common with most other Indian sects, believe that the soul is wrapped in a series of inner sheaths of subtle matter, which form an invisible body surrounding it. The statement of the text is not quite correct, for the siddhas, the perfected beings completely emancipated from karma who dwell in eternal omniscient bliss at the summit of the universe, are souls in a state of complete nakedness, according to orthodoxy Jain teaching.

24. According to earlier Hindu law books, if a man died sonless and without male relatives, the king was entitled to appropriate his property, though he was responsible for the maintenance of the widow and the dowry of the dead man's daughters. In accordance with the precept of the Upanishad Smṛti, Kumārapāla allowed the widow to inherit to such cases.

25. The heroes of the Mahābhārata.

26. It was a commonplace of Indian thought that the king had jurisdiction not only over the human beings of his kingdom, but also over the animals. His virtue or lack of it, moreover, was supposed directly to affect the course of nature.

27. A famous king of the Mahābhārata legend, who was ruined by gambling.

28. This line shows, as is quite clear from other sources, that Hemachandra's idea of ahimsā did not include the renunciation of war.

29. Several great kings of Hindu India established new eras, but that of Kumārapāla did not survive his death.

30. Legendary divine cows, which granted all the wishes of those who milked them.

31. Implying that it is better for a king to pay tribute to a more powerful enemy, rather than to fight to the last and lose his kingdom altogether, and probably his life also.

32. Thus even if the enemy conquers, and seems immensely powerful, he may yet lose much of his power by one means or another, and it will then be possible to resist him.

33. Mythical divine elephants presiding over the cardinal points.

34. Righteousness, profit, and pleasure.

35. Only human beings are capable of achieving complete salvation. The gods cannot gain it unless they are born as men, for in heaven there is not enough sorrow and pain to work off the residual evil karma.

Chapter 5

THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

As we have already seen, the centuries that saw the rise of Buddhism and Jainism in India were marked by continuing social change and profound intellectual ferment. What has been said above about the conditions in which the heterodox systems developed in the sixth and fifth centuries must be borne in mind in the study of Buddhism.

The founder of Buddhism was a chief's son from the hill tribe of the Śākyas. He gave up family life to become an ascetic when he was twenty-nine years old, and, after some years, he emerged as the leader of a band of followers who pursued the “Middle Way” between extreme asceticism and worldly life. The legends that were told about him in later times are mostly unreliable, though they may contain grains of historical truth. Moreover, many of the sermons and other pronouncements attributed to him are not his, but the work of teachers in later times, and there is considerable doubt as to the exact nature of his original message. The historicity of the Buddha 1 is, however, certain, and we may believe as a minimum that he was originally a member of the Śākya tribe, that he gained enlightenment under a sacred pāpal tree at Gaya, in the modern Bihar, that he spent many years in teaching and organizing his band of followers, and that he died at about the age of eighty in Kushinagara, a small town in the hills. The Sinhalese Buddhists have preserved a tradition that he died in 544 B.C., but most modern authorities believe that this date is some sixty years too early.

The band of yellow-robed bhikkhus 2 that the Buddha left behind to continue his work probably remained for some two hundred years one small group among the many heterodox sects of India, perhaps fewer in numbers and less influential than the rival sects of Jains and Ajivikas. Though by Western standards its rule was rigid, involving continuous movement from place to place for eight months of the year and the consumption of only one daily meal, which was to be obtained by begging, it was light in comparison with the discipline of many other orders, the members of which
were often compelled to take vows of total nudity, were not permitted to wash, and had to undergo painful penances. It is evident that between the death of the Buddha and the advent of Ashoka, the first great Buddhist emperor, over two hundred years later, there was considerable development of doctrine. Some sort of canon of sacred texts appeared, though it was probably not at this time written down, and the Buddhists acquired numerous lay followers. For the latter, and for the less spiritually advanced monks, the sect adapted popular cults to Buddhist purposes— notably the cult of stūpas, or funeral mounds, and that of the sacred pipal tree. We have seen that these had probably been worshiped in the Ganges valley from early times, and both Hinduism and Buddhism had come to terms with such cults. Buddhist monks began to overlook the rule that they should travel from place to place except in the rainy season and took to settling permanently in monasteries, which were erected on land given by kings and other wealthy patrons, and were equipped with pipal trees and stūpas, theoretically commemorating the Buddha’s enlightenment and death respectively.

Quite early in the history of Buddhism sectarian differences appeared. The tradition tells of two great councils of the Buddhist order, the first soon after the Buddha’s death, the second a hundred years later. At the latter a schism occurred, and the sect of Mahāsāṅghikas (“members of the Great Order”) is said to have broken away, ostensibly on account of differences on points of monastic discipline, but probably on doctrinal grounds also. The remaining main body, which claimed to maintain the true tradition transmitted from the days of the founder, took to calling itself its system Theravāda (“The Teaching of the Elders”).

By little over a century after this schism the whole of India except the southern tip had been unified politically by Magadha, after a long and steady process of expansion, which culminated in the rise of the first great Indian imperial dynasty, that of the Mauryas. The third and greatest of the Mauryas, Ashoka, became a Buddhist. According to his own testimony he was so moved by remorse at the carnage caused by an aggressive war that he had waged that he experienced a complete change of heart and embraced Buddhism. His inscriptions, the earliest intelligible written records to have survived in India, testify to his earnestness and benevolence.

Buddhism seems to have received a great impetus from Ashoka’s patronage. He erected many stūpas, endowed new monasteries, and enlarged existing Buddhist establishments. In his reign the message of Buddhism was first carried over the whole of India by a number of missionaries, sent out,

according to tradition, after a third council, which met at Pātaliputra (the modern Patna) in order to purify the doctrine of heresy. It was in Ashoka’s reign that Sri Lanka (Ceylon) first became a Buddhist country, after the preaching of the apostle Mahinda, said to have been Ashoka’s son, who had become a monk. From that day onward Sri Lanka has remained a stronghold of the Buddhism of the Theravāda school; Mahāyāna and other Buddhist sects, though they have at times been influential, have never seriously shaken the hold of the form of Buddhism that Sri Lanka looks on as particularly its own.

It is probable that, by the end of the third century B.C., the doctrines of Theravāda Buddhism were in essentials much as they are now. The monks taught a dynamic phenomenalism, maintaining that everything in the universe, including the gods and the souls of living beings, was in a constant state of flux. Resistance to the cosmic flux of phenomena, and craving for permanence where permanence could not be found, led to inevitable sorrow. Salvation was to be obtained by the progressive abandonment of the sense of individuality, until it was lost completely in the indescribable state known as Nirvāṇa (Pali, Nibbāna, “blowing out”). The Buddha himself had reached this state and no longer existed as an individual; nevertheless he was still rather inconsistently revered by his followers, and the less learned Buddhist layfolk tended to look on him as a sort of high god.

The fundamental truths on which Buddhism is founded are not metaphysical or theological, but rather psychological. Basic is the doctrine of the “Four Noble Truths”; (1) that all life is inevitably sorrowful; (2) that sorrow is due to craving; (3) that it can only be stopped by the stopping of craving; and (4) that this can only be done by a course of carefully disciplined and moral conduct, culminating in the life of concentration and meditation led by the Buddhist monk. These four truths, which are the common property of all schools of Buddhist thought, are part of the true Doctrine (Pali, dhamma; Skt. dharma), which reflects the fundamental moral law of the universe.

All things are composite, and, as a corollary, all things are transient, for the composition of all aggregates is liable to change with time. Moreover, being essentially transient, they have no eternal Self or soul, no abiding individuality. And, as we have seen, they are inevitably liable to sorrow. This threefold characterization of the nature of the world and all that it contains— sorrowful, transient, and soulless—is frequently repeated in Buddhist literature, and without fully grasping its truth no being has any chance
of salvation. For until he thoroughly understands the three characteristics of the world a man will inevitably crave for permanence in one form or another, and as this cannot, by the nature of things, be obtained, he will suffer, and probably make others suffer also.

All things in the universe may also be classified into five components, or are composed of a mixture of them: form and matter (rūpa), sensations (vedanā), perceptions (sārūṣa), psychic dispositions or constructions (samkhāra), and consciousness or conscious thought (vīriñcīna). The first consists of the objects of sense and various other elements of less importance. Sensations are the actual feelings arising as a result of the exercise of the six senses (mind being the sixth) upon sense-objects, and perceptions are the cognitions of such sensations. The psychic constructions include all the various psychological emotions, propensities, faculties, and conditions of the individual, and the fifth component, conscious thought, arises from the interplay of the other psychic constituents. The individual is made up of a combination of the five components, which are never the same from one moment to the next, and therefore his whole being is in a state of constant flux.

The process by which life continues and one thing leads to another is explained by the Chain of Causation (paticca-samuppāda, lit. dependent origination). The root cause of the process of birth and death and rebirth is ignorance, the fundamental illusion that individuality and permanence exist, when in fact they do not. Hence there arise in the organism various psychic phenomena, including desire, followed by an attempt to appropriate things to itself—this is typified especially by sexual craving and sexual intercourse, which are the actual causes of the next links in the chain, which concludes with age and death, only to be repeated again and again indefinitely. Rebirth takes place, therefore, according to laws of karma that do not essentially differ from those of Hinduism, though they are explained rather differently.

As we have seen, no permanent entity transmigrates from body to body, and all things, including the individual, are in a state of constant flux. But each act, word, or thought leaves its traces on the collection of the five constituents that make up the phenomenal individual, and their character alters correspondingly. This process goes on throughout life, and, when the material and immaterial parts of the being are separated in death, the immaterial constituents, which make up what in other systems would be called the soul, carry over the consequential effects of the deeds of the past life and obtain another body accordingly. Thus there is no permanent soul, but nevertheless room is found for the doctrine of transmigration. Though Buddhism rejects the existence of the soul, this makes little difference in practice, and the more popular literature of Buddhism, such as the Birth Stories (Jātaka), takes for granted the existence of a quasi-soul at least, which endures indefinitely. One sect of Buddhism, the Sammittiya, which admittedly made no great impression on the religious life of India, actually went so far as to admit the existence of an indescribable substratum of personality (pudgalā), which was carried over from life to life until ultimately it was dissipated in Nirvāṇa, thus fundamentally agreeing with the pneumatology of most other Indian religions.

The process of rebirth can only be stopped by achieving Nirvāṇa, first by adopting right views about the nature of existence, then by a carefully controlled system of moral conduct, and finally by concentration and meditation. The state of Nirvāṇa cannot be described, but it can be hinted at or suggested metaphorically. The word literally means “blowing out,” as of a lamp. In Nirvāṇa all idea of an individual personality or ego ceases to exist and there is nothing to be reborn—as far as the individual is concerned Nirvāṇa is annihilation. But it was certainly not generally thought of by the early Buddhists in such negative terms. It was rather conceived of as a transcendental state, beyond the possibility of full comprehension by the ordinary being enmeshed in the illusion of selfhood, but not fundamentally different from the state of supreme bliss as described in other nontheistic Indian systems.

These are the doctrines of the Theravāda school, and, with few variations, they would be ascribed to by all other schools of Buddhism, although the Mahāyāna and quasi-Mahāyāna sects that arose from the first and second century onward developed other doctrines, in favor of which they often gave comparatively little attention to these fundamental teachings.

Of the early schools, only one sect survives, the Theravāda, now prevalent in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. There were several others in earlier times, some of which had distinctive metaphysical and psychological systems that approached more closely to those of the Mahāyāna school than did that of the Theravāda. The most important of these sects was perhaps that of the Sarvāstivādins, which stress the absence of any real entity passing through time in transmigration, but on the other hand maintained the ultimate reality of the chain of events that made up the phenomenal being or object. A subset of the Sarvāstivādins, the Sau-
Sanskrit and based on an ancient vernacular, probably spoken in the western part of India.

The canon is generally known as Tripiṭaka (the Three Baskets) after the three sections into which it is divided, namely, Conduct (Vinaya), Discourses (Sutta), and Supplementary Doctrines (Abhidhamma). The first Piṭaka contains the rules of conduct of the Buddhist order of monks and nuns, usually in connection with narratives which purport to tell the circumstances in which the Buddha laid down each rule. The second Piṭaka is the most important; it contains discourses, mostly attributed to the Buddha, divided into five sections: the Long Group (Dīgha Nikāya) containing long discourses; the Medium Group (Majjhima Nikāya) with discourses of shorter length; the Connected Group (Samyutta Nikāya), a collection of shorter pronouncements on connected topics; the Progressive Group (Ariyuttana Nikāya), short passages arranged in eleven sections according to the number of topics dealt with in each—thus the three types of sin, in act, word, and thought, occur in section three, and so on; and finally the Minor Group (Khuddaka Nikāya), a number of works of varying type, including the beautiful and very ancient Buddhist poems of the Way of Righteousness (Dhammapada) and a collection of verses which are filled out by a lengthy prose commentary to form the Birth Stories (Jātaka) relating the previous births of the Buddha.

The third Piṭaka, the Supplementary Doctrines, is a collection of seven works on Buddhist psychology and metaphysics, which are little more than a systematization of ideas contained in the Discourses and are definitely later than the main body of the canon.

There is considerable disagreement about the date of the canon. Some earlier students of Buddhism believed that the Conduct and Discourse Baskets existed in much the same form as they do now within a hundred years of the Buddha's death. Later authorities are inclined to believe that the growth of the canon was considerably slower. On the other hand many of the discourses may look back to the Buddha himself, though all have been more or less worked over, and none can be specified with certainty as being his own words. The orthodox tradition itself admits that the Basket of Supplementary Doctrines (Abhidhamma Piṭaka) is later than the other two and was not completed until the time of Ashoka. Sinhalese tradition records that the canon was not committed to writing until the reign of King Vattagānani (86–77 B.C.), and it may not have finished growing until about this time. Thus it is possible that it is the product of as many as four centuries.
There are numerous other works in Pali that are not generally considered canonical. Perhaps the most important of these works are the standard commentaries on the books of the canon, most of which, it is said, were compiled in Sri Lanka by the great doctor Buddhaghosa, of the fifth century, from earlier commentaries. As well as passages of explanatory character, the commentaries contain much ancient Buddhist tradition not to be found elsewhere, and the elucidation of the Jātaka verses, in plain and vigorous prose, contains some of the finest narrative literature of the ancient world. Buddhaghosa is also the reputed author of a valuable compendium of Buddhist doctrine, The Way of Purification (Visuddhimagga). Another very important Pali work of early date is The Questions of King Menander (Milindapaniha), from which several passages are translated here. The inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka (c. 273-232 b.c.) must also be included in any survey, since they are inspired by Buddhism and are at least in part intended to inculcate the morality of Buddhism.

BASIC DOCTRINES OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

The Four Noble Truths

According to Buddhist tradition this was the first sermon preached by the Buddha. After gaining enlightenment under the Tree of Wisdom of Gaiśā he proceeded to Vārānasī, where, in a park outside the city, he found five ascetics who had formerly been his associates and who had left him in disgust when he gave up self-mortification and self-starvation as useless in his quest for supreme wisdom. In the presence of these five the Buddha "set in motion the Wheel" of the Law by preaching this sermon, which outlines the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, and the Middle Way, three of the most important concepts of Buddhism.

[From Sāmyutta Nikāya, 5.421 ff.]

Thus I have heard. Once the Lord was at Vārānasī, at the deer park called Isipatana. There he addressed the five monks:

There are two ends not to be served by a wanderer. What are these two? The pursuit of desires and the pleasure which springs from desire, which is base, common, leing to rebirth, ignoble, and unprofitable; and the pursuit of pain and hardship, which is grievous, ignoble, and unprofitable. The Middle Way of the Ṭathāgata avoids both these ends. It is enlightened, it brings clear vision, it makes for wisdom and leads to peace, insight, en-

lightenment, and Nirvāna. What is the Middle Way? . . . It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. This is the Middle Way. . . .

And this is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow; contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow—in short all the five components of individuality are sorrow.

And this is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow. It arises from craving, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion and seeks pleasure now here, now there—the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for continued life, the craving for power.

And this is the Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that craving, so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.

And this is the Noble Truth of the Way which Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

The Nature of Consciousness and the Chain of Causation

The following Discourse, though it purports to be a single utterance of the Buddha, is evidently a conflation of separate passages, bearing on the character of consciousness. It contains a short statement of the contingent nature of consciousness or conscious thought, an appeal for an objective and clear realization that everything whatever is dependent on causes outside itself, an enumeration of the elements of the Chain of Causation, given first in reverse order, an exhortation to the monks not to bother unduly about the question of the survival of the personality and to realize the facts of the Doctrine for themselves, not taking them from the lips of the Teacher, and finally an impressive passage comparing the life of the ordinary man with that of the Buddha, which we have not space to give here.

[From Majjhima Nikāya, 1.256 ff.]

Once a certain monk named Sāti, the son of a fisherman, conceived the heretical view that, as he understood the Lord's teaching, consciousness continued throughout transmigratation. When they heard this several monks went and reasoned with him . . . but he would not give in, but held firm
to his heresy. . . . So they went to the Lord and put the matter to him, and he sent a monk to fetch Sāti. When Sāti had come the Lord asked him if it was true that he held this heresy. . . . and Sāti replied that he did hold it.

"What, then," asked the Lord, "is the nature of consciousness?"

"Sir, it is that which speaks and feels, and experiences the consequences of good and evil deeds."

"Whom do you tell, you foolish fellow, that I have taught such a doctrine? Haven't I said, with many similes, that consciousness is not independent, but comes about through the Chain of Causation, and can never arise without a cause? You misunderstand and misrepresent me, and so you undermine your own position and produce much demerit. You bring upon yourself lasting harm and sorrow! . . ."

Then the Lord addressed the assembled monks:

"Whatever form of consciousness arises from a condition is known by the name of that condition; thus if it arises from the eye and from forms it is known as visual consciousness . . . and so with the senses of hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind, and their objects. It's just like a fire, which you call by the name of the fuel—a wood fire, a fire of sticks, a grass fire, a cow dung fire, a fire of husks, a rubbish fire, and so on."

"Do you agree, monks, that any given organism is a living being?" "Yes, sir."

"Do you agree that it is produced by food?" "Yes, sir."

"And that when the food is cut off the living being is cut off and dies?" "Yes, sir."

"And that any doubt on any of these points will lead to perplexity?" "Yes, sir."

"And that Right Recognition is knowledge of the true facts as they really are?" "Yes, sir."

"Now if you cling to this pure and unvitiated view, if you cherish it, treasure it, and make it your own, will you be able to develop a state of consciousness with which you can cross the stream of transmigration as on a raft, which you use but do not keep?" "No, sir."

"But only if you maintain this pure view, but don't cling to it or cherish it . . . only if you use it but are ready to give it up?" "Yes, sir."

"There are four bases which support all organisms and beings, whether now existing or yet to be. They are: first, food coarse or fine, which builds up the body; second, contact; third, cogitation; and fourth, consciousness.

All four derive and originate from craving. Craving arises from sensation, sensation from contact, contact from the six senses, the six senses from physical form, physical form from consciousness, consciousness from the psychic constructions, and the psychic constructions from ignorance. . . . To repeat: Ignorance is the cause of the psychic constructions, hence is caused consciousness, hence physical form, hence the six senses, hence contact, hence sensations, hence craving, hence attachment, hence becoming, hence birth, hence old age and death with all the distraction of grief and lamentation, sorrow and despair. This is the arising of the whole body of ill. . . . So we are agreed that by the complete cessation of ignorance the whole body of ill ceases.

"Now would you, knowing and seeing this, go back to your past, wondering whether you existed or didn't exist long ago, or how you existed, or what you were, or from what life you passed to another?" "No, sir."

"Or would you look forward to the future with the same thoughts?" "No, sir."

"Or would you, knowing and seeing this, trouble yourselves at the present time about whether or not you really exist, what and how you are, whence your being came, and whither it will go?" "No, sir."

"Or would you, possessing this knowledge, say, 'We declare it because we revere our teacher'?" "No, sir."

"Or would you say, 'We don't declare it as from ourselves—we were told it by a teacher or ascetic'?" "No, sir."

"Or would you look for another teacher?" "No, sir."

"Or would you support the rituals, shows, or festivals of other ascetics or brähmans?" "No, sir."

"Do you only declare what you have known and seen?" "Yes, sir."

"Well done, brethren! I have taught you the doctrine that is immediately beneficial, eternal, open to all, leading them onward, to be mastered by himself by every intelligent man."

False Doctrines About the Soul

The early Buddhists never ceased to impress upon their hearers the fact that the phenomenal personality was in a constant state of flux, and that there was no eternal soul in the individual in anything like the Hindu sense. On the other hand the perfected being had reached Nirvāna, and nothing could be meaningfully predicated about him. The following passage, attributed to the Buddha himself, criticizes the soul theories of other sects.
[From Digha Nikāya, 2.64 ff.]

It is possible to make four propositions concerning the nature of the soul—
"My soul has form and is minute," "My soul has form and is boundless,
"My soul is without form and is minute," and "My soul is without form and
boundless." Such propositions may refer to this life or the next.

There are as many ways of not making propositions concerning the soul,
and those with insight do not make them.

Again the soul may be thought of as sentient or insentient, or as neither
one nor the other but having sentience as a property. If someone affirms
that his soul is sentient you should ask, "Sentience is of three kinds, happy,
sorrowful, and neutral. Which of these is your soul?" For when you feel one
sensation you don't feel the others. Moreover these sensations are imper-
manent, dependent on conditions, resulting from a cause or causes, perish-
able, transitory, vanishing, ceasing. If one experiences a happy sensation
and thinks "This is my soul," when the happy sensation ceases he will think
"My soul has departed." One who thinks thus looks on his soul as some-
thing impermanent in this life, a blend of happiness and sorrow with a
beginning and end, and so this proposition is not acceptable.

If someone affirms that the soul is not sentient, you should ask, "If you
have no sensation, can you say that you exist?" He cannot, and so this
proposition is not acceptable.

And if someone affirms that the soul has sentience as a property you
should ask, "If all sensations of every kind were to cease absolutely there
would be no feelings whatever. Could you then say 'I exist'?" He could not,
and so this proposition is not acceptable.

When a monk does not look on the soul as coming under any of these
three categories . . . he refrains from such views and clings to nothing
in the world; and not clinging he does not tremble, and not trembling he
attains Nirvāṇa. He knows that rebirth is an end, that his goal is reached,
that he has accomplished what he set out to do, and that after this present
world there is no other for him. It would be absurd to say of such a monk,
with his heart set free, that he believes that the perfected being survives
after death—indeed that he does not survive, or that he does and yet
does not, or that the neither does nor does not. Because the monk is free
his state transcends all expression, predication, communication, and knowl-
edge.

[From Milindapañha (Trenckner ed.), p. 25 ff.]

The King Menander went up to the Venerable Nāgasena, greeted him re-
spectfully, and sat down. Nāgasena replied to the greeting, and the King
was pleased at heart. Then King Menander asked: "How is your reverence
known, and what is your name?"

"I'm known as Nāgasena, your Majesty, that's what my fellow monks call
me. But though my parents may have given me such a name . . . it's only
a generally understood term, a practical designation. There is no question
of a permanent individual implied in the use of the word."

"Listen, you five hundred Greeks and eighty thousand monks!" said King
Menander. "This Nāgasena has just declared that there's no permanent in-
dividuality implied in his name!" Then, turning to Nāgasena, "If, Reverend
Nāgasena, there is no permanent individuality, who gives you monks your
robes and food, lodging and medicines? And who makes use of them? Who
lives a life of righteousness, meditates, and reaches Nirvāṇa? Who destroys
living beings, steals, fornicates, tells lies, or drinks spirits? . . . If what you
say is true there's neither merit nor demerit, and no fruit or result of good
or evil deeds. If someone were to kill you there would be no question of
murder. And there would be no masters or teachers in the Buddhist Order
and no ordinances. If your fellow monks call you Nāgasena, what then is
Nāgasena? Would you say that your hair is Nāgasena?" "No, your Majesty."

"Or your nails, teeth, skin, or other parts of your body, or the outward
form, or sensation, or perception, or the psychic constructions, or con-
sciousness? 16 Are any of these Nāgasena?" "No, your Majesty."
"Then are all these taken together Nāgasena?" "No, your Majesty."
"Or anything other than they?" "No, your Majesty."
"Then for all my asking I find no Nāgasena. Nāgasena is a mere sound!
Surely what your Reverence has said is false!"
Then the Venerable Nāgasena addressed the King.
"Your Majesty, how did you come here—on foot, or in a vehicle?"
"In a chariot."
"Then tell me what is the chariot? Is the pole the chariot?" "No, your Reverence."
"Or the axle, wheels, frame, reins, yoke, spokes, or goad?" "None of these things is the chariot."
"Then all these separate parts taken together are the chariot?" "No, your Reverence."
"Then is the chariot something other than the separate parts?" "No, your Reverence."
"Then for all my asking, your Majesty, I can find no chariot. The chariot is a mere sound. What then is the chariot? Surely what your Majesty has said is false! There is no chariot! . . ."
When he had spoken the five hundred Greeks cried "Well done!" and said to the King, "Now, your Majesty, get out of that dilemma if you can!"
"What I said was not false," replied the King. "It's on account of all these various components, the pole, axle, wheels, and so on, that the vehicle is called a chariot. It's just a generally understood term, a practical designation."
"Well said, your Majesty! You know what the word 'chariot' means! And it's just the same with me. It's on account of the various components of my being that I'm known by the generally understood term, the practical designation Nāgasena."

Change and Identity

After convincing Menander of the composite nature of the personality by the simile of the chariot, Nāgasena shows him by another simile how it is continually changing with the passage of time but possesses a specious unity through the continuity of the body.

[From Milinda-panha (Trenckner ed.), p. 40]
"Reverend Nāgasena," said the King, "when a man is born does he remain the same [being] or become another?"
"He neither remains the same nor becomes another."
"Give me an example!"
"What do you think, your Majesty? You were once a baby lying on your back, tender and small and weak. Was that baby you, who are now grown up?"
"No, your Reverence, the baby was one being and I am another."
"If that's the case, your Majesty, you had no mother or father, and no teachers in learning, manners, or wisdom. . . . Is the boy who goes to school one [being] and the young man who has finished his education another? Does one person commit a crime and another suffer mutilation for it?"
"Of course not, your Reverence! But what do you say on the question?"
"I am the being I was when I was a baby," said the Elder . . . "for through the continuity of the body all stages of life are included in a pragmatic unity."
"Give me an illustration."
"Suppose a man were to light a lamp, would it burn all through the night?" "Yes, it might."
"Now is the flame which burns in the middle watch the same as that which burned in the first?" "No, your Reverence."
"Or is that which burns in the last watch the same as that which burned in the middle?" "No, your Reverence."
"So is there one lamp in the first watch, another in the middle, and yet another in the last?"
"No. The same lamp gives light all through the night."
"Similarly, your Majesty, the continuity of phenomena is kept up. One person comes into existence, another passes away, and the sequence runs continuously without self-conscious existence, neither the same nor yet another."
"Well said, Reverend Nāgasena!"
The Process of Rebirth

In this little passage Nāgasena presses the analogy of the lamp further, and shows Menander how rebirth is possible without any soul, substratum of personality, or other hypothetical entity that passes from the one body to the other.

[From Milindapañha (Trenckner ed.), p. 71]

"Reverend Nāgasena," said the King, "is it true that nothing transmigrates, and yet there is rebirth?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"How can this be? . . . Give me an illustration."

"Suppose, your Majesty, a man lights one lamp from another—does the one lamp transmigrate to the other?"

"No, your Reverence."

"So there is rebirth without anything transmigrating!"

Karma

Buddhism accepted the prevailing doctrine of karma, though it had an original explanation of the process whereby karma operated. In this passage from the Questions of King Menander karma is adduced as the reason for the manifest inequalities of human fate and fortune. Had Nāgasena been disputing with an Indian king instead of with a Greek one the question would not have been asked, for the answer would have been taken for granted.

[From Milindapañha (Trenckner ed.), p. 65]

"Venerable Nāgasena," asked the King, "why are men not all alike, but some short-lived and some long, some sickly and some healthy, some ugly and some handsome, some weak and some strong, some poor and some rich, some base and some noble, some stupid and some clever?"

"Why, your Majesty," replied the Elder, "are not all plants alike, but some astringent, some salty, some pungent, some sour, and some sweet?"

"I suppose, your Reverence, because they come from different seeds."

"And so it is with men! They are not alike because of different karmas. As the Lord said . . . 'Beings each have their own karma. They are . . . born through karma, they become members of tribes and families through karma, each is ruled by karma, it is karma that divides them into high and low.'"

"Very good, your Reverence!"

Right Mindfulness

The following passage is of interest for showing the means that the monk should take in order thoroughly to realize the transience and otherness of all things, and thus draw near to Nirvāna. The bhūvanās, or states of mind, are practiced by Buddhist monks to this day and are part of "Right Mindfulness," the seventh stage of the Noble Eightfold Path. The translation is considerably abridged.

[From Majjhima Nikāya, i. 420 ff.]

The Lord was staying at Sāvatthī at the monastery of Anāthapindaka in the Grove of Jeta. One morning he dressed, took his robe and bowl, and went into Sāvatthī for alms, with the Reverend Rāhula17 following close behind him. As they walked the Lord, . . . without looking round, spoke to him thus:

"All material forms, past, present, or future, within or without, gross or subtle, base or fine, far or near, all should be viewed with full understanding—with the thought 'This is not mine, this is not I, this is not my soul.' "18

"Only material forms, Lord?"

"No, not only material forms, Rāhula, but also sensation, perception, the psychic constructions, and consciousness."19

"Who would go to the village to collect alms today, when he has been exhorted by the Lord himself?" said Rāhula. And he turned back and sat cross-legged, with body erect, collected in thought.

Then the Venerable Sāriputta,20 seeing him thus, said to him: "Develop concentration on inhalation and exhalation, for when this is developed and increased it is very productive and helpful."

Toward evening Rāhula rose and went to the Lord, and asked him how he could develop concentration on inhalation and exhalation. And the Lord said:

"Rāhula, whatever is hard and solid in an individual, such as hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, and so on, is called the personal element of earth. The personal element of water is composed of bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, and so on. The personal element of fire is that which warms and consumes
or burns up, and produces metabolism of food and drink in digestion. The personal element of air is the wind in the body that moves upward or downward, the winds in the abdomen and stomach, winds that move from member to member, and the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. And finally the personal element of space comprises the orifices of ears and nose, the door of the mouth, and the channels whereby food and drink enter, remain in, and pass out of the body. These five personal elements, together with the five external elements, make up the total of the five universal elements. They should all be regarded objectively, with right understanding, thinking 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' With this understanding attitude a man turns from the five elements and his mind takes no delight in them.

"Develop a state of mind like the earth, Rāhula. For on the earth men throw clean and unclean things, dung and urine, spittle, pus and blood, and the earth is not troubled or repelled or disgusted. And as you grow like the earth no contacts with pleasant or unpleasant will lay hold of your mind or stick to it.

"Similarly you should develop a state of mind like water, for men throw all manner of clean and unclean things into water and it is not troubled or repelled or disgusted. And similarly with fire, which burns all things, clean and unclean, and with air, which blows upon them all, and with space, which is nowhere established.

"Develop the state of mind of friendliness, Rāhula, for, as you do so, ill-will will grow less; and of compassion, for thus vexation will grow less; and of joy, for thus aversion will grow less; and of equanimity, for thus repugnance will grow less.

"Develop the state of mind of consciousness of corruption of the body, for thus passion will grow less; and of the consciousness of the fleeting nature of all things, for thus the pride of selfhood will grow less.

"Develop the state of mind of ordering the breath... in which the monk goes to the forest, or to the root of a tree or to an empty house, and sits cross-legged with body erect, collected in thought. Fully mindful he inhales and exhales. When he inhales or exhales a long breath he knows precisely that he is doing so, and similarly when inhaling or exhaling a short breath. While inhaling or exhaling he trains himself to be conscious of the whole of his body, to be fully conscious of the components of his mind, to realize the impermanence of all things, or to dwell on passionlessness or renunciation. Thus the state of ordered breath-

ing, when developed and increased, is very productive and helpful. And when the mind is thus developed a man breathes his last breath in full consciousness, and not unconsciously."

The Last Instructions of the Buddha

The following passage occurs in the Discourse of the Great Passing-Away (Mahāpajapati Parinibbāna Sutta), which describes the last days and death of the Buddha. The Master, an old and ailing man, is on the way to the hills where he was born, and where soon he is to die. These are among his last recorded instructions to his disciples. Unfortunately we cannot be sure of their authenticity; the fine phrases concerning "the closed fist of the teacher" are particularly suspect, for they are just the sort of interpolation that an earnest Theravāda monk would be likely to make in order to discredit the doctrines of schisms of a Mahāyānist type, who claimed to possess the esoteric teachings of the Master. But, whether authentically the Buddha's words or not, the following passage perhaps gives the quintessence of Theravāda Buddhism, with its call for self-reliant striving against all that seems base and evil.

[From Dīgha Nikāya, 2.99 ff., 155-56]

Soon after this the Lord began to recover, and when he was quite free from sickness he came out of his lodging and sat in its shadow on a seat spread out for him. The Venerable Ānanda went up to him, paid his respects, sat down to one side, and spoke to the Lord thus:

"I have seen the Lord in health, and I have seen the Lord in sickness; and when I saw that the Lord was sick my body became as weak as a creeper, my sight dimmed, and all my faculties weakened. But yet I was a little comforted by the thought that the Lord would not pass away until he had left his instructions concerning the Order."

"What, Ānanda! Does the Order expect that of me? I have taught the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrines; for... with the Tathāgata there is no such thing as the closed fist of the teacher who keeps some things back. If anyone think 'It is I who will lead the Order,' or 'The Order depends on me,' he is the one who should lay down instructions concerning the Order. But the Tathāgata has no such thought, so why should he leave instructions? I am old now, Ānanda, and full of years; my journey nears its end, and I have reached my sum of days, for I am nearly eighty years old. Just as a worn-out cart can only be kept going if it is tied up with thongs, so the body of the Tathāgata
can only be kept going by bandaging it. Only when the Tathāgata no longer attends to any outward object, when all separate sensation stops and he is deep in inner concentration, is his body at ease.

"So, Ānanda, you must be your own lamps, be your own refuges. Take refuge in nothing outside yourselves. Hold firm to the truth as a lamp and a refuge, and do not look for refuge to anything besides yourselves. A monk becomes his own lamp and refuge by continually looking on his body, feelings, perceptions, moods, and ideas in such a manner that he conquers the cravings and depressions of ordinary men and is always strenuous, self-possessed, and collected in mind. Whoever among my monks does this, either now or when I am dead, if he is anxious to learn, will reach the summit." [p. 99 ff.]

THE LAST WORDS OF THE BUDDHA

"All composite things must pass away. Strive onward vigilantly." [pp. 155-56]

The Buddha in Nirvāṇa

This brief passage from the Questions of King Menander illustrates the Theravāda conception of Nirvāṇa. It is not total annihilation, but at the same time it involves the complete disintegration of the phenomenal personality—a paradox that cannot be explained in words.

[From Māndapaṇha (Trenckner, ed.), p. 73]

"Reverend Nāgasena," said the King, "does the Buddha still exist?"

"Yes, your Majesty, he does."

"Then is it possible to point out the Buddha as being here or there?"

"The Lord has passed completely away in Nirvāṇa, so that nothing is left which could lead to the formation of another being. And so he cannot be pointed out as being here or there."

"Give me an illustration."

"What would your Majesty say—if a great fire were blazing, would it be possible to point to a flame which had gone out and say that it was here or there?"

"No, your Reverence, the flame is extinguished, it can't be detected."

"In just the same way, your Majesty, the Lord has passed away in Nirvāṇa. . . . He can only be pointed out in the body of his doctrine, for it was he who taught it."

"Very good, Reverend Nāgasena!"

The City of Righteousness

This fine passage, from the latter part of the Questions of King Menander, is probably the work of a hand different from that which composed the dialogues we have already quoted. In it the Buddha almost takes on the character of a savior god, who, like Amṛtaśāna in the developed Mahāyāna mythology, built a heaven for his followers. Nirvāṇa is not described in negative terms, but in very positive ones, and the metaphor of the busy, populous, and prosperous city hardly suggests the rarified Nirvāṇa of the previous passage, but a heaven in which personality is by no means lost. It suggests in fact to the Western reader the New Jerusalem of the Book of Revelation. Clearly this passage is the work of a writer whose attitude approached closely to that of Mahāyāna, but it must be remembered that Theravāda Buddhists look on the text from which it is taken as only semi-canonical.

[From Māndapaṇha (Trenckner ed.), p. 330 ff.]

The builder of a city . . . first chooses a pleasant and suitable site; he makes it smooth, and then sets to work to build his city fair and well proportioned, divided into quarters, with ramparts round about it. . . . And when the city is built, and stands complete and perfect, he goes away to another land. And in time the city becomes rich and prosperous, peaceful and happy, free from plague and calamity, and filled with people of all classes and professions and of all lands . . . even with Scythians, Greeks, and Chinese. . . . All these folk coming to live in the new city and finding it so well planned, faultless, perfect, and beautiful exclaim: "Skilled indeed must be the builder who built this city!"

So the Lord . . . in his infinite goodness . . . when he had achieved the highest powers of Buddhahood and had conquered Mara and his hosts, tearing the net of false doctrine, casting aside ignorance, and producing wisdom, . . . built the City of Righteousness.

The Lord's City of Righteousness has virtue for its ramparts, fear of sin for its moat, knowledge for its gates, zeal for its turrets, faith for its pillars, concentration for its watchman, wisdom for its palaces. The Basket of Discourses is its marketplace, the Supplementary Doctrines its roads, the Conduct its court of justice, and earnest self-control is its main street. . . .
47. Note that Ashoka has by no means completely abandoned the use of force. This passage probably refers to the tribesmen of the hills and jungles, who still occasionally cause trouble for the government in Assam and in other parts of India, and who in ancient days were a much greater problem.

48. Antiochus II Theos of Syria, Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt, Antigonus Gonatas of Macedonia, Magas of Cyrene, and Alexander of Epirus. Classical sources tell us nothing about Ashoka's "victories of righteousness" over these kings. Probably he sent envoys to them, urging them to accept his new policy and his moral leadership. Evidently he never gave up his imperial ambitions, but attempted to further them in a benevolent spirit and without recourse to arms.

49. Some authorities have put different interpretations on the relevant phrases, but in our opinion there can be little doubt about their meaning.

50. There is some reason to believe that the adverb implies the royal capital of Pataliputra.

51. Samāja, generally interpreted as a fair or festival, but perhaps a society or club. A tone of rather pompous puritanism is sometimes evident in the edicts and suggests a less congenial side of Ashoka's character.

52. Tamil kingdoms, in the southern tip of the peninsula.

53. The chief town of Kalinga, the region conquered by Ashoka in his last war of aggression.

54. This phrase probably merely implies that Ashoka made a pilgrimage to the Bodhi Tree at Gaya.

55. With this compare the Admonition to Singāla (pp. 119 ff.).

56. Skt. krośa: calling distance, or about two miles; thus here, intervals of about sixteen miles, or a day's journey.

57. For all his humanitarianism Ashoka did not abolish the death penalty, as did some later Indian kings.

Chapter 6

MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM:
"THE GREATER VEHICLE"

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

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

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

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

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

The next step in the development of the new form of Buddhism was the changing of the goal at which the believer aimed. According to Buddhist teaching there are three types of perfected beings—buddhas, who perceived the truth for themselves and taught it to others, pratyeka-buddhas, “private buddhas,” who perceived it, but kept it to themselves and did not teach it, and arhants, “worthies,” who learned it from others, but fully realized it for themselves. According to earlier schools the earnest believer should aspire to become an arhat, a perfect being for whom there was no rebirth, who already enjoyed Nirvāṇa, and who would finally enter that state after death, all vestiges of his personality dissolved. The road to Nirvāṇa was a hard one and could only be covered in many lives of virtue and self-sacrifice; but nevertheless the goal began to be looked on as selfish. Surely a bodhisattva, after achieving such exalted compassion and altruism, and after reaching such a degree of perfection that he could render inestimable help to other striving beings, would not pass as quickly as possible to Nirvāṇa, where he could be of no further use, but would deliberately choose to remain in the world, using his spiritual power to help others, until all had found salvation.

Passages of Mahāyāna scriptures describing the self-sacrifice of a bodhisattva for the welfare of all things living are among the most passionately altruistic in the world’s religious literature.

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

The next stage in the evolution of the theology of the new Buddhism was the doctrine of the “Three Bodies” (trikāya). If the true ideal was that
of the bodhisattva, why did not Siddhārtha Gautama remain one, instead of becoming a buddha and selfishly passing to Nirvāṇa? This paradox was answered by a theory of doctetic type, which again probably had its origin in popular ideas prevalent among lay Buddhists at a very early period. Gautama was not in fact an ordinary man, but the manifestation of a great spiritual being. The Buddha had three bodies—the Body of Essence (dharmakāya), the Body of Bliss (sambhogakāya) and the Body of Magic Transformation (nirmanakāya). It was the latter only that lived on earth as Siddhārtha Gautama, an emanation of the Body of Bliss, which dwelled forever in the heavens as a sort of supreme god. But the Body of Bliss was in turn the emanation of the Body of Essence, the ultimate Buddha, who pervaded and underlay the whole universe. Subtle philosophies and metaphysical systems were developed parallel with these theological ideas, and the Body of Essence was identified with Nirvāṇa. It was in fact the World Soul, the Brahman of the Upanishads, in a new form. In the fully developed Mahāyānīst cosmology there were many Bodies of Bliss, all of them emanations of the single Body of Essence, but the heavenly Buddha chiefly concerned with our world was Āmitābha (“Immeasurable Radiance”), who dwelt in Sukhāvatī, the Happy Land, the heaven of the West. With him was associated the earthly Gautama Buddha, and a very potent and compassionate bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara (“the Lord Who Looks Down”).

The older Buddhism and the newer flourished side by side in India during the early centuries of the Christian era, and we read of Buddhist monasteries in which some of the monks were Mahāyānīst and some Hinayānīst. But in general the Buddhists of northern India were either Mahāyānīsts or members of Hinayāna sects much affected by Mahāyānīst ideas. The more austere forms of Hinayāna seem to have been strongest in parts of western and southern India, and in Ceylon. It was from northern India, under the rule of the great Kushāna empire (first to third centuries) that Buddhism spread throughout central Asia to China; because it emanated from the northwest, it was chiefly of the Mahāyāna or near-Mahāyāna type.

We have already outlined the typical Mahāyāna teaching about the heavenly buddhas and bodhisattvas, which is a matter of theology rather than of metaphysics. But Mahāyāna also produced physical theories that were argued with great ability, and that influenced the thought of Hinduism, as well as that of the Far East. The two chief schools of Mahāyāna philosophy were the Mādhyamika (Doctrine of the Middle Position) and the Viśṇavādā (Doctrine of Consciousness) or Yogicāra (The Way of Yoga). The for-mer school, the founder of which was Nāgārjuna (first to second centuries), taught that the phenomenal world had only a qualified reality, thus opposing the doctrine of the Sarvāstivādins. A monk with defective eyesight may imagine that he sees flies in his begging bowl, and they have full reality for the percipient. Though the flies are not real the illusion of flies is. The Mādhyamika philosophers tried to prove that all our experience of the phenomenal world is like that of the short-sighted monk, that all beings labor under the constant illusion of perceiving things where in fact there is only emptiness. This Emptiness or Void (śūnyatā) is all that truly exists, and hence the Mādhyamikas were sometimes also called Śānyavādins (“exponents of the doctrine of emptiness”). But the phenomenal world is true pragmatically and therefore has qualified reality for practical purposes. Yet the whole chain of existence is only real in this qualified sense, for it is composed of a series of transitory events, and these, being impermanent, cannot have reality in themselves. Emptiness, on the other hand, never changes. It is absolute truth and absolute being—in fact it is the same as Nirvāṇa and the Body of Essence of the Buddha.

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

The effect of Mādhyamika nihilism was not what might be expected. Skeptical philosophies in the West, such as that of existentialism, are generally strongly flavored with pessimism. The Mādhyamikas, however, were not pessimists. If the phenomenal world was ultimately unreal, Emptiness was real, for, although every logical proof of its existence was vitiated by the flaw of unreality, it could be experienced in meditation with a directness and certainty that the phenomenal world did not possess. The ultimate Emptiness was here and now, everywhere and all-embracing, and there was in fact no difference between the great Void and the phenomenal world. Thus all beings were already participants of the Emptiness that was Nir-
vāna, they were already buddha if only they would realize it. This aspect of Mādhyamika philosophy was especially congenial to Chinese Buddhists, nurtured in the doctrine of the Tao, and it had much influence in the development of the special forms of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, which often show a frank acceptance of the beauty of the world, and especially of the beauty of nature, as a vision of Nirvāna here and now.

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

metaphysics of Mahāyāna Buddhism has much in common with the doctrines of some of the Upanishads and of the ninth-century philosopher Shankara. The latter probably learned much from Buddhism, and indeed was called by his opponents a crypto-Buddhist.

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

The canons of the Mahāyāna sects contain much material that also occurs in Pali, often expanded or adapted, but the interest of the Mahāyānists was largely directed to other scriptures, of which no counterparts existed in the Pali canon, and which, it was claimed, were also the pronouncements of the Buddha. These are the Vaiśravaṇa Sūtras, or “Expanded Discourses,” of greater length than those in the Pali Basket of Discourses (Sutta Pitaka), and written in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit; in them the Buddha is supposed to have taught the doctrine of the heavenly buddhas and bodhisattvas. Of these Mahāyāna sūtras pride of place must be taken by The Lotus of the Good Law (Sūtradharaśāstra), which propounds all the major doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism in a fairly simple and good literary style with parables and poetic illustrations. In translation it is the most popular Buddhist scripture in China and Japan, the Japanese Buddhists of the Nichiren sect making it their sole canonical text. An important group of Mahāyāna texts is the Discourses on the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras), of which several exist, generally known by the number of verses they contain, ranging from 700 to 100,000. The primary purpose of these is to explain and glorify the ten perfections (pāramitā) of the bodhisattva, and especially the perfection of wisdom (prajñā), but they contain much of importance on other aspects of Buddhism. Other Mahāyāna sūtras are too numerous to mention.
The Bodhisattva

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

[From Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, 22.403–3]

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

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

The Mahāyāna Ideal Is Higher Than That of the Theravāda

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

[From Pañcaśīsattasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, pp. 40–41]

“What do you think, Śāriputra? Do any of the disciples and Private Buddhas6 ever think, ‘After we have gained full enlightenment we will bring innumerable beings . . . to complete Nirvāṇa?’”

“Certainly not, Lord!”

“But,” said the Lord, “the bodhisattva (has this resolve). . . . A firefly . . . doesn’t imagine that its glow will light up all India or shine all over it, and so the disciples and Private Buddhas don’t think that they should lead all beings to Nirvāṇa . . . after they have gained full enlightenment. But the disc of the sun, when it has risen, lights up all India and shines all over it. Similarly the bodhisattva, . . . when he has gained full enlightenment, brings countless beings to Nirvāṇa.

The Suffering Savior

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

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

[From Śikṣāsamuccayā, pp. 278–83]

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

“Whatever all beings should obtain, I will help them to obtain . . .
The virtue of generosity is not my helper—I am the helper of generosity. Nor do the virtues of morality, patience, courage, meditation, and wisdom help me—it is I who help them. The perfections of the bodhisattva do not support me—it is I who support them. I alone, standing in this round and adamant world, must subdue Mara, with all his hosts and chariots and develop supreme enlightenment with the wisdom of instantaneous insight! ... 

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

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

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

"For I have taken upon myself, by my own will, the whole of the pain of all things living. Thus I dare try every abode of pain, in ... every part of the universe, for I must not defraud the world of the root of good. I resolve to dwell in each state of misfortune through countless ages ... for the salvation of all beings ... for it is better that I alone suffer than that all beings sink to the worlds of misfortune. There I shall give myself into bondage, to redeem all the world from the forest of purgatory, from rebirth as beasts, from the realm of death. I shall bear all grief and pain in my own body, for the good of all things living. I venture to stand secure for all beings, speaking the truth, trustworthy, not breaking my word. I shall not forsake them. ... I must so bring to fruition the root of goodness that all beings find the utmost joy, unheard of joy, the joy of omniscience. I must be their charioteer, I must be their leader, I must be their torchbearer, I must be their guide to safety. ... I must not wait for the help of another, nor must I lose my resolution and leave my tasks to another. I must not turn back in my efforts to save all beings nor cease to use my merit for the destruction of all pain. And I must not be satisfied with small success."
Unlike the Prodigal's father in the Christian story, who kills the fatted calf for his long-lost son, the father in the Buddhist story makes his son undergo a very long period of humble probation before raising him to the position that he merits by his birth. The heavenly Buddha cannot raise beings immediately from the filth and poverty of the earthly gutter to the full glory of his own heavenly palace, for they are so earthbound that, if brought to it at once, they would suffer agonies of fear, embarrassment, and confusion, and might well insist on returning to the gutter again. So they must undergo many years of preparation for their high estate, toil daily among the material dross of this world, earnestly and loyally striving to make the world a tidier place. Like the father in the story, the heavenly Buddha will cover his glory with earthly dust and appear to his children as a historical budhha to encourage and instruct them. Thus the Buddha shows the perfection of "skill in means," that is to say, in knowing the best means to take to lead each individual to the light according to their circumstances in which he is placed.

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

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

[From Saddharma-pundarika, 4.101 ff.]

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

Then the poor man, in search of food and clothing, came to the rich man's home. And the rich man was sitting in great pomp at the gate of his house, surrounded by a large throng of attendants, ... on a splendid throne, with a footstool inlaid with gold and silver, under a wide awning decked with pearls and flowers and adorned with hanging garlands of jewels; and he transacted business to the value of millions of gold pieces, all the while fanned by a fly-whisk. ... When he saw him the poor man was terrified ... and the hair of his body stood on end, for he thought that he had happened on a king or on some high officer of state, and had no business there. "I must go," he thought, "to the poor quarter of the town, where I'll get food and clothing without trouble. If I stop here they'll seize me and set me to do forced labor, or some other disaster will befall me!" So he quickly ran away.

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

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

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

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

Thus the householder proved that his son was frugal, mature, and mentally developed, and that though he knew that he was now wealthy he still remembered his past poverty, and was still... humble and meek. ... So he sent for the poor man again, presented him before a gathering of his relatives, and, in the presence of the king, his officers, and the people of town and country, he said: “Listen, gentlemen! This is my son, whom I beget... To him I leave all my family revenues, and my private wealth he shall have as his own.”

Against Self-Mortification

Buddhists of both “vehicles” strongly deprecated the exaggerated ascetic practices of other sects, as they did taboos connected with food and ritual purity. Suffering, for the Buddhist, has no intrinsic value or purificatory effect, unless it is undertaken voluntarily for the sake of others, in the manner of the bodhisattva, who elects to dwell in all the purgatories in order to relieve the beings in torment there. The man who mortifies the flesh in order to gain rebirth in heaven is completely selfish and misguided, and his last state will be worse than his first.

The following verses are from the Deeds of the Buddha, a metrical life of the Buddha by Ashvaghosha (first to second centuries), which is among the masterpieces of Sanskrit poetry and one of the earliest known poems in the courtly style. Though it is written in Sanskrit, it contains no specifically Mahāyāna features; but it is included among Mahāyāna literature, because it was preserved by the Mahāyāna sects. The verses are spoken by the future Buddha during his period of spiritual apprenticeship, when he realizes that self-mortification is useless and wrong.

[From Buddhacarita, 7.20 ff.]

Penance in its various forms is essentially sorrowful;
And, at best, the reward of penance is heaven.
Yet all the worlds are liable to change,
So the efforts of the hermitages are of little use.

Those who forsake the kin they love and their pleasures
To perform penance and win a place in heaven
Must leave it in the end
And go to greater bondage.

The man who pains his body and calls it penance
In the hope of continuing to satisfy desire
Does not perceive the evils of rebirth,
And through much sorrow goes to further sorrow.

All living beings are afraid of death
And yet they all strive to be born again;
As they act thus death is inevitable,
And they are plunged in that which they most fear.

Some suffer hardship for mere worldly gain;
Others will take to penance in hope of heaven.
All beings fail in their hopeful search for bliss,
And fall, poor wretches, into dire calamity.

Not that the effort is to be blamed which leaves
The base and seeks the higher aim.
But wise men should labor with an equal zeal
To reach the goal where further toil is needless.

If it is Right to mortify the flesh
The body’s ease is contrary to Right;
Thus if, by doing Right, joy is obtained hereafter
Righteousness must flower in Unrighteousness.

The body is commanded by the mind,
Through mind it acts, through mind it ceases to act.
All that is needed is to subdue the mind,
For the body is a log of wood without it.

If merit comes from purity of food
Then even the deer gain merit.
And those who do not win the reward of Righteousness
But by an unlucky fate have lost their wealth . . .

And those who try to purify their deeds
By ablutions at a place which they hold sacred—
These merely give their hearts some satisfaction,
For water will not purify men’s sin.

Joy in All Things

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

[From Śīkṣāsamuccaya, p. 181 ff.]
Indeed nothing is difficult after practice. Simple folk, such as porters, fishermen, and plowmen, for instance, are not overcome by depression, for

their minds are marked by the scars of the many pains with which they earn their humble livings, and which they have learned to bear. How much the more should one be cheerful in a task of which the purpose is to reach the incomparable state where all the joys of all beings, all the joys of the bodhisattvas are to be found . . . Consciousness of sorrow and joy comes by habit; so, if whenever sorrow arises we make a habit of associating with it a feeling of joy, consciousness of joy will indeed arise. The fruit of this is a contemplative spirit full of joy in all things . . .

So the bodhisattva . . . is happy even when subjected to the tortures of hell . . . When he is being beaten with canes or whips, when he is thrown into prison, he still feels happy. . . . For . . . this was the resolve of the Great Being, the Bodhisattva: “May those who feed me win the joy of tranquility and peace, with those who protect me, honor me, respect me, and revere me. And those who revile me, afflict me, beat me, cut me in pieces with their swords, or take my life—may they all obtain the joy of complete enlightenment, may they be awakened to perfect and sublime enlightenment.” With such thoughts and actions and resolves he cultivates . . . and develops the consciousness of joy in his relations with all beings, and so he acquires a contemplative spirit filled with joy in all things . . . and becomes imperturbable—not to be shaken by all the deeds of Mara.

The Good Deeds of the Bodhisattva

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

[From Tathāgatagūra Sūtra, Śīkṣāsamuccaya, p. 274]

There are ten ways by which a bodhisattva gains . . . strength: . . . He will give up his body and his life . . . but he will not give up the Law of Righteousness.

He bows humbly to all beings, and does not increase in pride.

He has compassion on the weak and does not dislike them.

He gives the best food to those who are hungry.

He protects those who are afraid.

He strives for the healing of those who are sick.

He delights the poor with his riches.
He repairs the shrines of the Buddha with plaster.
He speaks to all beings pleasingly.
He shares his riches with those afflicted by poverty.
He bears the burdens of those who are tired and weary.

The Evils of Meat-Eating

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

[From Lankāvatāra Sūtra, p. 245 ff.]

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

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

Moreover the meat-eater sleeps in sorrow and wakes in sorrow. All his dreams are nightmares, and they make his hair stand on end. . . . Things other than human sap his vitality. Often he is truck with terror, and trembles without cause. . . . He knows no measure in his eating, and there is no flavor, digestibility, or nourishment in his food. His bowels are filled

with worms and other creatures, which are the cause of leprosy; and he ceases to think of resisting diseases.

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

The Gift of Food

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

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

[From Māmīṇgalai, 11.55-122]

The bowl rose in the water and . . . moved toward her hand. She was glad beyond measure, and sang a hymn in praise of the Buddha:
"Hail the feet of the hero, the victor over Māra!
Hail the feet of him who destroyed the path of evil!
Hail the feet of the Great One, setting men on the road of Righteousness!
Hail the feet of the All Wise One, who gives others the eye of wisdom!
Hail the feet of him whose ears are deaf to evil!
Hail the feet of him whose tongue never uttered untruth!
Hail the feet of him who went down to purgatory to put an end to suffering."
My tongue cannot praise you duly—All I can do is to bend my body at your feet!"

While she was praying thus Tivatilagai told her of the pains of hunger and of the virtue of those who help living beings to satisfy it. "Hunger," she said to Manimēgali, "ruins good birth, and destroys all nobility; it destroys the love of learned men for their learning, even though they previously thought it is the most valuable thing in life; hunger takes away all sense of shame, and ruins the beauty of the features; and it even forces men to stand with their wives at the doors of others. This is the nature of hunger, the source of evil craving, and those who believe it the tongue cannot praise too highly! Food given to those who can afford it is charity wasted, but food given to relieve the hunger of those who cannot satisfy it otherwise is charity indeed, and those who give it will prosper in this world, for those who give food give life. So go on and give food to all the hungry of those who are hungry."

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

The Three Bodies of the Buddha

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

[From Mahāyānasūtrarāstrā, 9.60–66]

The Body of Essence, the Body of Bliss, the Created Body—these are the bodies of the buddhas.
The first is the basis of the two others.
The Body of Bliss varies in all the planes of the universe, according to region,

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

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

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

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

Emptiness

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

[From Lalitavistara, 13.175–77]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The mystic knows the beginning and end
Of consciousness, its production and passing away—
He knows that it came from nowhere and returns to nowhere,
And is empty [of reality], like a conjuring trick.

Through the concomitance of three factors—
Firesticks, fuel, and the work of the hand—

Fire is kindled. It serves its purpose
And quickly goes out again.

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

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

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

[From Dharmasamāgiti Sūtra, Śikṣāsāntavāda, p. 264]
He who maintains the doctrine of Emptiness is not allured by the things of the world, because they have no basis. He is not excited by gain or dejected by loss. Fame does not dazzle him and infamy does not shame him. Scorn does not repel him, praise does not attract him. Pleasure does not please him, pain does not trouble him. He who is not allured by the things of the world knows Emptiness, and one who maintains the doctrine of Emptiness has neither likes nor dislikes. What he likes he knows to be only Emptiness and sees it as such.

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

[From Pitṛputrasamāgama, Śikṣāsāntavāda, pp. 251–52]
"The senses are as though illusions and their objects as dreams. For instance a sleeping man might dream that he had made love to a beautiful country
girl, and he might remember her when he awoke. What do you think—
... does the beautiful girl he dreamed of really exist?"

"No, Lord."

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

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

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

Suchness

The Viṣṇuvaśī school called their conception of the Absolute “Suchness” (tathātā), in which all phenomenal appearances are lost in the one ultimate being.

The following passage is taken from a text that was translated into Chinese in
the seventh century from a recension more interesting than the extant Sanskrit
form. The whole passage considers the “Suchness” of the five components of being
in turn. Here we give only the passage relating to the first component.¹⁴

[From Mahāprajñāpāramitā, ch. 29. 1]
What is meant by ... knowing in accordance with truth the marks of
form? It means that a bodhisattva ... knows that form is nothing but
holes and cracks and is indeed a mass of bubbles, with a nature that has no
hardness or solidity. ...

What is meant by ... knowing in accordance with truth the origin and
extinction of form? It means that a bodhisattva ... knows that when form
originates it comes from nowhere and when it is extinguished it goes
nowhere, but that though it neither comes nor goes yet its origination and
extinction do jointly exist ... What is meant by knowing ... in accordance with truth about the
Suchness of form? It means that a bodhisattva ... knows ... that Such-
ness of form is not subject to origination or extinction, that it neither comes
nor goes, is neither foul nor clean, neither increases nor diminishes, is con-
stant in its own nature, is never empty, false or changeful, and is therefore
called Suchness.

All Depends on the Mind

The following passage expresses the idealism of Mahāyāna thought.

[From Ramamegha Sūtra, Siṃhāsana-vagyā, pp. 121–22]
All phenomena originate in the mind, and when the mind is fully known
all phenomena are fully known. For by the mind the world is led ... and
through the mind karma is piled up, whether good or evil. The mind swings
like a firebrand,¹⁵ the mind rears up like a wave, the mind burns like a
forest fire, like a great flood the mind bears all things away. The bodhis-
attva, thoroughly examining the nature of things, dwells in ever-present
mindfulness of the activity of the mind, and so he does not fall into the
mind's power, but the mind comes under his control. And with the mind
under his control all phenomena are under his control.

Nirvāṇa Is Here and Now

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

[From Śīksāsamuccaya, p. 257]

That which the Lord revealed in his perfect enlightenment was not form or sensation or perception or psychic constructions or thought; for none of these five components come into being, neither does supreme wisdom come into being . . . and how can that which does not come into being know that which also does not come into being? Since nothing can be grasped, what is the Buddha, what is wisdom, what is the bodhisattva, what is revelation? All the components are by nature empty—just convention, just names, agreed tokens, coverings . . .

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

[From Lankāvatāra Sūtra, pp. 61–62]

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

Praise of Dharma

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

[From Dharmasamudgiti Sūtra, Śīksāsamuccaya, pp. 322–23]

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

The Law is equal, equal for all beings. For low or middle or high the Law cares nothing.

So must I make my thought like the Law.

The Law has no regard for the pleasant. Impartial is the Law.

So must I make my thought like the Law.

The Law is not dependent upon time. Timeless is the Law . . .

So must I make my thought like the Law.

The Law is not in the lofty without being in the low. Neither up nor down will the Law bend.

So must I make my thought like the Law.

The Law is not in that which is whole without being in that which is broken. Devoid of all superiority or inferiority is the Law.

So must I make my thought like the Law.

The Law is not in the noble without being in the humble. No care for fields of activity has the Law.

So must I make my thought like the Law.