

IV

The Founding of Buddhism

1. THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Siddhartha of the Gautama clan, later called the Buddha, or “the enlightened one,” began life in the foothills of the Himalayas, where his people, the Sakyas, were primarily rice farmers. The Sakyas formed the small city-state of Kapilavastu with an oligarchic republican constitution, under the hegemony of the powerful Magadha and Kosala Kingdoms to the south.¹ Siddhartha traveled south to study, and so, after his Enlightenment, he first spread his doctrines in Northeastern India, south of the Ganges, west of Bhagalpur, and east of the Son River—South Bihar, nowadays. The people of this provincial area had been only partially assimilated to the Aryan culture and its Brahminic religion. Brahminism focused in the region of Northwestern India between the Ganges and Jumna Rivers, the older center of Indian civilization. Indeed, despite Buddhism’s anti-Brahmin cast, its chief rival in the early days may have been not Brahminism, but Jainism.

Though Gautama was probably a Kshatriya, the rigidities of the Caste system were not yet established in the region, and Kapilavastu was oligarchic, so his father was not, as legend has it, a king.² He left home in his youth against the will of his parents to become a wandering ascetic,³ an odd and irresponsible thing to do

¹The location of Gautama’s homeland is confirmed in the *Nikayas*, which give the names of the places where each discourse was delivered. See *Sutta Nipata* 422, *Digha Nikaya* I 87 ff.

²The earliest scriptures do not provide an account of the life of the founder after the fashion of the Christian Gospels, but concentrate on preserving his words. Nonetheless, a *Sutta* usually includes an introductory account of the circumstances under which the words were delivered, and information is provided concerning the Buddha’s manner of attaining enlightenment, and his last days, in which he gave his last advice to the Sangha. Gautama says in *Majjhima Nikaya* I 504 that he spent his early life in luxury, having a separate dwelling for each of the three seasons, but this would have been true of any fairly wealthy person of the time. There are five non-canonical accounts of the Buddha’s life, though they are made mostly of the stuff of myth and legends: (1) the *Mahavastu* (“Great Account”), belonging to the Lokottaravadin sect of the Mahasanghika school, (2) the *Lalitavistara* (“Detailed Account of the Sports (of the Buddha)”), a Sarvastivadin text, (3) the *Nidanakatha* (“Connected Story”), attributed to Buddhaghosa, and forming an introduction to the *Jatakas*, (4) the *Buddhacarita* (“Acts of the Buddha”), attributed to the poet Asvaghosa (5th century CE), and (5) the *Abhiniskramana-sutra* (“Discourse of the Great Renunciation”), attributed to the Dharmaguptaka school and preserved in translation. For attempts to use these materials in a scholarly fashion see Thomas (1927), and Nyanamoli (1972), which contains a translation of the chief relevant parts of the Pali Canon.

³In *Digha Nikaya* II 151, the Buddha says at the point of his death that he was twenty nine when he left the world, and that that was more than fifty years ago. In *Majjhima Nikaya* I 163 ff., he says that he left against his parents’ will. The legend in later sources developed from this hint says that he was taken for a chariot ride in the country by Charron, his charioteer, and saw an old man, which he had not seen before. Charron answered his questions by telling him that life was impermanent. Despite redoubled guard on the palace, he escaped three more times to view the world, and saw a sick man, a dead man, and an ascetic. Upon having the aim of the

before discharging one's duties as a householder. In the groves where the ascetics lived Gautama practiced yogic meditations and austerities, and learned the philosophy and logic of his time. He would have encountered the doctrines of the *Upanishads*, and become familiar with the debates of the Brahmins. The Brahminic culture of central Bihar had not penetrated to the land of his birth, and he would have looked upon it with the critical and penetrating insight of an outsider.

After much testing and experimentation (tradition says seven years worth), Gautama discovered the way to attain freedom (*moksha*) from the deeply unsatisfactory life of the ordinary man, and from further rebirth.⁴ Acceptance of the Buddhist doctrine that there is not, and never was, a self, might involve a false sense

last explained to him he resolved to renounce his secular life. He found shortly afterward that his wife had borne him a son, which he names Rahula or "fetter," but, after sneaking one look at the baby, he set on his way. The tale is clearly one of mythic proportion, and, regarded mythically, no doubt has its truth. One might regard the youth as everyman in his childhood, Charron the senses, which deliver the truth of suffering and impermanence, despite the god-child's attempts to escape it by keeping itself locked up in the palace of its original innocence, so that it can remain a god. Charron plays the role of the tempter who aids the inquirer and contributes to his expulsion from Eden. Only, in this Buddhist tale, Eden was never real, and no fault leads to expulsion from it, but only the abandonment of self-delusion. Note that Krishna's position as charioteer in the *Bhagavad Gita* seems to echo Charron deliberately, providing an alternative enlightenment. Note also the use of the simile of the chariot to describe the structure of the mind in the *Katha Upanishad*. One could read the story as one about a person's attempts to indulge in escapism, and the way in which his senses and intellect undermine those attempts.

⁴His first teacher, according to tradition, was Arada Kalam, from whom he learned the meditation that enables one to enter the "sphere of nothing at all." He states that he took nothing on trust, but verified everything himself, and acquired all the teacher's virtues. Arada was so impressed with his accomplishments that he offered to share leadership with Gautama, but Gautama declined. The doctrine Arada subscribed to seems to have been that criticized in the *Isha* and other later *Upanishads*, and Gautama made his own criticism very much in the same spirit—"This doctrine does not lead to indifference, dispassion, cessation, calm, insight, enlightenment or nirvana, but only to transmigration to the sphere of nothingness." His second teacher, Udraka Ramaputra, took him to the sphere of "neither perception nor non-perception," but he found this likewise unacceptable. Perhaps Udraka aimed at a perception of the Self that did not implicate the senses or the imagery normally involved in awareness of our bodily and mental states. Again, the doctrine is one criticized in some of the *Upanishads*. Gautama then, after terrible austerities, recalled a time in his youth when he entered concentration spontaneously while watching his father ploughing, and resolved to give up austerities and seek the middle way suggested by that experience. Although his five companions deserted him when told of his resolve, he stuck with it. After taking food and drink, and recovering his strength, he found a suitable spot, and meditated on his own through the night, gaining enlightenment at the first dawn. In the course of the night he passed through the four higher stages of concentration discussed below, including the two learned from Arada and Udraka, and acquired three forms of supernatural knowledge, knowledge of his former lives (perhaps he reflected extensively on his own past), knowledge of karma (applying what he knew of himself to others) and its effects on the rebirth of other living beings, and then knowledge that he had destroyed the four outflows (*asravas*), namely sensory desire, desire for existence, false views and deliberate ignorance. Alternatively, he appeased his dispositions so that they no longer gave rise to either desire or aversion (*raga* or *dosa*), and finally eliminated confusion (*moha*). By seeing things as they really are (*yathabhutam*) he attained complete and perfect enlightenment. Thenceforth he was called the Buddha (Awakened One), Jina (Conquerer), Arhant (Worthy One), and the Tathagata (Thus-Come). Akira (1990) 27–28 reports that Uli Hakuju compiled a list of fifteen different early accounts of how Gautama achieved enlightenment. Other accounts than those we have just credited include his coming to realization by an understanding of the four noble truths, or the twelve links of dependent origination. It must be confessed, then, that we don't know the precise procedure used by the Buddha to come to enlightenment, and that the variety of accounts we have reflects the disciples' own understanding of the appropriate way to get there. Nonetheless, the same basic elements, calming the passions, in part through the use of meditation, and the attainment of wisdom, rooted in an intellectual apprehension of the

that one has been destroyed, but freedom from further rebirth was not sought from a desire for personal annihilation, but simply because it was a natural outcome of release from bondage to karma and the suffering that follows upon it. One had a choice, as far as Gautama could see, between furthering indefinitely a life full of suffering at every turn, or entering into a life freed from this suffering, but which comes to an end. One need not, perhaps, take all this quite literally. It seems possible that the Buddha, like some of the Upanishadic writers, did not believe that one lived many lives, but only, like many authors of later *Abhidharma* works, used this commonplace view as a way of speaking about the succession of mental states in this life. In connection with this, it might be that the rebirth that comes to an end is the illusory rebirth of the illusory self, so that freedom leads to a recognition that no one will be (or ever has been) reborn, not to a new state of affairs. If one's rebirth in a new life is actual, but occurs only in the presence of an illusion of self, as we shall see the doctrine of the twelve-fold chain of causation implies, then release will imply the cessation of further rebirth. In any case, the fact of one's eventual death will produce no great distress in someone freed from attachment to the illusory self.

The way to this release involved Yogic techniques intended to produce non-attachment, techniques which he learned from others, though Gautama repudiated Jain asceticism, and had no truck with ritual and sacrifices to the gods. The metaphysical views behind the borrowed techniques, though, were quite original, involving a denial of the existence of any permanent, true self and the claim that the recognition of the truth of this denial, rather than the discovery of one's true self, was the key to release. This meant, of course, that the yogic techniques themselves, adapted to a new purpose, took on a different character. It seems fair to say that he stumbled on enlightenment, without understanding what it truly is, while looking for something else. He wanted to liberate the Self, and ended up finding that there is no self, and was thereby freed from grasping and ignorance and the suffering they entail.

The date of the Buddha's enlightenment is uncertain. His death can be placed either about 485 BCE, relying on Sri Lankan sources, or, depending on Northern sources, about 383 BCE. The tradition states that the Buddha died at 80 years of age, so that would place his birth in 565 or 463 BCE., and given that he attained

fundamental truth about how things really are, seem to figure in all of them. Perhaps Gautama himself gave variant accounts, as he reflected on one part or another of a complex process that took place over a period of years.

enlightenment at 30–40 years of age, this would have been around either 500 or 400 BCE.⁵ During his forty years of preaching, he converted many ascetics and established the *sangha*,⁶ the order of monks, an egalitarian, democratically organized counter-weight to the Brahmin caste, to carry on his work. The Sangha seems to have been modeled on the political institutions of his mountain homeland. It recognized no castes, and formally made all decisions through majority vote or consensus, though in practice seniority was recognized, and the monks of longest standing tended to run things. The lay people of the religion were expected to support the monks, and in return, the monks were expected to teach them. The Buddha instructed his very first converts to go out and preach to the people out of compassion, specifying that no two should go to the same place.⁷ He himself preached morality to the laymen, and is always represented as adapting his discourse to his audience. In particular, he often uses satirical humor when talking of the Brahmins, the high god Brahma, ritual practices, the way in which governments foster evil doing by trying to prevent it, and so on. Indeed, it may be that some misunderstandings arose even within the tradition from taking too seriously the Buddha's ironical use of traditional notions in his discourses, possibly including even such notions as super-powers gained through meditation, and reincarnation or rebirth. The higher teaching concerning Nirvana and the means of achieving it were more or less reserved in the beginning for the monks, so that early Buddhism fits the Indian pattern of

⁵Akira (1990) 22–24, who favors the later date, defended by the Japanese scholars Ue Hakuju and Nakamura Hajime. See Heinz Bechert, "The date of the Buddha reconsidered," *Indologia Taurinensia* 10 (1982) 29-36, for the uncertainty of both the traditional Theravadin date of 544/3 B.C.E., and the date long favored by scholars, in the 480's B.C.E. See Bareau, "La date du Nirvana," *Journal Asiatique* (1953) 27 ff., and Eggermont, *The Chronology of the Reign of Asoka Moriya* (Leiden: Brill, 1956), for the scholars' date. These dates would place Gautama at about the time of the earlier Pre-Socratic philosophers in Greece, or make him an older contemporary of Socrates.

⁶The decision to preach the dharma to others may not have been automatic. According to the scripture, the Buddha was aware of having accomplished release from suffering, but he reflected that it might "be a weariness and trouble" for him if he were to teach the way to release and others did not grasp it because of the difficulty of the doctrine of the conditioned nature of all things, and the way in which the world "delights in a home," that is, in something secure to which one can be safely attached. Note that the attainment of Nirvana does not mean that there may not be things that are a weariness and a trouble, only, presumably, the trouble is of a different quality from that engendered by grasping desire and the illusion of the Self, and not such as to make life unsatisfactory. In any case, Gautama surveys beings with his wisdom and sees that there are some who would understand and embrace the dharma, so that teaching would not be vain. (*Majjhima Nikaya* I 167 ff.) The whole passage is suspect, for it does not appear in the Chinese version of the Sutta, and it seems to be motivated at least in part by a satirical passage embedded in it, in which Brahma descends from the highest heaven to supplicate the Buddha to teach the dharma, lest the world should perish. But it may reflect genuine hesitations, given the unusual nature of Gautama's convictions in his cultural context. Again, it frequently happens that a Buddhist, upon attaining enlightenment, will find no point to life, since he becomes aware that nothing is of itself intrinsically important, and so the usual reason for doing something is jerked out from under him. The habit of moral and compassionate action generally carries the practitioner past this point into the paradoxical life of the Arhat, whose actions are free from thoughts of gain or loss.

⁷*Vinaya Pitaka* I 20.

a religion with esoteric and exoteric branches. Nonetheless, it is to be observed that the Buddha apparently thought a layman could attain Nirvana thorough the practice of the virtues together with self-possession (the practice of awareness) and understanding of the Dharma, and remarks in several places that this is possible. The householder Citra was so learned that he instructed the monks.⁸ Probably Gautama thought that few laymen wished to aim so high, or would understand the more advanced doctrines, and that only an unusually capable person could attain the aim without living in the Order.⁹

The Buddha's success was due in good part to his conversion of King Bimbisara of Magadha, who presented a park to the Sangha. The Sangha relied on royal patronage thereafter in most places, and Buddhist missions typically visited the capital city first, in hope of converting the rulers. This alliance with the King, and, as we shall see below, the merchant class, led to accommodations. In particular, the Sangha would not admit anyone serving under the king (i.e. deserting soldiers), slaves that had not been freed, those fleeing from criminal prosecution, or anyone under the age of twenty.

The rules the Buddha made for the Sangha were not absolute, but established in response to various situations as they arise, and it seems the Buddha thought them justified by their effects in those situations. He specified that most of them might be modified in new situations. He was quite willing to take extenuating circumstances into account and excuse misbehavior. He seems to have thought that the Dharma should be sufficient to guide behavior. Indeed, even though he was asked by Sariputra in time of famine to formulate a systematic set of rules to govern the order, so that the laity would respect the order and continue to provide food for it, the Buddha refused to do so, and insisted instead on introducing rules as necessary when offenses appeared.¹⁰ He apparently wanted as few rules as possible, adapted to specific circumstances, but was particularly concerned not to make the Sangha something like a caste, with a rigid set of absolute ritual prescriptions, even if that was the sort of thing the laity was used to in dealing with the Brahmins. A great many of the rules have the explicit aim of avoiding a bad reputation among the laity, and the Buddha's attitude seems to have been that, as long as it was not opposed to the dharma, one ought to take whatever measure was

⁸*Samyutta Nikaya* IV 281 ff.

⁹In *Samyutta Nikaya* IV 281 ff. the Buddha says that he teaches the doctrine a person is best prepared to absorb, and sows the best ground first.

¹⁰*Vinaya* III 3 ff.

needed to insure the good repute of the Sangha.

The two chief disciples of Gautama were Sariputra and Maudgalanya. Sariputra supposedly figured out the dharma on his own from a hint gained from a monk, that the Buddha taught the origination of phenomena from causes.¹¹ Gautama visited home after gaining these disciples, and his son, Rahula, became a member of the Sangha, as well as Nanda, his half-brother. His cousin, Ananda, also joined, and is noted as the type of the scholar-monk in later tradition. The community of Nuns was established late in the Buddha's career, at the request of his aunt, Mahaprajapati, while he was in Vaisali. Gautama apparently thought the existence of the nuns would bring ill repute to Buddhism, for it flew directly in the face of traditional Indian practices, and he worried that it might bring a premature end to the religion, but he did not wish to refuse his aunt, who no doubt had appealed to his deeper convictions, and so he established the community of nuns, but subjected it to additional rules, and made it subordinate to the monks.

At the end of his life the Buddha seems to have known that he would not live much longer, and he traveled north, intending to return to his homeland. He died on the border of the Sakyan lands, at Kusinara. Before his passing, in one last meeting with his monks, Gautama told them they could abolish the minor rules if they wished (though, it not having been made clear which rules were minor, the monks never availed themselves of this privilege), and, after assuring himself that no one was unsure about any point of the Dharma, he proclaimed that he knew all present had a sufficient understanding, and assured them all that they were stream-winners, who could not fall back, but would certainly attain Nirvana. He then uttered his last words, "Now, monks, I declare to you, all conditioned things are of a nature to decay—strive on untiringly," and, after steadying himself in meditation, he died.¹²

2. THE WAY TO ENLIGHTENMENT

The sermon later identified as the first the Buddha gave opens with an account of Gautama's attainment of enlightenment, emphasizing his adoption of the "middle way" between the extreme asceticism characteristic

¹¹*Vinaya* I 39 ff.; *Mahavastu* III 56 ff. *Vinaya* I gives a more or less continuous account of the events as a framework for the introduction of the various rules governing the community, recounting the circumstances leading to the formulation of each rule.

¹²*Digha Nikaya* II 155–6 (*Mahaparinibbana Sutta*).

of the Jains, and the lay life of pleasures and worldly involvement.¹³ This was very much necessary, since the ascetics whom he was addressing doubted that he could have accomplished much precisely because of his abandonment of strict asceticism. From the point of view of the monk, the “middle way” is central, and it underlies the structure of life imposed on the Sangha. Following this, the Buddha enunciated the Four Noble Truths: (1) Life is inherently unsatisfactory, (2) this unsatisfactory character is due to craving (*trnsa*), (3) thus, the unsatisfactory characteristics of life can be eliminated if craving is once eliminated, which is possible. The first truth is not meant to deny that there is any happiness or pleasure in life, but is true since even pleasure and happiness are doomed to cessation, and create attachments that lead to suffering once they cease, or are suspected of being impermanent. When it is argued for, it is always argued on the ground of the three marks (*laksanas*) of existing things, first, that they are impermanent, and so lead to suffering due to change, second, that they are not self, and so lead to suffering rooted in our grasping after a self that cannot be found, and third, that they are unsatisfactory, since they lead to these sorts of suffering. The craving of the second noble truth is divided into craving for sensory pleasure, for becoming, and for non-existence, the last two covering craving for something to be the case or not the case, usually something associated with the self. (4) the way to eliminate craving is to follow the eightfold path, namely (i) the adoption of right views, that is, understanding the four noble truths, leading to (ii) right intention or thought, that is, renunciation of the worldly life and the determination not to harm anyone (*ahimsa*), carried out by (iii) right speech, no falsehood, malice, harshness, frivolity or nonsense, (iv) right action, no taking of life, taking what is not given, or misconduct in pursuit of pleasure, and (v) right livelihood, that is, a way of making one’s living that is morally acceptable, (vi) right effort, directed toward fostering good states of mind and eliminating bad states of mind, (vii) right mindfulness, including both the practice of awareness and remembrance of the Dharma, and (viii) right concentration, the correct use of meditative techniques.¹⁴ Later the way was more simply expressed as progress through three stages, morality, meditation for the attainment of tranquillity, and meditation for the attainment of wisdom

¹³*Vinaya Pitaka* I 10; the notion of a middle way is also applied to theoretical positions, so that, for instance, a middle position is sought between creationism and eternalism (*Samyutta Nikaya* II 38) or the view that everything exists and the view that nothing exists (*Samyutta Nikaya* II 17). This second application of the notion embodies a subtle philosophical doctrine that will be discussed below.

¹⁴*Samyutta Nikaya* V 420 ff.; *Majjhima Nikaya* III 248-52; *Vinaya* I 10-11.

(most important was meditation on the four Noble Truths, the five bundles, and dependent origination),¹⁵ or again, through progressive acquisition of the five faculties, faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.¹⁶ Correct views and intention (“wisdom” or faith) comes at the beginning of the eight-fold path, since correct views and intentions formed in accord with them are necessary before one will practice correctly. Wisdom is the last of the five perfections because it is understood that a *full* realization and understanding of things as they are, which constitutes this wisdom, is only obtained when it has infected one’s whole character and all one’s dispositions. This is accomplished, of course, only through the practice of morality and meditation (mindfulness and concentration), which deepen one’s initial understanding and bring one to the point where no act is uninformed by it. Gautama emphasized that the eightfold way can be followed only by one who has good friends, the other members of the Sangha, of course, who share his aims and can inspire him to effort.¹⁷

The Buddha especially emphasized that his teaching was of what he knew from his own experience to be true. He himself had carried through the practices he recommended, and he knew that they worked and how they worked. He himself had experienced the extinction of desires, and so verified both the initial diagnosis of the problem, and the effectiveness of the treatment he recommends. He criticizes the Brahmins for teaching what they have not themselves experienced.¹⁸ This is reflected in the Sutras in his technique of preliminary questioning of his pupil to lay the foundation for his discourse. He seems to have thought that a student must be convinced of the dharma through his own experience. Typically he presents the dharma as a reasonable

¹⁵These three are given in two different orders, *Majjhima Nikaya* I 299 ff. (*Culavedalla Sutta*) putting morality first, and wisdom last, *Digha Nikaya* II 72 ff. (*Mahaparinibbana Sutta*), putting wisdom first, and morality last. One can either begin with a theoretical understanding of the dharma, and that will recommend concentration and mindfulness, leading to the formation of the moral virtues, or one can begin by practicing the moral virtues, later taking up concentration, which will lead to understanding.

¹⁶*Samyutta Nikaya* V 199-200. See Conze (1954) 51 ff. for passages dealing with these perfections. The first formulation in three stages is for laymen, the talk of five perfections for the monks. Morality is covered here and under effort, as one of the means by which the rising of unfavorable states of mind is avoided and the preservation of favorable states of mind accomplished.

¹⁷In *Digha Nikaya* III 187–188 (*Sigalaka Sutta*), four sorts of real friend are listed, (1) the one who helps by saving one from being negligent or preserving his property when he is, providing a refuge when one is afraid, assists one liberally with one’s business, (2) the one who shares one’s happiness and misfortune, who shares and guards secrets, stays by one in misfortune, and will sacrifice even his life for his friend, (3) one who tells one what needs to be known, keeps one from evil, introduces one to the good, lets one hear what one has not heard (that is, imparts the esoteric teaching that a Brahmin, for instance, might withhold), and teaches the way to heaven, and (4) the compassionate friend who mourns at one’s misfortune and rejoices at his good fortune, and guards one’s reputation. The second and fourth sort of friend clearly suggest that a good friend has an altruistic interest in one’s welfare. A basic point in Buddhist ethical thought is that one who has attained Nirvana will consider all beings as like himself, and thus will naturally be compassionate and helpful.

¹⁸For instance, *Digha Nikaya* I 238-40.

modification of or a consequence of the pupil's own expressed views. Gautama does not always convince his audience, indeed, the very first person he spoke to after his enlightenment, an Ajivika, supposedly listened politely and then said only that it may be so, or again it may not, before going on his way.

Gautama strove to avoid being made into an authoritative cult leader by the Sangha. He insisted that it was not his person, but the Dharma that was important, and that, although he had discovered the truths of the Dharma, he was far from the only one to possess these truths, or to be able to explain them. Especially later in his life, he seems often to have withdrawn in weariness before finishing a sermon, leaving a senior monk to complete it, and he often recognized the skill of one disciple or another in the Dharma. Upon his death, he told his disciples that the Dharma was to be their guide, that he had withheld no teachings from them, and that they had to rely on themselves to attain release.

To return to the Buddha's teaching how to gain release, the desire at the root of the trouble people experience itself has a root, namely ignorance. The three roots of suffering are desire, aversion, and delusion.¹⁹ Delusion is in part brought on by desire and aversion, which produce false beliefs about the value and importance of things, and these beliefs in turn reinforce desire and aversion. Nirvana is the "blowing out", not of the self (such an aim presupposes the reality of the self), but of the three flames of desire, aversion, and delusion, with which everything in our lives are ablaze.²⁰ The idea is that we read our passions into reality and so come to see what we desire as objectively valuable, as something that *must* be had, else things have gone objectively wrong, and these false views of reality lead in turn to the intensification of desire and all the miseries that arise from it. Desire and ignorance continually reinforce one another.

The central delusion here is that there is a self which is important, and recognized as such by the cosmos, which must be satisfied, and is eternal, self-controlled and free-willed.²¹ In particular, the view that one can control the self is important for the first Noble Truth, for life is unsatisfactory in part because there is no self, that is, there is nothing over which we have absolute control. This, together with impermanence, is enough to guarantee that any grasping attachment will miscarry. Gautama took it that what we refer to when

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²⁰*Vinaya* I 34, Buddha's third sermon, the "Fire Sermon."

²¹*Vinaya* I 13 ff., Buddha's second sermon, enunciates this doctrine. See also, for instance, *Samyutta Nikaya* III 66; *Milindapanha* 252 (= ii.i.10); *Visuddhimagga* 16, 18; *Mahavastu* III 335 ff., and many other passages. *Suttanipata* 858 and 919 claims that it is as much an error to cling to absence of self as it is to cling to self.

we talk of the experiencing self is really the five bundles (*skandhas*):²² (1) the experienced body (*rupa*, often translated “form,” this word sometimes bears a different meaning, signifying the visible)—body is composed of the four great elements (*mahabhutas*), namely earth, air, water and fire; (2) feelings or sensation (*vedana*), pleasurable, painful or neutral, arising from contact with things in the world; (3) perception or cognition (*samjna*), of the characteristics of things in the world are known; (4) volitions, drives, impulses and other conative states (*samskara*), including *karma*, which just is voluntary action (considered as it affects our future selves), all of which color experience; and (5) consciousness (*vijnana*), falling into six types, that is, the awareness of each of the five sensory fields (*indriya*), and mind-consciousness. The last four of these bundles are mental (*nama*). Gautama apparently viewed the elements of the five bundles as realities, but pointed out that they were all transitory.²³ It is also to be noted that the bundles do not exist independently of one another, but each presupposes and depends on the rest. Reference to a self is merely conventional, that is, there is really only the bundles, and talk about a self provides a convenient way to speak about these bundles. He describes a progressive meditation on each of these elements, establishing that each is other than the self, due to its impermanence, and consequent unsatisfactoriness. Nothing is to be found beyond these constituents. The whole point is to reduce the self to something purely natural, in no way exempt from natural laws. The belief in a supernatural self with qualities such as freedom from causation in its willing, indestructibility, and the ability to survive outside the natural world is viewed as something deeply ingrained, a natural result of desire and aversion. The recognition that there is no such self is expected to convince a person that grasping after permanent possession of what is desired simply makes no sense, because no desire or aversion can ever be permanently satisfied. All that makes sense is to take things as they come, and let go as they go, maintaining a certain detachment from things, enjoying life without grasping after it.

The Buddha used traditional forms of meditation to accomplish “one-pointedness” and perfect stillness of mind, so that the mental discipline needed to form one’s life to the truths he taught could be obtained. But he also introduced a peculiarly Buddhist form of meditation, which is referred to under right mindfulness, or

²²Actually, the word means bundles of firewood, specifically, the bundles used by the Brahmins in performing their five fire sacrifices. It is often translated “aggregates.” The Brahmin sacrifices represent the world, of course, and the image of the illusory world as burning is used often by the Buddha, so it would be natural to take the five bundles as the stuff making up the world, which is on fire. One needs to extinguish the fire to attain release.

²³That it is composed of five bundles, of course, already means that the Self is not unchanging or eternal, but the temptation to identify one of these bundles (say, consciousness) as the true Self must be blocked as well.

meditation for the attainment of wisdom. One is to be aware of what is actually presented in experience at every moment, and in particular in what is presented as the. A deliberate search for the true self is to be undertaken, so that one can become convinced out of experience that there is no such thing, and cease to introduce a sense of ego into what is not the self.²⁴ This awareness meditation is to be practiced continually, so that a calm and controlled mindfulness is a high virtue for a Buddhist. Attention to what one is doing, care, conscientiousness, and diligence are all to be practiced, for their presence is a sign of, and fosters, mindfulness.

Awareness that there is no self supposedly leads to unselfishness and compassion for others, the four “divine” states, kindness (friendliness?), compassion, sympathetic joy (enjoyment?), and equanimity. Buddhaghosa compares these feelings to those of a mother with four sons, “a child, an invalid, one in the flush of youth, and one busy with his own affairs.”²⁵ In effect, Buddhist ethics takes these four states to be desirable in themselves whenever they can be obtained, so that a good life is one in which these four states dominate in one’s experience. Buddhist ethics, then, tends to focus on the results of one’s practice in one’s experienced life rather than duty, or any goal transcending experience. It is to be noted that the Buddhist virtues here are all of them disinterested, that is, they are due to the recognition that the other is not different from oneself, and one’s self is not important, so that there is nothing to block the operation of one’s natural feeling of kinship for the other. They are not due to the delusory notion that the other somehow belongs to one, the way we usually think of a child or spouse, or is a true self that is valuable in absolute terms, just as one’s own self is. This means that Buddhist ethics is very different in its philosophical bearings from the ethics of Kant, or the Neo-Confucian school, who systematize what the Buddhist would take to be delusory notions.

An early systematization of the Buddha’s way is reflected in the Buddha’s recitation of the chief topics in the *Mahaparanirvana Sutta*, supposedly his last discussion with the Sangha. The seven topics enumerated there, namely the four foundations of self-possession, the four right exertions, the four foundations of power, the five faculties, the five strengths, the seven factors leading to enlightenment, and the eightfold way, are listed

²⁴*Digha Nikaya* II 290 ff.

²⁵*Visuddhimagga* 9. Elaborating and perhaps departing from the teaching, these would be attitudes appropriate to (1) oneself, (2) others, who are (3) dominated by obsessive states (anger, grasping desire, deliberate ignorance or denial) (4) free of obsessive states and freely pursuing their way. So (1,4) enjoyment, (2,4) friendliness (let’s play, join in with their way, or activity), (1,3) equanimity (no problem, in the face of understanding the problem) (2,3) compassion (how might I help? Concern). The mother both identifies with her son, and distinguishes herself from her son, recognizes her son as doing fine, and as in need of help. One might take the host/guest relation the same way in Ch’an. So fiddling with these correspondences helps one to clarify and formulate the strategy for dealing with life.

in a number of places in the scriptures of all the schools.²⁶ *Abhidharma* seems to have begun as an elaboration of these seven topics. The four noble truths are presupposed by the seven topics, no-self and impermanence figure in establishing the first truth, and the theory of causation is an elaboration of the second truth. The Sutras of the Tripitaka are, moreover, organized, to a considerable extent, in terms of this classification of topics.

This scheme places mindfulness (*smṛti*) at the center, taking it to arise from the practice of awareness meditation mentioned above.²⁷ The four foundations (*upasthana*) are observation of the body, of sensations, of whatever thoughts arise, and of the five obstacles when they arise, namely, the will to pleasure, malevolence, deliberate stupidity, concern for others' opinions, and uncertainty or lack of faith. Further classifications of phenomena are added in the elaboration of the fourth group, including the five bundles. Again, the monk is to observe the six spheres of the internal and external, sight and its object, hearing, smell, taste, touch (body) and their objects, and mind and its objects. He is to observe how the conditioned connection in each pair arises and passes away, where "connection" is the entanglement of the internal organs of perception in their objects, leading to unfavorable mental phenomena. Again, the monk is to observe phenomena with reference to the seven factors of enlightenment, and the four noble truths.

The four right exertions follow on mindfulness, and aim at the prevention and abandonment of bad states of mind, and the production and preservation of good states of mind.²⁸

The four foundations of power are the ability to concentrate one's will, one's thought, one's energy, and one's investigation. These are the abilities that enable one to carry out the four exertions.²⁹

Various lists of faculties (*indriya*) are to be found, but the one intended here comprises faith, that is, confidence in the Buddha, in the Dharma, in the Sangha, and in virtue, vigor or energy to make the exertions,

²⁶This assures us that these views are early. There are three renditions of the canon, the Theravadin rendition in Pali, the Sarvastivadin in Sanskrit, and the Mahasanghika. Where the first two agree, we can argue that the text predates the split of the two schools under Asoka, and so is older than about 250 B.C.E. Where all three agree, we can move the date back another century, to perhaps 340 B.C.E. This is still 140 years after the Buddha's attainment of Nirvana, according to tradition, and unfortunately the Mahasanghika version of the *Sutras* is lost, so that it is only some texts in the *Vinaya* that can be placed that far back. (Conze (1962)) Of course, this is all a matter of ascertaining how far back the texts go, and it may well be that many portions of the surviving canon go back to the time of the Buddha himself, even though we are not in a position to establish this.

²⁷For the four bases, see the *Smṛtyupasthana Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikaya* no. 10, which is nearly identical to *Digha Nikaya* no. 22, as well as a collection of short sutras in *Samyutta Nikaya* V 141 ff.

²⁸So *Majjhima Nikaya* III 252 f., *Samyutta Nikaya* V 244, *Digha Nikaya* II 312 f.

²⁹So *Digha Nikaya* III 221 f.

mindfulness, concentration (*samadhi*), that is, the ability to withdraw oneself from distractions and make the four meditations, and wisdom (*prajna*), the understanding of origin and cessation, and the four truths, without which the other faculties cannot endure.³⁰ The four meditations, borrowed by Gautama from his teachers, are, first, that which arises from separation from pleasures and the bad mental states, with the presence of joy and happiness, and reasoning and consideration of what has occurred; second, the calming of reasoning and pondering, so that one achieves serenity and concentration of mind; third, that which arises through dispassion, so that joy is no longer present, though happiness is; and fourth, that which arises from the elimination of happiness and depression, leaving purity, equanimity and mindfulness. None of these methods involves an elimination of sensory experience, or awareness of a Self. The Buddha seems to have used the exercise of entering into these successive levels of concentration to gather his forces, for instance, at the point of his death. Unlike mindfulness, this sort of meditation cannot be indulged in all the time, but requires temporary withdrawal from life.

The five strengths are the same as the five faculties, but have become unshakable. They are nowhere discussed in the scriptures, but only enumerated.

The seven factors of enlightenment (*bodhi*) are mindfulness, discrimination of phenomena, energy, joy, tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity. They are always given in this order, and it seems that, although one is to practice all of them at once, they are considered to be acquired successively, the later factors depending on the earlier.³¹ These are opposed to the five obstacles. Note that joy is one of them, and though this is non-sensual and does not involve attachment, it is still one of the things to be transcended in the four meditations. The utilitarian character of those meditations should be apparent from this. The point is *not* to remain even in the first meditation. The obstacles are said to be increased and fostered by allowing them “food,” so that the food of pleasure is attention to attractiveness, the food of malevolence is attention to repulsion, the food of deliberate stupidity is discontent, laziness, languor, surfeit after meals, lack of mental energy, the food of concern for others’s opinions is lack of calm, and the food of uncertainty is attention to that which one is uncertain about. One is advised to starve these obstacles, by avoiding the conditions that give rise to them, and substituting their opposites, so that one attends to the foulness of what one expects to give

³⁰*Samyutta Nikaya* V 193 ff.

³¹*Digha Nikaya* II 79; III 251 f.; III 282; *Samyutta Nikaya* V 63 ff.

pleasure, to the good features of what gives rise malevolence, to courage and initiating action in order to starve deliberate stupidity, to calming the mind to combat concern for others' opinions (which is characterized by a kind of panic), to good and bad phenomena to starve uncertainty. Similarly, one is to seek out the conditions that give rise to the factors of enlightenment. It is also advised that one should pervade each of the four directions with the four divine states of benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, by considering that all beings are like oneself. (This last meditation is sometimes called the "Brahma" meditation, for Sariputra advises a Brahmin to use it as the way to attain to the heaven of Brahma, the highest heaven.)³²

One who undertook to follow the way of the Buddha would, through the undertaking alone, become a member of the family of "noble persons" who seek the way. One could then become a follower in faith, if one's faculties were not of the best, or a follower of the Dharma itself, that is, one who follows the moral precepts, gives to the monks, and so on, hoping for a favorable rebirth, or one who understands the more esoteric doctrines and seeks nirvana rather than rebirth in the heavens. Once one understands the four Noble Truths thoroughly, and has completely abandoned belief in a self, doubts about the Three Jewels (the Sangha, Dharma, and Buddha), and abandoned all belief in rituals, one is a streamwinner, and will suffer no further bad rebirths. Once progress is made toward stopping the outflows, one becomes a once-returner, assured of enlightenment within one more life-time, a non-returner, and finally an *arhant*, who has attained Nirvana in this life.

3. THE REJECTION OF BRAHMINISM

Buddhism rejected Brahminic thought, and the Pali scriptures of early Buddhism often attack the claims of the Brahmins to pre-eminence, and their dominance of religious life.³³ Thus in one text a dialogue between Gautama Buddha and the Brahmin Sonadandra is recounted, in which the Brahmin lays down five qualifications to be a true Brahmin. Gautama gets him to give up all the external qualifications, that is, purity of birth on both sides for seven generations, knowledge of the *Vedas*, a handsome appearance and fair complexion, the first or second of those who holds a spoon at sacrifices, and so on, and finally he admits that learning and virtue are

³²*Majjhima Nikaya* no. 97.

³³*Majjhima Nikaya* II 84; *Digha Nikaya* II 81.

alone necessary.³⁴ Elsewhere it is claimed that modern day Brahmins have degenerated from the standards of the old days, and are not really ascetics,³⁵ and it is roundly asserted that a person of any caste whatsoever might attain nirvana.³⁶ Sometimes the rejection of the Brahmins becomes more bitter, as when it is said that the five practices distinguishing the ancient Brahmins are now given up, save among *dogs*.³⁷ In general, the early Buddhists hold that Brahminic sacrifices will not lead to release (*moksha*), but only rebirth in the Brahma world ruled by Maha-Brahma, which is a heaven of sensory pleasure. The Brahmins were supposed to maintain the three fires required to carry out major sacrifices. The Buddha juxtaposed the three fires of desire, aversion, and ignorance to these, converting the Brahminic fire that makes up the essence of the world to the fires of illusion.

Buddhists claim that Maha-Brahma, quite mistakenly, thinks that he made the world, because he was the first of things to arise in the present world-cycle. Even this much is a concession, for a note of skepticism about the very existence of Brahman is also rung. It is considered notorious that the Vedic sages have never seen Brahman.³⁸ The Buddhist rejection of the reality of the self attacked a fundamental assumption of the Vedic schools, and the extension of this doctrine from the microcosm to the macrocosm led to the rejection of the view that the world has an essence. The Buddha allowed no underlying unity, no omnipotent creator or universal soul stuff, as the reality and self behind the world.

In one place³⁹ Gautama speaks of these three fires of desire, aversion and delusion (confusion or deliberate ignorance), and suggests that the householder maintain the three good fires, parents, his immediate family, and those who have renounced the world. This is a typical replacement of the Brahminic sacrificial requirements by moral requirements, repeated often in the *Nikayas*. In particular, the Buddha rejected the notion that there were special duties belonging to one in virtue of birth. Duties were either universal, or due

³⁴*Majjhima Nikaya* II 83 ff. (*Madhura Sutta*).

³⁵*Digha Nikaya* I 104 (*Ambattha Sutta*); *Sutta Nipata* 284-315.

³⁶*Majjhima Nikaya* II 177 ff. (*Esukari Sutta*). *Sutta Nipata* 462: "Men are not born vile. They become vile through their actions. Do not ask about their birth. Only ask about their actions."

³⁷*Anguttara Nikaya* III 221. The practices are seasonal intercourse, union of a Brahmin only with another Brahmin, no buying or selling, no storing up of wealth, and to beg only in the morning and evening. In a telling phrase, *Majjhima Nikaya* III 167 speaks of some people running like Brahmins to the smell of a sacrifice.

³⁸For all this, see *Digha Nikaya* I 235 ff. (*Tevijja Sutta*).

³⁹*Anguttara Nikaya* IV 43-5.

to one's undertakings, as with the duties of a member of the Sangha. One born a Kshatriya did not thereby gain a duty or a right to kill, and one born a Brahman did not thereby gain rights to make sacrifices and duties to recite scripture. So in *The Questions of King Milinda* a prostitute makes the Ganges flow backwards through an act of truth, asserting her virtue in imitation of Sita's assertion of perfect conjugal fidelity to Rama which enabled her to walk through fire. The lady asserts truly that she has always given good service for the cash she was paid, as is the duty of her station, regardless of who made the payment, noble or slave, high caste or low.⁴⁰ So much for the virtue of fulfilling the duties attaching to one's station in life.

In the manner of the *Upanishads*, the Buddha also insisted that sacrifices accomplished nothing, indeed, that they amounted to murderous cruelty to animals. When speaking to laymen, Gautama consistently reinterpreted the ritual requirements of the Brahmans as moral requirements.⁴¹ The moral quality of an action on his view, however, consisted not in the nature of the action itself, automatically imposing its karma, as the Jains held, but in the intention behind the action, which shaped one's character and so is one's karma.⁴² It was bold move to say that karma is intention, for the word "karma" in fact means "action." Probably the Buddha was prepared to argue that the reality behind an action is the intention that drives it. This view was coupled with the insistence that a "purifying action," that is, a good ritual action, is "really" a virtuous action in accord with Buddhist ethics, which purifies the mind of desire, aversion and illusion, in the same way that meditation does, but not so directly. Thus ritualistic purity was completely supplanted in Buddhist thought by moral purity.

The attack on the Brahmins is combined with a general rejection of the whole caste system. In the fourth of the five dreams the Buddha was said to have had before his enlightenment, four birds of different colors came from the four quarters, fell at his feet, and became white. The birds are the four castes, who are, once they become monks, all to be regarded as the same.⁴³ Within the Sangha, the Buddha said, the four castes

⁴⁰*Milindapanha* cited in Gombrich (1988) 80-81.

⁴¹So *Digha Nikaya* III 180-93, *Advice to Sighala*, where, for instance, it is explained that the right way to practice worshipping the six directions at daybreak is to observe one's duties to parents, teachers, one's immediate family, friends, servants, and those who have renounced the world.

⁴²*Anguttara Nikaya* III 415.

⁴³*Anguttara Nikaya* III 240. On this topic in general, see Thomas (1951).

lose their identity, like rivers flowing into the sea, and people become simply sons and daughters of the Sakya.⁴⁴ The rejection of the caste system, and the notion of special duties applying to people in virtue of their birth, was argued for on the ground that social arrangements were different elsewhere, and argument that would have appealed especially to Gautama, looking at the central Indian culture from the viewpoint of his own border province.⁴⁵

Buddhists were at odds with the Brahmins in matters of epistemology, as well. The Buddhist recognized the ultimate authority of no oral tradition, but only of the Dharma, the truth. The Buddha himself had personally realized the truth, and on his deathbed he told his followers that the Dharma and the rules of the Sangha would henceforth be their teacher.⁴⁶ In practice, of course, the tendency was to take the Dharma as the word of the Buddha, handed down in the oral tradition of the Sangha, and one might argue that things were not so different from the Brahminic oral tradition of the *Vedas*. Indeed, the Pali canon remained an oral tradition, and was not written down until the nineteenth century, though the situation was different in China.⁴⁷ But there were two important differences. One was that the Buddhist monks used the local language of the people, without chanting, and had been instructed always to do so by the Buddha. As a result the Buddhists became great translators.⁴⁸ The second difference was that the dharma as taught by the Buddha was supposed to have the authority of experience behind it, not any supernatural revelation. The Buddha urged everyone to test the dharma he preached by their own experience. His point, of course, was that if one tried out the prescription he proposed, one would find that it worked, and he was confident of the outcome of honest testing—the dharma was in principle a scientific tradition, not a revelatory one like that of the *Vedas*.⁴⁹

A most important contrast between the Buddha's religion and the Brahmin's was this, that Buddhism did not think that one needed, even in principle, an intermediary to discover the truth and attain salvation. The

⁴⁴*Anguttara Nikaya* IV 202.

⁴⁵*Majjhima Nikaya* II 149.

⁴⁶*Samyutta Nikaya* III 120.

⁴⁷Gombrich (1988) 71.

⁴⁸*Vinaya* II 139; II 108. Gombrich (1988) 71. Sylvain Lévi, "Sur la récitation primitive des textes bouddhiques," *Journal Asiatique* I (1915) 401-4.

⁴⁹*Anguttara Nikaya* I 188-93, *Kalama Sutta*.

Buddhist clergy, like Christian Protestant clergy, might teach, but it did not perform any sacred rite of salvation, or do anything other than instruct one how to proceed on one's own. Nirvana was attained by one's own efforts, and no one else could do it for you. There *is* a crucial difference between Buddhism and Protestantism, inasmuch as the Buddhist did not think that salvation could be achieved in the lay life, while the Protestant movement in 16th-century Europe rejected monasticism along with the intermediary role of the priesthood. That is not to say that Buddhists were quite decided on this point. The Buddha himself considered it possible, though difficult, for a layman to achieve nirvana, and a few cases are recorded in the Canon, along with many cases of laymen making spiritual progress. In the Mahayana tradition the enlightened layman was to come to play a central role, and with this a healthy reconsideration of the nature of nirvana was to take place. But in the early tradition, and in the Theravada, it was generally considered almost impossible to achieve enlightenment outside the *sangha*, and it is clear that the Buddha himself expected anyone seriously interested in achieving nirvana to enter the *sangha*. Indeed, to a considerable extent, no preaching concerning meditation or the higher religious aims of Buddhism beyond that morality which would help one attain a rebirth in the heavens, or in a life in which one would enter the *sangha*, was available to laymen. It was simply assumed that laymen had one religious aim, attainment to heaven, and monks another, nirvana.⁵⁰ In defense of this situation, which was criticized by the Mahayanists, it is in fact difficult to make progress toward nirvana unless one can devote a good deal of time to the thing, and that time alone, meditating, so a serious lay disciple will generally consider entering the *sangha* at some time, usually upon retirement.

The Buddhist layman was anyone who would listen to the preaching of the monks on occasion, perhaps join in some ceremonies at the monastery, and give alms. There was no reason why such a person might not also practice the local communal religion, observe Hindu festivals, and the like. He or she might well employ Brahmins for one purpose or another, but, if serious about Buddhism, not to attain salvation, only for worldly ends. A serious layman would undertake to follow the five moral precepts always, and observe mild austerities on feast days, almost the same austerities required of a novice monk.

Like most religions of personal salvation, Buddhism could be practiced anywhere and by anyone. The *sangha* was committed, in fact, to spreading the religion abroad, and followed the trade routes, no doubt often

⁵⁰*Majjhima Nikaya* III 261, in which a wealthy layman who had strongly supported the order has these higher matters explained to him on his deathbed, and complains that he has not heard any of this from the Buddha before. the answer that such things would not mean anything to most laymen. Again, *Digha Nikaya* III 191, where the Buddha says the monks should aid the laymen to attain rebirth in the heavens, but not that they are to aid them to attain nirvana. Gombrich (1988) 73–4.

traveling with Buddhist merchants. Thus the religion spread West along the Ganges at first, then South along the sea coast and to Ceylon, and East into Bengal.

Buddhism, then, was not only a religion of personal salvation, as opposed to a civic religion, but a religion of individual endeavor, as opposed to a religion relying on ritual observances, and a religion of ethical rather than ritualistic purity. One result of this in popular thought, given the retention of the basic Indian cosmology, was that both the gods and the operation of Karma were converted to ethical quantities, so that one's place in the world was held to be due entirely to the ethical quality of previous lives. The Gods became the protectors of the Buddhist religion, and the world came to be viewed much as it is in Christianity, as a place in which power is ultimately always for the good. No suffering, and no good fortune, is undeserved.

The rejection of the traditional Hindu justification for the use of violence on behalf of society, provided in the *Bhagavad Gita*, for instance, led many Buddhists to pacifism. It could not be argued that it is of the essence of a Kshatriya to make war, for he has no essence, and no duties rooted in his essence, nor any special privilege to violence, unless these are moral duties and privileges extended to all. Indeed, the state itself was looked upon with some suspicion. One *Jataka* tale says that the future Buddha was reborn as a king's heir-apparent, but observing, as an infant, the King dispensing justice, and imposing the death penalty, he remembered how he had spent long years in the hells for such activities in earlier lives, he resolved to pretend to be an idiot deaf-mute. The king was suspicious, but could not draw him out, and at last ordered him destroyed when he was grown, but he preached a sermon to the man who took him to the cemetery, and then proceeded to convert the entire kingdom, with the result that the city was abandoned, and everyone, except the drunks, moved out to the country to lead the religious life.⁵¹ The Buddhist theory of the state suggests that it is part of that world that must be escaped to truly seek enlightenment. Kings occur on one standard list of disasters along with thieves.⁵² Again, talk of state affairs, of kings and battles, is discouraged as the sort of talk that involves one in bad karma.⁵³ The Buddha made an effort to get along with the state, but seems to have had no better opinion of it in the end than did St. Augustine, who described it as a great robbery. In one place a Brahmin comes to the Buddha asking how to perform a great sacrifice that he has heard it rumored he knows how to

⁵¹*Jataka* VI 1-30, tale 538, *Temiya Jataka = Mugapakka Jataka*.

⁵²Gombrich (1988) 81, cf. *Vinaya* I 122.

⁵³*Digha Nikaya* I 7.

perform. Gautama answers, through a tale of one of his former lives, that a great sacrifice that would help eliminate lawlessness and disorder would be for the king to eschew the use of force and the raising of extra taxes, turning instead to supplying seed and feed to those engaged in farming, and capital to commercial ventures, and making sure that those in his service are provided for (so that they need not live off bribes and extortion). Thus the king would become rich (presumably through moderate taxation on a flourishing economy), and secure in the affection of his people.⁵⁴ In another Sutta, a king who had ruled his country justly during the Golden Age advises his son and successor to provide wealth to the poor. (Property has already evolved, and is necessary and to be respected because sufficient goods can be obtained only through work.) He neglects to do this, though he does provide protection to the righteous, that is, to those who have property rightfully acquired, and the result is that theft begins, and the thief is brought before the king, who gives him money. But it is too late, and the gift only makes matters worse because thieves expect to be rewarded, thievery becomes commonplace, and the king begins to execute thieves instead. After this thieves carry weapons to prevent being captured, violence increases, thieves begin to lie to protect themselves, others begin maliciously to accuse people of being thieves out of malice, and things become worse and worse.⁵⁵ Part of the lesson seems to be that once people are corrupted by poverty welfare systems and charity do harm rather than good. The trick is to prevent poverty in the first place. In yet another Sutta, the Buddha claims, apparently

⁵⁴*Digha Nikaya* I 135, *Kutadanta Sutta*.

⁵⁵*Digha Nikaya* III 61, *Cakkavatti-siha Sutta*. The story occurs in the context of a history of the present world order. Things had already deteriorated considerably, for in the beginning there were only gods, who descended to earth due to the development of craving, began to practice grosser and grosser pursuit of pleasures, and so on. But at the beginning of the story no violence or injustice had occurred yet, and the first injustice arose when the duty of the upper classes to see that the lower classes had a livelihood (presumably a good enough livelihood to satisfy them) was neglected. As a result of malice, some people became less attractive than others, and unfaithful wives and husbands appeared, with misconduct in the pleasures, and then harsh speech, nonsensical chatter, covetousness, malevolence, wrong views, incestuous behavior, greed, homosexuality, unfilial conduct, and disrespect towards elders and the like. Human life was immensely long at first, and was still several thousand years long at the time of the events recounted, but by the end of this degeneration it had dropped to a maximum of 100 years, as it was supposed to be at the time of Gautama. Extrapolating, it was predicted that life would become shorter and shorter, and people worse and worse, until the human life span dropped to only ten years and murder is institutionalized and commonplace, when the process will reverse itself and the virtues will gradually reestablish themselves until a new long-lived and just race arises. When the ideal state destroyed by the unwise king is restored, then Maitreya Buddha will appear. The whole mythical account is, as usual, markedly parallel to the psychological, suggesting that one only turns to the good after things get so bad he can no longer avoid recognizing how bad it is, and eventually, after attaining justice, achieves Buddhahood. Again, it would not be out of the question to compare the course of events to the life of a single person, who is born from heaven as a kind of god for whom food grows without his having to work, but is drawn into the world of desire, work, and suffering step by step, until injustice in service of his needs begins to look reasonable, etc. On the issue of government, the suggestion is often made that a just king will easily “conquer” other nations without bloodshed, since everyone will want to be ruled by him. Compare the Confucian view here.

satirically, to explain the beginnings of this world. The troubles begin with idleness and greed, which leads heavenly beings to life on the earth, where one of them steals rice, promises not to do it again, but does, and is punished the second time. Then government arises as one of the number is chosen to keep order, and he is the first Kshatriya. Thus the origins of the castes are explained sociologically as due to human convention, not eternal and divine arrangements, and it is suggested by the way that the Kshatriyas should have precedence over the Brahmins.⁵⁶

It will be noted that these stories favor the views of the merchant class. They suggest that the government would do better to enrich the people by supporting business than by instituting welfare, for instance, in particular by keeping tax rates down and relying on a flourishing economy to supply the government's needs. Indeed, there is evidence that the Buddha's message may have appealed especially to merchants and townspeople. It has been compared to the appeal of Protestantism in the West to the merchants of the sixteenth century.⁵⁷ It has been noted that the activity of Gautama centered on the capital cities of the countries he visited, not the forest retreats, and it seems clear that he aimed to convert, not ascetics or religious professionals, nor country folk, but the intellectually more sophisticated urban lay people, and, if possible, political leaders. An analysis of biographical information provided in the standard commentary for the more than 300 authors of the poems in the *Thera-* and *Theri-Gatha*, if its information is to be trusted, tells us that more than two-thirds came from large towns, and that about 40% were Brahmin, 23% Kshatriya, 30% Vaishya, and 3% each Shudra and Outcaste. Nearly half of these poets came from wealthy or powerful houses. Of course, this sample includes only monks and nuns capable of composing poetry, so the upper classes are presumably over-represented in it.⁵⁸ No doubt a class structure maintained itself in the *sangha* despite its democratic form, since the lower class members would defer to the upper class, and the upper class members would have the education to make their influence felt. But the impression of this sample is reinforced by the Canon's use of the term "householder" for the typical monk. A "householder" would be the independent head of a household, a freeholder rather than a day laborer, someone who could hold a seat on the village council.

⁵⁶*Digha Nikaya* III 80-98, *Aggana Sutta*. For all of this on politics, Gombrich (1988) 81-86.

⁵⁷Gombrich (1988) 72-81, the basis for my while discussion here. A.L. Basham, "The background to the rise of Buddhism," in A.K. Narain (ed.), *Studies in the History of Buddhism* (Delhi: 1980), 13-31.

⁵⁸B.G. Gokale (1965) "The early Buddhist elite," *Journal of Indian History* 42, Part 2, 391-402. Cited in Gombrich (1988) 55-56.

In the Canon they usually hold land, and have laborers to do the work, but in the cities they would be merchants or tradesmen.

The Buddhist ethic, founded as it is on prudential considerations and skepticism about the effectiveness of ritual, seems calculated to appeal to businessmen, as does its emphasis on industry and attention to one's work. It is suggested, for instance, that diligence will win both wealth in this world and, if one turns it that direction, nirvana.⁵⁹ Immorality supposedly leads to poverty, a bad reputation, loss of social status, anxiety about future lives, and a bad rebirth.⁶⁰ The first three considerations are precisely those that would appeal to a business person. The general insistence on self-reliance and one's responsibility for one's own affairs in Buddhism is perfectly consonant with the self-reliant confidence typical of the business class, which likes to view itself as depending on its own efforts to produce wealth, rather than on inheritance or social class. Thrift is praised as well in Buddhist ethics. In the best known sermon on lay ethics, the Buddha says that one should not spend money on drinking, gambling, luxury, keeping bad company, stage shows and attendance at fairs, but rather consume no more than a quarter of what one earns, turning half of it back into the business, and saving the rest. (Religious donations are counted as part of consumption, since they do lead to favorable rebirth.) In fact, the law of karma means that one who does badly will inevitably sink lower, into less powerful positions, and be less able to accumulate good karma in the future, whereas one who gains good karma will be born in higher positions, and become able to do much more good than before. Those who are economically well off have their good karma to thank for it, but, of course, unless they give to the Sangha and are kind and morally upright, they will accumulate bad karma and be reborn in a worse economic position than before. So just as the Calvinist took material success as a sign of "election," so a Buddhist would take material success as a sign of virtue in the past, and progress on the way toward enlightenment.⁶¹

4. THE BUDDHIST CANON

⁵⁹*Samyutta Nikaya* I 86. For the appeal to businessmen, see Gombrich (1988) 78-81; Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics* (1970) Chapter 6.

⁶⁰*Digha Nikaya* II 85-86.

⁶¹*Digha Nikaya* III 180-93, *Advice to Sighala*. Gombrich (1988) 127.

The texts on which our knowledge of early Buddhism is based are chiefly the surviving texts in the Pali language, and Chinese translations of the *Vinaya* and *Sutra Pitakas*. The destruction of the libraries and universities in the Buddhist homeland by the Moslem invaders of the 13th century means that we rely on what survived on the margins, the Pali texts of Ceylon and Indochina, texts preserved in Tibetan in monasteries in the Himalayas, and the extensive texts preserved in Chinese translations. The Pali scriptures are preserved by the Theravada (= Sthaviravadin) sect, but they agree closely with the Chinese translations in doctrine, and do not seem to reflect peculiarly Theravada, or scholastic Abhidharma views. They certainly represent the earliest texts we have. Moreover, the Bhabra Edict of Asoka (3rd century BCE) refers to seven identifiable texts from the Nikayas, and the (no doubt less reliable) Theravada records, the *Cullavaga*, *Dipavamsa*, *Mahavamsa*, and so on, all claim that the Nikayas are authentic. The Mahayana scholars explain the discrepancies between their doctrines and the Pali scriptures by arguing that these were the first discourses of the Buddha, suited to the poor understanding of the immediate disciples, and postulated a secret transmission of Dharma, wordless, which was later written down in Sutras dictated in the Heavens (for instance, the *Saddharmapundarika* and *Avatamsaka Sutras*). It is clear, of course, that no such thing happened, and the Mahayana represents a new literature reflecting later thought.

The general opinion is that the Abhidharma schools had formed by the third century BCE. These schools seem to represent a scholastic systematization and philosophic elaboration of the discourses in the *Nikayas*. The *Nikayas*, or *Sutra Pitaka* (Basket of Discourse), was probably completed, then, in the first 150 (or 50) years or so after the Buddha's death, so that the second council in the time of King Kulasoka would have settled the text of the Sutras. That leaves another 100 years for the divergent commentary traditions of the Abhidharmic schools to arise. The later schools all possessed the same *Sutra Pitaka* (except for very few minor works), but essentially different *Abhidharma Pitakas* with only a small core of works in common. The disagreements among the later schools, which were traditionally eighteen in number, seem to concern either points that were not settled in the original Sutras, or else differing options for the philosophical elaboration of the doctrine.

A check on the Theravadin Pali *Nikayas* is provided by the preservation of considerable portions of the Sarvastivada, Dharmaguptika, and Kasyapiya recensions of the canon in Chinese translation. Moreover, we have the Mahasamghika recension of the *Vinaya*. So we can reconstruct the texts of much of the canon before these various schools split apart. The chief questions on which the schools differed were (1) Can an *arhant*, one who has attained freedom, relapse again? Here the original view seems to have been that one can. (2) Is there a

group of mental phenomena that is indifferent, in addition to those that are good and bad? The original view seems to be that there was. (3) Is talk about the “person” (*pudgala*), an expression that appears in the Buddha’s dialogues, entirely reducible to talk about the five bundles or not? The original view was perhaps not clearly enough developed to decide, but it states that “person” and all apparent references to a self over and above the bundles are only “conventional expressions.” (4) Is progress toward understanding the truth gradual or does insight come all at once? The original view seems to be that it was usually gradual. (5) Do the simple elements of the natural world, granted to be momentary in their causal interaction with things, nonetheless have a sort of eternal being that accounts for our ability to refer to them? The original view seems to be that they do not. (6) Are Buddhas transcendental or supernatural? The tendency to claim some sort of supernormal status, and some sort of existence outside the world of illusion (taken to be the natural world) is very early, but probably the Buddha himself made no such claim, at least if it implies that a Buddha is something *real* and transcendental. The early view is subtle, but is probably accurately captured in the later Madhyamaka philosophy. (7) Are all volitions or forces (*samskara*) momentary, or do karmic forces persist for a period of time until they make their causal action felt? The original view seems to be that they are momentary. (8) Do the groups of elements, *skandhas*, transmigrate? The original view seems to be that they do not. (9) Can good conduct grow unconsciously? (10) Are all the dialogues in the canon direct statements, or do some of them require special interpretation? On these last two questions it is hard to say what the original view was.⁶²

The chronological order of texts within the five collections of the *Sutra Pitaka* (the Pali *nikayas*, in other traditions usually called the *agamas* or “traditions”) is difficult to establish, though it has been proposed that the study of the meters of the verse passages can help us arrange them in order, since the favored meters changed over time.⁶³ It is fairly clear that, despite the tradition, not even everything common to the various traditions in the *Tripitaka* could have been authenticated at the first council. There must have been monks who could not attend the first council who preserved discourses of the Buddha not otherwise known, and no doubt such works were later incorporated into scripture. The rule laid down by Sakyamuni (!) in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra* was that if anyone claimed to be in possession of a text not in the *Vinaya* or *Sutra Pitakas* (no mention made of the *Abhidharma Pitaka*), then it should be checked against what was included already, and if it agreed in its teachings

⁶²Warder (1971) 5–13.

⁶³Warder (1971) 14.

with what was already there, it was to be admitted. This opened the way for the development of variant versions of the scriptures, as the different schools could introduce texts that clearly stated their peculiar doctrines, and which seemed to *them* to agree with existing scripture, and the Mahayanists, of course, made use of this rule to introduce their Sutras into the tradition as well.

Pali is not the original language of the discourses in the *Sutra Pitaka*. The commentators agree that the discourses were first uttered in Magadhi, the language of Magadha, and seem to take it that Pali is Magadhi, though it clearly is not. Pali is a dialect related to the original tongue, and some of the verse passages carry traces of the older speech. There are other recensions of the Sutras, one in Sanskrit by the Sarvastavadins, with traces of Prakrit, a popular dialect, in the verse passages, and another in Sanskrit, with Prakrit more prevalent in the verses, by the Mahavastu school. But we rely much on Tibetan and Chinese translations from these Sanskrit texts, rather than the texts themselves. It should be noted that there is no sacred language among the Buddhists. The Magadhi version of the canon seems to have enjoyed a favored position for a few centuries, given the “Magadhisms” in other recensions, but Gautama had told his followers to preach and learn in their own languages, and it is clear that the canon was translated into the local language, and preserved in that language, wherever converts were made.

The oldest material seems to be that in the Pali *Vinaya Pitaka*. Its contents are: (I) *Sutta-Vibhanga*. This contains the Patimokkha rules, which must go back to the first century of the order. These rules were recited at the new moon and full moon meetings, with a confession of faults, and seem to be present in pretty much the same form in all the schools. For each rule, there is a story or stories explaining the circumstances under which it was laid down, the rule itself, a word by word commentary on the rule, and stories indicating mitigating circumstances under which exceptions to the rule or the indicated punishment might be made. (II) *Khandakas*. These discourses comprise the *Mahavagga* (large series), which comment on rules concerning actions performed by the entire order, admission to the order, Uposatha meetings at the full moon and new moon and the recital of Patimokkha rules with confession at those meetings, the retreat in the rainy season with its concluding ceremony, distribution and regulation of possessions, such as shoes, dress, furniture, medicine and food, ceremonies connected with the annual making and distribution of robes, the material for making robes, sleeping regulations, and sickness, the execution of official acts of the Sangha, and proceedings to be followed in the case of dissension within the Sangha. These rules, like the Patimokkha rules, seem for the most part to go back before the division into sects. The discourses are preceded by an account of the Buddha’s early life up

to the conversion of Sariputra, and followed by an account of the Buddha's death. (III) The *Cullavagga* (small series), a Theravadin work, which deals with the handling of offenses brought before the order, expulsion and reinstatement in the order, the manner in which a question can be raised before the order, the handling of schism, rules concerning dress, bathing and the like, travel regulations, the duties of teachers and students, exclusion from the Patimokkha, the ordination and instruction of nuns, and a valuable history of the first council of Rajagaha, and the second council of Vesali. (IV) The *Parivara*, likewise a Theravadin work, a supplementary collection of summaries and clarifications of the rules in the first two collections. This last section is said by the *Dipavamsa* to have been rejected by the Mahasanghikas, and it may be that each sect had its own *Parivara*, which means that this section arose after the division into sects. The general division seems to assign the routine rules ordering the monk's life to the first section, rules concerning wrong-doing and dissension to the second, and supplementary commentary to the last. (The Sarvastivadin version, in the Tibetan and Chinese translations, is relatively close to the Pali, and very close in the first parts of the book.)

The *Sutra Pitaka* contains five *Nikayas*, each representing a chunk of material a single monk might reasonably be expected to memorize during his career, though after ten years a monk was expected to know, in addition to the parts of the Vinaya obligatory on all, perhaps a third of his *Nikaya*.⁶⁴ The *Digha Nikaya*, the "Long Discourses," contains 34 Suttas in 3 series. In the first series of thirteen discourses the Suttas all contain lists of moral rules. They describe the training of the monks in three stages. First they learn to follow the moral rules (*Sila*), then they learn meditation (*Samadhi*), and at last attain to wisdom (*Panna*). In the second series the ten Suttas for the most part contain legends, relating the Buddha's previous lives, his visits to the worlds of the gods, the lives of previous Buddhas, and the like. Notable here are the *Mahanidana Sutta* on causation, the *Maha Satipatthana* on the four Jhanas, or stages of meditation, containing a commentary on the four noble truths, and the *Payasi Sutta* (delivered by an elder, Kumarakassapa, instead of Gautama) on future life and its rewards. The third series, the *Patika-vagga*, contains 11 discourses, including two Suttas on the origin and development of the universe, and the differentiation into castes. One Sutta here concerns the universal king, and another contains the prophecy of the next Buddha, the Maitreya Buddha. The *Sangiti Sutta* and the *Dasuttara Sutta* are ascribed to Sariputra, and contain lists of doctrinal terms with definitions and classifications. They are really Abhidharma, and form the second book of the Abhidharma Pitaka in the Sarvastivadin recension.

⁶⁴Warder (1970) 205, cites Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon* (Migodha: Puswella, 1946) 24 ff.

The *Majjhima Nikaya* contains 152 Suttas of intermediate length in 15 series. Notable here are some debates with the Jains (nos. 35, 56, 58, 79, 101, 104), material on the schism of Devadatta (nos. 29, 58), and some Suttas critical of the Caste system (nos. 84, 93, 96). There are commentaries among these, showing Abhidharmic tendencies, and 21 of them are by disciples rather than Gautama.

The *Samyutta Nikaya* contains 5 series, with 56 subdivisions, and then yet further subdivisions. Its Suttas are for the most part very short. In the first series there are many poems and scraps of verse, arranged alphabetically. In the second series there is much on causation. The third series contains numerous Suttas on the 5 *skandhas*. The fourth series begins with a series of Suttas on the 6 senses. The fifth series opens with Suttas on the 8-fold path.

The *Anguttara Nikaya* contains 11 groups of about ten Suttas each. Each Sutta is a list of a certain number of things, such as the eleven bad qualities of a herdsman and the eleven good qualities of monk. The first group contains lists with one member, the second lists with two members, and so on.

The *Khuddaka Nikaya* is something of a grab-bag of popular works, most in verse, that has contained different materials at different times. Nowadays, in Ceylon, it contains: (1) the *Khuddaka-Patha*, "The Reading of Short Passages," a Theravadin manual of short passages not found in other traditions. (2) the *Dhammapada* "Verses on the teaching," a summary of the doctrine apparently composed in response to the *Bhagavad Gita*, and (3) the *Udana*, a short collection of "solemn utterances" of the Buddha, are both of them collections of verses from other places in the *Tripitaka*. (4) *Itivuttaka*, "Thus it was said," is a collection of 112 short Suttas. The Theravada commentary on this work says that they were remembered by a slave girl who became a lay disciple, and were circulated by her until they came to the attention of the monks, who had forgotten these sayings, in time to be included in the first council's work. Presumably they were of late provenance and their authenticity had been questioned, though this portion of the *Khuddaka Nikaya* is, like (2), (3), (5), and (8) - (11), common to all the schools. (5) The *Suttanipata*, "Sutta Collection," is a collection of short Suttas in verse, including the "*Khadgavisana-gatha*" ("rhinoceros strophes," a poem by a *pratyekabuddha*, one who attains enlightenment alone and does not undertake to teach others), the "*munigatha*" ("Recluse strophes", on the same themes as the first poem), "*Sailagatha*" ("Saila's strophes," being a dialogue in verse between the Buddha and a brahmin named Saila), "*Arthavargiyani Sutrani*" ("sutras of the welfare group," or perhaps "sutras of the groups of eights," being sixteen short poems on ethical and moral matters), and the "*Parayana*" ("the way across," being sixteen brief verse dialogues between the Buddha and various brahmins). (6) The *Vimana Vatthu*, "Stories about Heavenly

Palaces,” is about beings in the heavens and the meritorious deeds that got them there, and (7) the *Peta Vatthu*, “Stories about Hungry Ghosts,” is about ancestral spirits, which often enjoyed a cult in the Buddhist part of the world, as reinterpreted in Buddhist thought. (8) the *Thera Gatha*, the “Verses of the Elders,” is a collection of autobiographical verses by 264 elders. (9) The *Theri Gatha*, “Verses of the Nuns,” is a collection of autobiographical verses by about 100 Nuns. In imitation of these *gathas*, later Chinese and Japanese monks typically composed verses on the occasions of realization, transmission, and death. (10) the *Jataka* is a collection of some 550 stories about the Buddha’s previous lives, in verse. Many of these stories are reduced in the text to brief verses that recall them, or provide the highlights alone. The stories are related in full in the commentary. (11) The *Apadana*, on the lives of famous monks and nuns, consists mostly of tales of former lives. (12) The *Patisumbhida-magga*, “The Way of Analysis,” is an Abhidharma work. (13) The *Niddesa*, “Exposition,” is a commentary on the *Suttanipata*. (14) The *Buddhavamsa*, “Lineage of the Buddha,” is a history of the Buddhas. (15) Finally, the *Cariya Pitaka*, “Collection concerning Conduct,” is about the conduct of future Buddhas in their attainment of the perfections, in verse. The last four of these are Theravadin works, not common to the schools.

A third Pitaka, the *Abhidharma Pitaka*, grew up in the various schools in the centuries after Gautama’s death. These works are almost all clearly late, many reflecting the peculiar doctrines of the schools that produced them after the schisms. Their source and inspiration, however, are to be found in the *Sutra Pitaka*. They begin with a *matrka*, a set of headings serving as a summary of doctrine. In an oral culture, of course, such lists of the five virtues, four noble truths, twelve steps in the chain of causation, and so on, serve as invaluable aids to memory. An *Abhidharma* is an elaboration and commentary on a *matrka* (usually listed at the beginning of the *Abhidharma*), dealing with each heading in turn, and providing, at least, a selection of Sutra texts explicating each point. Almost always, though, it goes further, analyzing and commenting on the Sutra materials, elaborating them and working out a detailed set of views. It seems that such work began even in the Buddha’s own lifetime. The Buddha himself set out *matrkas*, and his leading monks, especially Sariputra, were asked to research these *matrkas* and elaborate on them. Aside from Sariputra, the elder Katyayana is praised by the Buddha for being the best at such detailed analysis of what has been briefly stated.⁶⁵ The Prajnavaptivadins of the Mahasanghika school, and the Theravadins both attribute a (presumably apocryphal) treatise on the

⁶⁵*Anguttara Nikaya* I 23.

interpretation of scripture to Katyayana.

The most primitive Abhidharma text we have is the *Samgitaparyaya*, which is an enormous and comprehensive *matrka* combining over 200 lists from one to eleven members in length. There is only a little explanation and a few definitions, and virtually everything listed is discussed in the Sutras. As the literature developed the lists increased in length, and commentary became much more careful and deliberate. The earliest real Abhidharma works seem to have concerned (1) self-possession, exertion, power, the faculties, enlightenment, the way, the four meditations, the bundles, the sense-spheres, the elements, the four truths, and chain of causation, (2) the classification of various phenomena under these heads, with the addition of a few other heads, and a listing of phenomena that can occur together at one time, and (3) the study of the chain of conditions in particular. Much of this would have been driven forward by the practice of awareness meditation, in which one is to observe phenomena as they arise and classify them.⁶⁶

Another early work is the *Mahavastu*, an *avadana* based on the Lokattaravadina *Vinaya*, containing a large number of Sutras and other selections from the canon.⁶⁷

For the history of early Buddhism, we rely especially on the *Dipavamsa*, perhaps from the 4th century BCE, being a history of Ceylon, and the *Mahavamsa*, a reworking of the *Dipavamsa* about a century later.⁶⁸ The work contains five chapters, the first reporting legends about the Buddha, the second discussing his genealogy and dates. The third chapter recounts the funeral of the Buddha and the first council of the Sangha. The fourth chapter given an account of the second council, and the last chapter tells of the rise of seventeen new schools in the first century after the Buddha's death, and later of six others in India and two in Ceylon. It includes a discussion of Asoka, the Buddhist emperor, and the arrival of Buddhism in Ceylon.

5. THE *VINAYA* AND THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF BUDDHISM

The early Sangha revealed in the *Vinaya* was a most democratic organization. No hierarchy was established in it, but the monks who had been in the order longest had seniority. Early on the immediate

⁶⁶Warder (1970) 218-224.

⁶⁷See B.C. Law, *A Study of the Mahavastu* (1930), which contains selections from the text.

⁶⁸The *Mahavamsa* is translated by W. Geiger.

disciples of the Buddha must have had sufficient personal authority to suppress schism. This lack of central organization and hierarchy has persisted to the present day. Regular meetings are prescribed every other week, as well as a conclave of the whole order during the rainy season. (It is to be noted that one cannot wander far and still get back together with the group within a two week interval.) As Gautama perhaps intended, cenobitic living became the rule, as the monks settled into a single residence year round and the wandering life became a fiction, but eremites could be supervised from the local monastery.

The date of the *Vinaya Pitaka* is quite early. It has been argued plausibly that the frequent references to external conditions in the work betray no awareness of states larger than the Kingdoms of the Buddha's day. That would place the work before 324 BCE, the founding of the Mauryan Empire. Still, that leaves a good hundred years for the *Vinaya* to develop after the Buddha's death. The scholar's long-established date for the *Vinaya* is 350 BCE,⁶⁹ though Buddhist tradition would place the formation of the *Vinaya* at the first council, upon the Buddha's death, and there is a good chance that the tradition is substantially correct, at least to the extent that the basic shape of the *Sangha* and its rules were established by the Buddha himself.

The monks lived by begging, so that a group of monks would perforce split up once it became too great to be supported by the faithful laymen in the neighborhood. The order split into geographic districts, each holding its own biweekly meetings, and each governing itself. The practice of begging was adopted from earlier Indian practice, but it also serves to remind the monks of their dependence on the laymen. An order of nuns was established in Gautama's lifetime, and represents a radical departure from the Indian notion that women can have no part in spiritual attainment.

The *Vinaya* is a set of rules for conducting life within the order. The presence of a single central aim, the achievement of enlightenment, agreed on by all the members of the order, make such a set of rules possible, and prevent their becoming a form of tyranny. Such rules would be very difficult to set up for laymen, who not only pursue many divergent aims that give rise to all sorts of difficult cases, but preserve the right to choose what aim shall be uppermost at any given time. Only if a single aim were recognized as paramount, and the means to that aim generally agreed on, could laymen have some hope of regularizing their lives after the manner of a monk. In any case, the rules define the *Sangha*, for it is precisely those who recognize their

⁶⁹The Chinese *Vinaya* is the oldest aside from the Pali, and, though a thorough study is yet to be made, it seems that it does not diverge often from the Pali. Gombrich (1988) 91-2, points out that the Chinese translation seems loose, and tends to omit those passages where the Pali is difficult, so even what divergences there are cannot be taken automatically to invalidate the early date of material in the Pali version.

authority who are members of the *Sangha*. (There is another conception of the ideal *Sangha*, which includes only those, whoever they may be, who have reached or surpassed the point in their spiritual development at which they have only seven lives left before reaching enlightenment. It would seem very likely, though, that this ideal *Sangha*, and the conventional *Sangha* of those who wear the robes should show considerable overlap.)

The aim of the *Vinaya* rules is, first of all, to establish a form of life in which one can be content with very little, both in the form of property, and in the form of complex emotional involvement with family, friends, and community. Each monk is to rely on his or her own resources, emotional and physical, as far as possible, and to cut off attachments and aversions. The “middle way” emphasized in what came to be regarded as the first sermon of the Buddha is most important here, for one can become attached to great austerities and the role that makes them “necessary” just as much as one can become attached to the goals of worldly life. The *Vinaya* tries to undermine this kind of prideful attachment, as well as eliminating the distractions of fear and need, actually requiring monks to do and accept whatever is needful for health and vigor.

In the second place, the *Vinaya* simplifies life to the point where more or less continuous awareness and reflection becomes possible. The monks are not to be continually caught up in exciting, emotionally significant endeavors and events that involve them in roles with which they identify, and seduce them away from self-awareness. Life in the *Sangha* must enable them to form the habit of standing back from themselves in detachment, and seeing that the particular roles they play are not after all themselves, but only roles. The life of a monk should be uneventful and even boring. Later, considerable concern would be shown about the trap that the role of monk can become, and about attachment to the *Vinaya* rules themselves. Institutions can only carry one so far toward enlightenment. Whatever institution is established, at some point the individual must recognize that this, too, is not something that it makes sense to become attached to.

In the third place, the *Vinaya* imposes the rules of morality, for to understand one’s own suffering is to understand that of other beings, to respect them and their needs, and to wish them well. Wisdom is coupled to compassion, and so one is required to help those not as advanced as oneself, and to bridle at this requirement is only to show that one is not as wise as one thinks. In particular, the atmosphere of the community must be such as to enable the other monks to practice, and so one must shape one’s own conduct to this aim. Most of the *Vinaya* rules are presented with the supposed occasion of their enactment, and many of them were said to have been established to meet the dissatisfaction of the laity. (Often, as a matter of fact, a new rule to meet a problem is then said to have been modified when strict adherence to it gave rise to a new problem. The system

is supposed to be flexible, for the usefulness of a rule is conditioned, as is everything else there is, so that no rule can reasonably be held to be absolutely valid in all conditions.) So not only within the Sangha, but also in the relations of the Sangha to the wider community, the monks must do what is necessary to preserve peace and the atmosphere conducive to the flourishing of the dharma, that is, the recruitment and retainment of the laity and the provision of respectful guidance to the laity.

The ideal of homelessness pervades the *Vinaya*.⁷⁰ One is to leave home, and in particular the hearth that symbolizes home, wandering unattached to particular people or a particular role within the community. Eventually, one hopes to internalize this homelessness, so that there is nothing within that one recognizes as one's true self, and one wanders from role to role without attachment just as one wanders from place to place and person to person. One must also wander for the sake of preaching, for the chief duty of a monk is to preach, and he is not allowed to turn down an opportunity to do so even during the rainy season, when travel is otherwise forbidden (apparently to avoid damaging plants and small creatures, in imitation of the Jains). There would be much movement between monasteries, and a typical monastery should contain many visitors with its regular residents. The aim is to avoid coming to belong to the place.

6. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SANGHA

The *Pattimokkha* rules, or "binding," "non-optional" rules form the core of the *Vinaya*, and were recited at the biweekly meetings of the *Sangha*, along with a confession of faults after the recitation of each rule. (Nowadays an immediate confession of a fault to a senior monk is substituted for the public bi-weekly confession.) The rules, virtually identical in all recensions, fall into eight groups. About half the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the *Sutta-vibhanga*, is devoted to commenting on these rules.

The four *Parajika* rules, violation of which entails permanent expulsion from the *Sangha*, specify that monks are not to (1) engage in sexual intercourse, (2) take what is not given, (3) knowingly kill anyone, or incite to suicide, or, (4) lie about their Yogic attainments of higher knowledge or superhuman abilities. For nuns the first rule was supplemented by four others forbidding (1) touching a man between shoulders and knees, (2) allowing a man sexual contact, (3) condoning or concealing another nun's *Parajika* offense, and (4)

⁷⁰Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge: 1982) 167-176; Gombrich (1988) 96.

persisting in taking the side of an expelled monk. Though the Buddha did allow the ordination of women, the *Vinaya* insists on a degree of subordination to men, requiring that nuns be ordained both by the nuns and the monks, so that no woman can enter the order without the men's permission, and, as in the third rule here, treating women as natural co-conspirators who might be expected to conceal things from the men. Lack of power, of course, always leads to the habit of concealment. No nun, however senior, could ever exercise seniority over even the most junior of monks.⁷¹ On the other hand, the monasteries for the nuns were governed by nuns, and the nuns were held to form a separate Sangha, not a subordinate part of a greater Sangha controlled by men.

Violations of the thirteen *Sanghodesesa* rules involve expulsion and penance for a time, and then reinstatement by the assembly. The first five of these forbid minor sexual offenses. The next two regard the monk's hut, which must be approved by the order. The last six forbid false accusations against other monks, fomenting or abet dissension in the order, and abusiveness when admonished by a senior, or refusal to leave a village in which one begs if told to do so because of bad behavior.

The third set of rules applied only to the men, forbidding meditation in seclusion with a lay-woman, or in a place convenient for seduction. The penalty for violations of these rules is left uncertain, since the seriousness of the offense is uncertain. The offended lay-woman or other witnesses may charge a monk with violations of one of the first two groups of rules in the first case, of the second or fifth in the second case, and the penalties for the violation depend on the outcome of the procedure.

Violations of the thirty *Nissaggiya pacittiya* rules do not lead to expulsion, but expiation of the offense or forfeiture of property that is in violation of the rules may be required. The first ten concern robes, how long an extra robe may be kept, their repair and exchange, their receipt as alms. One is not to ask a lay-person for a robe unless the old one is lost, nor to suggest what sort of robe is desired. The next ten concern material used in mats, specifying that a mat must be used for six years before being replaced, and specify that no money is to be received in alms and no buying or selling is permitted to a monk. The next ten concern the monk's bowl, medicines, and robes to be used in the rainy season. Nothing given to the order is to be converted to personal use. A bowl must be broken in five places before it can be replaced. Formally, all one's possessions are property of the order, and no store of personal property in immediate use is permitted.

⁷¹Gombrich (1988) 103-105.

There are two standard lists of possessions allowed a monk. In one, he is allowed the four “requisites,” clothing (three robes), begging bowl, dwelling, and medicine. The other list allows three robes (enough to keep warm at night, though all three must be worn in public, nudity being frowned upon—nuns are allowed two extra pieces of clothing), begging bowl, razor (to shave one’s head, for no renouncer tends his hair, and the Buddha went for personal neatness rather than an unkempt appearance), needle (since one may never wear a torn robe), belt and water-strainer (to strain out any small insects that might be harmed when one drank, a concession to the Jain ideal of harmlessness toward all things).

These rules concerning personal possessions must be understood to operate within the institution of the *kappiya-karaka*, or “one who makes things suitable,” a lay attendant to the monks who accepts money and the like on their behalf, and then provides for the monks’ needs out of these contributions when they arise.⁷² There is a danger here, of course, for it allows a monastery to grow rich. The lay attendants of the monks had no restrictions laid on them to prevent it, and the patronage of laymen often did make monasteries rich. Indeed, they must often have been implicated in social injustice, and the monks would have had to be hypocritical not to recognize the facts. (The monks were not allowed to turn down any gift that was offered, unless the giver was impoverished, for that would prevent the giver from gaining the meritorious karma that came from giving the gift.) The Buddha is said in one place to have lamented that in the good old days monks lived in forests, wore cast-off rags, and so on, but now they receive material goods in abundance.⁷³ But part of the point of the middle way is to provide a certain security to the monks, without necessitating that they become involved in supporting themselves within lay society, and looked at in that way, the *kappiya-karaka* is logical enough. It is perhaps odd that the Sangha never aimed to be literally self-supporting, in the way that monasteries within Christianity sometimes were. That, no doubt, is chiefly to be imputed to the dominant traditions in India at the time the Sangha was formed, which viewed it as a right of the ascetic to be supported, no doubt inherited from the right of Brahmin to live off his sacrifices. We must admit a failure on the Buddha’s part in accepting this picture of things, though there is an advantage to be gained in not allowing the internal structure of the order to grow to the complexity required to run a farm, for instance. Life begins to become complicated, and social divisions and special roles, both enviable and unenviable, become evident. But the

⁷²*Vinaya* III 219-23, I 245.

⁷³Gombrich (1988) 93.

practice of keeping servants, at first, no doubt, students and interested lay persons, but eventually a full complement of monastic employees, no doubt did enough to establish invidious distinctions, and many the members of the Sangha lived a comfortable life that must have seemed enviable to the poorest strata of society. Periodically claims were made that the order had been infiltrated by poor men and women interested only in economic security.⁷⁴

The patronage of kings led to monasteries possessing huge tracts of land, along with the labor of the inhabitants, and firmly placed the monks in the upper classes of society, as honored religious specialists. Though their personal needs may be small, and their lives relatively ascetic, they enjoyed prestige, and had to be waited on by others so that they could pursue their ascetic, but fundamentally secure, lifestyle, and provided with noble buildings and temples, so that, through art, they could spread the faith. More than this, the official state recognition of the religion included recognition of the inviolable character of the monk, who was essentially free from secular duties. In exchange, the Sangha would not ordain soldiers, debtors, slaves, criminals etc., or, in general, undermine the existing political and social order.

It has been argued⁷⁵ that the state's support was necessary to enforce the expulsion of bad monks, and that when state support was lacking the Order fell into disrepute because, for all that it might expel someone, if the fellow insisted on going about in the yellow robes anyway, nothing could be done. The long-term health of the *Sangha* required that its decisions receive governmental enforcement. Perhaps this is true in the West as well. The splintering of the Christian Church since its disestablishment in the Liberal West, it can be argued, has led not only to the dissolution of doctrine, but to the rise of scandalous incidents and fanatic sects, and may lead to the disappearance of Christianity entirely, in the long run. I would guess that it does help to have the correct way institutionalized and given the sanction of one's society, even to the point of the establishment of religion, and I doubt if as great a portion of the population in the West are now sincere Christians than were such in the earlier centuries. Liberal doubts can be raised, but they do not so much concern the increased effectiveness of established religion, if it is correct, in guiding people to the right path, as the difficulty in knowing if a religion is correct, and the problem of preserving people's freedom to choose their own way. Once government is allowed its role, things can easily miscarry. After all, however much Buddhism may have

⁷⁴Gombrich (1988) 92-5.

⁷⁵Gombrich (1988) 116 ff.

benefitted from the support of Buddhist governments, it was the support of Moslem governments for their own religion that led to the destruction of Buddhism in India. It is better, surely, to allow the correct religion, whatever it might be, to go unsupported, and remain less effective in drawing adherents and helping people, than it is to risk the wrong group receiving government support, or a group that will use its power to hinder free choice in matters of religion.

The *Vinaya* ensures complete dependence on the laity for the monk's livelihood, if it is followed strictly. This dependence receives ideological justification from the claim that the laity are thus enabled to gain meritorious karma. Like all good ideology, this has something in it. The layman no doubt does benefit from the vicarious commitment expressed to religious aims when he gives something to the Sangha, and gains something to in the way of practicing non-attachment. But the criticism often brought, that the monks lived a life pursuing honors and pleasure, must very often have had something in it, too.

The criticism one wants to bring here, aside from the point already made, that insincere monks might be attracted to the order once it was rich, is that nothing was done by the *Sangha* to pursue social justice. The monastic Order simply fit right into the existing social order, if not because the monks reflected social classes within their community, at least because the Order itself (somewhat like a modern University) took the position of the clients of the upper classes within the community. Of course, there must always have been the poorer monasteries and those monks who lived off the patronage of the lower classes rather than the king. Not all of the monasteries, even at the worst of it, were simply creatures of the rich, and, moreover, Buddhist ideals, taught to the laity by the monks, served to moderate exploitation and foster charity within the larger community. (In the same way, a defender of the University might point out that not all universities are creatures of the rich in the way that, perhaps, the Ivy League schools are, and that the ideals of scholarship and free thought have a beneficial effect on society at large, so that much of the impetus for social reform comes out of the work of scholars, however they receive their financial support.) More fundamentally, though, the monks would have objected that social reform was less important than the preservation of the *Sangha*. The monk's responsibility to the community is fundamentally to provide an example how one should live. It is for this reason that the monk must always behave appropriately in public, demonstrating in his person the ideal of release. The objection that is often raised, that he should, if he is indeed compassionate, help others in a more concrete way, is recognized within Buddhism, and the *Sangha* maintains hospitals and other charitable institutions in response, and, of course, urges charity upon the laity. But in the end, the Buddhist faith does not

lie in economics, or personal assistance for others, but in the ability of the individual to achieve enlightenment on his own. Only with enlightenment is there truly an end to suffering for anyone. So the preservation of the way, realized concretely in the practice of the *Sangha*, is the most compassionate thing one can do. Somewhat like a modern capitalist, Buddhists believe in individual enterprise, and take it that people must, in the end, solve their problems themselves, so that the fostering of individual enterprise is the best thing one can do for them.⁷⁶

The fifth group of rules in the *Vinaya* is the ninety-two *Pacittiya* rules. Violation of these minor rules is expiated without expulsion. They prohibit lying, slander, abusive language, disrespect, stirring up ill-will, reviving a settled matter, concealment of a serious offense, ordainment of anyone less than 20 years of age, irregular behavior at meetings, eavesdropping, suggesting difficulties of conscience, telling those not ordained of one's supernatural powers or of any serious offense in the order. They also regulate the relations of monks and nuns, and specify the rules for living in a *vihara*, or common dwelling place. Finally, they regulate food and drink, travel, and various ascetic practices.

The first schism is said to have occurred when a monk proposed that five ascetic practices be made compulsory, subsisting on alms, vegetarianism, wearing only rags, living only in the jungle, and only at the foot of a tree.⁷⁷ The Buddha allowed these practices, except for living outdoors during the rainy season, but refused to make them compulsory. In late texts there were thirteen allowable ascetic practices. Nine of them are listed in a canonical sermon of the Buddha, who points out that they can be followed for all sorts of bad reasons having nothing to do with learning to be content with little.⁷⁸ These practices include eating only once a day, living in a cemetery, and sleeping seated. It is traditional for an ascetically inclined monk to perform only one of these practices at a time, and any sort of publication of one's asceticism or boasting about is proscribed. At least one reason for this is that Indian respect for the ascetic is such that one can become rich from donations if one gains a reputation for asceticism. Quite aside from the matter of envy and pride among the monks, the exploitation of the laity by hypocritical ascetic show-offs is to be avoided.⁷⁹

⁷⁶Gombrich (1988) 114.

⁷⁷*Vinaya* II 197.

⁷⁸*Majjhima Nikaya* III 40-2.

⁷⁹Gombrich (1988) 94-5.

The sixth set of rules is the four *Patidesaniya* rules. Violations of these rules must be confessed, but no punishment is set for them. They specify that a nun may not accept food from those unrelated to her, and may not give orders to laymen concerning the serving of food at mealtimes. They also forbid the monks to receive alms from poor families. No food may be accepted by one that lives in the jungle if the almsgiver is not first warned of the danger in visiting him.

The seventy-five *Sekhiya* rules form the seventh set, and violations of these rules do not have to be confessed, though the violator is expected to recognize his error and reflect on it privately. The first twenty specify modesty and polite behavior. The rest concern teaching the dharma to lay-people, specifying respectful deportment.

Every novice was assigned to a personal preceptor, as was traditional in India. Characteristically, though, the Buddhist practice is somewhat more egalitarian, allowing the student to criticize the teacher under certain circumstances, in particular, for taking an incorrect doctrinal position. In the end, the dharma is seen as the real instructor, and the teacher does not speak from a personal authority, but from the authority of a publicly testable and verifiable dharma.⁸⁰

The *Adhikarana-samatha* rules form the last set, specifying proceedings if a disputed accusation is made. A majority decision at a meeting of the Sangha is required if the matter cannot be settled informally.

There were several important ceremonies marking turning points in the life of the monk. Ordination, which required parental consent, came in two stages. In the first, the postulant would be accepted as a trainee by a single monk, typically in the presence only of his immediate family. He or she is shaved, changes into a monk's robes, and takes refuge in the Buddha, the *Dharma* and the *Sangha*. During training postulants are bound by the ten precepts for laymen, but not by the *Vinaya* in general except in matters of decorum. Higher ordination is far more elaborate and formal. The postulant is presented to the *Sangha* by his or her teacher, examined, and formally admitted when found qualified. A quorum of ten monks (five in "border areas") of ten years experience is required for an ordination. In the Theravada the examination of the postulant is only a formality.

Confession of faults is compulsory for many offences. In the end the only real punishment used by the Sangha is expulsion. The monk's moral life is his own business. Self-reliance entails responsibility for one's own

⁸⁰Gombrich (1988) 106.

actions, and the only reasonable response to a fault is not to seek to make it magically go away through some ceremony of forgiveness, but, reaffirming one's goal of enlightenment, simply to resolve to do better. There is no supernatural state of guilt to be removed, and *karma* will work its way regardless of our ceremonies. But confession to another does force one to face up to what he has done. One does have, after all, a responsibility to use the opportunity to seek enlightenment honestly and with full effort, so one is, that far, responsible to others for what one does.

The *Sangha* met every two weeks to recite the *Patimokkha* rules, thus maintaining its solidarity. The emergency procedure of abbreviating the recitation has become the usual practice since literacy removed the need to maintain the rules in the oral memory of the community. In the Buddha's lifetime it seems that these meetings provided an opportunity for public confession, but, rather quickly, the laity was excluded from attendance, and then confession was made a private matter to be carried out before the public meeting with senior monks. It is inquired if all are pure, and whoever has confessed in preparation for the meeting remains silent, signifying purity. The quorum for this ceremony is four.

In addition to the rules for the monks, there were rules for novices and laymen.⁸¹ All adherents were required to abstain from killing, from taking what is not given, unchastity, falsehood, and intoxicants that lead to inattention and delusion. Novices, and laymen on feast days, were required to avoid eating between formally prescribed meals, and to abstain from escapist entertainment, that is, plays, music, and the like, from the use of garlands, scents, and other fancy personal adornment. There were six feast days for the laity in each month, the 8th, 14th and 15th, 23d, and 29th and 30th. On these days the laity would visit their local monasteries, where they would hear sermons from the monks. On the 7th and 22nd days the monks would receive more advanced sermons when they met to recite the *Patimokkha* rules, without the laymen present.

The status of a layman, an *upasaka* or *upasika*, was established by "taking refuge" in the Buddha, the *Sangha* and the *Dharma*, and undertaking to follow the five precepts for the laity.

6. FROM THE BUDDHA'S DEATH TO THE DEATH OF ASHOKA

According to the early tradition, Gautama appointed no successor after his death, informing Ananda

⁸¹*Vinaya* I 38. *Khuddakapatha* 2.11.

that the *dharma* he had taught, and the rules of discipline he had established, would be the teacher of the *Sangha* henceforth.⁸² His teachings, however, had been misinterpreted even during Gautama's lifetime, so that we have reports of one Arittha, who held that the pleasures of the senses were not stumbling-blocks to those seeking enlightenment, and one Sati, who held that consciousness persists even after the dissolution of the body, and transmigrates to the next body, thus rejecting the doctrine of *anatman*.⁸³ So the growth of doctrinal differences was to be expected if no measures were taken to ensure unity.

The earliest sectarian split was that of Devadatta, a schismatic who emerged at the end of Gautama's life, and seems to have represented a tendency among the monks to conform their practise more closely to what would be expected in Hindu circles. He proposed that monks be required to live in the forest, get their food only by begging, eat no meat, wear only clothing thrown away by others, and live at the foot of a tree rather than in a dwelling. Gautama permitted those to follow these practices who wished to, but did not require them, and he even prohibited living at the foot of a tree during rainy season, when one must take refuge indoors, not to avoid austerities but to avoid harming plants and small animals.⁸⁴ Note that this schism did not arise over doctrine, but over a matter of practice. (Stories to the effect that Devadatta tried to kill the Buddha, after getting the son of King Bimbisara of Magadha, the Buddha's supporter, to attempt an assassination of his father, seem to be slander. The schism had some success, surviving for several centuries, and slander of this sort was a natural response to combat it.)⁸⁵

A quorum of four monks was needed for the fortnightly meeting of the *Sangha*, and the recitation of the *Patimokkha* rules was required at such meetings. That meant that a schism could develop as long as at least four monks were willing to split from the assembly together. Splitting the *Sangha* was a heinous offense, but it would always have been the other party that committed it, of course. Aside from this fact, geographic expansion and the resulting isolation of communities from one another was bound to lead to somewhat different *Patimokkha* traditions, and that would be sufficient to produce a *de facto* schism, since monks with

⁸²*Digha Nikaya* II 154.

⁸³*Majjhima Nikaya* I 130; I 256.

⁸⁴*Vinaya* II 196.

⁸⁵Warder (1970) 62-63. *Vinaya* II 199 says that five hundred monks followed Devadatta at one time, though it also insists that Sariputra brought them back into the fold.

different *Patimokkha* rules could not participate in the same fortnightly meeting. In the end correct practice is more important here than doctrine, and so there are two sorts of split. The split between Mahayana and Hinayana, for instance, is doctrinal, and does not involve the *Patimokkha* rules, and as a result it did not formally give rise to different sects, but to doctrinal differences within sects. Naturally, each of the eighteen sects (by conventional numbering) that eventually evolved would tend to have its own doctrinal cast, but often, perhaps even usually, the difference over the *Patimokkha* rules was the deciding factor, and doctrinal developments came later, after isolation was achieved.

Thus a Theravadin monk is one who adheres to the Pali version of 227 *Patimokkha* rules, and so is a member of the Theravadin ordination tradition. The term “Theravadin” means “doctrine of the elders,” for, of course, the legitimacy of the tradition hangs on its being the original tradition, from which the others split off.⁸⁶

Many of the early writings refer to the disorder in the Jain sect when Nigantha Nataputta died to explain why the first council was necessary.⁸⁷ According to tradition the first council met in Rajagaha three months after Gautama’s death to forestall such confusion. Five hundred senior monks established a canon of the Buddha’s discourses to be preserved in an oral tradition. Thus an authoritative account of the most important doctrines was established, and, just as important, some version of the *Vinaya*. The historicity of this council is often questioned, though it is not clear why it should be, though the details of the standard story of the council are obviously some of them mythical. The oral tradition would not have been contained entirely in the memory of any one monk. In effect, many independent traditions would have arisen as each disciple memorized some section of the *Vinaya* rules or some discourse of the Buddha he had heard, and then passed this on to his own successors. The function of the council would have been to authorize and organize all these various traditions.

The second council met at Vaisali, a hundred years after the Buddha’s death, according to tradition, but given the round number and the fact that several monks who had heard the Buddha were supposed to be in attendance, it may have been earlier. Our sources unanimously report that the dispute giving rise to the meeting involved the relaxation among the monks at Vaisali of certain rules of the *Vinaya*, in particular, the

⁸⁶Gombrich (1988) 110-112.

⁸⁷*Digha Nikaya* III 117, 272. *Majjhima Nikaya* II 243. The *Pasaldika Suttanta*, *Sangiti Suttanta*, and *Smagama Sutta*.

acceptance gold and silver donations from the laity; and the Theravadin sources, but not the Mahasanghika, report that there were nine other points of discipline at issue, the most important of which concerned whether one should follow practices established in the tradition of one's teacher regardless of the Vinaya code. If this was permitted, then the other local variations in practice at Vaisali would have to be allowed. In any case, a visiting monk became aware of the collection of gold and silver and protested, and, when he was rebuffed by the local monks, took his complaint to the community at large. Eventually it became clear that only a general council representing all the Buddhists in India, as far as this could be managed, could settle the matter, and both sides enlisted as much support as they could for the meeting. Over 700 monks attended from all over India, but the debate went on endlessly, so a committee of eight, with four from each of the opposing parties, was selected to discuss the matter. Finally the Vaisali supporters on the committee were convinced of their error, and a unanimous report suppressing the new practices was submitted to the whole meeting, which found it acceptable. The *Vinaya* was then rehearsed again, a sensible procedure to help prevent future deviations, and the meeting adjourned.⁸⁸

This affair occurred under the Magadha King, Asoka the Black (396-360 B.C.E.), whose kingdom had expanded so that it encompassed nearly all the lands where Buddhism was found. Asoka seems to have been deposed by Mahapadma Nanda, who founded the Nanda dynasty, and under his reign the first schism occurred. The *Dipavamsa*, a Theravada history, records that some adherents of the Vaisali party withdrew and performed their own "great rehearsal" of the scriptures after the decision went against them, adding new texts and altering the old, and so the Mahasanghikas arose. But in fact the Mahasanghika *Vinaya* supports the majority position against the Vaisali group, though its omission of the nine other points of *Vinaya* mentioned in the Theravada works suggests that there may have been some sympathy among Mahasanghikas for the Vaisali brethren. Perhaps the Mahasanghikas felt that there was something in the Vaisali position, though it was overblown and, strictly speaking, incorrect. The most likely account of the split between the Mahasanghikas and Sthaviravadins seems to be that of the Sammitiya school, preserved in Bhavaviveka and the Tibetan historians who followed him. By this account the "Great Rehearsal" occurred somewhat later, in 349 BCE., during the reign of Mahapadma and (!) Nanda. By this account a monk (named Bhadra or Mahadeva) put forth five points of

⁸⁸Warder (1970) 208-212, Akira (1990) 79 ff., for the affair at Vaisali. Following the Theravadin documents, most earlier discussions tend to take it that this affair led immediately to the split of the Mahasanghikas from the Theravadins, but we shall take another line, following Warder and Akira. The *Dipavamsa* reports that variant scriptures were at issue in the Mahasanghika split, the *Mahavamsa*, however, rejects the report as untrue.

doctrine, none of which bore directly on discipline, and four of which related to the nature of an arhant. In an assembly at Pataliputra a majority voted in favor of the points, and constituted itself as the “Great Community,” or Mahasangha. The minority, which included a number of senior monks, constituted itself as the “Elders,” or Sthaviravadins. The latter group was apparently strong in the West, the former in the East. Thus the split between the two groups was rooted in important points of doctrine, and the accusation of the Theravadins that their rivals had violated *Vinaya* was a slander rooted in known Mahasanghikan sympathy for the Vaisali group.⁸⁹

The five points of Bhadra were: (1) that an arhant can be seduced by another, that is, have erotic dreams, interpreted as the visits of goddesses, (2) that an arhant may be ignorant of some matters, (3) that an arhant may be in doubt, (4) that an arhant may be instructed by another, and (5) that one may enter the way as a result of spoken words. The point seems to be to combat the view that an arhant has supernatural powers of cognition (we have seen that the Buddha did not claim any such powers), is free even of erotic dreams (such dreams being the natural result of continence in any reasonably young man), and perhaps that one need not have an actual experience of unconditioned reality as it is in itself (attained through the higher forms of meditation) to understand and believe the doctrine, and attain to the extinction of passions. The Theravadins held that points (2) - (4) were accurate as regards matters irrelevant to the dharma, but that a perfect knowledge of the dharma is enjoyed by an Arhant, so it seems that Bhadra must have held that some shortcomings were possible even there. The position seems reasonable, if one takes it that nirvana is essentially a conative state induced by an understanding of the dharma, for surely, then, some could enter such a state without fully understanding every point, particularly if an understanding of great philosophical depth was understood to be at issue. On the fifth point, the Theravadins suggest that their opponents held that one needed instruction through speech in order to enter on the way, though one could clearly enter on the practice of meditation without such an aid, or that one could enter the way by hearing the right speech, despite bad behavior. Perhaps the Mahasanghikas suggested that one might need speech, that is, some kind of theoretical understanding, in order to interpret one’s meditational experience, so that meditation alone, without discursive

⁸⁹See J Masuca, *Asia Major* II, p. 14, “Origin and doctrines of early Buddhist schools,” which suggests that the source of the Mahasanghika split was surely the doctrinal dispute, and takes the attribution of *Vinaya* violations in the Theravada sources as slander, as does Warder (1970) 212-218. Akira (1990) 82 takes a more traditional view, holding that the *Vinaya* dispute was at the root of the schism, and doctrinal differences arose later. In general, one might expect an organizational split arising from *Vinaya* differences to lay the foundation for the two groups to drift apart in doctrine, but the doctrinal issue at stake here is quite fundamental, and it is not hard to imagine it establishing itself among the monks as a continuing debate on which one felt forced to take sides, and a debate which could lead to a schism.

reasoning or instruction, was not enough to discover the dharma. Again, they may have thought that one could enter the way through correct views acquired from hearing, even though some bad behavior remained. On the first point there seems to have been no compromise from the Theravadins, and it is perhaps to be noted that elders might have had no trouble with a requirement for the arhant that ruled out attainment before the onset of old age. In any case, the Theravada gradually attributed higher levels of knowledge to the Buddha, until they came to think him omniscient,⁹⁰ particularly in the more popular literature. The situation with the Mahasanghikas is more complex. In their popular literature the Buddha came to be, in the Mahayana school that developed from their position, a purely supernatural entity. But the esoteric teachings of the Mahayana hold on to the Mahasanghika view in all essentials. The supernatural Buddha of the Mahayana stands in for various metaphysical conceptions, and was never intended to be the man Gautama, and in the doctrine, emphasized for instance in Dogen's thought in Japan, that Emptiness just is the world of illusion lived in by the ordinary man, the simple humanity of the arhant, of the Bodhisattva, and of the Buddha, is firmly retained.

The supernatural character of the Buddha was held to among the Mahasanghikas because of certain utterances in the canon, the most important being to the effect that whoever sees the Dharma sees the Buddha, that the Buddha is omniscient and depends on no one else for his knowledge, and that there is no one like him even in the world of the gods. The first point led finally in the Sarvastivada and Mahayana to talk about the *dharmakaya*, the body of dharma, which, for the Theravada, was only the body of the Buddha's teachings, but became among the Mahasanghikas an unconditioned thing, reality itself, as it were, insofar as it "teaches" the doctrine of the Buddha. The Buddha is reality revealing itself. Thus the essence of a Buddha is identified as this characteristic of revealing reality and the teaching, and *dharmakaya* is identified with the Buddha. This approach disarms the claim to omniscience, independence, and transcendence, for it may now be read simply as the claim that the *dharmakaya* contains all (spiritually relevant) knowledge within it, and this reality transcends all the worlds, even that of the gods, since these worlds are all illusory constructions rooted in the notion of a self. It should be clear that the humanity of Gautama can be held to at the same time as it is held that, since he is a Buddha, he can be identified with *dharmakaya*, and thus an unlimited material body, divine power, great length of life, and so on, can all be attributed to him, considered as such.

It is sometimes held that the development of the Bodhisattva doctrine in Mahayana Buddhism is due

⁹⁰*Patisambiddhamagga* I 131 ff.

to the deprecation of the Arhant ideal in its Mahasanghika predecessors.⁹¹ It is wrong to take the Mahasanghika position as deprecation, though, and another account must be found. The Mahasanghikas themselves present the first stages of the Boddhisattva doctrine in the *Mahavastu*, laying out some of the ten stages of Boddhisattva development in the Mahayana (to be discussed below), and emphasizing the central point that all sentient creatures may hope to attain to Buddhahood, so that there is not only one current Boddhisattva, with everyone else reduced to aiming at Arhanthood, a lower status, as the Theravada would have it. The Theravada took it that a Buddha differs from an arhant in his opportunities and abilities for teaching, not in his grasp of the Dharma or his extinction of craving, aversion, and deliberate ignorance. But if one holds, as the Mahasanghika did, that one who understands the truth becomes, as it were, reality itself revealing itself with no covering illusion, then every Arhant is a Buddha, and is the *dharmakaya*. The Buddha was no more than a man who recognized the truth, and thus *became* the truth revealing itself, and every man can attain to that status, and no one should aim lower. But to aim at that status is to aim to benefit other beings by revealing reality to them, and the development of the Boddhisattva vows as a dramatization of this fact, detailed below, becomes logical enough.

Chandragupta founded the Mauryan Empire by deposing the son of Mahapadma in about 317 BCE, and defeated Seleucus Nicanor about 305-3, thus establishing his control of the Indus, which had been conquered by Alexander the Great in 327. Thereafter, he probably ruled northern India from coast to coast, a region comprising some two-thirds of the subcontinent. His capital, Patliputta, is modern Patna. During the reign of his son, Bindusara (293-268 BCE) both the Sthaviravadins and the Mahasanghikas underwent further schism.

The Sthaviravadins split when Vatsiputra prepared a new *Abhidharma* in nine sections that he claimed to have received from Sariputra and Rahula, no doubt through intermediate teachers. One section was devoted entirely to the theory of “person” (*pudgala*), which Vatsiputra took to be an ultimate reality of some sort over and above the *skandhas*, while the orthodox Theravadins thought to be nothing ultimate at all, “person” being only a conventional expression used by the Buddha when speaking to those who could not understand a more precise expression of the doctrine. The Vatsiputriyas held that a person could not be said to be different from the five *skandhas*, but also held that it could not be identified with them. Thus no answer could be given to the question what it was, and, as scripture said, it could not be said to be eternal or non-eternal, but it could be

⁹¹For instance, Akira (1990) 82.

cognized by the six consciousnesses, and it alone transmigrated. It seems that they saw the difficulty with reductionism in psychology, but certainly did not wish to postulate anything like an Aristotelian substantial form, or the substance of the Vaisesika-Nyaya school. Talk about the self is not merely talk about the five bundles, but neither is there a self that survives without the skandhas, or represents some positive thing with its own reality over and above them. It looks as if their views might have been congenial to many contemporary anti-realist opponents of both reductionism and dualism in psychology, and it seems clear that no rejection in spirit of the Anatman doctrine was intended.

Shortly after the Vatsiputriyas split from the Sthaviravadins, the Mahasanghikas produced two new schools from their numbers, the Ekavyavaharika and the Gokulika. Not much information is currently available on these schools, but the latter seems to have exaggerated the first noble truth, holding that there is no happiness of any kind whatever in this world. They may also have held that only the Abhidharma can be trusted as the real teaching, Sutra being adapted to circumstances, and they may have emphasized the faculty of energy in their practice. The latter group held, according to late sources, that the mind is by its nature pure and undefiled, and that all phenomena (including the first of the five bundles) are mental. They seem to anticipate Mahayana themes in the Madhyamika and Cittamatra schools.⁹²

The most famous of the Buddhist emperors was Asoka, grandson of Chandragupta. The dates of Asoka's reign are controversial, but perhaps 268-239 BCE is correct.⁹³ His "Rock Edicts," carved in various places in stone (probably in imitation of the Achaemenids of Persia), give us the first mention of Buddhism outside the Buddhist scriptures. These inscriptions report that after some customary warfare, and a successful campaign in Kalinga (modern Orissa) he declared his remorse over the sufferings he had caused, and vowed henceforth to conquer only by righteousness, or *dhamma*. He has "won the victory of Dhamma" over the nations bordering India, including Antiochus II of Syria, Ptolemy II of Egypt, Antigonus Gonatus of Macedonia and some other Greeks, with rulers of the southern part of the peninsula, as well as Ceylon. The inscription can be dated to 256 or 255 BCE from its list of rulers, and thus provides the lynch pin for the whole of Indian

⁹²Warder (1970) 239-242.

⁹³Eggermont, P.H.L., *The Chronology of the Reign of Asoka Moriya*. Leiden: 1956; "New notes on Asoka and his successors," *Persica I* (1965-6) 2, pp. 27-71.

chronology.⁹⁴ The Dhamma victories seem to refer to peace treaties, though Buddhist sources report that he sent out missions. Probably the missionaries accompanied the diplomatic corps, and were not the central point of the trips. (Missionaries would have hoped to convert the court, or to obtain permission to preach in the large urban centers.) Asoka's conversion to righteousness no doubt coincided with his conversion to Buddhism. He wrote that he became a layman, but made little progress for a year, and then "went to the Sangha," which suggests that he at least got more information from those who preserved the scriptures in oral tradition, and perhaps he lived for a while as a monk. Asoka declared religious toleration, making donations to sects other than Buddhism, abolished the death penalty, had wells dug and shade trees planted along the roads, and generally proceeded in accord with the *Advice to Sigghala*⁹⁵ and other Buddhist Suttas directed to laymen, in particular, by advising people to substitute ethical behavior for ritual observances. His inscriptions reflect Buddhist ethics very closely, but, as one would expect from a layman, they say nothing about nirvana, anatman, and other more advanced topics that would have been reserved for the Sangha. His Buddhism is authenticated by his report of pilgrimages to visit Stupas, and by two inscriptions directed to the Sangha, one of which prescribes that any monk or nun who would split the Sangha is to be expelled.

This information can be supplemented, though only cautiously, by the accounts of the Theravadins, in particular the *Mahavamsa*, that tells a tale more legend than history. It makes Asoka a typical saint, exaggerating his wickedness before his conversion, and his devotion to religion afterwards, beyond all bounds. After his conversion, inspired by accidental observation of the tranquil deportment of a monk, he is said to have been so generous to the Sangha that many non-Buddhists joined, so that no *uposatha* ceremony could be performed. With the advice of a senior monk, Asoka purified the Sangha (there is one Rock Edict that instructs the Sangha on which scriptures to study, so he was apparently bossy enough), ordered the *uposatha* ceremony to be held, and gave his support to the third Council. Tissa Moggaliputta, the king's advisor, and apparently the foremost Theravadin intellectual of the day, had the canon recited, and then added his own composition, the *Kathavatthu*, sealing off the Pali canon. Some have questioned whether this third council actually occurred. There is no mention of it in the *Cullavagga*, and the *Kathavatthu*'s authority is rejected in the commentary on

⁹⁴Rock Edict 13. Others of the Rock Edicts recommend the practice of the Dhamma to attain to merit in this world beyond and to rebirth in the heavens, which suggests the line taken in preaching to laymen. Rock Edict 2 is addressed to the Sangha, and orders the preservation of a number of expositions of the doctrine which speak of nirvana and vimutti as the goal to be achieved.

⁹⁵*Sigalaka Sutta* = *Digha Nikaya* III 180 ff.

the *Dhammasangani* despite the purported support of the council. It has even been suggested that the story of the council was concocted to authenticate the *Kathavatthu*, a patch-work catalogue of false doctrines identified with various heretical schools. But on the whole, it now seems most probable that the splitting of the Sarvastivada, the “All Exist” school, from the Theravada was the event that lies behind the story. Now the Theravada reports the affair as an expulsion of non-Buddhists, but that may reflect the fact that this was a doctrinal and not a Vinaya dispute, and in fact the Sarvastivadins were often accused of holding views indistinguishable from the Samkhya school of Bramanical thought. It seems possible that an expulsion actually took place, and that the Sarvastivadins then simply withdrew to a remote place to reconvene their Sangha. The third rehearsal might well be apocryphal—it certainly was limited to the Theravada if it occurred.⁹⁶

The defining doctrine of the Sarvastivada is that all the elements classified in the Abhidharma, the *dharmas*, exist, including their future and past occurrences. The momentary nature of every such existent was granted, as in all the other schools of Buddhism. The Theravada objected that the only past phenomena that still existed in a way would be those whose causal consequences had not yet been fully worked out, and that no future phenomena existed at all at the present moment. The critics of the Sarvastivada view argued that it amounted to making all things eternal, like the eternal elements of Samkhya thought, and seems to accept the Samkhya notion that the effect exists already in the cause, and the cause continues to exist in the effect. The school must have held that actual existence was momentary, or at least temporary, and restricted to present things, but that future things have a potential existence in present things, which can produce them, while past things have a residual existence in present things, which can reveal them. Sarvastivadin views are chiefly known through the *Abhidharmakosa*, the commentary of Vasubandhu on the Abhidharma of an offshoot of their school, the Vaibhasikas. One question raised by the Vaibhasikas is what it means to take refuge in the Buddha when the Buddha no longer is alive, and, given that he has not been reborn, no present reality can be said to be referred to when we speak of the Buddha. Vasubandhu replies that we need not postulate some thinned out residual existence in present things, but should resort to the doctrine of *dharmakaya* explicated above. The Sarvastivadins emphasized the practice of the six perfections which were to play such a role in the Mahayana schools, and held that an Arhant could regress, though a streamwinner could not. Clearly, they had come to think of an “Arhant” as an inferior fellow who had not yet recognized the truths necessary to eliminate selfish desires.

⁹⁶Warder (1970) 272-274, following Bareau, *Les premiers conciles* (Paris: 1955), and Eggermont, *The Chronology of the Reign of Asoka Moriya* (Leiden: Brill, 1956).

The commentary to the *Kathavatthu* reports 17 schools that split off from the main group in the first three centuries. There are several lists, and no chronological scheme seems to offer itself. A Sarvastivadin work, the *Mahavyutpatti*, seems to give the best account. It divides the “schools of teachers” into four groups: (1) The Sarvastivadins. (2) The Sammatiyas, who split off from the Vatsiputriyas, literally the “Vatsa people” in the West, who, as we have seen, held to the doctrine of the *puḍgalavada*, arguing that an individual is something over and above the five bundles. There were three other schools that split from the Vatsiputriyas, the Dharmottariya, Bhadrayaniya, and Sannagarika, all these schools differing on the exact nature of the person, but we know little about them. The Sammatiyas have left us an Abhidharma text dealing with the person, and they held that it was a “concept based on the bundles,” perhaps somewhat in the way that some Western Scholastics held that there was no real difference between universals and the particulars falling under them, the concept of the universal differing from the concepts of the individuals, but being based on the individuals. (3) The Mahasanghikas, who included the Lokattaravadins (who arose from the Ekavyavaharikas?), who held a docetic theory of the Buddha which is of some influence in the Mahayana (like the Purvasailas and the Aparasaikas, likewise in this group). The Buddha was supposed to have transcended this world from the beginning, even before enlightenment, so that he never felt fatigue, etc., but only feigned needs and their satisfaction. The Gokulika produced the Bahusrutiya and the Prajnaptivada, probably towards the end of the 3rd century BCE. The first of these schools held that the Buddha’s transcendent teaching concerned impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, emptiness, no-self, and extinction, and that all the other teachings were of this world. Perhaps the intention was to put all aims other than nirvana in their place as fundamentally no good. The second school apparently distinguished the bundles and unhappiness as real, but classified the 118 elements (*dhatu*s) and the senses and mind, with their objects, as unreal, mere concepts, and merely conceptual. Perhaps some sort of reductionism was intended of a phenomenalistic nature. (4) The Sthavira, or Theravadins.⁹⁷

Asoka’s reign did not end well. His queen died around 244 BCE, and he raised a concubine to the position of queen. She was jealous of Asoka’s devotion to Buddhism, and determined to make her own son emperor. Her schemes failed, though she got Asoka’s son disqualified by blinding him, and Asoka’s grandson succeeded him, or, according to other accounts, Asoka’s son reigned only briefly. Probably the empire was divided in some way that the later chroniclers didn’t understand. In any case a succession of weaker rulers after

⁹⁷Gombrich (1988) 127-136; Warder (1970) 274-278.

Asoka led to the decline of the Empire. In 180 BCE the general Pusyamitra overthrew the emperor, and established Brahmanism as the official religion of the Empire. It has been suggested that disgust at the military weakness of the Buddhist emperors motivated him in this, but he does not seem to have done much better than they against the Bactrian Greeks. Buddhist tradition speaks of a persecution at this time, but it seems to be exaggerated. There was probably tolerance, but a removal of state support.

7. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY LAY BUDDHISM

Perhaps before, and certainly after the Buddha's death, there were several important developments in Buddhist practice resulting from accommodation to lay society.

For one thing, the Buddha himself came to be treated as an object of faith and worship. The Buddha had spoken of faith as a virtue, and he meant by this confidence in the truth of the doctrine, but not a confidence despite lack of rational support. The convert declares trust or faith in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and before this act there is a salutation to the Buddha. In the tradition that developed after his death, the Buddha was the object of a personality cult, and the Sangha was generally seen as holy because it is the present-day representative of the Buddha. The Buddha himself would surely have rejected such a development, even if it were restricted to the exoteric Buddhism of the laity. He is reported to have insisted at the end that the monks were to take refuge in themselves alone, choosing whoever they felt competent to lead the Sangha, and taking the Dharma and Vinaya as their source of instruction in place of Gautama himself.⁹⁸ But the very text in which these words are recorded goes on to lay the foundation for the practices of pilgrimage and relic worship.

Prayer to the Buddha, or to any other enlightened being or saint, had very little ideological support in early Buddhist doctrine, for it was granted that the Buddha was dead, and unable to provide any assistance, whether through grace or any other means, to his devotees. At best, prayer could be taken to be a matter of reminding oneself to rely on the Buddha's teachings. Moreover, the life of the Buddha was a rather mundane affair, though later elaborations of it filled it with miraculous incident. But there was considerable pressure to imitate the devotional art and practices of non-Buddhist religious culture. The first development here was

⁹⁸*Digha Nikaya* II 100 ff., *Maha Parinibbana Sutta*.

probably the tales of the Buddha's former births, the *Jataka*, some adapted from non-Buddhist literature, especially animal fables, and some apparently invented by the Buddhists themselves. It was generally accepted in Indian culture that release occurred only after many lifetimes spent seeking it, and one of the supernatural accomplishments of an enlightened person was the recollection of former lives. Since Gautama did not deny the current theory of multiple lifetimes that came to an end upon release, but only reinterpreted its metaphysical basis (and, as we shall see, perhaps used the doctrine as a metaphor in psychological theory), it was open to a Buddhist to speculate on the Master's former lives, and competition, especially with Jainism, which probably provided the pattern here, no doubt led quickly to claims on behalf of the Buddha that he would not have made himself. (It seems likely that the Buddha himself told some such tales of former births, though the fabulous, and often satiric, nature of the tales suggests that he did not intend them to be taken literally.) Further, in imitation of the Jains, earlier Buddhas were introduced, and Maitreya, the next Buddha, who was already supposed to be in a heaven, reaping the results of meritorious karma, and awaiting birth as a Buddha. Messianic aspirations could be pegged on Maitreya. One use of this material was to establish Dharma as an eternal tradition, on a par with the *Vedas* of the Hindus, passed down from one Buddha to the next. So Gautama was supposed to have embarked on his career as a bodhisattva, or future Buddha, by taking a vow at the feet of Dipankara, a fellow twenty-four Buddhas back.

The Buddha came to be thought of as somebody with extraordinary powers, though early on, at least, those powers never placed him entirely outside the natural order. The temptations here are well revealed in the story of Ananda's error. Ananda was the personal attendant of the Buddha for the last twenty five years of his life. At the age of eighty, Gautama stated that he could live to the end of the present *kalpa* (the dissolution of the present world order) if he wished, but Ananda did not pick up the hint (due to the fact that he had not yet attained enlightenment) and did not request that the Buddha do this. Note that the Buddha could not last forever, he could only last as long as the most long-lived of the gods, Brahman himself. At this point the demon Mara approached and suggested that he enter into Parinirvana and the Buddha agreed to do so, the time for Ananda to make his request having passed. The tale is clearly meant to explain how it is that the Buddha, having such great powers, should have lived out only a human span of life. Ananda plays the role of the wise fool, the clever but disorderly fellow who both destroys and creates through his foolishness, rather like the Coyote figure in Amerind mythology, who, by the way, brings death into the world through his lack of control and foolish failure to make the right requests. The myth here is parallel to the many myths in other groups of the origin

of death through the foolishness of some creative figure. Ananda's status is verified by the fact that he was the only one of the original 500 members of the order not to become an arhant until after the Buddha's death, and by the fact that he was later regarded as the type of the scholar (as Buddha's constant attendant, he supposedly memorized all of his discourses and established the oral tradition of the Canon). The scholar was always an ambiguous figure in the Mahayana tradition, one responsible for the preservation of the doctrine, but generally not benefitting from it himself, and standing outside the direct transmission of the Buddha-mind due to his lack of experience in meditation. He is at once a wise one who supports the order of things, and a fool. In any case, the conviction is clear that the Buddha surely could have remained with us had he wanted to.

At the end of the *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* the Buddha declared that an enlightened person should be buried beneath a *stupa*, a funeral mound, which would serve as a memorial to instill faith in pilgrims. (In fact there were many claimants for the Buddha's ashes, and they were divided into eight portions, with a ninth claimant collecting the ashes of the wood, and then divided further later to make more stupas.) This seems to be a deliberate adaptation of Indian practices of venerating certain holy locations, removing the magical elements, and adapting them to the aim of reminding oneself of the Dharma that must be followed to attain release, and it seems quite possible that it was proposed by the Buddha himself, as simply one more reworking of traditional religious practices for the aims of the new religion. (Gautama liked shrines, which seem to have been, more often than not, sacred trees, and where he might meditate at night with no one to disturb him. Given the isolation of such places and the nocturnal animals roaming about them, this took exceptional concentration, and the tales of masters meeting with tigers and other terrifying beings and subduing them through their calm deportment no doubt were based in real life.) Pilgrimage centers arose everywhere, for one could use places important in the life of Gautama Buddha, or in the lives of former Buddhas, and many countries came to think that the Buddha had paid them a flying visit, to be memorialized by pilgrimages to the places where he taught. Chinese monks made some famous pilgrimages to India in the first millenium CE But one should not think that pilgrimages are required for a Buddhist. They are entirely optional.

Associated with pilgrimage, of course, was a cult of relics. This was decidedly un-Indian, for Indian tradition viewed a dead body as ritually polluted, even after cremation. The *Maha Parinibbana Sutta* states that Gautama's ashes were divided into eight parts, and given to eight people, each of whom built a stupa over their share of the remains. This, and the insistence of the gods that the body be carried through the town and cremated to the East, the most auspicious direction, rather than avoiding contact with the settlement as far as

possible and burning it to the South, the direction of the God of Death, suggest a deliberate refusal to follow traditional custom. No doubt the Buddha's rejection of the notion of ritual pollution, his insistence that it is only a person's intentional behavior that counts, played a role in this, but it was also, no doubt, intended that one see that this death was indeed an auspicious one, for it was a death of one that had escaped the wheel of existence, and would not be followed by another rebirth. One of the worst insults a Hindu could think of for a Buddhist was to describe him as a "relic-worshipper." The Buddhist "worship" of relics was not worship in any traditional sense, though, even when incense or flowers were offered or verses recited as though in prayer, but only a matter of reminding oneself of one aspect or another of the dharma, and purifying one's mind.

Later Buddhists classified relics into three kinds, corporeal relics, i.e. bones, teeth and hair, objects used by an Arhat, such as a begging bowl, but also the tree under which the Buddha gained enlightenment, the Bo tree, and the stupa itself. In the early days the Buddha was not portrayed in art, his presence being indicated by some possession of his, such as a pair of sandals, no doubt to indicate the reversal of the natural course of events by Gautama, and his status as a being that existed in none of the six worlds in which one may be reborn. Early in the first millennium this practice was abandoned, and statues of the Buddha began to be made, which were treated as akin to relics, possessing a certain holiness.

Buddhist monks hardly ever acted as priests. They did not officiate at rites of passage such as marriage, other than ordination, of course, and they carried out no rituals of purification or other priestly functions. But they did attend at funerals, though only as preachers and consolers. Traditionally, Brahmins attended funerals, and received gifts of food on behalf of the dead person, so that he or she might attain rebirth in a heaven from the merit of the gift. This practice was transferred to the Sangha, and merit of gifts to the Sangha, sometimes given as annual memorials, could be transferred to a dead person. This practice seems to represent a falling away from the purest dharma. Clearly people were aiming to have their loved ones or themselves reborn in the heavens, not to attain nirvana, and the transferral of merit should not be possible on the Buddhist moral interpretation of Karma. The theory behind it is that one may gain merit above that attaching to a gift by wishing that others could share in the merit of the gift (even though this is not possible, of course), and one may gain merit by wishing that he could share in the merit of the giver, so that he empathizes with the giver, and feels the same sense of generosity the giver does. There is some sense in this, for surely one who wishes he could share in the merit gained by another might actually be improved, and come to be more likely to do similar meritorious acts himself. In any case, the idea is that the giver expresses the wish that a second person

could share in his merit, the second person wishes he could too, and thus merit is, as it were, transferred. Often, merit is transferred to the gods in this way, in the expectation that the gods will return the favor. Of course, the gods might empathize with the giver whatever the giver does, but a formal act of wishing that they might share in his merit will call their attention to the matter, at least. The “transferral” of merit to the gods is described only once in the canon, in the *Maha Paraniibbana Sutta*. There is, by the way, no way at all to get rid of bad karma, even in the metaphorical way in which one might transfer good karma. The best one can do to get bad karma removed is to continue to do good so that the realization of the bad karma might be put off by all the good karma that has to be realized first.

8. THE RISE OF THE THERAVADIN SCHOOL

The Sthaviravadin or Theravada school established itself in Ceylon during the reign of Asoka (ca. 250 BCE), in Central Thailand around 600 CE, and in Burma, apparently supplanting an older Buddhist tradition, in 1057 CE.⁹⁹ Mahinda brought the religion to the Sinhalese in Ceylon, proceeding straight to the capital, where he converted the court, and received royal land for a monastery. He apparently translated some of the scriptures into the local tongue, and Buddhism was not considered to be established in Ceylon until a local *Vinaya* tradition was established in the local language. After a year, a party was sent to India to get relics, and a stupa was erected. After the first beginnings, Buddhism distinguished the Sinhalese from the Hindu Tamils who lived across the straits in India, and repeatedly invaded the northern part of the island. The *Mahavamsa*, our chief source for early Sinhalese history, espouses a nationalistic Sinhalese Buddhism, directed chiefly against the Tamils. So King Dutthagamani (101-77 BCE) is reported to have fought a holy war against the Tamil king, placing a Buddhist relic in the spear that served as his standard. After capturing the capital, Anuradhapura, he asked the monks, some of whom had left the Order to fight with him, what consolation he could have for causing such a slaughter, and was told that he had only caused the deaths of one and a half people, for only one had taken the three refuges, and another the precepts as well, and all the rest died as animals.¹⁰⁰ Clearly things had moved a long way from the pacifism and religious tolerance of Asoka in India. In fact there were Tamil

⁹⁹Gombrich (1988) 137-8.

¹⁰⁰*Mahavastu* XXV 108-11.

Buddhists from the earliest times until the seventeenth century, and on at least one occasion, the *Mahavastu* records, virtuous and learned monks were brought back from Tamil lands conquered by the Sinhalese king to restore the local Sangha.¹⁰¹ Presumably the Tamils were *largely* Hindu, and, of course, one is often ignorant of one's enemy.

The Sinhalese retained a good deal of Hinduism. The god Vishnu was supposedly assigned by the Buddha on his deathbed to watch over them.¹⁰² But Buddhism has nonetheless marked Ceylonese society, and introduced many deviations from the usual Indian model. The society was thoroughly rural, merchants being mostly foreigners, and so Buddhism existed here in conditions the reverse of those in which it had arisen, and had to make its appeal to farmers and landowners rather than a rising urban, mercantile class. Nonetheless, Buddhist notions have strongly modified ideas of caste, there being no real untouchables, and, since it plays no role in Buddhist practices, there is much less emphasis on matters of pollution. The status of women is also in general much higher than among the Hindus. No god receives blood sacrifices, and the pre-Buddhist village cults, involving possession and mediumistic deliverances, have rather low prestige.

The Sangha essentially has two roles. One is the preservation of the oral tradition, for Buddhism lives above all by the paradoxical power and beauty of its thought, and is defined by a counter-intuitive philosophy, so that it requires an intelligentsia to survive. The second role is the provision of an environment in which a monk can seek Nirvana. These two duties are not entirely consistent with one another, for the first requires learning, and the second meditation. So, repeatedly in Buddhist history, specialization has arisen, some monks retiring to isolated places to meditate, and others congregating in urban centers to study.

Among scholars, the foremost in the Pali tradition is Buddhaghosa, who, in the early 5th century CE, composed most of the Pali commentaries to the canon (or edited and compiled them from pre-existing Sinhalese material) at the capital, Anuradhapura, and wrote the *Visuddhi-magga*, or *Path to Purity*, the authoritative compendium of Theravada doctrine. The canon had already been written down ca. 100 BCE, and, though an oral tradition was maintained, with Buddhaghosa the written tradition was firmly established. After Buddhaghosa, Theravadin literature was composed in Pali, which is a learned language, rather remote from the Sinhalese Prakrit spoken among the people. This establishment of a learned language enabled Theravada

¹⁰¹*Mahavastu* XXXIV 9-10, Gombrich (1988) 142.

¹⁰²Gombrich (1988) 139.

monks and nuns to communicate henceforth across linguistic boundaries, and was of great importance in making it possible for a local Sangha in decline to renew itself from abroad.