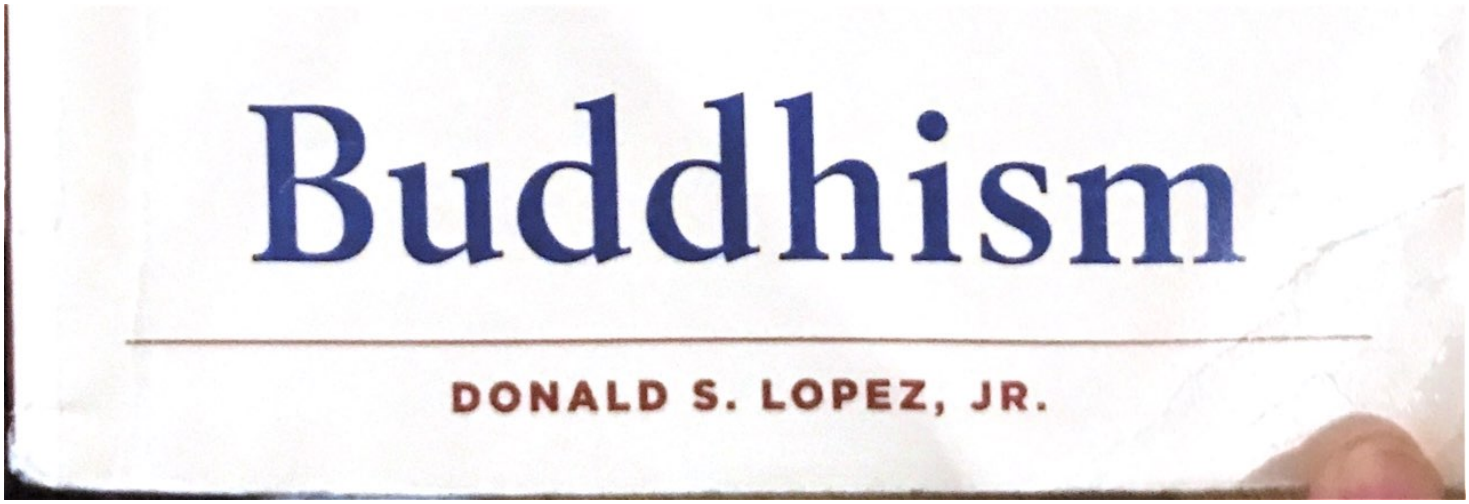
Buddhism
DONALD S. LOPEZ, JR.

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INTRODUCTION
In the World of the Buddha

Among all the world religions, Buddhism enjoys a particularly positive reputation, widely respected for its teachings of love and compassion, its promotion of nonviolence and commitment to a vegetarian diet, and its renunciation of war. In fact, Buddhism does teach love and compassion and it does promote nonviolence. But the Buddha himself ate meat and he did not forbid his monks from doing so. And wars have been fought by Buddhists in the name of Buddhism. Thus, there is some dissonance between the commonly held view of Buddhism and its history, a dissonance that may have much to do with Western yearnings for a religion founded by a man who declared that there is no God, a religion whose primary practice is to sit cross-legged on the ground and calm the passions.

When the term "world religion" was first coined by European scholars in the nineteenth century, only two were deemed worthy of the name: Christianity and Buddhism. They were called world religions because European scholars believed that their teachings had spread around the world by the force of their truths, not by the force of their armies. All the other religions were somehow local. Indeed, Buddhism has been so highly regarded that it is often claimed that Buddhism is not a religion at all—it is rather a philosophy or simply a way of life, one whose tenets can be selectively adopted regardless of religious affiliation, or lack of one.

Yet, as we will see in what follows, Buddhism is a religion, regardless of how one might seek to define that indefinable term. Some 350 million people around the world are counted, either by themselves or by others, as Buddhists. But what makes someone a Buddhist? The traditional answer is that a Buddhist is someone who "takes refuge" in what are called "the three jewels": the Buddha, the dharma (which here means his teachings), and the sangha (or community, a term that we will consider in more detail below). Someone who says three times, "I go for refuge to the Buddha. I go for refuge to the dharma. I go for refuge to the sangha," is a Buddhist. "Refuge" here means protection from the sufferings of life, and a Buddhist is thus someone who has concluded that the best protection from those sufferings is provided by the Buddha, his teachings, and the community of his disciples. But as is so often true of religions, affiliation is not always a matter of conscious reflection and logical conclusion. And in the case of Buddhism, even this classical definition of a Buddhist does not preclude one from seeking assistance from other quarters on matters less weighty than liberation from suffering. Buddhism has a long history of accommodating the religious traditions of the cultures it encounters, making it rarely an all-or-nothing proposition.

"Going for refuge" does not make one a Buddhist monk or nun; although monks and nuns also go for refuge, they achieve their monastic status through an ordination ceremony and the taking of vows. Over the course of Buddhism's long history in Asia, kings and emperors have often tried, with mixed success, to count the number of monks and nuns in their nations. With rare exceptions, they have not tried to count the much larger number of lay Buddhists. Indeed, counting Buddhists has always been difficult, long before the twentieth century and proclamation of a Buddhist identity in Europe and North America by Christians and Jews. How this came to be the case is something we will consider in due course, but we should begin at the beginning.

Buddhism began in India in the fifth century before the Common Era (B.C.E.), spreading throughout the Indian subcontinent and into what is today Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was introduced into the island of Sri Lanka in the third century B.C.E., into China in the first century of the Common Era (C.E.), then into Southeast Asia in the second century, Korea in the fourth century, Japan in the sixth century, Tibet in the seventh century, and Mongolia in the thirteenth century.

Each nation has its own myth of the arrival of Buddhism. In the case of China, it is said that the emperor Ming of the Han Dynasty (who reigned from 58 to 75 C.E.) had a dream in which he saw a golden spirit outside his palace, emitting rays of light from the top of its head. When he told his ministers about the dream, they reported that they had heard of a sage called "Buddha" who was able to fly. The emperor dispatched a party of envoys, who journeyed westward into Central Asia and the eastern end of the vast and vague region that the Greeks called "Scythia," returning with a copy of the *Scripture in Forty-two Sections* (p. 496).

In Tibet, the king received a Chinese princess in marriage as part of a treaty between the two nations. As part of her dowry, she brought a large statue of the Buddha, said to have been made during his lifetime. As the cart that carried the statue entered Tibetan territory, its wheels repeatedly became stuck in the sandy terrain. The princess, skilled in the arts of geomancy, determined that the landscape of Tibet was in fact a huge demoness, lying on her back. Dismayed at the prospect of Buddhism entering her domain, the demoness kept shifting her body to impede its progress. The statue eventually arrived safely in the capital of Lhasa, where the king then undertook a royal construction project: he built temples at key sites across his kingdom, each located at a particular point on the demoness's body. The temples were designed to pin her down and prevent further interference. The Jokhang, the so-called Cathedral of Lhasa, is said to be located directly over her heart.

In Burma, they tell the story of Bhallika and Tapussa, two merchants who happened upon the Buddha near the Bodhi tree not long after his enlightenment. They offered him some honey cakes, the first food he had received since achieving buddhahood. In return, the Buddha offered them the first of his relics: some of his hair and parings from his nails. The merchants went on their way, continuing, it is said, all the way to Burma, where these relics of the Buddha were enshrined in the Shwedagon Pagoda in Rangoon, the holiest site in the nation.

Knowledge of Buddhism in the West came by different routes. Perhaps the first reference to Buddhism in European sources is that of Clement of Alexandria in the third century C.E. In describing the Indian gymnosophists, Clement writes, "Some of the Indians obey the precepts of Boutta; whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to divine honors." After Clement of Alexandria, not much is heard about the Buddha in Greek or Latin until the eighth century, when, in works ascribed to St. John of Damascus, we find the story of two Christian saints, Barlaam and Josaphat—a story that is clearly drawn from the life of the Buddha (the name Josaphat derives from the Buddhist term *bodhisattva*), though this was not recognized for many centuries. References to the Buddha in Europe began to increase in the thirteenth century, when European emissaries and missionaries came into contact, not always by choice, with the westward-advancing Mongol horde. During the colonial period that began in the eighteenth century, Western knowledge of Buddhism grew significantly, owing to increased contact with Buddhist cultures and the learning of Buddhist languages by European scholars. They were the ones who coined the term Buddhism—according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *Boudhism* first appeared in English in 1801; it has no terminological equivalent in the languages of the various Buddhist canons. In Sanskrit, what we call Buddhism is *buddhadharma*, the "teaching of the Buddha." In Tibetan, what we call Buddhism is *nang pa'i chos*, the "religion of the insiders."

Chinese Buddhists came to California in the nineteenth century to work on the railroads, to be followed by Japanese Buddhist laborers, but the American fascination with Buddhism did not begin in earnest until the late nineteenth century, following on a wave of similar interest in Europe propelled by such figures as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner. In the January 1844 issue of *The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion*, Henry David Thoreau, then twenty-six years old, included a piece called "The Preaching of the Buddha"; it was in fact a translation of the fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (see the *Saddharmapundarika*, or *White Lotus of the True Dharma*, p. 278). Madame Blavatsky sometimes described her new religion of Theosophy, particularly popular among poets and painters, as "Esoteric Buddhism." In 1958, Jack Kerouac published *The Dharma Bums*, a roman à clef about his and his fellow Beats' dabblings in Buddhism. The following year, the Dalai Lama, today the most famous Buddhist monk in the world, left his native Tibet and went into exile in India. He made his first visit to America in 1979 and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 (see "The Nobel Evening Address," p. 781).

What we call Buddhism was founded by a person known to history not by his name but by his title: the Buddha, the "Awakened One." Like Jesus, the Buddha never wrote anything himself and, unlike Moses and Muhammad, he never wrote down divine words that were spoken to him. Instead, he spoke himself, and others remembered his words. His words typically occur in a text called a *sutra*, often translated as "discourse." Buddhist sutras begin with the phrase "Thus did I hear."

The words of Jesus were written down, although most scholars place the earliest of the four gospels after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E., some four decades after the crucifixion. Perhaps time

moves more quickly now, yet we still might wonder about the accuracy of the words attributed to Jesus after such a time span. The Buddhist case is much more extreme. We do not know precisely when the Buddha lived, or how long he lived. The traditional "long chronology," accepted in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, gives the date of the Buddha's death as 486 B.C.E. There is only one canonical Buddhist text that mentions the length of the Buddha's life. Called the *Great Discourse on the Final Nirvana* (*Mahaparinibbana Sutta*; see p. 158), it says that the Buddha passed into nirvana when he was eighty. If this figure is correct and not simply a round number indicating old age, he would have been born in 566 B.C.E. These dates were later adjusted by scholars to produce the well-known dates, found in many reference works, of 563–483 B.C.E. But another chronology, the "short chronology," places the death of the Buddha more than a century later, in 368 B.C.E. In Japan and Korea, a traditional date is 949 B.C.E.; in Tibet it is 881 B.C.E. After much research, and some contention, most scholars today place the death of the Buddha at 400 B.C.E., plus or minus twenty years, and accept that he lived a long life.

What is not disputed is that what the Buddha taught remained only an oral tradition for a very long period of time, and was finally written down not in India but on the island of Sri Lanka to the south. There, the king, fearing that the words of the Buddha might be lost if the monks who had memorized them died in a famine or a war, ordered that they be inscribed onto dried palm leaves, the paper of the day—a relatively fragile medium for the preservation of the truth. That king reigned from 29 to 17 B.C.E. Thus, some four centuries passed between the death of the Buddha and the first recording of his discourses. But those texts do not survive; the oldest extant Pali manuscripts date from around 800 C.E. The oldest Buddhist manuscripts, some of which date from the first century B.C.E., were recently discovered in Afghanistan; they were written in a form of Sanskrit, in a script called Kharoshthi.

Head of the Buddha from Gandhara, 4th–5th century.

Does this mean that there is nothing we can say with certainty about what the Buddha taught? Not necessarily. In ancient India—in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism—there was a deep reverence for the power of speech; a standard term for a learned person literally means "one who has heard much." Writing was not unknown, but it was used for more mundane matters, such as record-keeping and commerce. What we would regard as religious teachings were preserved orally. And thus the traditions of ancient India developed sophisticated mnemonic devices to maintain the word accurately. In the case of the Vedas, priests were recite the text literally forward and backward. monks do not seem to have gone to the same lengths, but we have references to monks called "reciters of the long discourses,"

"reciters of the middle-sized discourses," and "reciters of the short discourses," indicating that from an early date, the monastic community included memory specialists whose job it was to preserve the teachings of the Buddha.

The Order of Monks and Nuns

The teachings that they preserved are often called in the early sources the *dharmavinaya*, a compound made up of two words, *dharma* and *vinaya*. The first is notoriously difficult to translate. A celebrated fourth-century commentator gives ten meanings, including "phenomenon," "path," "nirvana," and "virtue." Nineteenth-century translators rendered it as "law," but in this context it appears to refer to the discourses of the Buddha and might best be translated as "doctrine." The *vinaya* is the "discipline": that is, the ethical code, especially the ethical code followed by monks and nuns. Thus, the term *dharmavinaya* would mean "the doctrine and the discipline." The teachings of the Buddha, on a variety of topics, would be "the doctrine," and the code of monastic conduct would be "the discipline." That the discipline makes up half of this famous compound suggests the centrality of monastic life to the tradition.

It is said that the Buddha in the early years of his teaching did not have a formal system for the selection and ordination of monks, and no formal system of rules existed. When someone sought to join the order, the Buddha would say simply, "Come, monk," and the person was ordained. In later centuries, this moment was described as something of a magical transformation. Accounts of an ordination by the Buddha commonly resemble the following: "No sooner had the Lord pronounced these words than he found himself shaved, dressed in the religious mantle, and provided with the begging bowl and the pitcher whose spout is shaped like the beak of a bird, having a beard and hair of seven days; he appeared with the decent aspect of a monk who would have received investiture one hundred years ago." There was no code of conduct, because almost all the early disciples quickly attained enlightenment, rendering their behavior naturally ethical. But as the community of monks grew, it became necessary to establish rules. The Buddha did not do so preemptively. When he heard that a monk had done something untoward, he made a rule that henceforth such deeds were prohibited but did not punish the initial transgressor. Thus, at first, there was no vow of celibacy, until the parents of a monk who had left his wife begged him to return home long enough to produce an heir. He obeyed, not out of lust but out of filial devotion. When the Buddha learned what had happened, he made a rule against sexual intercourse. Thus, each of the rules of the monastic code—253, according to one version—has a story about the circumstances that led to its imposition; those stories, like the hadith in Islam, provide a wealth of insights into Buddhist monastic life in India. According to the account of his final days (see the *Great Discourse on the Final Nirvana*, p. 158), the Buddha tells the monks that they can ignore the minor precepts after his death. But no one remembers to ask him which precepts are minor, and so the entire code has remained in place over the centuries, with no rules added or subtracted. However, as Buddhism spread beyond India, monasteries formulated additional local rules to govern monastic life

more effectively than could a set of regulations that reflected the cultural mores of ancient India.

In the early tradition, men could be ordained when they were twenty years old; the minimum age was later reduced to "old enough to scare away a crow," meaning that boys could also be ordained. One would begin as a novice, with a limited set of vows that included the five precepts, which Buddhist laypeople may also take but are not required to do so: not to kill humans, not to steal, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie about spiritual attainments, and not to use intoxicants. Novices took an additional five vows: not to eat after noon, not to handle gold and silver, not to adorn their bodies, not to attend musical performances, and not to sleep on high beds. After spending some time as a novice, one would decide whether to go on to become a fully ordained monk (*bhikshu*, literally "beggar" in Sanskrit). It was the full monk who took and kept the full set of more than two hundred vows, confessing transgressions in a ceremony every two weeks.

Those vows defined a certain way of life conducive to the practice of the path. But in addition, the vows—especially to remain celibate and not to kill any creature—bestowed a certain purity on monks and nuns, making them suitable recipients of the alms of the laity, who garnered good karma by their gifts. This symbiosis of monk and layperson has been central to the Buddhist traditions across Asia: the monk offers the layperson a kind of spiritual sustenance in the form of merit that will fructify as happiness in the future, while the layperson provides the monk with the physical sustenance necessary for one who has renounced a life of labor in the world. Thus there must always be both monks and laity, in proportions that vary in different Buddhist cultures at different moments in their history. Tibet is generally regarded as having had the largest monastic population, sometimes as high as 15 percent of males. The vows of the fully ordained monk are expected to be kept for life, and a certain stigma clings to those who return to lay life. The novitiate, in contrast, could be temporary. In Thailand, for example, most males are ordained as novices for a period of one rainy season (sometimes extending to three years) and then return to lay life.

Women have played an important role in Buddhism in all Asian cultures, despite the tradition's ambivalent attitude toward them. The Buddha's mother is extolled as the Buddhist *theotokos* (mother of God), but died seven days after his birth; the commentaries explain that after the birth of a buddha, nothing may ever enter his mother's womb. She was reborn as a (male) god, and after his enlightenment the Buddha preached the dharma to her in heaven. The Buddha abandoned his wife on the day of his firstborn's birth in order to seek enlightenment. In a famous scene, his resolve to leave his palace is steeled when he surveys the sleeping women of his harem and sees a charnel ground of corpses.

The Buddha was raised by his stepmother, who urged him to allow women also to renounce the world to seek nirvana. He conceded that women are capable of following the path to enlightenment, but only grudgingly permitted the founding of an order of nuns. He is said to have established an additional set of rules for nuns (including the rule that the most senior nun must always defer to the most junior monk) and to have predicted that as a consequence of his allowing women to enter the order, his teaching would

remain in the world only for five hundred years. If he had not admitted women, it would have lasted for one thousand years.

Among the women who joined the order, many achieved enlightenment (see *Songs of the Female Elders*, p. 232), including his stepmother and his wife. Moreover, the Buddha had a number of important lay female disciples, including queens and courtesans; he sometimes used the aging bodies of the latter to illustrate the truth of impermanence. Perhaps reflecting the impediments faced by women in traditional Indian society, in the prayer that concludes his *Introduction to the Practice of the Bodhisattva Path* (see the *Bodhicharyavatara*, p. 395), Shantideva writes, "May all women in the world be reborn as men." Yet women, in the form of female bodhisattvas, would become objects of devotion in the Mahayana, receiving prayers from both women and men (see "In Praise of the Twenty-One Taras" and *Dharani Sutra of Five Mudras of the Great Compassionate White-Robed One*, pp. 486 and 571).

Nuns eventually appeared in Sri Lanka, Burma, China, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. However, it was difficult for the order to survive periods of social upheaval and declines in patronage; the rules of discipline required that ten fully ordained nuns be present to confer ordination on a new nun, followed by a second ordination ceremony at which ten monks were present. If those conditions could not be met, ordination was not permitted. Indeed, as a result of Sri Lanka's protracted war with a south Indian king in the late tenth century, Buddhist institutions were devastated to the point that new monks could not be ordained. The king brought monks from Burma to revive the order, but he did not make similar efforts for the order of nuns. Thus, although the order of nuns survives in China, Korea, and Vietnam, it died out in Sri Lanka and the other Theravada countries of Southeast Asia. In Tibet, all ordained women were novices. The right to full ordination for women in all Buddhist cultures became an important, and controversial, topic in the late twentieth century.

As noted above, a Buddhist, whether female or male, is traditionally defined as someone who seeks refuge from suffering through the "three jewels" of the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha, saying three times, "I go for refuge to the Buddha. I go for refuge to the dharma. I go for refuge to the sangha." The Buddha is said to be the teacher of refuge; the dharma, or his teaching, is said to be the actual refuge; the sangha is said to be those who help one to find refuge. In one of the medical metaphors so common in Buddhism, the Buddha is the physician, the dharma is the medicine, the sangha are the nurses. These three are called "jewels," because like a jewel, they are difficult to find in this world and, when they are found, they are of great value.

Exactly what constitutes the sangha, the dharma, and even the Buddha would become points generating considerable commentary. In the practice of going for refuge, it is said that the sangha consists only of the Buddha's enlightened disciples—those who have advanced far on the path to nirvana that he set forth. That is the most restrictive meaning of the term. More generally, in Asia the sangha means the community of monks and nuns. In American Buddhism, it has taken on a much broader sense, functioning as a kind of Buddhist correlate to a Christian "congregation."

The Vehicles to Enlightenment

At around the time that the teachings of the Buddha were being committed to palm leaf in Sri Lanka, the words of the Buddha were also being recorded in India. But these were words that the historical Buddha never spoke, in works known as the Mahayana ("Great Vehicle") sutras. They include some of the most famous and influential Buddhist texts—some of the very few Buddhist works that would come to be well-known by their English title, such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Diamond Sutra*, and the *Heart Sutra* (each of which appears here). Exactly what the Mahayana was and how it evolved continues to be explored and debated by scholars, but its importance is difficult to overstate; for Mahayana Buddhism, first appearing in India in the first centuries of the Common Era, would become the dominant form of Buddhism in China, Korea, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, and parts of Vietnam. Because of its geographical distribution, Victorian scholars called it Northern Buddhism. It seems to have begun as a disparate group of cults; composed of both monastic and lay followers, they were devoted to a single text, which purported to be the word of the Buddha and promised all manner of rewards to those who regarded it as the word of the Buddha and revered it above all others. The fundamental claim of this text was not universally accepted. Indeed, a standard element of Mahayana treatises in India, from the rise of the Mahayana in the first century to the demise of Buddhism in India in the twelfth century, is the defense of the Mahayana as the word of the Buddha. Apparently, this claim remained a point of contention and, despite its subsequent fame, the Mahayana remained a minority movement in India.

The Mahayana sutras sometimes called the majority form of Buddhism the Hinayana, a Sanskrit pejorative often euphemistically rendered in English as "Lesser Vehicle." In fact, it means "Vile Vehicle." Scholars have long struggled with this term, often using it as a convenient designation for the many non-Mahayana schools (traditionally counted as eighteen, although there were many more). Only a Sinhalese offshoot of one of these remains today: the Theravada ("Way of the Elders") of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Thus, it is historically inaccurate to speak only of Mahayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism. Scholars tend to refer to the non-Mahayana as "Nikaya Buddhism" (*nikaya* means "school" or "group"), covering the eighteen traditional schools, or simply as "mainstream Buddhism," in recognition of its majority status in India. In this volume, I have called it the "shared tradition," because it consists of those elements that the various forms of Buddhism, both across time and across Asia, have tended to accept as canonical. Developments in Buddhism have generally taken the form of augmentations to or reinterpretations of this shared tradition.

Regardless of which texts a school of Buddhism considers to be the word of the Buddha, those words contain rather little biographical information. One of the most detailed accounts of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment occurs in the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*, or *The Noble Search* (see p. 119). It is interesting to note that none of the familiar details about the Buddha's sheltered youth—the four chariot rides outside the palace, his departure from the palace and his wife and newborn son—are found there. Those stories appear much later in works like the *Nidanakatha* or *Account of the Beginning* (see p. 131), the first biography of the Buddha in Pali, the canonical language of the Buddhist traditions of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. It dates from the fifth century C.E., some eight centuries after the Buddha's passing. In the *Ariyapariyesana*, the description is much more spare; the Buddha says simply, "Later, while still young, a black-haired young man endowed with the blessing of youth, in the prime of life, though my mother and father wished otherwise and wept with tearful faces, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe, and went forth from the home life into homelessness." In ancient India, the shaved head and the ochre robe were signs that one had left the world in search of a condition beyond it. The Buddha was not the first to seek such a state, but he would become the most famous of those who claimed to find it. In this text, and in other accounts, the Buddha's description of his enlightenment is brief. Over the centuries, commentators across the Buddhist world would seek to recover the meaning of that moment in widely different ways, attempting to understand what it means to be the Buddha.

A vast body of teachings would come to be ascribed to the Buddha in the centuries after his death, with considerable disagreement among the Buddhist traditions of Asia as to what is authentic—what should be considered *buddhavachana*, the "word of the Buddha." As more texts were added to the corpus, they needed to be placed within the chronology of his life, with pride of place given to the first words that he spoke after he achieved enlightenment at the age of thirty-five. Most of the traditional sources, however, agree that in his first sermon he first proclaimed the famous "four noble truths" (see *Setting the Wheel of the Dharma in Motion*, p. 177). They are worth reviewing briefly here because they set the terms for much of the tradition that would follow.

Although the four truths are certainly comprehensible when set forth simply, much of their power, and indeed the power of all Buddhist teachings, derives from their context, the world in which the four truths are true. Thus, before outlining the four truths, it is useful to describe the Buddhist universe, which, although locally modified, has been generally accepted across the history of Buddhism.

The Buddhist Universe

In one sense, the Buddhist world is our world, taking the personal pronoun in the broadest possible terms. For though the teachings of the Buddha were directed to humans, humans were not the only members of the Buddha's audience. A common closing of a discourse by the Buddha declares, "The entire world, the gods, humans, demigods, and *gandharvas*, admired and praised the speech of the Bhagavan [the 'Blessed One,' an epithet of the Buddha]." Also present are *nagas*, a kind of water spirit that was identified with a dragon when Buddhism was transmitted from India to China. One of the most important genres of Buddhist literature is the *abhidharma* (see the *Abhidharmakosha*, or *Treasury of Higher Doctrine*, p. 267), sometimes translated as "metaphysics": the detailed analysis of the constituents of experience and the functions of consciousness. The Buddha is said to have first imparted these teachings not to humans but to the gods, specifically to his mother.

After her death she had been reborn in heaven, so during the rainy season in the seventh year after his enlightenment, he went there to teach her. The most famous of all Buddhist festivals in East Asia, called Obon in Japan, commemorates another maternal visitation—this time by the eminent monk Maudgalyayana, who went in search of his dead mother and found her in hell. Thus, the Buddhist universe includes not just the world of humans but celestial and infernal realms as well.

For Buddhists, the universe has no beginning. Various world systems come into existence and eventually cease to be, but other worlds precede and follow them. The Buddha is said to have discouraged speculation about the origin of the universe; the question of whether the world has a beginning is one of fourteen questions that the Buddha refused to answer. He also remained silent when asked whether the universe will ever come to an end. Individual worlds are destroyed, incinerated by the fire of seven suns; but no apocalypse, no final end time, is foretold. Individual beings put an end to their individual existence, one that also has no beginning, by traversing the path to nirvana.

This does not mean that Buddhists do not have creation myths. One is offered in the *Agganna Sutta* (p. 92), which describes how beings first came to populate a newly formed world system and how gender, sexuality, private property, labor, and government came into existence. The place that they inhabit—and which we inhabit, according to the Buddhists—is an island continent called Jambudvipa, "Rose Apple Island," in a great sea. It is the southern continent, one of four continents in a flat world, situated in the four cardinal directions around a central mountain called Mount Meru. The mountain is in the shape of a great cube, each of its four faces composed of a different kind of precious stone. The southern face of the mountain is made of lapis lazuli and so when the light of the sun reflects off Meru's south face, it turns the color of our sky blue. Gods live on the slopes of the mountain and on the summit. It was in the heaven on the summit on Mount Meru that the Buddha taught the *abhidharma* to his mother.

The Buddha, like other teachers of his day, believed in rebirth—a process of birth and death called *samsara*, literally "wandering." According to the Buddha, this process has no beginning and will not end unless one brings it to an end. Until then, each being is born in lifetime after lifetime into one of six, and only six, realms: as a god, demigod, human, animal, ghost, or denizen of hell. This is not a process of evolution but rather very much an aimless wandering from realm to realm, up and down, for aeons, a process that on the surface appears entirely random. The gods live above our world, some on the surface of the central mountain, some in the heavens above it. Their lives there are long but not eternal. For the gods who live on the summit of Mount Meru, the life span is a thousand years, and every day of those years is equal in length to one hundred human years. In the heavens arrayed above the summit of Mount Meru, the life spans are longer. These heavens, as well as the realms of demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and the denizens of hell, together constitute what is called the Realm of Desire, because the beings there desire the pleasures that derive from the five senses, constantly seeking beautiful things to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. Above the Desire Realm are the heavens of the Realm of Form, where the gods have bodies made of a subtle matter invisible to humans; having no need for food or drink, these gods only have the senses of sight, hearing, and touch. The highest Buddhist heavens are located in what is called the Formless Realm. There the gods have no bodies but exist only as consciousness, and the names of its four heavens are derived from the object in which the minds of the gods of that heaven are absorbed: Infinite Space, Infinite Consciousness, Nothingness, Neither Perception nor Nonperception. But these heavens remain within the cycle of birth and death, and when the karmic effect has run its course, each inhabitant is reborn elsewhere.

In general, it is said that one is reborn as a god as a result of acts of generosity and charity in a former life; charity directed toward the community of Buddhist monks and nuns is considered particularly efficacious. However, one is reborn in these heavens of the Formless Realm by achieving their deep levels of concentration in meditation while a human. Yet even these profound states of bliss, states that last for millennia, are not eternal. Indeed, Buddhist texts sometimes consign the saints of other religions to these heavens, explaining that they have mistaken such states, which lie within samsara, as liberation from it.

Below the gods in the hierarchy of beings are the demigods (excluded in some lists), a kind of catchall category of all manner of spirits and sprites, some malevolent and some benign; one of the words for "plant" or "tree," which Buddhist monks are prohibited from uprooting or cutting down, literally means "abode of a being." The demigods are less potent than the gods but have powers that exceed those of humans and can cause all manner of mischief if not properly propitiated. In the category of demigod, one finds the *gandharvas* mentioned above, a class of celestial musicians who, according to their name, subsist on fragrances; a crude translation of their name would be "odor eaters." One also finds a kind of half-human half-horse creature called the *kimnara*, literally "is that a man?"

The third realm is the world of humans, regarded as the ideal state for the practice of the Buddhist path. The realms of the gods above are too pleasurable; those of the animals, ghosts, and denizens of hell below are too painful. The world of humans is said to have sufficient suffering to cause one to wish to escape from it, but not so much as to cause paralysis and thereby block such an attempt. Among the sufferings of humans, the Buddha enumerated eight: birth, aging, sickness, death, losing friends, gaining enemies, not getting what you wish for, and getting what you do not wish for. As we consider, as we always must, the extent to which the doctrines of a religion reflect, on the one hand, the concerns of a distant time and place and, on the other hand, more general elements of the human condition, this list, set forth in ancient India more than two millennia ago, seems to fall on the universal side of the spectrum.

It is said that one is reborn as a human as a result of being an ethical person, generally understood as keeping vows. As mentioned above, for the Buddhist laity, there are five traditional vows: to abstain from killing humans, from stealing, from sexual misconduct, from lying, and from intoxicants. Laypeople could take any one, two, three, four, or all five of these vows, whether for life or for a more limited period. The vows kept by monks and nuns number in the hundreds. They govern all elements of monastic life, including possessions (especially robes), hygiene, and general comportment. The vows are categorized by the weight of the infraction they seek to prevent. Four transgressions

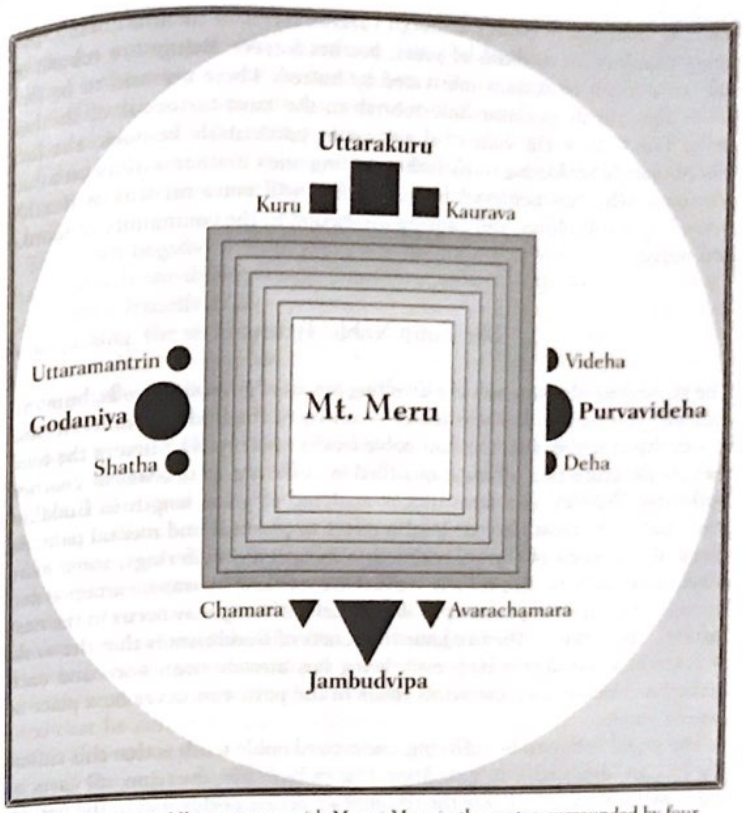
result in permanent expulsion from the order: murder, sexual intercourse, theft (of anything above a specified value), and lying about spiritual attainments. Lesser infractions may require probation, confession, or simply a verbal acknowledgment.

Vows play a central role in Buddhist practice. They are not commandments from God, nor do they represent a covenant, but instead are a mechanism for making merit, the good karma that leads to happiness in this life and the next. It is sometimes said that one of the Buddhist innovations in Indian karma theory was to introduce the element of intention. A misdeed was no longer a ritual mistake, a sacrifice poorly performed, as it was in Vedic times, but an intentional action—whether physical, verbal, or mental—motivated by desire, hatred, or ignorance. A vow represented not a situational decision for good over evil but a lifetime commitment to refrain from a particular negative act. It was said that one accrued greater good karma by taking a vow not to kill humans than by simply happening not to commit murder over the course of one's life. Conversely, one accrued greater negative karma if one took and then broke a vow to avoid a particular misdeed than if one simply happened to commit that misdeed. The scholastic tradition would later explain why this was the case. In the act of taking a vow, a kind of "subtle matter" was created in one's body. As long as the vow was kept, this subtle matter caused good karma to accrue in every moment throughout one's life. For this reason, taking a vow was a much more efficient means to generate the seeds of future happiness than simply being occasionally ethical.

The realms of gods and humans are considered the "good" or "fortunate" realms within the cycle of rebirth, because rebirth there is the result of virtuous actions and because the sufferings undergone by the beings in these realms are far less horrific than those of the beings reborn in the three lower realms.

The realm of animals (which includes all birds, mammals, amphibians, fish, and insects, but not plants) is familiar enough, as are their various sufferings. Buddhist texts say that the particular suffering of animals is that they always must go in search of food while avoiding themselves becoming food; unlike humans, animals are killed not because of something that they did or said, but because of the taste of their flesh or the texture of their skin. One is said to be reborn as an animal as a result of past actions that were motivated by ignorance.

The next realm is that of the ghosts—often called "hungry ghosts," the translation of the Chinese term for the denizens of this realm. Their primary form of suffering is indeed hunger and thirst, and they are constantly seeking to fill their bellies. As they do so, they encounter all manner of obstacles. In Buddhist iconography, ghosts are depicted as baleful beings with huge distended bellies and emaciated limbs, not unlike the victims of famine. But beyond this affliction so familiar in human history, the other sufferings of ghosts are more fantastic. Some have knots in their throats, making it impossible for food and drink to pass. For others, who are able to swallow, the food they eat is transformed into sharp weapons and molten lead when it reaches their stomach. Still others find that when they finally come upon a stream of flowing water, it turns into blood and pus as they kneel down to drink. Ghosts live in a world located five hundred leagues beneath the surface of the earth, but they sometimes venture into the



A diagram of the Buddhist cosmos, with Mount Meru in the center, surrounded by four island continents.

human world, where they can be seen by monks with supernormal powers. Indeed, the feeding of ghosts is a special responsibility of Buddhist monks. The Sanskrit term translated as "ghost" is *preta*, which means "departed" or "deceased," suggesting that they are the spirits of the dead who have not received the proper ritual offerings from their families and thus are doomed to starvation. Buddhist monks and nuns, who also have left family life behind, have a special responsibility to feed the hungry ghosts, who appear often in Buddhist stories. It is said that one is reborn as a ghost as a result of actions motivated by greed in a former life.

In the Buddhist cosmology, the most elaborate of the realms are the most desired—the heavens—and the most feared—the hells. There are eight hot hells and eight cold hells, four neighboring hells, and a number of trifling hells. They are stacked beneath the surface of the earth—the deeper below, the greater the intensity and duration of the suffering. The cold hells are desolate lands of ice where snow is always falling, without a sun or moon, or any source of light and heat. The beings there are naked, and the names of some of the hells describe the shape of the blisters that form on their bodies: for example, "Split Like a Blue Lotus." The hot hells are lands of

burning iron where beings undergo various forms of torture during lifetimes that last for millions of years, but not forever. Beings are reborn in hell as a result of actions motivated by hatred. There are said to be five deeds that result in immediate rebirth in the most torturous of the hot hells. The first of the four of these seems particularly heinous, the last less obviously so: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat (someone who has achieved liberation and will enter nirvana at death), wounding the Buddha, and causing dissension in the community of monks and nuns.

The Four Noble Truths

The six realms of samsara—the dwelling places of gods, demigods, humans, animals, ghosts, and denizens of hell—constitute the Buddhist universe, and it is in this universe that the four noble truths are true. The first of the four, then, is the truth that all life is qualified by suffering, in one way or another. Suffering (*duhkha*) is a term that is analyzed at great length in Buddhist texts, but at its most obvious level it refers to physical and mental pain. As noted above, each of the six realms has its specific sufferings, some more subtle than others. But all the realms are marked by impermanence and uncertainty, the ever-present possibility that suffering may occur in the next instant. Thus, one of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism is that the world of rebirth, a world in which each being has already been born and each being has already died countless times in the past, can never be a place of lasting peace.

The world is flawed by suffering; the second noble truth is that this suffering has an identifiable origin. According to Buddhist doctrine, all cases of pain, without exception, are the result of an action performed in the past by the person who undergoes the pain. This is their cause, this is their origin (*samudaya*), the name of the second noble truth. Thus, Buddhism recognizes no suffering as truly "innocent." The origins or causes of suffering are only two, called *karma* and *klesha* in Sanskrit. Let us consider each in turn.

First is the famous doctrine of *karma*, a Sanskrit word that simply means "action." According to the religious traditions of ancient India, good actions—good karma—result in feelings of pleasure in the future, and evil actions—bad karma—result in feelings of pain, with the meanings of "good" and "evil" (a more literal translation would be "virtuous" and "nonvirtuous") specified and enumerated. Typically, ten negative actions are listed. Much might be said about these ten and how they compare to the ethical systems of other religions; here it suffices to simply observe that each represents a form of harm to others, whether physical, verbal, or mental. They are thus divided into three groups, depending on their source. The three negative actions done with the body are killing, stealing, and committing sexual misconduct. The four negative actions done with the voice are lying, speaking divisively, speaking harshly, and speaking senselessly. The three negative actions done with the mind—and it is important to note that thoughts also have karmic effects—are coveting, wishing that harm come to others, and holding wrong views (variously described, but here referring specifically to the mistaken view that actions do *not* have consequences). As the Indian master Naropa remarked, "Samsara is blaming others." He likely meant that as long as one continues to imagine that something (like bad luck) or someone (like an enemy) is the cause of one's suffering, one will continue to be reborn in the cycle of birth and death called samsara. In fact, nothing, and no one, is to blame but oneself. When one realizes that all suffering is the result of one's own decisions and one's own actions, one will seek to understand how to put an end to actions and their effects, and hence an end to suffering and rebirth.

These ten negative actions plant a seed in the mind of their agent, and that seed will one day—perhaps tomorrow, perhaps a thousand lifetimes in the future—fructify as an experience of pain. Since the cycle of rebirth has no beginning, the number of past lives of each being in the universe is limitless, and thus the number of deeds done in the past is boundless. These deeds, whether positive or negative, create the future. They create the environment, they create the beings that inhabit that environment, they create the experiences of those beings. And those experiences are ultimately unsatisfactory because they are unpredictable, shaped by factors beyond one's control. There is a Buddhist saying, "All that is independent is a form of happiness; all that is dependent is a form of suffering."

If samsara were simply a matter of good deeds and bad deeds, of positive and negative karma, then liberation from samsara would be impossible, because it is impossible to cease all action. It is therefore necessary to seek the cause of the negative actions that in turn give rise to all manner of pain. We now come to the second of the causes or origins of suffering that constitute the second noble truth. According to the Buddha, these are states of mind that he called *kleshas*, "afflictions" (or, less literally, "negative emotions"). In a sense, the afflictions are not a second cause of suffering. Rather, karma is the cause of suffering, and klesha is the cause of karma—the cause of the cause. The afflictions are variously specified, but three, called the "three poisons," are particularly important: desire, hatred, and ignorance. When one considers what motivates the ten negative actions above, desire and hatred are their prime drivers: people kill because of hatred, they steal because of desire, they wish harm to others because of hatred, they covet because of desire. But desire and hatred also have a cause, and that cause is ignorance. Here, ignorance has an active meaning: not so much the absence of knowledge as a misunderstanding of the true nature of things. The Sanskrit term is *avidya*, literally "nonknowledge," but one of its synonyms is *moha*, denoting a dark and deluded state of mind. In Buddhism, ignorance most commonly is a false belief—in particular, the belief that in each being in the universe, there is a permanent, partless, and independent self or soul, a self that is the agent of actions, a self that goes from lifetime to lifetime. It is the Buddha's fundamental claim that such a self does not exist and has never existed; instead there is only the illusion of self, the false belief that there is something real and enduring located somewhere in the mind or body—the thinker of thoughts, the doer of deeds, the enjoyer of pleasures—something that must be soothed with desire and protected with hatred, something that lasts more than an instant. But such a self is an illusion, and the belief in such a self is the cause of all the suffering in the universe. If ignorance is the false belief in self, then wisdom is the confident knowledge that there is no self.

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The Buddhist claim is that the collection of physical and mental constituents that we call the person consists entirely of perishable parts—arising, abiding, and disintegrating in each instant. This does not mean that the person does not exist, or that there is no agency or action, or that rebirth is impossible. Rather, rebirth is simply another of the endless changes that this impermanent process called the person undergoes, changes that occur every instant. The only difference is that at the end of one lifetime, this impermanent person is blown to the next lifetime by the winds of karma. The second of the four truths is thus called origin (*samudaya*). The first two truths—suffering and origin—describe the predicament.

The last two truths provide the solution. Ignorance is the cause of desire and hatred, and desire and hatred are the cause of negative actions, and negative actions cause suffering. Thus, the Buddha argued, if ignorance can be destroyed, then all that follows from it will come to an end. The third truth is therefore called "cessation" (*nirodha*). Suffering will cease if ignorance can be destroyed by wisdom. And because the root cause of the entire cycle of rebirth is this ignorance, wisdom will bring the entire edifice that is samsara tumbling down—at least for that individual. On the night of his enlightenment, the Buddha declared, "All your beams are broken. The ridgepole is shattered." The goal of the path, then, is to bring about the cessation of each of the accumulated causes of future suffering and rebirth. The state of their collective cessation is called *nirvana*. Perhaps the most famous of Buddhist terms, it literally means "blown out" or "extinguished," like a flame. The fuel that feeds the fire is gone, and the fire goes out. Here, the fuel of ignorance has been destroyed, and that destruction is so complete that it not only stops the production of future karma but also incinerates all the unripened seeds of past deeds accumulated over countless lifetimes in the past. In the case of the Buddha, and those who followed the path he set forth, nirvana occurs in two phases. The first occurs when all the causes for future rebirth are destroyed; this might be called "seeing nirvana" and is not followed by death. The Buddha saw nirvana at the age of thirty-five; he did not die until he was eighty. Since the causes of the present lifetime have already been set in motion at birth, what is destroyed is the causes for future lives. And so, the Buddha lived out his life, and when the cause of that life was spent, he experienced nirvana in the second sense of the term: he entered nirvana. Hence, the third truth postulates a state of freedom from suffering and its causes, a state that is entered at the only death that is not followed by rebirth. But exactly what that state is like is difficult to say, because, at least as conceived early in the history of Buddhism, nirvana is also the state of the cessation of mind and body, making it a state of freedom that is literally inconceivable.

The fourth truth is the truth of the path, the path to the cessation of all suffering. In his first sermon (see *Setting the Wheel of the Dharma in Motion*, p. 177), the Buddha characterizes this path as eightfold— right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right meditation—and each aspect receives considerable commentary. However, a somewhat more straightforward, and shorter, list describes the path to nirvana in terms of three trainings under which the eightfold path is often subsumed: the training in ethics, the training in meditation, and the training in wisdom. Here, ethics refers to the restraint of negative deeds of

body and speech, especially through the taking and keeping of vows, whether the five vows of the layperson or the 253 vows (as enumerated in one of the major orders) of a monk. It is only when body and speech have been controlled through ethics that one can begin to control the mind through meditation. In this context, meditation (*samadhi*) is the practice of bringing the wild elephant of the mind under control and developing powers of concentration that enable one to focus single-mindedly on one object for a prolonged period of time. Such a concentrated mind is necessary to undertake the third training, the training in the wisdom that will destroy the seeds of ignorance. That is, a simple intellectual understanding that there is no self is necessary but not sufficient to achieve liberation from suffering. One must understand the reality of no-self with a mind that has developed strong powers of concentration. It is said that the ax may be sharp, but a strong arm is required to uproot the tree of suffering. That is, in order to destroy suffering at its root, one needs both the sharp insight of wisdom and the power of concentration.

This, in broad paraphrase, is how the Buddha's first teaching after his achievement of enlightenment has been generally understood across the various Buddhist traditions of Asia. Though these have been long known in English as the "four noble truths," the traditional commentaries indicate that a better translation might be the "four truths for the noble"—that is, the four truths for those on the path to enlightenment. Benighted beings would not agree that all life is characterized by suffering and that the root cause of that suffering is their own ignorance. One must understand this truth about suffering in order to successfully end it. One must understand that suffering is produced by its origin, that cessation results from following the path. Indeed, one sees immediately a strong emphasis on causation: suffering is caused by negative actions, which in turn are caused by desire and hatred, which are themselves caused by ignorance; by destroying the cause one can destroy the effect; and through the practice of the path, one can achieve nirvana.

Not long after his enlightenment, one of the Buddha's disciples was asked to summarize what he learned from his teacher. The monk said, "For those things that have causes, he has set forth the causes. And he has also set forth their cessation. The great renunciant has so spoken." According to the story, by simply hearing these words, the person who requested the summary reached the first stage of insight into nirvana. This statement is the most famous in all of Buddhism; when it was written down it served as a substitute for a relic of the Buddha's body.

The Presence of the Buddha

But who was the Buddha, the great renunciant? As noted above, we do not know precisely what he taught, yet we do know what teachings the various traditions of the Buddhist world attribute to him. When one gathers together the various canons—the Pali canon, the Tibetan canon, the Chinese canon—his teachings exceed anything that a single person could produce. Regardless of which particular tradition one might consider to be the most authentic, the most faithful to his teachings, its canonical texts fill thousands of pages. Unlike Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Buddhism

does not have a single sacred text. But if Buddhism is not a "religion of the book," it is a "religion of the books." The Buddha is said to have taught the dharma for forty-five years, during which he was renowned for his "skillful methods" in teaching what was appropriate to particular disciples and what was appropriate to the moment. This motif of adaptation remained powerful in the tradition, providing an important impetus for the production of texts over many centuries and in many lands. Texts that represent "the word of Buddha" not only served to transmit Buddhism across Asia but were themselves objects of devotion, to be worshipped, recited, copied, translated, studied, and commented upon.

Only a tiny sampling from these canons is provided in this volume, providing just a glimpse of the scope and complexity of the Buddhist tradition. In reading through the sixty-seven selections from Buddhist texts here, one might continue to ponder the question: Who is the Buddha?

This is a question that Buddhists themselves have long sought to answer. In one sense, the answer is easy: The Buddha was an Indian prince who lived sometime around the fifth century B.C.E. He claimed to achieve enlightenment (*bodhi*, literally "awakening" in Sanskrit)—the salvific insight into the nature of reality that bestows liberation at death—at the age of thirty-five. He spent the rest of his life teaching others the path to that state of liberation, a state he called nirvana. But this account in fact tells us very little. One of the things left unmentioned is that all Buddhist traditions believe that there is more than one buddha. Multiple buddhas populate the pages of this book.

Regardless of one's perspective—whether it be that of the scholar of Buddhist history or that of the adherent of any of the schools of Buddhism—the Buddha did not come out of nowhere. As is clear from some of the readings here (e.g., see the *Tevijja Sutta*, p. 181), the Buddha rejected the authority of the Vedas, the sacred texts of Hindus, as well as the authority of the brahmin priests who recited them. Those priests declared that the Vedas were eternal, preexistent sound—sound not produced by either gods or humans; the authority of the Vedas derived in part from their antiquity. Innovation is rarely lauded in religion; when innovation occurs, it must be sanctified by the past. And thus it is not surprising that the Buddha did not claim to teach something new. Instead, he maintained that he discovered a truth, indeed a preexistent truth, that had been forgotten. Previous buddhas had come in the past, had discovered the path to nirvana, and had taught it to others. But with the passage of time, oblivion had set in; the path had become so overgrown that it was no longer visible and was eventually lost. And so another buddha had come who discovered the same path and taught the same truth. But that discovery had also been forgotten, and so another buddha—our buddha, "the historical Buddha"—had appeared in the world. According to some accounts, he was the seventh; according to others, he was the twenty-fifth. Indeed, the main concern of the early tradition seems to be describing the lives of the buddhas who had come before our Buddha, explaining not how he differed from his predecessors but how he was exactly like them. All buddhas are said to be remarkably similar in word and deed; they differ from each other in just a few ways, one of which is the circumference of their auras.

The appearance of a buddha in the world is a rare moment of profound significance, for when the world is bereft of the teachings of a buddha, there is no escape from suffering. In a famous scene after the Buddha's enlightenment, the god Brahma descends from his heaven and implores the Buddha to teach. Such a request might at first seem surprising. But from the perspective of Buddhist doctrine, there is no God, no eternal creator of the universe; there are only gods—beings who were once humans, animals, ghosts, and denizens of hell—who, through their practice of charity in the past, are reborn as gods in the future. Their lifetimes in heaven are long and blissful, but they come to an end. Thus, even Brahma, the powerful god of creation in the Hindu tradition, is also bound in the cycle of rebirth and does not know how to escape. He therefore asks the Buddha to teach him. The story also represents an attempt to portray the Buddha as superior to Hindu deities and to incorporate those deities, already in existence at the time of the rise of Buddhism in India, into a Buddhist pantheon. According to tradition, there are thirty-three gods in the Rig Veda, the most ancient of the Hindu scriptures. In Buddhism, one of the heavens of the gods—that is, those reborn as gods, who will one day be reborn as humans, animals, ghosts, or in hell—is called the Heaven of the Thirty-three. Thus, the gods of India were retained in Buddhism, but they were made subservient to the Buddha.

Yet another indication of the relations between the early Buddhist and Hindu communities was the Buddha's caste. Traditional Indian society was divided into four castes: the brahmins, or priests; the kshatriyas, or warriors; the vaishyas, or merchants; and the shudras, or servants. Only the first three "twice-born" castes were granted access to the sacred Veda. The brahmins were the Buddhist monks' chief competitors for both alms and patronage, and thus they receive particular criticism in the early literature (see the *Agganna Sutta* and *Tevijja Sutta*). Further evidence of this competition and sometimes antipathy is found in the Buddhist doctrine that prior to his final birth, the future buddha selects both his parents and his caste. A buddha, it is said, is always born as either a brahmin or kshatriya, choosing whichever is more highly respected at the time. The buddha of our age was born as a kshatriya.

The appearance of a buddha is said to be the culmination of a long process of perfection. The Buddha decided to set out on the path to enlightenment not during his youth as a prince but billions of lifetimes before. Over the course of the succeeding millennia, he had accumulated the great stores of virtue that would make it possible for him to discover the path to enlightenment without the instructions of a teacher, for buddhas appear only in a world in which the teachings of the previous buddha have been completely forgotten. He had vowed aeons ago to become a buddha in the far distant future, and from the time that he made that vow, he was called a *bodhisattva*: a being intent on *bodhi*, enlightenment.

Many reference books state that a bodhisattva is someone who "postpones his enlightenment." This definition is somewhat misleading. It is said that a person who vows to achieve buddhahood vows to do so in the presence of a previous buddha. At the time of the vow, the person understands that should he become a disciple of that buddha, he would quickly complete the path in that same lifetime to become an *arhat*, one who has destroyed the causes for future rebirth and who enters nirvana at death. But an arhat is not a buddha; an arhat must rely on the teachings of a buddha to achieve liberation, whereas a buddha does not. And so, out of compassion for the

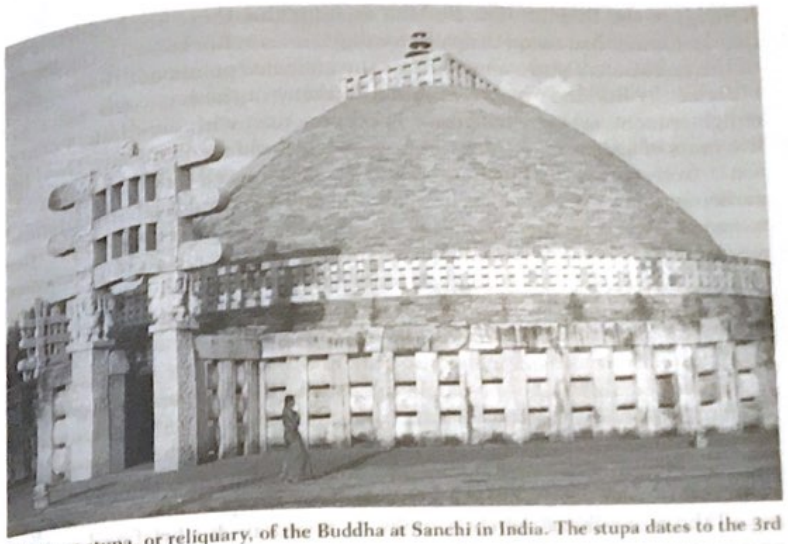
world, the bodhisattva decides not to become an arhat, vowing instead to become a buddha at a time in the far distant future when the path to liberation from suffering has been forgotten. The bodhisattva then sets out on the path to buddhahood at full speed, postponing nothing. But the path is very long, requiring billions of lifetimes.

Over the course of those lifetimes the bodhisattva who would become "our buddha"—known to the tradition as Gautama Buddha or Shakyamuni Buddha—practiced virtues called the perfections: giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom, in the most famous list. After his enlightenment, he told stories of his previous lives, each of which he remembered, recounting his practice of virtue sometimes as an animal, sometimes as a human (see the *Shibi Jataka* and *Vessantara Jataka*, pp. 100 and 109). These are the famous jataka or "birth" stories, as well-known in some Buddhist cultures as the story of Prince Siddhartha. When he emerged from his mother to be born as that prince (exiting from under her right arm rather than by the usual route), he took seven steps and announced, "This is my final birth."

Much, then, is made of the birth of a buddha, and of the many births leading up to it. And much is made of his death. The story of the Buddha's passage into nirvana is told in the *Great Discourse on the Final Nirvana* (the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*), a long section of which appears below. There, in a scene not included in that excerpt, the Buddha tells his attendant Ananda that a buddha is able to extend his life "for an aeon or until the end of the aeon" if one of his disciples asks him to so. But Ananda somehow does not take the hint, a sin of omission for which he was tried after the Buddha's death. To live in a time when a buddha walks the earth is considered fortunate beyond value, and Buddhists have long lamented the mistake of kind Ananda, who, blinded by the illusion of permanence, somehow imagined that the person he loved most would live forever.

And so the Buddha died. Before he died, he gave instructions on how his body should be burned. He said that what remained in the ashes should be buried within a hemispherical tomb built at a crossroads. Such a tomb or reliquary is called a *stupa*. As the sutra explains, there was a dispute over who deserved the relics, and they were eventually divided into ten parts, with a stupa erected for each. Later it is said that the Emperor Ashoka (see the *Ashokavadana*, or *Legend of Ashoka*, p. 238) broke open the existing stupas, gathered the relics together, and enshrined them in 84,000 others. These stupas took many shapes, from the domes of India to the spires of Cambodia to the pagodas of Japan. The Buddha was said to be alive within each stupa, and they became important places of pilgrimage. When there were not enough relics to be held by more stupas, they would instead enshrine the words of the Buddha, making use of a different kind of corpus (see the *Perfection of Wisdom That Rends Like a Thunderbolt* [the *Diamond Sutra*], p. 325).

Yet despite the continued presence of the Buddha in stupas erected to sanctify the landscape, his death marks the beginning of the disappearance of his teaching from the world. Indeed, the so-called First Council was said to have been convened shortly after the Buddha's death so that the monks could collectively remember what he had taught them before it was forgotten. The Buddha is said to have taught for forty-five years, from the time of his enlightenment to the time of his death, and there was much to remember. The Buddha himself is said to have predicted how his dharma would



The great stupa, or reliquary, of the Buddha at Sanchi in India. The stupa dates to the 3rd century B.C.E.

disappear in the centuries after his passage. Although often referred to as "the decline of the dharma," the decline is less in the dharma than in the ability of his followers to put it into practice. Eventually it will be completely forgotten. In the final stages of its disappearance, all Buddhist texts will vanish, the saffron robes of the monks will turn white (the color of the robes of laymen), all of the stupas will break open, and the relics of the Buddha will fly through the air to Bodh Gaya, the site of his enlightenment, where they will reassemble beneath the tree under which he had sat millennia ago. They will be worshipped one last time by the gods and then they will burst into flames.

But what is one to do until then? It is standard Buddhist doctrine that as the nirvana of the last buddha recedes further into the past, it becomes more difficult to practice the dharma, to the point that some have claimed that now no one can follow the path to nirvana. Attempts to deal with the problem of living in a time between two buddhas have been made across the Buddhist world. One approach is simply to wait. The next buddha, whose name is Maitreya ("Kindness"), has all but completed the long path of the bodhisattva and now abides in the Tushita ("Joyous") heaven, awaiting the appropriate moment to appear in the world. Buddhists have long prayed to be reborn as one of his disciples in the far distant future, or they have practiced alchemy to extend their life span until his advent.

In the form of Buddhism called the Mahayana, the "Great Vehicle," the consequence of the death of the Buddha has been confronted in a variety of ways. Proponents of one solution say that in fact the Buddha never died, he only pretended to do so in order to illustrate the truth of impermanence to his disciples. Indeed, the entire life story of the Buddha had been something of a pretense. In a famous scene from the *Lotus Sutra* (a selection from which is found on p. 278), a host of bodhisattvas rise out of the earth to pay

homage to the Buddha. The Buddha explains that these are bodhisattvas that he himself had set on the path to enlightenment. But knowing the length of the bodhisattva path, a member of the audience points out the impossibility of the Buddha's having inspired so many in the few years since his enlightenment, saying, "Suppose a handsome man with dark hair, twenty-five years of age, were to point to a hundred-year-old man and say, 'He is my son.'" In response, the Buddha reveals that he achieved buddhahood aeons earlier and that his life span is beyond measure. The Buddha had pretended to agonize about leaving the palace, the Buddha had pretended to practice austerities for six years, the Buddha had pretended to achieve enlightenment under the tree, the Buddha had pretended to pass into nirvana. In fact, he had been a buddha for ages. In fact, he had not died and his life span is immeasurable.

In the early tradition, there was only one buddha per universe; there needed to be only one, for he taught the path to nirvana to all the gods and humans who had the good fortune to encounter him. Salvation was dispensed sequentially by a single teacher who appears in the universe once per age. The appearance of a buddha was considered a rare and momentous event in the history of the universe; indeed, it was an epochal moment, requiring all the resources of the entire universe to sustain his brief and majestic presence.

But in the Mahayana, the bodhisattva was no longer that rare individual who makes the remarkable vow to free all beings in the universe from suffering. The vow remains remarkable, but the bodhisattva became the ideal, and the norm. If, as the Buddha stated in the *Lotus Sutra*, all beings in the universe would set out on the bodhisattva path and become buddhas (a statement that some other Mahayana sutras did not make), then many beings were achieving buddhahood. They were not appearing in our world—Shakyamuni Buddha was still the buddha of our world—but they were achieving buddhahood in other realms, for there are multiple worlds. And thus, those who have been reborn in this world after the Buddha is gone, or at least appears to be gone, need not spend aeons waiting for Maitreya. It is possible for them to be reborn in their very next lifetime in a different world where a different buddha is presently teaching the dharma.

It is this possibility that motivates what is referred to as "Pure Land Buddhism" in the West, a form of Buddhism—or more accurately, a form of Buddhist practice—typically associated with Japan but with a long history in India and China. The most famous of those "pure lands" is Sukhavati, the Land of Bliss of the buddha Amitabha (see the *Sukhavativyuha Sutra*, p. 316). But the Mahayana sutras name many other buddhas and many other lands, and they explain how to be reborn in those lands and into the presence of those buddhas.

The simultaneous presence of multiple buddhas in multiple worlds meant that many teachings were being dispensed, with each buddha employing his skillful methods to set forth what was most appropriate for his time, his place, and his disciples. And thus, much as the teachings of the Mahayana came to be ascribed to the Buddha in texts that began to be composed some four centuries after his death, another genre of Buddhist literature called the *tantras* began to appear some ten centuries after his death—sometimes ascribed to Shakyamuni Buddha, sometimes ascribed to other buddhas

from other worlds (see the *Tantra on the Complete Enlightenment of Vairochana*, p. 471). These texts did not simply teach the path to buddhahood but presented all manner of techniques for achievements both sacred and profane (see the *Sarvadurgatiparishodhana Tantra*, p. 464); Victorian scholars condemned them as magic.

However, many of the tantras set forth techniques by which the long path of the bodhisattva—described both in the mainstream schools and in the Mahayana as requiring billions of lifetimes—could be radically curtailed; indeed, it was said that the bodhisattva path could be undertaken and completed in a single lifetime. Various initiations, rituals, and vows were required; one must make mandalas and recite mantras. One also had to imagine oneself as now being a buddha, by—as an important Tibetan tradition describes it—"taking the result as the path" (see *Heart of the Practice*, p. 701).

In some ways, the idea was not new. Some of the most famous Mahayana sutras had proclaimed the existence of the *tathagatagarbha*, the "essence of the *tathagata*," the Buddha nature (see the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*, p. 340). According to these sutras, all beings possessed within them, at least in an obscured form, the buddha that they were destined to become. From this point on, one sees a tension in the tradition, in India, Tibet, and East Asia alike, as questions arose about the nature of the Buddhist path. If each person possesses the buddha nature, what does it mean to be mired in ignorance and what does it mean to be enlightened? Is the path a slow purging of pollution, accumulated lifetime after lifetime, the gradual lifting of the layers of obscurations that have prevented the mind from seeing things as they are? Or is the path a moment of recognition of an enlightenment that has always been the mind's true nature?

The great eleventh-century Bengali scholar Atisha often walked by an old woman who was alternately crying and laughing. Finally, he asked her why. She said, "I think about the terrible sufferings that sentient beings undergo. And so I cry. But then I realize that all of these sufferings result from one tiny error, and when this error is understood, they are freed from all suffering. And so I laugh."

The Buddhist Canon

This story is not included in the selections that follow, but many works from the vast Buddhist canons are. When we consider the Buddhist canons, perhaps the first question we might ask is, "What language did the Buddha speak?" Like so many other things about his life, no one knows for sure. In ancient India, languages were divided into two categories. The first was Sanskrit, a term that literally means "constructed, refined, perfected." It was originally considered not a separate language but rather a refined form of expression, especially suited for liturgical, philosophical, and literary purposes and used by cultured elites, including members of the brahmin caste. The other category was Prakrit, a term that literally means "natural, ordinary" and was used to refer to vernaculars, not a single language. The particular Prakrit or vernacular that was likely spoken in the region and period of the Buddha is called Magadhi. However, discourses of the Buddha are not preserved in that language, much as the teachings of Jesus are not preserved

in his native Aramaic. Instead, the teachings of the Buddha come to us largely in two other Indian languages, Pali and Sanskrit.

It is said that after the Buddha had assembled sixty disciples and guided each of them to enlightenment, he gave them these instructions:

> I am free, O monks, from all shackles, human and divine. You, O monks, are also free from all fetters, human and divine. Go forth, O monks, and wander, for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans. Let no two take the same road. Teach, O monks, the dharma that is of benefit in the beginning, of benefit in the middle, and of benefit in the end, with the meaning and the letter. Make known the holy life, which is utterly perfect and pure. There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who will be lost unless they hear the dharma. Some will understand.

It is largely on the basis of this statement that Buddhism is sometimes described as a "missionary religion." Yet Buddhism never developed the missionary apparatus of Christianity, nor was the failure of nonbelievers to convert said to lead to punishment in this life or damnation in the next. According to Buddhist doctrine, one encountered the dharma because of virtuous deeds done in the past; those reborn in Buddhist cultures, and hence with access to the dharma, were considered more karmically fortunate than those bereft of it. Because of future rebirths, there was the possibility, and in Buddhist lands the fervent hope, that one would encounter the dharma in future lives. Yet this relatively relaxed attitude toward conversion did not mean that Buddhists have ever believed that all paths take believers to the same mountaintop. Other religions offer, through their teachings of an ethical life, the possibility of favorable rebirth within the six realms of rebirth. But the path to liberation from the cycle of birth and death is set forth only in Buddhism. In effect, all paths lead to Everest Base Camp, but Buddhism is the sole route to the summit.

And so, in keeping with the Buddha's exhortation, the dharma was carried around the world, not as a disembodied truth descending on another culture from above but as a more material movement—of monks (sometimes in groups of two or more, despite the Buddha's instruction), and of Buddhist texts, relics, and icons—along trade routes and across deserts, mountains, and seas. In addition, monks also conveyed elements of Indian culture more generally that would be highly valued at their destinations, elements such as writing, medicine, and forms of art. Tibet, for example, did not have a written language until the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century.

The Buddha is said not to have spoken in Sanskrit, the learned language of the priests of his day, but in the vernacular, and he is said to have forbidden monks from composing his teachings in formal verses for chanting. This prohibition implies that the content was more important than the form, and led to the notion that the dharma that the monks were to convey "for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans" could be translated from one language to another. Thus, Buddhism has no sacred language comparable to Sanskrit for Hinduism, Hebrew for Judaism, or Arabic for Islam. Over the centuries, therefore, the act of translation (together with the sponsorship of translation) has been regarded throughout Asia as one of the most pious and meritorious acts that a Buddhist could perform. It was common for Buddhist kings to sponsor the translation of texts from one language into another: from Sanskrit into Chinese, from Sanskrit into Tibetan, from Tibetan into Manchu, from Pali into Burmese, and so on. Adding to Buddhism's ease of dissemination was that the primary objects of Buddhist devotion—texts, relics, icons—were all portable; stories of the transportation and enshrinement of a particularly potent image of the Buddha figure in the histories of almost all Buddhist cultures.

For the Theravada tradition of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, the language of the canon is Pali, one of the Indian vernaculars spoken at the time that Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka. (Despite claims to the contrary, it was not the language of the Buddha himself.) Pali functions for Theravada Buddhism much as Latin has traditionally done for Roman Catholicism: it is the language of the canon and the liturgy, but not the language spoken every day, even by learned monks. The various Theravada countries render Pali in their own script.

Most of the Mahayana texts, including the Mahayana sutras and treatises as well as the tantras, were composed in Sanskrit or some version of it (including something called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit); and from Sanskrit, these texts were translated into Chinese and into Tibetan. For the Buddhist traditions of East Asia, whether in China, Korea, or Japan, the Chinese translations became their canon; and exegetes, regardless of their nationality, first read these works and composed commentaries on them in Chinese. In the Tibetan Buddhist cultural domain, which included Mongolia, Tibetan was the canonical language. Thus, when scholars of Buddhism refer to the canonical languages of Buddhism, they typically have four in mind: Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan. There is considerable overlap in the texts preserved in these languages, but one very significant divide.

The largest, and in many ways the most significant, overlap is the texts shared, in one form or another, by all traditions of Buddhism. In organizing this anthology, I have called these texts "the shared tradition" and placed them first. They include descriptions of the formation and structure of the universe; the collections of stories about the Buddha's past lives, called the jataka or "birth" stories; the biographies of the Buddha, from his birth to his death; the accounts of his teachings to his first disciples; and the *abhidharma*, technical works on psychology and epistemology. All of these works originated in India, and versions of them were translated from Indian languages into Chinese and Tibetan, and eventually into the vernaculars of the many other Buddhist cultures of Asia. Thus, although scholars often like to speak of "Buddhisms" rather than "Buddhism," it is important to recall how much the various Buddhist traditions share. The works placed in "The Shared Tradition" provide both the foundation for all forms of Buddhism and the touchstone for all subsequent developments. This, therefore, is the largest section of the anthology.

The great divide in the canon appears in the question of the Mahayana sutras. Composed in India beginning some four centuries after the death of the Buddha, they purported to be records of his words. Because these works went on to be so important in China and Tibet, one might imagine that they somehow carried the day. However, the influence of a religious tradition cannot always be measured by the size of its corpus. Indeed, it

appears that most Buddhist monks in India regarded the Mahayana sutras as spurious. But many did accept them as authentic, and they continued to be composed in Sanskrit over the course of several centuries. Just as importantly, monks who regarded the Mahayana sutras as the word of the Buddha took those sutras to China, where the previous history of the tradition in India was unknown. Thus, the second section of this anthology is devoted to several of the most famous of the Mahayana sutras—works that were important in India, especially to those who accepted them, but were of much greater importance in East Asia, following their translation into Chinese.

With a few exceptions, the works presented in the initial two sections of the anthology are anonymous, works that begin with the standard line that opens all sutras: "Thus did I hear"; the rapporteur is unnamed but usually is assumed by the tradition to be the Buddha's personal attendant, the monk Ananda. However, there is a large body of Indian texts—works of philosophy, devotion, counsel, and polemic—by some of the leading figures in the history of Indian Buddhism. The third section of the anthology provides a selection of these writings, some of which went on to become important in China and all of which became important in Tibet.

Whether an Indian work went on to become important in China (and hence Korea and Japan) depended in large part on when it was written. Buddhism began to be transmitted to China in the first century of the Common Era, and by the end of the seventh century most of the texts that would define East Asian Buddhism had been translated into Chinese. Tibet received Buddhism from India much later, beginning in the seventh century, just as the transmission of Buddhism from India to China was drawing to a close. Following a lapse of almost two centuries, the transmission of Buddhism from India to Tibet resumed in earnest in the eleventh century. As a consequence, Tibet received a much fuller corpus of Indian works than China did; some works that would be very important in Tibet were less significant or even unknown in China. This was especially the case for the Mahayana treatises and the Buddhist tantras. Early treatises, such as those of Nagarjuna (see the *Madhyamakakarika* or *Verses on the Middle Way*, p. 366), were highly influential in both East Asia and Tibet, but later treatises, such as those of Shantideva (see *Introduction to the Practice of the Bodhisattva Path*, p. 395), were important only in Tibet. Some of the early tantras (such as the *Tantra on the Complete Purification of All Negative Places of Rebirth*, p. 464) were central to the development of Esoteric Buddhism in East Asia, while the accounts of the lives of many of the tantric saints (e.g., the *Lives of the Eighty-Four Siddhas*, p. 478), compiled rather late, were largely unknown in China, Korea, and Japan.

In selecting works for this volume, I have chosen to provide fewer and longer selections, rather than more and shorter ones, offering the text in full whenever possible. I have done so with the conviction that the power of the text derives at least in part from its development and its structure. Longer selections also provide the reader with the opportunity to identify the many shared themes and tropes that appear across Buddhist texts of all traditions. The section on Indian Buddhism, organized more or less chronologically, is followed by sections on China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet—the order in which Buddhism came to those countries. In all cases, however, the Indian tradition must be assumed as an integral part of their Buddhism. For example, perhaps the most influential of all Buddhist texts in China and Japan was the *Lotus Sutra*, which inspired both philosophical schools and a wide range of popular practice. Indeed, each of the Mahayana sutras that appears here was of great importance for East Asian Buddhism. Thus, all of the works listed under China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet were composed by natives of those lands on the Indian foundation.

Among Buddhist nations, China, Korea, and Japan form one group and Tibet, Mongolia, and Nepal—a geographically contiguous region—form a second. China received its Buddhism from India, and Korea and Japan received their Buddhism from China (in Japan's case, initially via Korea). Thus, all the works in the China section would go on to be important in Korea and Japan, whereas the works in the Korea and Japan section remained largely limited in influence to their respective homelands. Tibet, as already mentioned, is in many ways a different case, having received Buddhism directly from India and much later than did China, Korea, and Japan. Tibet inherited traditions from the last centuries of Buddhism in India, as did Nepal, and these would form the foundation for the Tibetan Buddhism that would spread to Mongolia, Bhutan, and other regions of the Himalayas. In the twentieth century, Buddhism was brought from Asia to the West not by European travelers and scholars, as had been the case in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but by Asian Buddhists themselves, both monks and laypeople from China, Tibet, Vietnam, and Cambodia, often driven across the sea by the winds of revolution and war.

Even though each Buddhist tradition claims to teach only what the Buddha himself taught, the nations touched by Buddhism have each made their own contributions to its theory and practice. Just as the Vedic gods of India were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon and housed in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, so the local gods of other Asian cultures would become Buddhist deities, whether they were originally the mountain spirits of Tibet or the *kami* of Japan. Rather than simply commenting on the sutras received from India, Buddhist authors would sometimes write their own, presenting them as originally Indian works spoken by the Buddha himself and beginning "Thus did I hear." This genre of "Buddhist apocrypha" constitutes an important form of Buddhist literature, one that even spread to the United States when the Zen poet Gary Snyder wrote the "Smokey the Bear Sutra" (see p. 777), in which the Buddha manifests himself in the form of a local deity of the American West and teaches that "all true paths lead through mountains."

The need to present new works in the ancient voice of the Buddha suggests that Buddhism is a profoundly retrospective tradition. And indeed, from one perspective, all Buddhist texts are commentaries, each attempting to articulate the silent content of the Buddha's enlightenment so many centuries ago. It is also the case, in a more prosaic sense, that commentary is one of the most important genres of Buddhist literature; the idea of the "root text" with layers of commentary and subcommentary abounds throughout the Buddhist world. Each of the Buddhist traditions of Asia has its own "golden age" (variously identified), but by the seventeenth century, much Buddhist literature across Asia was taking the form of commentary (with some notable exceptions, as in Tibet). Therefore, few works from that period are represented

in this anthology, which moves ahead to the nineteenth century and the formation of what has been called "modern Buddhism."

Buddhism and the West

The encounter of Buddhism with the West is a long and fascinating story, told here by five works under the heading "Modern Buddhism"—one from the end of the nineteenth century and four from the twentieth. Only in the nineteenth century did Westerners remove Buddhism from the catch-all category of paganism to view it as a world religion, a shift that largely reflected European scholars' new ability to read Buddhist texts in the original, especially in Sanskrit and Pali. This ability was gained just around the time that philologists were discovering the existence of a language family that they called Aryan and is today called Indo-European or Indo-Iranian, which includes Sanskrit, Persian, Russian, French, Italian, German, English, and, importantly, Greek and Latin. The Aryan language family did not include Chinese, Turkish, Arabic, or Hebrew. European scholars thus discovered a kinship between the classical language of India and the classical languages of Europe.

This discovery, which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, coincided with the British East India Company's gaining control over much of India; India would become a colony of the United Kingdom in 1858. Britain's was not the first European interaction with India; Alexander the Great had led his troops across the Indus in 326 B.C.E., when Buddhism was just beginning. Modern contact is generally dated to 1498, when four ships under the command of Vasco da Gama landed on the western coast of India. By that time Buddhism had disappeared from India, the land of its birth, although it was flourishing almost everywhere else in Asia.

Buddhism came under assault early in India, in ways both direct and indirect. For example, during the first millennium C.E., Buddhism's holy of holies, the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha sat on the night of his enlightenment, was repeatedly cut down at the order of various Hindu kings—only to miraculously return. A more subtle attack sought to redefine the nature of Buddhism, incorporating the Buddha into the Hindu pantheon in a way that undercut his authority.

According to Hindu belief, the great god Vishnu appears in the world at crucial moments in different avatars, or incarnations, usually numbered at nine. The most famous are the seventh and eighth, Rama and Krishna, but long after his death the Buddha was named as the ninth. Each appearance of Vishnu, it is said, is intended to right a particular wrong, and the specific purpose of his incarnation as the Buddha was variously portrayed in the Hindu scriptures. In one well-known version, demons gain so much power through the recitation of the sacred Veda and the practice of asceticism that they challenge the supremacy of the gods. In order to deprive the demons of their power, Vishnu appears as a sage who condemns the practice of Vedic sacrifice, ignores caste distinction, and denies the existence of a creator deity. The demons become disciples of this new teacher, the Buddha, and embrace his teachings. As a consequence, they not only lose their power but are reborn in hell. Vishnu thus appears as the Buddha to deceive

the demons, convincing them that important truths—Vedic sacrifice, caste distinction, and a creator god—are instead false. But in the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha did in fact reject these elements of Hinduism (though his attitude toward caste was more nuanced than modern accounts suggest). This story of the Buddha's incarnation as Vishnu—hardly an ecumenical embrace, as it is often portrayed—is not accepted by any of the Buddhist schools or reported with anything but condemnation in any Buddhist text.

It is important to note, however, that in conflicts between Buddhists and Hindus, even the more violent ones, the Buddhists were not always the victims. According to the *Great Chronicle* (Mahavamsa) of Sri Lanka, the Buddhist prince Dutthagamani defeated the righteous but Hindu king Elara in 164 B.C.E., killing him in a bloody battle in which each monarch was mounted on a war elephant. After his victory, the Buddhist prince is troubled by all the carnage he has caused. But a delegation of eight monks, all arhats (those who will enter nirvana at death), reassure him: "From this deed arises no hindrance to the way to heaven. Only one and half human beings have been slain here by thee, O Lord of Men. . . . Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts." The *Great Chronicle* explains their odd calculation: among the "millions" slain in battle (an obviously hyperbolic number), one person had taken refuge in the Buddha, dharma, and the sangha (making him half a human) and another who had done so had also taken the five vows of a Buddhist layman (making him a full person). The story of Dutthagamani continues to be told, and was offered in the late twentieth century in defense of the violence of Sinhalese Buddhists against Hindu Tamils in Sri Lanka. Dutthagamani is also remembered for building important stupas and for granting sovereignty over the island of Sri Lanka not to any king but to the relics of the Buddha.

Although Buddhism continued to thrive in Sri Lanka, it died out in India for reasons beyond theological polemics. Buddhism had been in decline in India, or at least certain regions of India, for centuries; the famous seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (see his *Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western World*, p. 511) reports seeing stupas in ruins. The religious life of India, especially the life cycle rituals at its center, was increasingly controlled by Hindu priests, depriving Buddhist monks of the lay support they relied on for their survival. The intellectual vitality of the monastic tradition came to depend on large monastic universities, whose fortunes rose and fell with the level of royal patronage. Without these monasteries, Buddhism had little chance to survive in India.

The monastic universities of northern India became favored targets of Muslim troops. In 1193 they attacked Nalanda, the most famous of all the celebrated monasteries of India. At its height it housed some ten thousand monks and was considered the greatest center of Buddhist learning in the world, drawing students from across Asia. Its library was said to contain hundreds of thousands of manuscripts. The Muslim forces apparently mistook it for a fortress. Buddhists clearly regarded the Muslim armies with a combination of fear and contempt, blaming them for the decline of the dharma in India. An eleventh-century text, the *Kalachakra Tantra*, describes barbarians who drink camel blood and cut off the ends of their penises (i.e., practice circumcision), followers of one Madhumati (a Sanskrit approximation of "Muhammad"). The same text foretold an apocalyptic war in which

Buddhist armies would sweep south out of the Himalayas to defeat the barbarians and restore the dharma to India. Instead, Buddhism had essentially disappeared from India by the time Vasco da Gama arrived in 1498. In the nineteenth century, a new form of Buddhism would arise, originating not in India but in Europe.

Two factors—the European discovery of Sanskrit with its kinship to Greek and Latin, on the one hand, and the conquest of India by the British long after Buddhism had disappeared, on the other—were key to the development of Modern Buddhism. A common feature of colonialism is the denigration of the colonized culture, and in India the British condemned Hinduism as a form of polytheistic idolatry, filled with multiheaded and multiarmed gods, and overseen by a corrupt class of priests. For early European scholars, many of whom never traveled to Asia and knew it only from a relatively random group of texts, Buddhism offered an alternative. Here was a religion, or perhaps it was a philosophy, in which there was no God. The founder was a prince who had set out in search of life's meaning; having found it, he condemned the priests and their caste system (many of the British, German, and French scholars of Buddhism were for varying reasons strongly anti-Catholic), opening his new religion to all. Through their selective reading of Buddhist texts, unconstrained by contact with any living Buddhists, they painted a portrait of the Buddha as a man of (the) Enlightenment who was able to set forth a rational philosophy and an ethical way of life without a jealous God. And this founder taught in an Aryan language. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the verbal roots of the Aryan language turned into bloodlines: race science was born, as the creation of the category of Semitic languages and the Semites who spoke them gave an apparently natural foundation to centuries of prejudice against Jews and Muslims. In the process, the Buddha some two millennia after his death somehow became an ancient kinsman—an Aryan like the Europeans, not a Semite like Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. At the time of the quest for the historical Jesus, European scholars set out on their own quest for the historical Buddha and discovered someone who taught what they called "original Buddhism," sometimes "pure Buddhism"—a Buddhism long dead in India (and thus all the easier to control from Europe), a Buddhism against which the other still living Buddhisms of Asia could be judged, and found to be lacking. The Buddhism that was known in Europe from such best-selling works as Sir Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia* (a favorite of Queen Victoria) derives from this process, as does the positive portrayal of Buddhism that persists in the West to this day.

But European and North American views of the Buddha were not uniformly positive. For the Christian missionaries who fanned out across the Buddhist world, Buddhism, like Hinduism, was a form of idolatry, and the Buddha was an atheist who taught a life-denying philosophy. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Buddhist leaders in Asia responded to this criticism by importing to Asia, and sending into battle against the Christian missionaries, the ethical and human Buddha who had been invented in Europe. They were able to claim that Buddhism, rather than Christianity, was the religion most suited to the modern world. The reasons for its superiority were many, including what they saw as its compatibility with science: the mechanistic universe described by the Buddha seemed to anticipate the science of the day. This claim, used to defend Buddhism in Asia during the nineteenth century, would be used to promote Buddhism in the West during the twentieth century. And so Modern Buddhism was born.

The earlier Buddhist traditions of Asia had developed regionally, as contact with other forms of Buddhism usually occurred across local borders. The lineage of monastic ordination in the Theravada had been established in Burma by monks from Sri Lanka, and from Burma moved eventually to Thailand. When that lineage became threatened in Sri Lanka as a result of wars, a delegation of monks was invited from Burma around 1070, and another from Thailand in 1753, to come back to Sri Lanka and ordain Sinhalese monks. In the early centuries of Japanese Buddhism, monks would often make the perilous sea voyage to China to retrieve texts and teachings. Korean monks would travel to Chinese monasteries. Tibetans invited Indian Buddhist masters to Tibet, and Indian monks would sail to Sumatra to study there. Sometimes the journey was longer. The lineage of fully ordained Buddhist nuns was introduced to China in the fifth century C.E. by a delegation of nuns from Sri Lanka. However, the importance placed on foreign contacts waned as each local tradition developed and began to present itself as the repository of the true teaching with its own sacred sites. This pattern became increasingly common after India, once the place of pilgrimage shared by all Buddhists, lost its own Buddhist tradition. The development of modern travel, made possible in part by colonialism, encouraged greater contact between Buddhists; such contacts would be a key element in the development of Modern Buddhism. For example, heeding the claim of European scholars that the Pali tradition of Sri Lanka was the fullest remnant of original Buddhism, some Japanese monks traveled there to be ordained.

Two young monks, Sonada Monastery in Darjeeling, India, 1989.

A central feature of Modern Buddhism was the belief that centuries of cultural and clerical ossification around the teachings of the Buddha could be reversed to reveal a Buddhism that was neither Theravada nor Mahayana; neither monastic nor lay; neither Sri Lankan, Japanese, Chinese, nor Thai. As a consequence, many of the distinctions important to Asian forms of Buddhism faded. For example, it was traditionally held that Buddhism could not exist without the presence of ordained monks, yet many of the leaders of Modern Buddhism were laypeople. Another tradition set aside was the sexism that has pervaded the Buddhist monastic orders, as women played key roles in the development of Modern Buddhism.

However, Modern Buddhism did not dispense with monastic concerns. Rather, it blurred the boundary between monk and layperson, as laypeople claimed for themselves vocations of the traditionally elite monks such as the study and interpretation of scriptures and the practice of meditation.

Over the course of Buddhism's long history, most of its adherents have not meditated. Even in the twentieth century, the Buddhist monks and priests who accompanied refugee communities to America did not teach them how to meditate; instead they performed the rituals, especially funerals, that had long been among the central responsibilities of Buddhist monks. Yet when these monks came to America, those whose families had immigrated in the decades and centuries before—the so-called white Buddhists—wanted to learn how to meditate. And so the essential practice of Modern Buddhism is meditation. In keeping with the quest to return to the origin, Modern Buddhists looked back to the primary image of the tradition: the Buddha seated in silent meditation, contemplating the ultimate nature of the universe. An emphasis on this silent practice allowed Modern Buddhism generally to dismiss the rituals of consecration, purification, and expiation so common throughout Buddhist Asia as extraneous elements that had crept into the tradition to address the needs of those unable to follow the true path. Silent meditation enabled Modern Buddhism to transcend local expressions, which required form and language. And this same silence made it possible to move beyond sectarian concerns of institutional and doctrinal formulations by making Buddhism, above all, an experience.

This is not to say that Modern Buddhism has displaced or even overshadowed all other forms of Buddhism. Rather, it is useful to consider Modern Buddhism as itself a Buddhist sect of a distinctly new and international kind, unlike the previous national forms of Buddhism in that embracing it does not require the rejection of all other forms. For example, one may be a Chinese Buddhist and also be a Modern Buddhist. Yet one may also be a Chinese Buddhist without being a Modern Buddhist.

Asia is a vast continent of many nations, peoples, and languages. There is one element—whether labeled a religion or a culture—that has linked its inhabitants together. That common possession is Buddhism. Born in India, it is no longer widely practiced there or in adjacent Muslim Central and South Asia, where it had flourished for many centuries. Over those centuries it also evolved into undeniably many, undeniably different, undeniably local forms, each with its own language, in the broadest sense of the term. Yet through these transformations, Buddhism has traveled further and lasted longer than any other cultural creation in Asian history.

At this point, readers may still be asking themselves, "What does it mean to be a Buddhist?" As noted at the beginning of this introduction, the traditional answer is that a Buddhist is a person who seeks refuge in the three jewels: the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha. But as the following chapters will make clear, it is difficult to say exactly who the Buddha was, and who the Buddha is. The word *dharma* remains resistant even to translation into English. The membership of the sangha is at once limited and vast. Each question leads to another, like an object placed between two mirrors. And even this analogy is a Buddhist allusion: Indra's net has a jewel at each knot in the pattern, each jewel reflecting all the others, just as everything in the universe arises in dependence on everything else.

I cannot promise that after reading the following sixty-seven selections, readers will have a definitive answer to the question "What does it mean to be a Buddhist?" But those who read these classic texts will find that question to be refined, deepened, and enriched. After two and a half millennia, the story of this endlessly fascinating, often surprising, sometimes shocking, sometimes profoundly calming engagement with the human condition continues to touch us, and never more deeply than in the words of those whom Buddhists revere as their greatest teachers, teachers who themselves struggled with this very question.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The Norton Anthology of World Religions policy for representing words from Indian languages and alphabets in the characters of the Roman (Latin) alphabet is to simplify as much as possible, since the text is designed for the general reader rather than the scholar. To enable consistent public pronunciation of key names and terms in the texts anthologized here, ś = sh, c = ch, and no macrons or other diacritics are employed to modify the Roman characters. Thus, "Śākyamuni" appears as "Shakyamuni," "bodhicitta" as "bodhichitta," and "Mahāyāna" as "Mahayana" (without macrons) in all texts in Sanskrit and Pali. In addition, all Chinese terms are transliterated in pinyin rather than Wade-Giles. In this way, besides enabling consistent classroom and other public pronunciation, we obviate the confusion that might arise from citing several texts in a given language, each from a scholar who uses a different system of transliteration.