very lifetime, an important but hardly universal claim of tantric texts. Beyond these specific errors, a more general problem with such an evolutionary (or devolutionary) model is that it suggests that one vehicle ceases or dies out before the next becomes fully formed. Such a suggestion is supported in those anthologies that only provide works from the Pāli "canon," the early collection of works considered by the Theravāda to represent the authentic teachings of the Buddha and his early followers. These anthologies ignore the great mass of literature composed in subsequent centuries in both Pāli and the vernaculars of Southeast Asia, as if the Buddhism of this region essentially ceased its literary output after the fifth century of the common era.

Buddhist institutions had disappeared in India by the thirteenth century. The reasons for this demise remain much debated. The overt cause was a series of Muslim invasions, beginning in the eleventh century, during which the major monastic centers of northern India were destroyed. There had been persecutions of Buddhism by various Hindu kings in the past, but these had been localized and short-lived, often followed by an infusion of support under another dynasty. In this case, however, no such dynasty arose. It also appears that by the end of the first millennium, the locus of Buddhism in India had become the large monastery, which depended on royal rather than local patronage; the most famous of these was Nālandā, said to have housed ten thousand monks. When such centers were destroyed (as Nālandā was by Turkic troops in 1197), the power and influence of the monastic institutions quickly dissipated. Some scholars argue as well that by this time many Buddhist practices had been incorporated into Hinduism and that the local functions fulfilled by Buddhist monks in the past were being performed by Hindu priests. Historians no longer subscribe to the further claim that Buddhism was already weak during this period due to the degenerating influence of tantra. Indeed, tantric Buddhism has survived in Nepal until the present day in a tradition of Mahāyāna devotionalism officiated by a saṅgha of married priests.

Buddhism is often described as the only pan-Asian religion, the only Asian religion to spread beyond the boundaries of its native culture. This is not entirely accurate. Confucian thought has had a profound influence on Korea and Japan, for example, and Hindu epics, with their gods, demons, and social ideals have shaped the cultures of Southeast Asia. It is true, however, that Buddhism spanned both the Indian and Chinese cultural domains of Asia. But it is important to think not so much of a disembodied dharma descending on another culture from above, but rather of a more material movement—of monks, texts, relics, and icons—along trade routes and across deserts, mountains, and seas.

The Buddha is reported to have exhorted his monks to "go and travel around for the welfare of the multitudes, for the happiness of the multitudes, out of sympathy for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans. No two should go in the same direction." Although this last admonition seems not to have been heeded, it is true that Buddhist "missions" were not large

and well-organized movements, and instead often took the form of itinerant monks (or groups of monks) traveling by land and sea in the company of traders and royal emissaries. According to traditional accounts, the first foreign mission was to the island of Sri Lanka, and was led by the son of Aśoka.

In descriptions of Buddhism outside of India, one sometimes encounters the term "Southern Buddhism" to describe the Buddhism of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma, Laos, and parts of Vietnam, and the term "Northern Buddhism," used in reference to China, Japan, Korea, Tibet, and Mongolia. It is often said that Southern Buddhism is Theravāda and Northern Buddhism is Mahāyana. This is not historically accurate. Theravāda has been the dominant school of Buddhism in most of Southeast Asia since the thirteenth century, with the establishment of the monarchies in Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos. Prior to that period, however, many other strands of Buddhism were also widely present, including other Hīnayāna sects, as well as Mahāyāna and tantric groups. The great monument at Borobudur in Java reflects Mahāyāna doctrine, and there are reports of Indian monks traveling to Sumatra to study with Mahāyāna and tantric masters there. Indeed, Buddhists texts, icons, and institutions (Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna) were just some of the Indian cultural forms introduced into Southeast Asia by traders and travelers, beginning as early as the fourth century. Buddhist Bengal exerted a strong influence from the ninth through thirteenth centuries, and Sanskrit Mahāyāna and tantric texts were donated to Burmese monasteries as late as the fifteenth century. It was only after the demise of Buddhism in India that the Southeast Asian societies looked especially to Sri Lanka for their Buddhism, where by that time Theravāda was established as the orthodoxy. The monarchs of the kingdoms of Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos found an effective ideology in Theravāda notions of rulership, often invoking the model of Aśoka.

Just as Southeast Asian Buddhism was not always Theravāda, so "Northern Buddhism" was not always Mahāyāna. The monastic codes practiced in China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet were all derived from the Indian Hinayāna orders. Furthermore, several of these orders flourished in Central Asia (including parts of modern Iran and Afghanistan), whence Buddhism was first introduced into China via the silk route.

Buddhist monks came to China from the northwest sometime during the first century of the common era. China was the most advanced of the civilizations to encounter Buddhism, as measured in terms of literary culture and the organization of social and political institutions. Unlike Tibet and areas of Southeast Asia, for example, China was not a place to which Buddhist monks brought Indian cultural forms, such as writing, which would powerfully shape the future history of the society. It is sometimes argued that if China had not been suffering a period of political disunity in the first centuries of the common era, Buddhism would never have taken hold. It is also argued that Buddhist institutions tended to be strongest in China when the central government was weakest and that Buddhist institutions existed in a state of atrophy after the Tang. Indeed, the first patrons of the dharma

were the leaders of the foreign or "barbarian" dynasties in northern China. However, such claims can be overstated, for the influence of Buddhism on a wide range of Chinese cultural forms, such as vernacular literature, has been and remains profound. It is also often stated that Buddhism did not truly take hold in China until it had been fully "sinified," that is, made Chinese. It is important to consider the degree to which Chinese Buddhism is Chinese and the degree to which it is Buddhist, as well as to ponder the bases upon which such judgments might be made.

Contacts with China brought Buddhist monks into the Korean peninsula in the late fourth century. As elsewhere in Asia, these monks did not simply carry texts and icons, but brought with them many of the products of their own civilization, in this case, that of China. Buddhist institutions thrived especially after the unification of the Korean peninsula under the Silla Dynasty in 668. As had been the case in China and would be the case of Japan, part of the appeal of Buddhism to kings was the claim that worshiping the Buddha, promoting the dharma, and supporting the monastic community would protect the state from foreign invasion and calamity, a view set forth in apocryphal works such as the *Sūtra for Humane Kings*. During this period, a number of Korean monks became influential figures in China, Japan, and even in Tibet.

As in China, Buddhism has been both embraced and condemned in Japan as a foreign religion. In the sixth century, monks from Korea first introduced Buddhist texts and teachings into Japan, which, according to traditional accounts were received with enthusiasm at court. Just as Buddhist monks had served as carriers of Indian cultural forms to Southeast Asia, so they brought the products of Chinese civilization to Japan. The Japanese have since looked to China as the source of their Buddhism, and for centuries Japanese monks made the often perilous journey to China to retrieve texts and teachings. These monks, such as the founders of the Tendai and Shingon schools of the Heian period (794–1185), were generally rewarded with imperial support upon their return. During the Kamakura period (1185–1333), when the nation was ruled by a series of military dictators, the shoguns, new sects came to prominence with their patronage. The foremost of these were Zen, Pure Land, and Nichiren, which came to eclipse the previous schools in popular support. In contrast to the more eclectic approach of the Heian sects, each of these three claimed that their single practice offered the only effective means to salvation.

According to traditional accounts, Buddhist monks did not come to Tibet until the seventh century. As was the case with Japan, Buddhism was initially introduced to the court. Indeed, the Tibetan king is said to have been converted to Buddhism by two princesses—one from China and one from Nepal, but both Buddhists—whom he received in marriage as the result of treaties. The dissemination of Buddhist teachings and institutions in Tibet took place in two waves. The first, during the seventh and eighth centuries, saw royal support for the founding and maintenance of Buddhist monasteries, the invitation of Buddhist teachers from India, and the beginnings of a massive project to translate Buddhist

texts from Sanskrit into Tibetan. The Tibetan script is said to have been invented for this purpose. Around 838, a king who was not kindly disposed to the dharma closed the monasteries. He was assassinated four years later by a Buddhist monk, thus ending the Tibetan monarchy. A revival of Buddhism took place in western Tibet almost two centuries later. One of the signal events of this second wave was the invitation of the Indian monk Atiśa. There followed a period of extensive contact with India, when Tibetans went to study at the great monasteries of northern India, often inviting their teachers to come back with them. By the end of the fourteenth century, most of the work of translation had been completed. The Tibetans were able to avoid invasion by the Mongols by serving as preceptors to a succession of Mongol khans, who were the first in a series of foreign patrons for the sects of Tibetan Buddhism. In the seventeenth century, the head of one of these sects, the fifth Dalai Lama, was able to consolidate political power over Tibet with the help of his Mongol patron. A succession of Dalai Lamas (or their regents) continued to rule Tibet until 1959, when the current Dalai Lama was forced to flee to India after the invasion and occupation of his nation by China.

In the history of Buddhism in each of these cultures, it is usually possible to discern two general periods. The first is one of assimilation in which Buddhist practices were introduced, with much attention devoted to the translation of texts, the founding of monasteries (with state support), the establishment of places of pilgrimage, often centered on a relic or icon, and close contact with the culture from which Buddhist cultural forms were being received (for example, India in the case of Tibet, Central Asia in the case of China, China in the case of Japan, Sri Lanka in the case of Thailand, and Tibet in the case of Mongolia). In most cases, the period of assimilation lasted for several centuries. This was followed by a period of adaptation, in which Buddhist forms were more fully integrated into the society and made more distinctively its own. It is during this period that schools developed that did not have precise analogs in Indian Buddhism, local deities were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon, and Buddhist deities were incorporated into the local pantheon. Of course, the adherents of these new schools and devotees of these local cults would reject the suggestion that their practices could not be traced back directly to the Buddha. This concern with the authentic source of the teaching is evinced in the pan-Asian practice of pilgrimage to Bodhgayā, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. The history of Buddhism in Asia continues to the present day.

Buddhism has a vast literature dealing with what we term logic, epistemology, and ontology—works that are (depending on one's perspective) as profound or as impenetrable, as rich or as arid, as anything produced in the West. However, like philosophical works in other cultures, Buddhist treatises are the products of a tiny, highly educated elite (largely composed of monks in the Buddhist case) and their works rarely touch the ground where the vast majority of Buddhists have lived their lives.

It is important to recall, however, that the Buddhist philosopher was also a Buddhist and, in most cases, a Buddhist monk. He was thus a participant in rituals

and institutions that provided the setting for his work. The authors of Buddhist philosophical treatises do not, therefore, fulfill our traditional image of the philosopher engaged in a quest for knowledge "for its own sake," with an overarching concern with logic, rationality, and theoretical consistency. Although these enterprises find an important place in Buddhist traditions, it is also true that for many Buddhist scholastics the faculty of reason provides a relatively superficial awareness, insufficient to the task of directly apprehending the truth. All endeavors in the realm of what might be termed "philosophy" were theoretically subservient to the greater goal of enlightenment, and the ultimate task of the philosopher, at least in theory, was to attain that enlightenment. The Tibetan authors who are regarded as preeminent scholars, for example, devoted great efforts to the performance of tantric rituals or to various sophisticated forms of meditation, in an effort to manifest a fantastic world of benign and malevolent forces, propitiating deities and repelling demons. What we term "philosophy" was but one concern of these authors; a perusal of the titles in the collected works of any of Tibet's most erudite thinkers reveals that among the commentaries on Indian logical treatises and expositions of emptiness are myriad works devoted to tantric ceremonies and visualizations, along with instructions on techniques for drawing maṇḍalas, making rain, stopping smallpox, and manufacturing magical pills. The biographies of the most famous Buddhist philosophers are replete with the most extraordinary events. Thus, although there is a large and significant body of Buddhist literature devoted to such issues as the validity of sense experience and inference as sources of knowledge, the study of such texts must be undertaken with careful attention to their contexts, in the broadest sense of the term, so that the ideas and arguments are not regarded as denizens of a free-floating world, whether that world be the history of ideas or the dharma.

Buddhist texts speak often of the three jewels: of the Buddha, the dharma, and the saṅgha, that is, the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of his followers. In Buddhist texts, a Buddhist is defined as someone who takes refuge in these three, and the refuge ceremony is the most widely performed ritual in the Buddhist world. The Buddha, dharma, and saṅgha are called jewels because they are precious and rare. It is said that it is difficult to encounter them in the cycle of rebirth and when they are encountered they are of great value. The notion of refuge suggests two points fundamental to the Buddhist worldview. The first is that sentient beings are in need of protection, of a place of refuge where they can escape from the sufferings of saṃsāra, the cycle of rebirths. The second point is that the three jewels can provide such protection, that they themselves are free from the dangers and vicissitudes of saṃsāra, and thus can offer refuge to others. In the medical metaphor of which Buddhists are so fond, the Buddha is the doctor, the dharma is the medicine, and the saṅgha are the nurses. It is the Buddha who finds the path to liberation and shows it to others. The dharma is the path itself, and the saṅgha are one's companions who offer assistance along the way.

Before discussing the three jewels in more detail, it would be useful here to outline some of the doctrines most basic to Buddhist practices, as they have been

understood by Buddhist authors and by Western scholars. Although there are significant variations among Buddhist cultures, Buddhists in Asia generally accept a view of the universe and of the afterlife that originated in India. Some elements of this cosmology seem to have been current in India at the time of the Buddha, whereas others are the results of elaborations by Buddhist thinkers, perhaps including the Buddha himself. The most standard cosmology divides the universe into three realms, called the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*), the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*) and the formless realm (*arūpyadhātu*).

The realm of desire is the universe inhabited by humans. Its topography is symmetrical, with four islands surrounding a central mountain, Mount Meru (or Sumeru). Ours is the southern island, called Jambudvīpa (Rose-Apple Island). The other three islands are also inhabited by humans (although of different height and lifespan), but are generally regarded as inaccessible; a buddha can become enlightened only in Jambudvīpa. Mount Meru is the abode of a class of beings called *asuras,* often translated as "demigod" or "titan." They are usually depicted as mean-spirited lesser deities who can bring harm to humans. At a higher elevation on and above Mount Meru is the abode of six classes of gods (*deva*) who inhabit increasingly pleasant realms for increasingly long lifespans. The first two godly realms are on Mount Meru itself. The lower is that of the four royal lineages, ruled by the guardians of the cardinal directions. Next is the "Heaven of the Thirty-Three," on the flat summit of Mount Meru, where thirty-three gods abide. Here, as elsewhere, we see Buddhists assimilating elements from rival groups or other cultures, because thirty-three is the traditional number of gods in the *Ṛg Veda.* Although early Buddhists rejected any ultimate power for Vedic deities, such as Indra, they nonetheless incorporated them into their pantheon, acknowledging their worldly powers but placing them on the second lowest rung of their heavenly hierarchy. Indeed, throughout Buddhist cultures, the worship of local deities is not proscribed, unless that worship involves animal sacrifice. Gods are honored for the boons they can bestow. The thirty-three gods live very long lives: their lifespan is one thousand years, but each of their days is equal to one hundred human years. Yet they are not immortal; they are also subject to rebirth. The remaining four heavens of the realm of desire float in the sky above the summit of Mount Meru. It is in the fourth of the six godly realms, called Tuṣita (Joyous) that the future Buddha, Maitreya, waits.

Also inhabiting the realm of desire are, of course, all manner of animal and insect life, as well as a pitiful class of beings called *pretas,* usually translated as "ghosts" or "hungry ghosts." These beings—some of whom are visible to humans, some of whom are not—are depicted iconographically with huge, distended bellies and emaciated limbs. Their throats are said to be the size of the eye of a needle, rendering them constantly hungry and thirsty and forcing them to search constantly for food and drink. The feeding of these beings was seen as a special responsibility of Buddhist monks and nuns. Located far below Jambudvīpa (usually measured from Bodhgayā, the place in India where the Buddha achieved enlightenment) in the realm of desire is an extensive system of hells, some burning

hot, others freezing cold. The beings there undergo a variety of tortures, often depicted in gruesome detail in Buddhist texts and paintings.

The realm of form is situated above the realm of desire and is regarded as superior to it. The beings here are gods who experience the pleasures of sight, sound, and touch, but not taste and smell. They are distinguished from the gods of the realm of desire by their greater powers of concentration, which provide deep states of mental bliss. There are four major levels within the realm of form, categorized by the increasing power of concentration of its inhabitants. Even more sublime is the formless realm, where gods exist in states of pure consciousness, without bodies and sense organs. This is considered the most blissful of abodes, yet it does not receive a great deal of attention in Buddhist literature outside the psychological treatises.

This universe has no beginning, although its physical constituents pass through a fourfold cosmic cycle of evolution, stasis, devolution, and vacuity. Mount Meru and its surrounding islands are said to have evolved over a period of eons, during which, according to one of the Buddhist creation myths, they came to be populated. At the beginning of this process, the lifespan of humans is said to have been immeasurable. Human life had an Edenic quality about it: there was no need for food and humans illuminated the world with their own inner light. As the result of curiosity and desire (to taste the milky froth that covered the surface of the earth), humans began to eat, which required that they expel waste. Their bodies developed accordingly, leading eventually to sexual intercourse. Their natural light faded, the sun and moon appeared, and they began to hoard food for themselves, creating private property for the first time; the eventual result was human society. The human lifespan also gradually diminished until it reached an average of one hundred years, at which point the Buddha appeared in the world to teach the dharma. The quality of human life and the human life span will continue to decline until it reaches ten years of age, coinciding with a time of pestilence, poverty, and warfare. All memory of the Buddha and his teaching will have disappeared from the world. The human lifespan will then begin to increase once more, until it reaches eighty thousand years again, at which point the next buddha will appear. At the end of twenty such cycles, this universe will gradually be destroyed and will then enter into a long period of vacuity, after which a new universe will be created. As the current Dalai Lama has said, Buddhists do not believe in one Big Bang, they believe in many Big Bangs.

The realm of desire, the realm of form, and the formless realm are not only locations in the Buddhist universe, they are also places of rebirth. Buddhists conceive of a cycle of birth and death, called *saṃsāra* (wandering), in six realms of rebirth: those of the gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and hell beings (although sometimes the realm of demigods is omitted). The entire cycle of rebirth in which the creations and destructions of universes is encompassed has no ultimate beginning. The realms of animals, ghosts, and hell beings are regarded as places of great suffering, whereas the godly realms are abodes of great bliss. Human rebirth falls in between, bringing as it does both pleasure and pain. The

engine of saṃsāra is driven by karma, the cause and effect of actions. Like adherents of other Indian religions, Buddhists believe that every intentional act, whether it be physical, verbal, or mental, leaves a residue. That residue, like a seed, will eventually produce an effect at some point in the future, an effect in the form of pleasure or pain for the person who performed the act. Thus Buddhists conceive of a moral universe in which virtuous deeds create experiences of pleasure and nonvirtuous deeds create experiences of pain. These latter are often delineated in a list of ten nonvirtuous deeds: killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, senseless speech, covetousness, harmful intent, and wrong view. Wrong view can mean many things in Buddhist thought, but here refers especially to the belief that actions do not have effects. Buddhist texts provide extensive discussions of the specific deeds that constitute these ten nonvirtues and their respective karmic weight. The ten virtues are the opposites of this list: sustaining life, giving gifts, maintaining sexual decorum, and so on.

These deeds not only determine the quality of a given life but also determine the place of the rebirth after death. Depending on the gravity of a negative deed (killing being more serious than senseless speech and killing a human more serious than killing an insect, for example) one may be reborn as an animal, a ghost, or in one of the hot or cold hells, where the life span is particularly lengthy. Among the hells, some are more horrific than others; the most tortuous is reserved for those who have committed one of five heinous deeds: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, wounding a buddha, and causing dissent in the saṅgha.

Rebirth as a god or human in the realm of desire is the result of a virtuous deed, and is considered very rare. Rarer still is rebirth as a human who has access to the teachings of the Buddha. In a famous analogy, a single blind tortoise is said to swim in a vast ocean, surfacing for air only once every century. On the surface of the ocean floats a single golden yoke. It is rarer, said the Buddha, to be reborn as a human with the opportunity to practice the dharma than it is for the tortoise to surface for its centennial breath with its head through the hole in the golden yoke. One is said to be reborn as a god in the realm of desire as a result of an act of charity: giving gifts results in future wealth. Rebirth as a human is said to result from consciously refraining from a nonvirtuous deed, as when one takes a vow not to kill humans. The vast majority of Buddhist practice throughout Asia and throughout history has been directed toward securing rebirth as a human or (preferably) a god in the next lifetime, generally through acts of charity directed toward monks and monastic institutions. Despite repeated admonitions that birth as a god is a temporary state from which one must eventually fall, to be reborn in a lower realm—admonitions such as those made by the twentieth-century Thai monk Buddhadāsa—a happy life and an auspicious rebirth have remained goals more sought after than escape from saṃsāra into nirvāṇa. Indeed, much Buddhist literature intended for both monks and lay people has promoted a social ideal, defining the good life and explaining how to lead it.

Rebirth as a god in the realm of form or formless realm is achieved somewhat

differently. Because these realms are characterized by deep states of concentration, one must achieve one of those states in this life through the practice of meditation in order to be reborn there in the next. For example, one must reach the third level of concentration in order to be reborn as a god in the third level of the realm of form. Because these states require a specialized and sustained practice, they have been little sought as places of rebirth. The formless realm in particular seems to have been more important as an abode to which non-Buddhist meditation masters could be consigned. For example, such a master may have wrongly imagined that he had achieved the ultimate state and liberation from rebirth, when in fact he was only in the realm of infinite consciousness of the formless realm, from which he would eventually be reborn into a lower abode; liberation is possible only by following the teachings of the Buddha.

In the Mahāyāna sūtras, a further cosmic wrinkle is provided by the description of buddha fields (*buddhakṣetra*) or "pure lands," worlds created by buddhas and presided over by them. Through a variety of pious acts, humans can be reborn in these blissful abodes, where the conditions are ideal for rapid progress on the path to enlightenment. The marvels of the pure lands are described in elaborate detail in certain Mahāyāna sūtras, which tell of every variety of jewel growing from trees, streams of variable temperature for bathing, and soothing breezes that carry sermons appropriate to each listener. Rebirth in one of these lands became a prominent goal of Buddhist practice in India, China, and Japan, where it seemed to serve as either a replacement or a temporary substitute for the purportedly greater goal of buddhahood. In some Mahāyāna sūtras, the notion of the buddha field was given a somewhat different twist with the claim that this benighted world in which humans now live is in reality itself a buddha field; it need only be recognized as such. This view was to be important in tantric Buddhism.

A brief description of the Buddha, the dharma, and the saṅgha follows below, organized under these three headings both to reflect this most traditional of Buddhist categories and to call these categories into question by demonstrating the myriad ways in which Buddhists have answered the questions: Who is the Buddha? What is the dharma? And who belongs to the saṅgha?

The Buddha

Scholars are increasingly reluctant to make unqualified claims about the historical facts of the Buddha's life and teachings. There is even a difference of opinion concerning the years of his birth and death. The long accepted dates of 563–483 B.C.E. have recently been called into question with the suggestion that the Buddha may have lived and died as much as a century later.

The traditional accounts of the Buddha's life are largely hagiographic and tend to include the following narrative. It tells of the miraculous birth of a prince of the warrior (*kṣatriya*) caste in a kingdom in what is today southern Nepal. Astrologers predict that the prince, named Siddhārtha ("He Who Achieves His Goal") will be either a great king or a great religious teacher. His father the king,

apparently convinced that dissatisfaction with the world is what causes one's mind to turn to existential questions and the spiritual quest, is determined to protect his son from all that is unpleasant, and keeps him in a palace where he is surrounded by beauty and all forms of sport and delight. Only at the age of twenty-nine does the prince become sufficiently curious about the world beyond the palace walls to venture forth on four chariot rides. During the first he sees an old person for the first time in his life, and is informed by his charioteer that this is not the only old man in the world, but that old age eventually befalls everyone. On the next tour he sees a sick person, on the next a corpse. It is only then that he learns of the existence of sickness and death. On his final chariot ride he sees a religious mendicant, who has renounced the world in search of freedom from birth and death. He decides to follow a similar path and, against his father's orders and leaving behind his wife and infant son, goes forth from the life of a householder in search of liberation from suffering.

Over a period of six years he engages in a number of the yogic disciplines current in India at the time, including severe asceticism, and concludes that mortification of the flesh is not conducive to progress toward his goal of freedom from birth, aging, sickness, and death. He eventually sits beneath a tree and meditates all night. After repulsing an attack by the evil deity Māra and his armies, at dawn he comes to a realization that makes him the Buddha ("Awakened One"), forever free from future rebirth. Exactly what it was that he understood on that full-moon night has remained a source of both inspiration and contention throughout the history of Buddhism. Some accounts say that the content of the enlightenment was so profound that the Buddha was initially reluctant to try to teach it to others, and decided otherwise only after being beseeched by the great god Brahmā, himself subject to rebirth and hence desirous of liberation. In this volume, the life of the Buddha and the content of his enlightenment is recounted in a Thai ritual for consecrating (that is, animating) a statue of the Buddha, and in the lament of the wife he deserted.

The Buddha was one of an infinite series of buddhas, all of whom reached their exalted state in the same manner, at exactly the same spot in India under one or another species of bodhi tree. When the Buddha gained enlightenment (*bodhi*), he did so all at once, in an instant, and his realization of the truth was perfect. He also made his momentous discovery by himself, without the aid of a teacher. It was this fact above all that distinguished the Buddha from his enlightened disciples, called *arhats*, in the early tradition. The disciples had to rely on his teachings to realize nirvāṇa, and typically did so only in stages. The Buddha was able to reach his enlightenment on his own and in a single night of meditation because he had previously devoted himself to the practice of virtues such as generosity, patience, and effort over countless previous lifetimes. In one of his previous lives, in the presence of a previous buddha, he had made the firm resolution to become a buddha himself at a future time when the path to liberation had been lost; he had dedicated his practice of virtue over the next eons of rebirth to that goal.

Seven weeks after his enlightenment, the Buddha is said to have walked to the

city of Varanasi (Banaras) and to a deer park on its outskirts, where he encountered five renunciates with whom he had previously practiced asceticism. To them he gave his first teaching, usually referred to as the "four noble truths." However, it is not the truths that are noble. The term is perhaps less euphoniously but more accurately rendered as the "four truths for nobles." The term "noble" or "superior" in Sanskrit is *āryan*, the term with which the Indo-European invaders of India had described themselves and which Buddhism appropriated to mean one who is spiritually superior, that is, who has had a vision of a state beyond birth and death. The four things that the Buddha set forth to the five ascetics are known to be true by such people, not by others. Although some Mahāyāna texts dispute that this was the Buddha's very first teaching after his enlightenment, all agree that the teaching of the four truths was of great importance. Over the centuries it has received numerous renditions, the general contours of which follow.

The first truth is that life is inherently unsatisfactory, qualified as it inevitably is by birth, aging, sickness, and death. Various forms of suffering are delineated in Buddhist texts, including the fact that beings must separate from friends and meet with enemies, that they encounter what they do not want, and do not find what they want. The fundamental problem is presented as one of a lack of control over future events; a person wanders constantly from situation to situation, from rebirth to rebirth without companions, discarding one body to take on another, with no certainty or satisfaction, sometimes exalted and sometimes debased. Briefly stated, the problem is change or, as more commonly rendered, impermanence (*anitya*). Because suffering can occur at any moment without warning, even pleasure is in a sense a form of pain, because it will eventually be replaced by pain; there is no activity in which one can engage that will not, in the short or long term, become either physically or mentally painful.

The second truth is the cause of this suffering, identified as action (*karma*), specifically nonvirtuous action, and the negative mental states that motivate such action. As described above, the experience of pleasure and pain is the direct result of actions performed in the past. These actions are motivated by states of mind called *kleśas* (often translated as "afflictions" or "defilements"), the most important of which are desire, hatred, and ignorance. The exact content of this ignorance is again the subject of extensive discussion in Buddhist literature, but it is represented as an active misconception of the nature of reality, usually described as a belief in self (*ātman*). There is, in fact, no permanent and autonomous self in the mind or the body, and to believe otherwise is the root cause of all suffering. It is this imagined self that is inflamed by desire and defended by hatred. As long as one believes in the illusion of self, one will continue to engage in deeds and accumulate karma, and will remain in the cycle of rebirth. This belief in self, in short, is not merely a philosophical problem, but is the cause of the egotism and selfishness that harm others now and oneself in the future through the negative karma they create.

The third truth is the truth of cessation, the postulation of a state beyond suffering. If suffering is caused by negative karma, and karma is caused by desire and hatred, and desire and hatred are caused by ignorance, it follows that if one could destroy ignorance then everything caused by ignorance, directly or indirectly, would also be destroyed. There would be a cessation of suffering. This state of cessation is called *nirvāṇa* ("passing away") and, again, a remarkable range of opinion has been expressed concerning the precise nature of this state beyond suffering—whether it is the cessation also of mind and body or whether the person persists in nirvāṇa.

The postulation of a state beyond suffering would be of little interest if there were not some means to achieve it. The fourth truth, then, is the path, the technique for putting an end to ignorance. One useful way to approach the topic is through the traditional triad of ethics, meditation, and wisdom. Ethics refers to the conscious restraint of nonvirtuous deeds of body and speech, usually through observing some form of vows. Meditation (*dhyāna*), in this context, refers to developing a sufficient level of concentration (through a wide variety of techniques) to make the mind a suitable tool for breaking through the illusion of self to the vision of nirvāṇa. Wisdom is insight, at a deep level of concentration, into the fact that there is no self. Such wisdom is said not only to prevent the accumulation of future karma but eventually to destroy all past karma so that upon death one is not reborn but passes into nirvāṇa. A person who has achieved that state is called an *arhat* ("worthy one"). Two paths to becoming an arhat were set forth. The first was that of the *śrāvaka* ("listener"), who hears the Buddha's teachings and then puts them into practice. The second was the *pratyekabuddha* ("privately awakened one") who becomes an arhat in solitude.

It is important to reiterate that although many Buddhists throughout history have known the teaching of the four truths in more or less detail, not very many have actively set out to destroy the ignorance of self and achieve nirvāṇa through the practice of meditation. Lay people tended to see this as the business of monks, and most monks tended to see it as the business of the relatively few among them who seriously practiced meditation. Even for such monks, the practice of meditation should be understood as a ritual act in a ritual setting, replete with devotions to the three jewels.

If the Buddha taught the four truths, he also must have taught many other things over the course of the four decades that followed his enlightenment. He is renowned for his ability to teach what was appropriate for a particular person, for adapting his message to the situation. Indeed, in the more spectacular descriptions of his pedagogical powers it was said that the Buddha could sit before an audience and simply utter the letter *a* and each person in the audience would hear a discourse designed specifically to meet his or her needs and capacities, in his or her native language. What he taught was represented as a truth that he had not invented but discovered, a truth that had been discovered by other buddhas in the past and would be discovered by buddhas in the future. Importantly, this truth, whatever it may be, was portrayed as something that could be taught, that could be passed on from one person to another, in a variety of languages. It is in this sense that we may speak of a Buddhist tradition. At the same time, the

emphasis on the flexibility of the Buddha's teaching helps to account for the remarkable range of practices described as "Buddhist."

According to traditional accounts, at the age of eighty the Buddha died, or passed into nirvāṇa. He is said to have instructed his followers to cremate his body and distribute the relics that remained among various groups of his followers, who were to enshrine them in hemispherical reliquaries called stūpas. For all Buddhist schools, the stūpa became a reference point denoting the Buddha's presence in the landscape. Early texts and the archeological records link stūpa worship with the Buddha's life and especially the key sites in his career, such as the site of his birth, enlightenment, first teaching, and death. A standard list of eight shrines is recommended for pilgrimage and veneration. However, stūpas are also found at places that were sacred for other reasons, often associated with a local deity. Stūpas were constructed for past buddhas and for prominent disciples of the Buddha. Indeed, stūpas dedicated to disciples of the Buddha may have been especially popular because the monastic rules stipulate that donations to such stūpas became the property of the monastery, whereas donations to stūpas of the Buddha remained the property of the Buddha, who continued to function as a legal resident of most monasteries in what was called "the perfumed chamber."

The Mahāyāna stūpa later became a symbol of buddhahood's omnipresence, a center of text revelation, a place guaranteeing rebirth in a pure land. By the seventh century, the practice of enshrining the physical relics of the Buddha ceases to appear in the archaeological record. Instead, one finds stūpas filled with small clay tablets that have been stamped or engraved with a four-line verse that was regarded as the essence of the Buddha's teaching: "The Tathāgata has explained the cause of all things that arise from a cause. The great renunciate has also explained their cessation." Although this pithy statement is subject to wide interpretation, we can see here an intimation of the four truths: the Buddha has identified that suffering arises from the cause of ignorance and he has also identified nirvāṇa, the cessation of suffering. It is said that the wisest of the disciples, Śāriputra, decided to become the Buddha's follower upon simply hearing these words spoken by a monk, in the absence of the Buddha. But of perhaps greater importance in this context is the fact that this statement functions as a slogan, a mantra, and as a substitute for the relics of the Buddha to be enshrined in a stūpa. The teaching has become the teacher.

Stūpas were pivotal in the social history of Buddhism: these monuments became magnets attracting monastery building and votive construction, as well as local ritual traditions and regional pilgrimage. The economics of Buddhist devotionalism at these centers generated income for local monasteries, artisans, and merchants, an alliance basic to Buddhism throughout its history. At these geographical centers arrayed around the symbolic monument, diverse devotional exertions, textual studies, and devotees' mercantile pursuits could all prosper. The great stūpa complexes—monasteries with endowed lands, a pilgrimage center, a market, and support from the state—represent central points in the Buddhist polities of Central, South, and Southeast Asia.

The Buddha was also worshiped in paintings and statues. The production and worship of Buddhist icons—whether images of buddhas such as Śākyamuni and Amitābha, or bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya—has been a central feature of Buddhist religious life throughout Asian history. The worship of Buddhist icons was promoted by sūtras, and sponsoring the production of an icon was considered an act of great merit, as was bathing an image, a practice that continues in Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. A common goal of both devotional and ascetic Buddhist practice was to recollect the good qualities of the Buddha, which sometimes led to seeing the Buddha "face to face." Images of the Buddha seem to have been important aids in such practices, in part because, far from being a "symbol" of the departed master, images of the Buddha were ritually animated in consecration ceremonies intended to transform an inanimate image into a living deity. Icons thus empowered were treated as spiritual beings possessed of magical powers, to be worshiped with regular offerings of incense, flowers, food, money, and other assorted valuables. Buddhist literature from all over Asia is replete with tales of miraculous occurrences associated with such images.

The Buddha was thus the object of elaborate ritual devotions, often accompanied by recitations of his myriad virtues and powers. These devotions were later incorporated into a larger liturgy that included the visualization of vast offerings and the confession of misdeeds. But not all buddhas were so extraordinary. Indeed, the Japanese Zen master Dōgen went to some lengths to explain why the extraordinary telepathic powers that were supposedly a standard byproduct of enlightenment were not necessarily possessed by enlightened Zen masters in China. The true Zen master is utterly beyond all such categories of Buddhist doctrine.

The question arose early as to the object of devotion in the universal practice of taking refuge in the three jewels: the Buddha, the dharma, and the saṅgha. In some formulations, the Buddha was regarded as having a physical body that was the result of past karma; it consisted of his contaminated aggregates (*skandha*), the final residue of the ignorance that had bound him in saṃsāra until his last lifetime. Because that body was the product of ignorance and subject to disintegration, it was not considered suitable as an object of veneration, as the Buddha-jewel. The Buddha was at the same time said to possess certain qualities (also called *dharma*) that are uncontaminated by ignorance, such as his pure ethics, his deep concentration, his wisdom, his knowledge that he has destroyed all afflictions, and his knowledge that the afflictions will not recur. The qualities were later categorized as the eighteen unshared qualities of a buddha's uncontaminated wisdom. This "body of [uncontaminated] qualities" was deemed the true object of the practice of refuge. Thus, the term "body" came to shift its meaning from the physical form of the Buddha, corporeal extension in space and over time, to a collection of timeless abstract virtues. In addition, the early community had to account for those fantastic elements in the Buddha's hagiography such as his visit to his mother, who had died shortly after his birth and been reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. The Buddha is said to have made use of a "mind-made body"

for his celestial journey. These notions were later systematized into a three-body theory encompassing the physical body (*rūpakāya*), the body of uncontaminated qualities (*dharmakāya*), and the mind-made or emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*).

In Mahāyāna literature also there is a doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha. There we find references to the dharmakāya as almost a cosmic principle, an ultimate reality in which all buddhas partake through their omniscient minds. After the dharmakāya comes the enjoyment body (*saṃbhogakāya*), a fantastic form of a buddha that resides only in the highest pure lands, adorned with thirty-two major and eighty minor physical marks, eternally teaching the Mahāyāna to highly advanced bodhisattvas; the enjoyment body does not appear to ordinary beings. The third body is the emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*). It is this body that appears in the world to teach the dharma. Thus we can discern an important change in the development of the conception of the Buddha in India: whereas in the earlier tradition, the nirmāṇakāya had been that specialized body employed by the Buddha for the performance of occasional supernormal excursions, in the Mahāyāna there is no buddha that ever appears in the world other than the nirmāṇakāya. All of the deeds of the Buddha are permutations of the emanation body—they are all magical creations, the reflexive functions of the dharmakāya. These functions are by no means random. Indeed, the biography of the Buddha is transformed from the linear narration of a unique event into a paradigm, reduplicated precisely by all the buddhas of the past, present, and future in twelve deeds: descent from the Joyous Pure Land, entry into his mother's womb, being born, becoming skilled in arts and sports as a youth, keeping a harem, taking four trips outside the city that cause him to renounce the world, practicing austerities for six years, sitting under the bodhi tree, defeating Māra and his hosts, attaining enlightenment, turning the wheel of doctrine, and passing into nirvāṇa.

The effects of this final deed have long been felt by Buddhist communities. Their sense of loss was not limited to the direct disciples of the Buddha but has been expressed by generations of future followers, often in the form of the lament that one's negative karma caused one to be reborn someplace other than northern India during the lifetime of the Buddha, that one's misdeeds prevented one from joining the audience of the Buddha's teaching. A standard part of Buddhist rituals became the request that other buddhas not pass into nirvāṇa but remain in the world for an eon, which they could do if they wished.

The absence of the Buddha has remained a powerful motif in Buddhist history, and remedies have taken a wide variety of forms. In Burma, secret societies, with possible antecedents in tantric traditions, concentrate their energies on kinds of supernormal power that the mainstream tradition regards with some suspicion. Specifically, they engage in longevity practices to allow them to live until the coming of the next buddha, Maitreya. In China and Japan, rituals constructed around the chanting of the name of the buddha Amitābha offer a means of being delivered at death into the presence of a buddha who is not present here but is present now, elsewhere, in the western paradise of Sukhāvatī.

With the absence of the historical Buddha, a variety of substitutes were conceived to take his place. One such substitute was the icon, as we already noted. Another was the written text of his teaching, the sūtra, described below. In the absence of the Buddha, the transcendent principle of his enlightenment, sometimes called the buddha nature, became the subject of a wide range of doctrinal speculation, devotion, and practice. This impersonal principle, which made possible the transformation of Prince Siddhārtha from an ignorant and suffering human being into an omniscient and blissful buddha, was most commonly referred to as the *tathāgatagarbha*. *Tathāgata*, "One Who Has Thus Come [or Gone]" is one of the standard epithets of the Buddha. *Garbha* has a wide range of meanings, including "essence" and "womb," which were exploited in works like the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, a popular and influential Mahāyāna work which declared that this seed or potential for buddhahood resides equally in all beings, and it needs only to be developed. A related work states that everything in the universe contains in itself the entire universe, and that, therefore, the wisdom of a buddha is fully present in each and every being. Such an impersonal principle was not only an important point of doctrine but could also be the object of devotion and praise, prompting the Japanese monk Myōe to address an island as the Buddha. In so doing, Myōe, who had desired to go to India, was able to find the Buddha in Japan.

There is a vacillation in the metaphors and similes employed in these texts as if between two models of the means of making manifest the buddha nature, of achieving enlightenment. One model regards the buddha nature as something pure that has been polluted. The process of the path, therefore, is a gradual process of purification, removing defilements through a variety of practices until the utter transformation from afflicted sentient being to perfect buddha has been effected. Other tropes in these texts, however, do not suggest a developmental model but employ instead a rhetoric of discovery: buddhahood is always already fully present in each being. It need only be recognized. It was this latter model that exercised particular influence in the Chan and Zen schools of China and Japan, which were at least rhetorically dismissive of standard doctrinal categories and traditional practices. And in Tibet, the most ancient Buddhist school spoke of a first buddha, a primordial buddha who is the fundamental embodiment of enlightenment.

One of the earliest substitutes for the Buddha was the wisdom by which he became enlightened and, by extension, the texts that contained that wisdom. This wisdom was called the "perfection of wisdom" (*prajñāpāramitā*). In part because it was this wisdom that metaphorically gave birth to the Buddha and, in part, because the word *prajñāpāramitā* is in the feminine gender in Sanskrit, this wisdom was anthropomorphized and worshiped as a goddess, referred to sometimes as Prajñāpāramitā, sometimes as "the Great Mother." But not all of the important female figures in Buddhism have been anthropomorphized principles. The eighth-century queen of Tibet is identified as a female buddha, and the tantric symbolism of her vagina as the source of enlightenment is set forth. The story is told of Gotamī, not the Buddha's metaphorical mother, but his aunt and foster-mother

(his own mother died shortly after his birth). She was instrumental in convincing the Buddha to establish the order of nuns, and her life story has served as a female parallel to the life of the Buddha. The account of her passage into nirvāṇa clearly mimics the story of the Buddha's death.

Perhaps the most popular substitute for the absent Buddha, however, was the bodhisattva. The Buddha is said to have been able to remember all of his past lives, and he is said to have employed his prodigious memory to recount events from those lives. The Buddha's remarkable memory provided a scriptural justification for the appropriation of a diverse body of folklore into the canon. The Jātakas ("Birth Stories"), of which there are over five hundred, were transformed from an Indian version of Aesop's Fables into the word of the Buddha by a conclusion appended to each story, in which the Buddha represents the tale as the recollection of one of his former lives and inevitably identifies himself as the protagonist ("in that existence the otter was Ānanda, the jackal was Maudgalyāyana, the monkey was Śāriputra, and I was the wise hare"). In these tales, the Buddha is referred to as the *bodhisattva,* a term widely etymologized in later literature, but which generally means a person who is intent on the attainment of bodhi, enlightenment. If very few Buddhists felt that they could emulate the Buddha in his last life by leaving their families, living the life of an ascetic, and practicing meditation, the stories of the Buddha's previous lives provided a more accessible model. Stories of the Bodhisattva's deeds of generosity, morality, patience, and perseverance against great odds have remained among the most popular forms of Buddhist literature, both written and oral, and both in the Jātaka tales and in another genre called Avadāna.

In the early Mahāyāna sūtras, the bodhisattva's deeds were represented not merely as an inspiration but as a model to be scrupulously emulated. Earlier in the tradition, the goal had been to follow the path set forth by the Buddha and become liberated from rebirth as an arhat. But in the Mahāyāna, the goal became to do not what the Buddha said but what he did: to follow a much, much longer path to become a buddha oneself. It seems that, at least in the time of the Buddha, it had been possible to become an arhat in one lifetime. Later Mahāyāna exegetes would calculate that, from the time that one made buddhahood one's goal until buddhahood was achieved, a minimum of 384×10^{58} years was required. This amount of time was needed to accumulate the vast stores of merit and wisdom that would result in the omniscience of a buddha, who was able to teach the path to liberation more effectively than any other because of his telepathic knowledge of the capacities and interests of his disciples. It was not the case, then, that bodhisattvas were postponing their enlightenment as buddhas; instead, they would forego the lesser enlightenment of the arhat, which offered freedom from suffering for oneself alone, in favor of the greater enlightenment of a buddha, whereby others could also be liberated.

Formal ceremonies were designed for taking the vow to become a bodhisattva and then follow the long bodhisattva path to buddhahood in order to liberate others from saṃsāra. This included the promise to follow a specific code of conduct. At those ceremonies, the officiant, speaking as the Buddha, would declare that a particular disciple, at a point several eons in the future, would complete the long bodhisattva path and become a buddha of such and such a name, presiding over such and such a pure land. So, with the rise of the Mahāyāna we see the goal of enlightenment recede to a point beyond the horizon, but with the millions of intervening lives, beginning with this one, consecrated by the Buddha's prophecy that these present lives are a future buddha's former lives, part of a buddha's story and thus sacred history.

But the bodhisattva was not simply an object of emulation; the bodhisattva was also an object of devotion, for if the bodhisattva had vowed to liberate all beings in the universe from suffering, all beings were the object of the bodhisattva's compassionate deeds. The bodhisattvas mentioned in the Mahāyāna sūtras were worshiped for the varieties of mundane and supramundane succor they could bestow—bodhisattvas such as Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom; Kṣitigarbha, who as Jizō in Japan rescues children, both born and unborn; Maitreya, the bodhisattva who will become the next buddha; and most of all, Avalokiteśvara, the most widely worshiped bodhisattva, who takes a female form as Guanyin in China and Kannon in Japan, and who in Tibet takes human form in the succession of Dalai Lamas.

Yet another substitute for the absent Buddha is to be found in the Vajrayāna, in which rituals (called *sādhana,* literally, "means of achievement") are set forth in which the practitioner, through a practice of visualization, petitions a buddha or bodhisattva to come into the practitioner's presence. Much of the practice described in tantric sādhanas involves the enactment of a world—the fantastic jewel-encrusted world of the Mahāyāna sūtras or the horrific world of the charnel ground. In the sūtras, these worlds appear before the audience of the sūtra at the command of the Buddha, as in the *Lotus Sūtra,* or are described by him, as in the Pure Land sūtras. In the tantric sādhana, the practitioner manifests that world through visualization, through a process of invitation, descent, and identification, evoking the world that the sūtras declare to be immanent, yet only describe. The tantric sādhana is, in this sense, the making of the world of the Mahāyāna sūtras here and now. Tantric sādhanas usually take one of two forms. In the first, the buddha or bodhisattva is requested to appear before the meditator and is then worshiped in the hope of receiving blessings. In the other type of tantric sādhana, the meditator imagines himself or herself to be a fully enlightened buddha or bodhisattva now, to have the exalted body, speech, and mind of an enlightened being. Those who become particularly skillful at this practice, it is said, gain the ability to appear in this form to others.

Dharma

Before the Buddha passed away, it is said that he was asked who would succeed him as leader of the community. He answered that his teaching should be the

teacher. That teaching is most commonly referred to with the name *dharma,* a word derived from the root *dhṛ,* "to hold," a term with a wide range of meanings. Indeed, ten meanings of *dharma,* including "path," "virtue," "quality," "vow," and "nirvāṇa" were enumerated by a fifth-century scholar. Nineteenth-century translators often rendered *dharma* as "the law." But two meanings predominate. The first is the teaching of the Buddha, creatively etymologized from *dhṛ* to mean "that which holds one back from falling into suffering." The second meaning of dharma, appearing particularly in philosophical contexts, is often rendered in English as "phenomenon" or "thing," as in "all dharmas lack self."

The ambiguities encountered in translating the term are emblematic of a wide range of practices that have been regarded as the teaching of the Buddha. And because the Buddha adapted his teachings to the situation and because (at least according to the Mahāyāna), the Buddha did not actually disappear into nirvāṇa but remains forever present, works that represented themselves as his teaching (which begin with the standard formula, "Thus did I hear") have continued to be composed throughout the history of Buddhism. The term "Buddhist apocrypha" has generally been used to describe those texts composed outside of India (in China, for example) which represent themselves as being of Indian origin. Yet strictly speaking all Buddhist texts, even those composed in Indian languages, are apocryphal because none can be identified with complete certainty as a record of the teaching of the historical Buddha. This has, on the one hand, led to a certain tolerance for accepting diverse doctrines and practices as Buddhist. Sometimes new texts were written as ways of summarizing what was most important from an unwieldy and overwhelming canon. In some cases, these new texts represented themselves as the words of the historical Buddha; in other cases, essays were composed in poetry and prose with the purpose of explicating for a newly converted society the most essential teachings from a bewildering scriptural tradition.

The absence of the Buddha did not merely occasion the creation of substitutes for him. Over the course of the history of Buddhism in Asia, it also portended crisis, notably in a variety of texts that responded to the notion of the decline of the dharma. Within a century or two after the Buddha's death, there were predictions of the eventual disappearance of the dharma from the world. Various reasons were given for its demise, ranging from a general deterioration in human virtue to the fact that the Buddha had agreed to admit women into the order. These texts, like most Buddhist sūtras, are set at the time of the Buddha, and the dire circumstances that signal the demise of the dharma are expressed in terms of prophecies by the Buddha of what will happen in the future. We can assume that the authors of the sūtras were in fact describing the events of their own day, usually including the corrupt and greedy behavior of monks, the persecution of Buddhism by the state, or the threat posed by foreign invaders. Some works of this genre not only prophesied decline of the dharma but offered prescriptions so that decline could be averted. One Chinese work criticizes the traditional practice of offering gifts to monks and monasteries, and advocates acts of charity directed instead toward the poor, the orphaned, the aged, the sick, and even

animals and insects. An Indian work composed at the time of the first major incursion of Muslim armies into northern India foretells an apocalyptic war in which Buddhist forces will sweep out of the Himalayas to defeat the barbarians and establish a utopian Buddhist kingdom. In another Indian text, there is no such threat. Instead, the text may be addressed to a community whose very security and complacency would allow the eventual disappearance of the dharma.

When works such as these were composed to respond to a particular historical circumstance, it was sometimes necessary to account for the fact that there had been no previous record of such a text. It was explained that a certain text had been found locked inside an iron stūpa, having been placed there long ago to be discovered at the appropriate time. The fact that the version which eventually reached China seemed little more than an outline was the result of an unfortunate circumstance: the larger and more comprehensive version of the work had inadvertently been thrown overboard on the sea journey from India to China. Likewise, the Tibetan ritual text of the Great Bliss Queen is an example of a Tibetan genre of texts known as *gter ma* (treasures). It is believed that the Indian tantric master who visited Tibet in the late eighth century, Padmasambhava, and his followers buried texts all over Tibet, knowing that they would be uncovered at an appropriate time in the future.

As one might imagine, there were those who found such claims fantastic, and the Mahāyāna was challenged by the foundational schools for fabricating new sūtras and distorting the Buddhist teaching. A sixth-century Mahāyāna author, Bhāvaviveka, summarizes the Hīnayāna argument that the Mahāyāna is not the word of the Buddha: the Mahāyāna sūtras were not included in either the original or subsequent compilations of the word of the Buddha; by teaching that the Buddha is permanent, the Mahāyāna contradicts the dictum that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent; because the Mahāyāna teaches that the buddha nature is all-pervasive, it does not relinquish the belief in self; because the Mahāyāna teaches that the Buddha did not pass into nirvāṇa, it suggests that nirvāṇa is not the final state of peace; the Mahāyāna contains prophecies that the great early disciples will become buddhas; the Mahāyāna belittles the arhats; the Mahāyāna praises bodhisattvas above the Buddha; the Mahāyāna perverts the entire teaching by claiming that the historical Buddha was an emanation; the statement in the Mahāyāna sūtras that the Buddha was constantly in meditative absorption is unfeasible; by teaching that great sins can be completely absolved, the Mahāyāna teaches that actions have no effects, contradicting the law of karma. Therefore, the opponents of the Mahāyāna claim, the Buddha did not set forth the Mahāyāna; it was created by beings who were demonic in order to deceive the obtuse and those with evil minds.

Centuries earlier we find implied responses to these criticisms in the Mahāyāna sūtras themselves, side by side with the assertions that the Hīnayāna found so heretical. The most influential defense of new sūtras as authoritative teachings of the Buddha is found in the *Lotus Sūtra,* with its doctrine of skillful means (*upāya*). In that work the validity of the Mahāyāna and the Mahāyāna vision of buddha-

hood is defended by the use of parables. Because the *Lotus* is the most influential of Buddhist texts in all of East Asia, it is worthwhile to consider some of these.

The *Lotus Sūtra* must somehow account for the fact that the Mahāyāna has appeared late, after the Buddha had taught a path to nirvāṇa that had already been successfully followed to its terminus by his original disciples, the great arhats such as Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, and Kāśyapa. If the Mahāyāna is the superior teaching why had it not been evident earlier? Several of the parables place the fault with the disciples themselves. Thus, in the parable of the hidden jewel, a man falls asleep drunk in the house of a friend who, unbeknownst to him, sews a jewel into the hem of his garment. The man awakes and goes on his way, only to suffer great poverty and hardship. He encounters his friend, who reveals the jewel, showing him that he had been endowed with great wealth all the while. In the same way, the disciples of the Buddha have constant access to the path to supreme enlightenment but are unaware of it; they are bodhisattvas unaware of their true identity. Again, the Buddha compares his teaching to the rainfall that descends without discrimination on the earth. That this rain causes some seeds to grow into flowers and some into great trees implies no differentiation in the rain but rather is due to the capacities of the seeds that it nurtures. Thus, the teaching of the Buddha is of a single flavor but benefits beings in a variety of ways according to their capacity. The Buddha knows the abilities and dispositions of his disciples and causes them to hear his dharma in a way most suitable to them.

Other parables employ a more radical strategy of authorization, suggesting that the Hīnayāna nirvāṇa is but a fiction. The oft-cited parable of the burning house tells of a father distraught as his children blithely play, unaware that the house is ablaze. Knowing of their respective predilections for playthings, he lures them from the inferno with the promise that he has a cart for each waiting outside, a deer-drawn cart for one, a goat-drawn cart for another, and so on. When they emerge from the conflagration, they find only one cart, a magnificent conveyance drawn by a great white ox, something that they had never even dreamed of. The burning house is saṃsāra, the children are ignorant sentient beings, unaware of the dangers of their abode, the father is the Buddha, who lures them out of saṃsāra with the teaching of a variety of vehicles—the vehicle of the śrāvaka, the vehicle of the pratyekabuddha, the vehicle of the bodhisattva—knowing that in fact there is but one vehicle, the buddha vehicle whereby all beings will be conveyed to unsurpassed enlightenment. And the Buddha tells the parable of the conjured city, in which a skillful guide leads a group of travelers on a long journey in search of a cache of jewels. Along the way, the travelers become exhausted and discouraged and decide to turn back. The guide magically conjures a great city in the near distance, where the travelers can rest before continuing toward their ultimate goal. The travelers enter the city where they regain their strength, at which point the guide dissolves the city and announces that the jewel cache is near. The travelers are those sentient beings who are weak and cowardly, intimidated by the thought of traversing the long Mahāyāna path to buddhahood. For their benefit, the Buddha creates the Hīnayāna nirvāṇa, more easily attained,

which they mistakenly believe to be their final goal. He then announces to them that they have not reached their ultimate destination and exhorts them on to buddhahood, revealing that the nirvāṇa they had attained was but an illusion.

Thus, the claim to legitimacy of the earlier tradition is usurped by the Mahāyāna through the explanation that what the Buddha had taught before was in fact a lie, that there is no such thing as the path of the arhat, no such thing as nirvāṇa. There is only the Mahāyāna (also called the *ekayāna*, the "one vehicle"), which the Buddha intentionally misrepresents out of his compassionate understanding that there are many among his disciples who are incapable of assimilating so far-reaching a vision. But what of those disciples of the Buddha who are reported in the early sūtras to have become arhats, to have passed into nirvāṇa—what of their attainment? In an ingenious device (found also in other Mahāyāna sūtras) the great heroes of the Hīnayāna are drafted into the Mahāyāna by the Buddha's prophecies that even they will surpass the trifling goal of nirvāṇa and go on to follow the Mahāyāna path to eventual buddhahood. The first such prophecy is for the monk Śāriputra, renowned in the works of the foundational tradition as the wisest of the Buddha's disciples, who is transformed into a stock character in the Mahāyāna sūtras as one who is oblivious of the higher teaching. When his ignorance is revealed to him, he desires to learn more, coming to denounce as parochial the wisdom that he had once deemed supreme. The champion of the Hīnayāna is shown to reject it and embrace that which many adherents of the foundational tradition judged to be spurious. Thus the early history of the movement, already highly mythologized into a sacred history, was fictionalized further in the Mahāyāna sūtras, and another sacred history was eventually created. To legitimate these newly appearing texts, their authors claimed the principal figures of the earlier tradition, indeed its very codifiers, as converts to the Buddha's true teaching and central characters in its drama. The early story of Gautama Buddha and his disciples, preserved in the Pāli canon and already accepted as an historical account by the "pre-Mahāyāna" traditions, is radically rewritten in the *Lotus* in such a way as to glorify the *Lotus* itself as the record of what really happened. Such rewriting recurs throughout the history of the Buddhist traditions in the perpetual attempt to recount "what the Buddha taught."

And who is this Buddha that the *Lotus Sūtra* represents? In the fifteenth chapter, billions of bodhisattvas well up out of the earth and make offerings to the Buddha. The Buddha declares that all of these bodhisattvas who have been practicing the path for innumerable eons are in fact his own disciples, that he had set each of them on the long path to buddhahood. The bodhisattva Maitreya, who has witnessed this fantastic scene, asks the obvious question. He reckons that it had only been some forty years since the Buddha had achieved enlightenment under the tree at Bodhgayā. He finds it incredible that in that short period of time the Buddha could have trained so many bodhisattvas who had progressed so far on the path. "It is as if there were a man, his natural color fair and his hair black, twenty-five years of age, who pointed to men a hundred years of age and said, 'These are my sons!' " Maitreya, representing the self-doubt of the early Mahāyāna

and reflecting the Hīnayāna critique, is deeply troubled by this inconsistency, fearing that people who hear of this after the Buddha's passing will doubt the truth of the Buddha's words and attack his teaching.

It is at this point that the Buddha reveals another lie. He explains that even though he is widely believed to have left the palace of his father in search of freedom from suffering and to have found that freedom six years later under a tree near Gayā, in fact, that is not the case. He achieved enlightenment innumerable billions of eons ago and has been preaching the dharma in this world and simultaneously in myriad other worlds ever since. Yet he recognizes the meager intelligence of many beings, and out of his wish to benefit them resorts to the use of skillful methods (*upāya*), recounting how he renounced his princely life and attained unsurpassed enlightenment. And, further recognizing that his continued presence in the world might cause those of little virtue to become complacent and not ardently seek to put his teaching into practice, he declares that he is soon to pass into nirvāṇa. But this also is a lie, because his lifespan will not be exhausted for many innumerable billions of eons.

Thus, the prince's deep anxiety at being confronted with the facts of sickness, aging, and death, his difficult decision to abandon his wife and child and go forth into the forest in search of a state beyond sorrow, his ardent practice of meditation and asceticism for six years, his triumphant attainment of the liberation and his imminent passage into the extinction of nirvāṇa—all are a pretense. He was enlightened all the time, yet feigned these deeds to inspire the world.

But we should not conclude that once the *Lotus* and other Mahāyāna sūtras declared the superiority of the bodhisattva path, the supremacy and authority of the Mahāyāna was finally and unequivocally established. Defenses of the Mahāyāna as the word of the Buddha remained the preoccupation of Mahāyāna scholastics throughout the history of Buddhism in India. Nor should we assume that teachings were ranked only as Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. Even sects that exalted the *Lotus Sūtra* above all others, for example, could disagree about whether there was more than one true practice, one true sūtra, one true buddha. In Japan, a dispute over the meaning of "original enlightenment" in what is called the Matsumoto Debate led to a bloody conflict in 1536 that involved thousands of troops on each side. In China, the promotion and control of sacred scripture was the prerogative of the highest imperial offices. A sect that came into conflict with this authority, the "Teaching of the Three Stages," had its texts declared heretical and banned from the official collection of Buddhist texts.

Thus, the significance of Buddhist texts does not lie simply in their doctrinal or philosophical content but in the uses to which they have been put. We find, for example, that the Abhidharma (literally, "higher dharma," sometimes rendered as "phenomenology"), a class of Buddhist scriptures concerned with minute analyses of mental states, is chanted at Thai funerals. Contained in virtually every Mahāyāna sūtra was a proclamation of the marvelous benefits that would accrue to those who piously handled, recited, worshiped, copied, or circulated the text itself—again, the teaching had become the teacher. Ritual enshrinement and devotion to the sūtra as a vital embodiment of the dharma and, in a certain sense, as a substitute for the Buddha himself was instrumental to the rise of the disparate collections of cults of the book that came to be known as the Mahāyāna. In China, no text was more venerated than the *Lotus,* and tales were told of the miracles that attended its worship.

The importance of texts in Buddhism derives in part from the fact that the tradition represents the Buddha as being eventually persuaded to teach others after his enlightenment. This suggests that the dharma is something that can be passed on, something that is transmittable, transferable. The Buddha is said to have spoken not in Sanskrit, the formal language of the priests of his day, but in the vernacular, and he is said to have forbidden monks from composing his teachings in formal verses for chanting. The implication was that the content was more important than the form. This led to the notion that the dharma could be translated from one language to another, and the act of translation (and the sponsorship of translation) has been regarded throughout Asia as one of the most pious and meritorious acts that could be performed. It was therefore common for Buddhist kings and emperors to sponsor the translation of texts from one language into another: from Sanskrit into Chinese, from Sanskrit into Tibetan, from Tibetan into Manchu, from Pāli into Burmese, and so on. Adding to this notion of translatability was the fact that the primary objects of Buddhist devotion—texts, relics, icons—were all portable; stories of the transportation and enshrinement of a particularly potent image of the Buddha figure in the histories of almost all Buddhist cultures. We should not conclude, however, as Buddhists sometimes do, that the dharma is something self-identical and transcendent, that showers over the cultures of Asia, transforming and pacifying them. In a Japanese text, for example, Buddhism is portrayed as a Korean possession that can be offered in tribute to the Japanese court as a means of protecting the state. It is this universalism of the Buddhist dharma with its plastic pantheon into which any local deity could easily be enlisted, its doctrine of the Buddha's skillful methods for accommodating conflicting views, and its claims about the pervasive nature of reality that have made it a sometimes useful ideology for rulership and empire.

Buddhism has indeed transformed Asia, but it has been transformed in the process. We may consider even whether there ever was some entity called "Buddhism" to be transformed in the first place. What cannot be disputed is that if Buddhism exists, it is impossible to understand it outside the lives of Buddhists, outside the saṅgha.

Saṅgha

The last of the three jewels is the saṅgha, "the community." Technically taken to mean the assembly of enlightened disciples of the Buddha, the term more commonly connotes the community of Buddhist monks and nuns. In the rules governing the ordination ceremony, the saṅgha is said to be present when four fully

ordained monks are in attendance. However, in its broadest sense the saṅgha is the whole body of Buddhist faithful. The selections in this section fall under two broad categories. The first deals with monastic life or, more specifically, life organized by vows. The second deals with the lives of Buddhists.

As mentioned earlier, Buddhist practice was traditionally subsumed under three headings: ethics (*śīla*), meditation (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*). Ethics, which in this context refers to refraining from nonvirtue through the conscious control of body and speech, was regarded as the essential prerequisite for progress in meditation and wisdom. It was the element of the triad most widely practiced both by lay people and monks and nuns, and this practice generally took the form of the observance of vows. Since in Buddhist ethical theory karma, both good and bad, depended not on the deed but on the intention, if one could make a promise not to kill humans, for example, and maintain that promise, the good karma accumulated by such restraint would be far greater than had one simply not had the occasion to commit murder. From the early days of the tradition, therefore, elaborate systems of rules for living one's life, called *vinaya,* were established, along with ceremonies for their conferral and maintenance. Lay people could take vows not to kill humans, not to steal, not to commit sexual misconduct, not to lie about spiritual attainments (for example, not to claim to be telepathic when one actually was not), and not to use intoxicants. Novice monks and nuns took these five vows, plus vows not to eat after the noon meal (a rule widely transgressed in some Buddhist cultures through recourse to the evening "medicinal meal"), not to handle gold or silver, not to adorn their bodies, not to sleep in high beds, and not to attend musical performances. Fully ordained monks (*bhikṣu*) and nuns (*bhikṣunī*) took many more vows, which covered the entire range of personal and public decorum, and regulated physical movements, social intercourse, and property. Monks and nuns convened twice monthly to confess their transgressions of the rules in a ceremony and reaffirm their commitment to the code, with transgressions carrying punishments of various weights. The gravest misdeeds entailed expulsion from the order, whereas others could be expiated simply by confessing them aloud. In Buddhist traditions across Asia, ritual maintenance of these monastic codes has served as the mark of orthodoxy, much more than adherence to a particular belief or doctrine. Indeed, it is said that the teaching of the Buddha will endure only as long as the vinaya endures.

The Buddha and his followers were probably originally a group of wandering ascetics. However, they adopted the practice of other ascetic groups in India of remaining in one place during the rainy season. Wealthy patrons had shelters built for their use, and these shelters evolved into monasteries that were inhabited throughout the year. It seems that early in the tradition, the saṅgha became largely sedentary, although the tradition of the wandering monk continued. Still, the saṅgha was by no means a homogeneous community. The vinaya texts describe monks from a wide variety of social backgrounds. Mention is made of monks from all four of India's social castes. There were also a wide variety of monastic specialties. The vinaya texts describe monks who are skilled in speech, those who

memorize and recite the sūtras, those who memorize and recite the vinaya, and those who memorize and recite lists of technical terms. There are monks who live in the forest, who wear robes of felt, who wear robes made from discarded rags, who live only on the alms they have begged for, who live at the foot of a tree, who live in a cemetery, who live in the open air, who sleep sitting up, and so on. There were also monks who specialized in meditation, monks who served as advisors to kings, and monks responsible for the administration of the monastery and its property. One of the tasks of this administrator was to insure that the wandering monks were not given mundane work, that meditating monks not be disturbed by noise, and that monks who begged for alms received good food. Whether they wandered without a fixed abode or lived in monasteries, monks and nuns that lived in a designated region, called a *sīmā,* were to gather twice a month to confess and affirm their vows communally, a ceremony that laypeople also attended.

Throughout the Buddhist world, monks and laypeople have lived in a symbiotic relationship: the laity provide material support for monks while monks provide a locus for the layperson's accumulation of merit (by supporting monks who maintained their vows). The rules and regulations in the vinaya texts were meant to govern the lives of Buddhist monks and to structure their relations with the laity. Monks in the vinaya literature are caught in a web of social and ritual obligations, are fully and elaborately housed and permanently settled, and are preoccupied not with nirvāṇa, but with bowls and robes, bathrooms and buckets, and proper behavior in public. The saṅgha was also a community where disputes arose and had to be settled. Because it is said that the Buddha only prescribed a rule in response to a specific misdeed, the vinaya texts often provide the story of that first offense and the Buddha's pronouncement of a rule against such behavior in the future.

There were also rules for nuns, although these receive much less attention in the vinaya literature. According to several traditions, the Buddha was approached early in his career by his aunt and step-mother, Mahāpajāpatī, also called Gotamī, at the head of a delegation of women who wished him to institute a Buddhist order of nuns. The Buddha initially declined to institute such an order. But when the Buddha's cousin and personal attendant, Ānanda, asked him whether women were able to attain the fruits of the practice of the dharma, the Buddha unhesitatingly answered in the affirmative and agreed to establish an order for women. However, the same text states that if the Buddha had not agreed to establish an order for nuns, his teaching would not disappear from the world so quickly. The rules for nuns are both more numerous and stricter than those for monks, and placed nuns in a position of clear subordination to monks. For example, seniority in the order of monks and nuns is measured by the length of time one has been ordained, such that someone who has been a monk for five years must pay respect to a monk of six years, even if the first monk is chronologically older. However, the rules for nuns state that a woman who has been a nun for one hundred years must pay respect to a man who was ordained as a monk for one day. The diffi-

culties entailed in maintaining the strict nuns' vows and a lack of institutional support led to the decline and eventual disappearance of the order of nuns in India, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia, and to an order of novices alone (rather than fully ordained nuns) in Tibet. The tradition of full ordination for women was maintained only in China.

Throughout the development of the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna, the rules for monks and nuns seem to have remained fairly uniform and the adherents of the new vehicles seem to have seen no contradiction between the monastic life and the practices of the Mahāyāna and the Vajrayāna. But if we understand the vinaya not as that which restricts individuals and their actions but as that which creates them, we will not be surprised that additional vows were formulated for the bodhisattva and the tantric practitioner, and that rituals which mimicked the monastic confession ceremony were designed for their administration. The vows of a bodhisattva included not only the vow to liberate all beings in the universe from suffering but also to act compassionately by always accepting an apology, not to praise oneself and belittle others, to give gifts and teachings upon request, and so on. Those who took the bodhisattva vows also promised never to claim that the Mahāyāna sūtras were not the word of the Buddha.

Vajrayāna practice also entailed extensive sets of vows. As mentioned above, it was common for Buddhist monks, especially in late Indian Buddhism and in Tibet, to hold bodhisattva and tantric vows in addition to their monk's vows. In the case of the more advanced tantric initiations, which involved sexual union with a consort, this presented problems, for monks were bound by the rule of celibacy. Whether or not monks were permitted to participate in such initiations became a question of some gravity when Buddhism was being established in Tibet, and a famous Indian monk and tantric master, Atiśa, composed a text that dealt with this issue.

The second type of selection found in this section are stories of Buddhists from across Asia. Some of these accounts are ancient, like the life story of a "miraculous and strange" Chinese monk of the sixth century; some are modern, like the autobiographies of Japanese Buddhist women after the Second World War. Some are hagiographies of famous masters, and some tell of miraculous voyages; others recount the deathbed visions of devotees of Amitābha. Some of the biographies are highly stereotyped with often transparent agendas.

Because of the portability of relics, texts, and icons, sacred sites were established across the Buddhist world and pilgrimages to those sites was a popular form of Buddhist practice throughout Asia. Pilgrimage was sometimes to a stūpa associated with the life of the Buddha; Bodhgayā, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, has drawn pilgrims from the outer reaches of the Buddhist world for centuries. Particularly powerful buddha images also attracted pilgrims; it was not uncommon for pilgrims from as far east as Manchuria and as far west as the Mongol regions of Russia to travel to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, to visit the statue of the Buddha there. They would travel on foot or on horseback; the most pious would proceed by prostration—bowing and then stretching their bodies on the ground

before rising, taking one step forward and prostrating again, along the entire route. In China, mountains believed to be the abodes of munificent bodhisattvas were (and are) popular destinations of communal pilgrimages. Women pilgrims in modern China reported a variety of reasons for making the pilgrimage: to insure a good harvest, to protect the silkworms, to promote the health of family members and domestic animals. But we should not assume that Buddhist travel was always directed from the periphery to the center. A renowned Buddhist scholar left one of the great monastic universities of India on a perilous sea voyage to Sumatra, where the preeminent teacher of the practice of compassion was said to reside. Nor was travel always so concerned with what or who was to be found at the end of the journey; the Japanese monk Ippen saw travel itself as essential to his practice of devotion to Amitābha.

Thus, the category of the three jewels is not without its own ambiguities. The reader is asked again to consider: Who is the Buddha? What is the dharma? And who belongs to the saṅgha?

Note

1. The historical survey that follows is drawn largely from Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings, ed., *Buddhism and Asian History* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), a collection of the most recent scholarship on Buddhist history. Readers are referred there for more detailed histories and bibliographies of sources.