



PART 4

BUDDHISM

SUMMARY

Buddhism, it is now generally believed, emerged into the world sometime around the fifth century BCE, in northern India, and is derived from the teachings of one man – Siddhartha Gautama – known to his followers by the title Buddha. Central to the Buddha's teachings was the idea that one had to experience dissatisfaction or suffering in order to understand that these have a cause: the egocentric desire for satisfaction, pleasure, or even life itself. Once this understanding is reached, followers of the *Dharma*, 'the teaching', can begin their quest for enlightenment, *nirvana*, by following the Buddhist moral code, and by meditating in order to purify the mind. As a non-theistic religion, Buddhism does not concern itself with the existence of a creator, in the Western sense at least, teaching that attainment of *nirvana* is a person's route out of the endless cycle of death and rebirth.

A variety of different schools and monastic traditions emerged within Buddhism, from *Theravada*, the earliest surviving monastic school, to *Tantra*, which advocates the use of ritual magic to control hidden forces or aid the path to *nirvana*. One of the most important traditions is *Mahayana*, through which some seek not only to achieve *nirvana* but actually to become a Buddha. Regional variations also emerged, as Buddhism spread outward from India across much of eastern Asia. In many cases, these variations are closely related to local religious traditions, or are even the product of wider syncretism, such as the Cao Dai in Vietnam, which has roots not only in Buddhism but also Catholic Christianity, Confucianism, and Taoism. In recent decades, Buddhism has faced suppression in many Asian countries, perhaps most notably in Tibet, where rule by Maoist China led to severe repression of the local traditions. Alongside this, though, Buddhism has experienced growth elsewhere, buoyed both by migration and Western interest in the religion.

A Historical Overview



Buddhism is the '-ism' that is named after the Buddha. 'Buddha' is not a personal name, but a title meaning 'the one who has awakened'. The Buddha was a historical individual who lived and died some centuries BCE, although it is difficult to be precise about his exact dates. The common traditional date for the Buddha's birth is 563 BCE, and the sources agree he lived in North India for eighty years. However, modern scholarship questions the reliability of this date, and most historians place his birth eighty to a hundred years later, and his death around 400 BCE. The Buddha's clan-name was Gautama, but later tradition called him Siddhartha in Sanskrit, or Siddhartha in the Pali language, in which many early Buddhist works were written.

'Buddhism' is an English name for a religion that its followers often simply refer to as the *Dharma* (Pali, *Dhamma*), which can be taken here as meaning both 'the teaching' and 'the way things are'. It was discovering this, and teaching it, that made Siddhartha Gautama 'the Buddha'. Whereas Western discussions tend to stress the importance of its founder (Buddha + ism, no doubt on the model of Christ + ianity), Buddhists prefer to emphasize not him, but rather what he taught; for them the obvious place to start is the teaching. This teaching, they say, leads people to understand how things truly are, and thence to a radical reassessment of their lives. The Buddha simply awakened to this truth and taught it. In this he was not unique, for – it is said – others had awakened before him, and there will be many, many after him too.

*Hatred is never
quenched by hatred;
by non-hatred alone
hatred quenched. This
is an Eternal Law.*

Dhammapadam 1

WHO WAS THE BUDDHA?

To start with the life story of the Buddha is the Western tradition. Even if we start with it here too, this life story should not be read as historical fact, though we can reasonably take it that Siddhartha Gautama lived and died. He was considered by his followers to have achieved the fullest possible understanding of reality, an understanding that is true freedom. The historicity of the rest is difficult to assess. Some of it we know is very unlikely to have happened, but Buddhism has always been more interested in the ways in which the life story illustrates Buddhist teachings than in its literal historical truth.

The legendary account of the Buddha's life developed gradually in the centuries after his demise. In that account, he is a prince who is protected from all knowledge of the nasty things of life. However, in the Pali sources he is simply a highborn Shakyen who had little awareness of suffering as he grew up, but the shock of discovering old age, sickness, and death led him to renounce worldly pursuits. He had married and had a son, but left his family and took to the life – not uncommon in India then as now – of a wandering seeker. He sought the final truth that would lead to complete freedom from suffering – a harsh life of meditation, study, and asceticism. Food – and very little of it – came from asking for alms. But eventually Siddhartha, looking within, in deep meditation, reached the truth he sought. He came to 'see it the way it really is', and this truth set him free. He was now the awakened one, the Buddha. The Buddha gathered around him a group of disciples and wandered northern India, teaching all who would listen. Eventually, in old age, the Buddha died. But for him death was nothing; for he was now free from death, as he was free from all other forms of unpleasantness, imperfection, and frustration. After death, there is nothing more to say.



Chinese Buddha figurine.

WHAT DID HE TEACH?

The life story of the Buddha is all about things appearing one way and really being another. The Buddha taught that 'seeing things the way they really are' is the way to overcome every sort of unpleasantness, imperfection, and frustration. These are all classed under the expression *dukkha* (Pali), a term which in the everyday context of the time meant literally 'pain' or 'suffering'. He taught that, when we look deeply, we can see that all our lives are, one way or another, at root simply *dukkha*. The Buddha was uninterested in the question of God; and Buddhist tradition has been unanimous that a creator-God, in the sense in which he is thought to exist by Christians, for example, simply does not exist. Suffering, for Buddhists, is the result of our ignorance, not understanding the way things really are, and we all live our lives in the light of that failure in understanding. The central dimension of such misunderstanding lies in our not appreciating that everything in our experience is by its very nature impermanent. Alongside impermanence – in fact, logically and doctrinally prior to it – is conditionality: the teaching that things arise and pass away in dependence upon conditions. Suffering results from holding on, trying in our experiences and in our lives to 'fix things' so they do not break up and cease to be. Clearly we are doomed to failure. We need to learn to let go let go of attachment and a fixed sense of selfhood; but this letting go has to occur at a very deep level indeed, since we have been confused and suffering in this manner for infinite lifetimes.

For Buddhists, human experience consists of a flow of consciousness, with associated mental contents such as feelings and intentions, and a body that is ever changing too. Any further unchanging element, called a 'self' (Pali, *atta*; Sanskrit, *atman*), would appear to be unnecessary. Indeed, it could lead to a dangerous form of self-grasping, the very opposite of letting go. Rather, Buddhist tradition teaches 'not-self' (Pali, *anatta*; Sanskrit, *anatman*). At death the body ceases, but the ever-flowing continuum of consciousness and its mental accompaniments continues and 'spins', as it were, another body in accordance with one's good or bad deeds (*karma*). Such 'rebirth' means that one is yet again subject to suffering – old age, sickness, death and so on. This process ceases only with letting go at the deepest possible level, attained through meditation. It is a letting go that springs from seeing things as they truly are, and completely reversing one's almost instinctive and frantic patterns of grasping after things. This cessation Buddhists call 'enlightenment' (Pali, *nibbana*; Sanskrit, *nirvana*).

MONASTIC TRADITIONS AND DOCTRINAL SCHOOLS

Central to the Buddha's vision of the way forward was an order of monks and nuns – known as the *Sangha* – living on alms, and expressing in their state of renunciation their commitment to the radical transformation we all need. In time, monasteries were established, together with a monastic rule, to regulate the conduct of the *Sangha*, and promote the peace and harmony necessary in order to follow the Buddha's path. The Buddha did not appoint a successor, reportedly declaring that the teaching – the *Dharma* – should be his successor. But after his death, with time, disagreements occurred, initially over the monastic rules. Where disputes over the rule could not be reconciled, monks in the minority were required to depart, forming their own groups based on variants of the monastic rule. Eventually, a number of different monastic traditions were formed. The best known of these – and the only one of the early Indian Buddhist monastic traditions to survive to the present day – is the 'Way of the Elders' (*Theravada*), found nowadays in, for example, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar (Burma).

In Buddhism, 'schism' (*sanghabheda*) technically concerns monastic rule, not doctrinal disagreement, which is relatively less serious. Nevertheless, as time passed, different doctrinal positions also evolved, sometimes followed by identifiable schools – for example the school known as *Pudgalavada* ('Teaching the *pudgala*'). The point of contention here was that of the 'person' (*pudgala*). Advocates urged that, although the Buddha taught 'not-self', there still exists something – albeit difficult to specify what – called the *pudgala*, as something in some sense really there 'in' us. Others viewed this *pudgala* as just a self in disguise, and an abandonment

*Let none deceive another, not despise any person
whatsoever in any place. Let one not wish any
harm to another out of anger or ill-will ...*

*Let thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole
world: above, below and across, without any
obstruction, without any hatred, any enmity.*

From the *Metta Sutta*, *The Discourse on Loving-Kindness*,
Sutta Nipata, version 11.11

of a central part of the Buddha's teaching. Further issues of debate involved who or what the Buddha himself was. Some urged that a Buddha is really much more extraordinary than people realize. For example, although he seems to teach, really he is permanently in meditation. He has no need to sleep, to defecate, or even to eat, but only does these things in order to act in accordance with the expectations of the world. Many such topics were debated in early – and even later – Buddhism, as the Buddha's followers sought to put his teaching into practice, and to explain it clearly to others. Indeed, also discussed was the relative importance of practising the *Dharma* for one's own freedom from all suffering, as opposed to compassionately teaching it to others.

WHAT IS MAHAYANA BUDDHISM?

To understand early Buddhist history it is thus necessary to distinguish doctrinal dispute and debate – that is, doctrinal schools – from behavioural disharmony and schism – monastic traditions. Different again, and appearing in the literature from about the first century CE, is the greatest internal development within Buddhism, the growth of the *Mahayana*: the 'Great Vehicle' or perhaps 'the Vehicle that leads to the Great'. Mahayana Buddhism is not a doctrinal school; within the Mahayana there are many doctrinal schools. Moreover the Mahayana is to be distinguished from a monastic tradition. There is no such thing as a distinct set of Mahayana monastic rules (*vinaya*). For example, monks in India holding to the Mahayana perspective would be ordained and live in accordance with any one of the sets of monastic rules that had already developed, and were sometimes to be found in monasteries with others who did not hold to the Mahayana perspective.

Hence it makes no sense to speak of two 'schools' of Buddhism, Theravada and Mahayana. Theravada is a monastic tradition; Mahayana is not. They are not comparable phenomena: there could in theory be a Theravada follower of Mahayana. However, in their practice Mahayana and Theravada are very different phenomena, with different scriptures and practices. Mahayana can best be thought of as a vision of what Buddhism is really, finally, all about. Mahayana appears first in texts – writings known as *Mahayana sutras* – claiming, controversially, to be the word of the Buddha himself. Crucially, what gradually emerges in these writings is a distinction between simply being free from all suffering – in other words, enlightened – and actually being a Buddha. A Buddha is spiritually more than just free from his own suffering; a Buddha is also perfectly compassionate. Thus to be a Buddha is better than simply being enlightened. This is not only because of a Buddha's great compassion, but also because of the many marvellous – indeed miraculous – abilities a Buddha possesses in order to help others. But it takes many, many lifetimes of spiritual striving to become a Buddha. Thus, those who aim for the highest goal should seek not just their own freedom from suffering and rebirth, but should also vow to follow the long path to Buddhahood. This path is to be followed over very many rebirths, willingly taking on their attendant sufferings, in order eventually as a Buddha better to be able to help others.

The Mahayana, in a nutshell, is the way of those who aspire to become perfect Buddhas, which is said to be for the benefit of all sentient beings – all those with consciousness. Those

who vow to do this are known as *bodhisattvas*, perhaps originally meaning 'one who is capable of awakening'. Mahayana sources go into great detail about the stages of the path that a *bodhisattva* must follow in order to become a Buddha.

With time, the Mahayana also elaborated on the ways in which a Buddha is superior to someone who has simply put an end to his or her own suffering, developing further the idea that a Buddha is really much more than he appears to be. Even his death was just a show, put on in order to give a 'skilful teaching' of impermanence. For the Mahayana, the Buddha – indeed infinite Buddhas – are still around, living on higher planes – 'Pure Lands' – from which, through their great compassion and with miraculous powers, they are available and willing to help those who have need of them. With them are advanced *bodhisattvas*, who are also full of compassion and able to help others. Some of these Buddhas and 'celestial' *bodhisattvas* are named, such as Avalokiteshvara, a *bodhisattva* who is said to be the very incarnation of compassion, or Mañjushri, likewise the very incarnation of wisdom and insight.



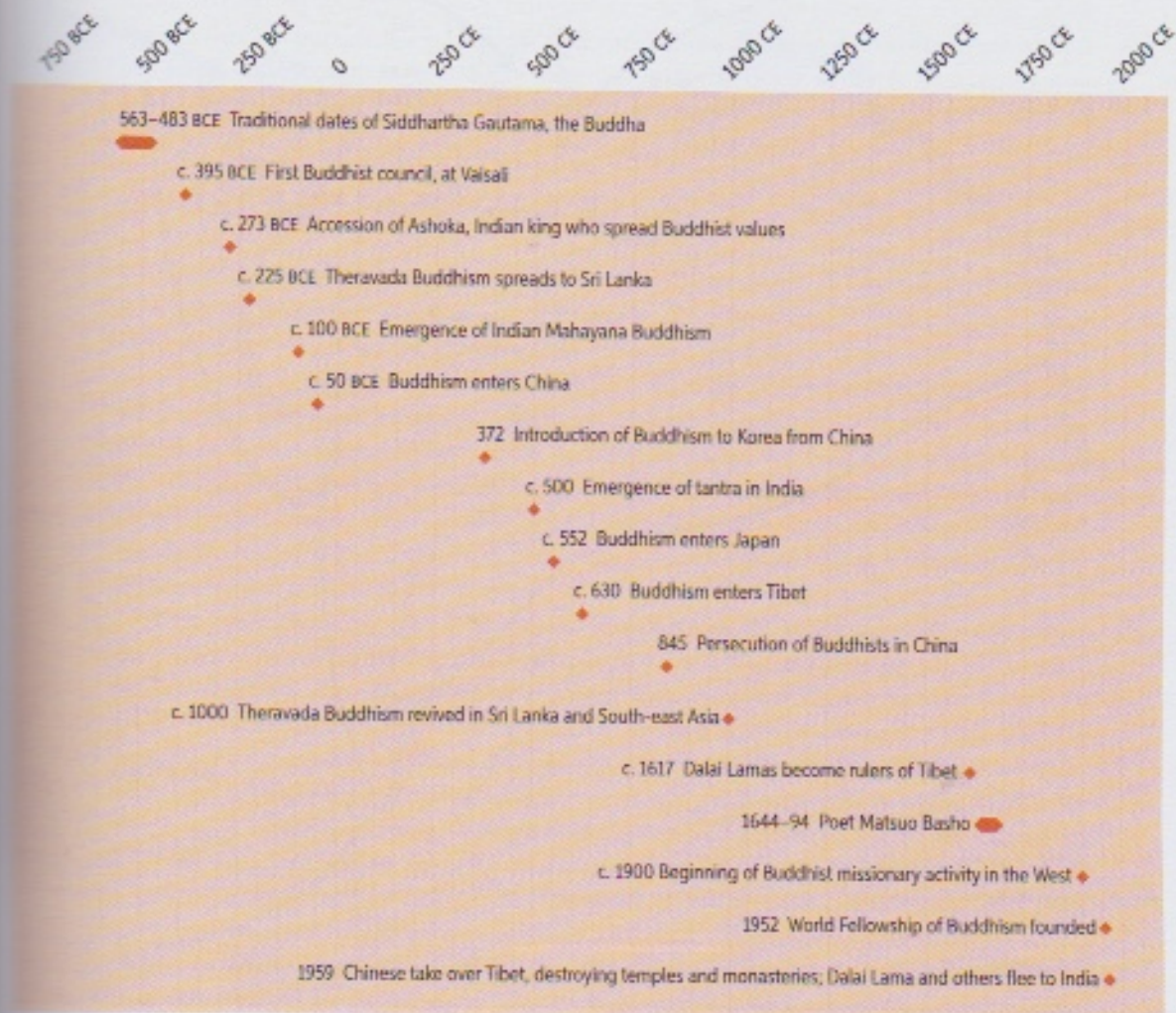
Stone Buddha in Buddhist temple, Bangkok, Thailand.

BUDDHISM BEYOND INDIA

Significant to the history of Buddhism in India was the conversion of the great Emperor Ashoka (third century BCE), which gave the religion important imperial patronage – although scholars now discount the view that he attempted to make Buddhism the state religion. From the time of Ashoka, Buddhism began to migrate further afield, according to tradition reaching Sri Lanka at this time. It subsequently spread into South-East Asia, reaching China along the Central Asian trade routes during the early centuries CE, spreading to Korea and other countries of East Asia, and reaching Japan in the sixth century CE. Buddhism came to Tibet from various directions – including India and China – probably from about the seventh century. In India, however, for various reasons not yet fully understood, but possibly partly related to the rise of devotional theistic forms of Hinduism, as well as the impact of Islam on India, Buddhism declined, almost ceasing to exist from about the fourteenth

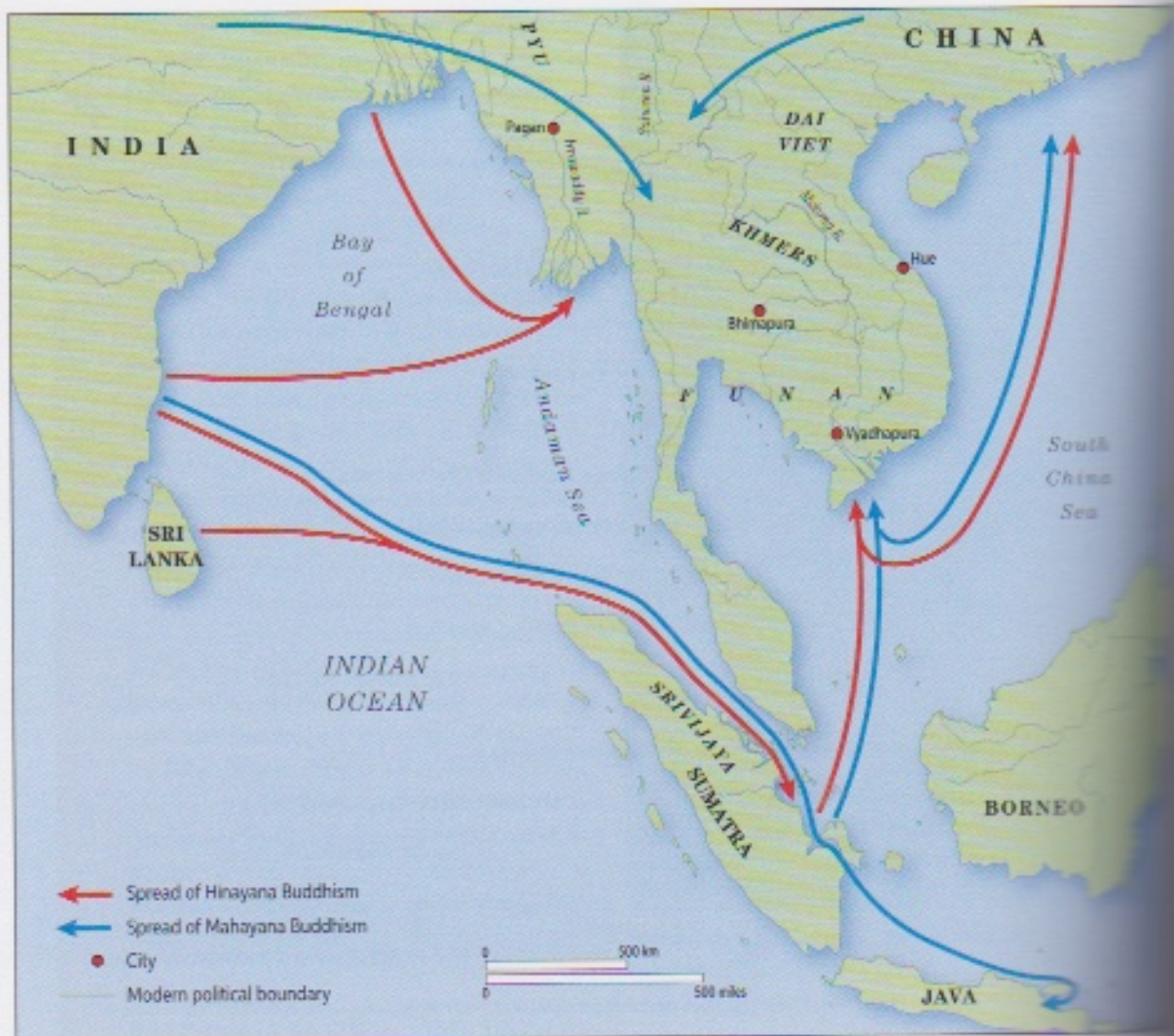


BUDDHISM TIMELINE



century. It has revived in recent centuries, and Buddhism has also now taken on a global dimension. Perhaps the most well known modern Buddhist is the Dalai Lama of Tibet (1935–), a former winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

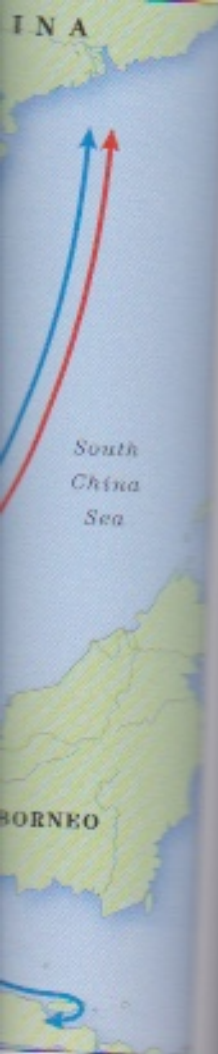
It is common, although misleading, to speak of the Buddhism of, for example, China, Japan, and Tibet as Mahayana, as opposed to the Theravada Buddhism of, for example, South-East Asia. As we have seen, these are not comparable phenomena. Nevertheless, many Mahayana scriptures were transmitted to, and usually given unquestioning authority in, China, Japan, and Tibet. Unlike in South-East Asia, Buddhists in those countries could be expected to express adherence, in one way or another, to the Mahayana vision as embracing their highest and final aspirations.



Spread of Buddhism to South-east Asia

ZEN

Particularly characteristic of East Asian Buddhism is the tradition known in Japan as Zen. Zen – the word itself is related to ‘meditation’ – is known for stressing direct, non-verbal, intuitive insight, expressed through arts such as painting, but sometimes also employing humour and shock tactics to bring about awakening. This awakened ‘Buddha-nature’, it is urged, is already present within all of us, if we did but realize it. Also important is, for example, Japanese Buddhism is the tradition of Shinran (thirteenth century CE). For Shinran, the awakening of a Buddha is quite beyond unenlightened capabilities; only by completely letting go of reliance on ourselves, and trusting in the Buddha’s salvific abilities,



can the already-enlightened nature of the Buddha (a Buddha known here as *Amida*) shine forth. According to this teaching, humans have to let go completely of even the subtle egoism that encourages them to think they can achieve anything spiritually worthwhile – including enlightenment – through their own efforts. Being a monk or nun, or even meditating, is finally irrelevant, a distraction, and a possible source of egoistic attachment.

TANTRA AND VAJRAYANA

The final important development to mention is *Tantra*. From the beginning Buddhists, in common with their peers, accepted magic – bringing about desired results through manipulation of hidden forces, usually by ritual means such as sacred circles (*mandalas*), utterances of power (*mantras*), visualizations and so on. In addition to teaching, among the services Buddhist monks and nuns might be required to perform for the lay communities that supported them would be magical rituals – for crops, for health, for children and so on. Although this was not their main interest as Buddhists, its appropriateness, as an act of caring, and efficacy was not questioned. From quite early on, Buddhist ritual texts were produced, and in some circles such texts were – again controversially – attributed to the Buddha himself, and often called *tantras*.

Also controversial was the development, from perhaps the seventh century CE or earlier, of certain *tantras* claiming one could actually become a Buddha through the use of such magical means. Secret initiations were required, with unquestioning devotion to the teacher (*guru*), in order to learn their use. Even more controversial were *tantras* that explained the possibility of this supreme attainment through the employment and manipulation of a sort of subtle, psycho-physical body that everyone is said to possess within them. In this, the ritual use of sexual intercourse was held to be a particularly powerful technique – a practice reserved for advanced practitioners who do not respond to sexual stimuli with craving or attachment. Since an awakened Buddha is beyond all worldly entanglements and confusions, also recommended – expressing humanity's awakened nature – are not only sexual activity – in ways, and with partners, usually considered outside the socially accepted norm – but also other behaviour surprising to the unenlightened. These developments – often linked with the expression *Vajrayana* (Way of the Thunderbolt, Way of the Diamond), which followers used to distinguish their approach from the *Mahayana* (the Great Way), and the early schools, which they disparagingly termed '*Hinayana*' (lesser vehicle) – also produced a genre of literature detailing the unexpected exploits of certain awakened tantric 'persons of magical power' (*siddhas*).

Not surprisingly, such developments within Buddhism were – and still are – highly controversial. With time, and subjected to orthodox, and particularly monastic, control, the more controversial dimensions of Tantric Buddhism were 'tamed' and absorbed into the wider Mahayana spiritual context of great compassion and wisdom. It is in this form that one finds today the widest and most well known presence of *tantra*, in the Buddhism of Tibet.

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Sacred Writings



The Buddha himself wrote nothing; he simply taught. He sometimes taught his vision of the world, humanity's place within it, and the spiritual and moral way to freedom – eventually complete freedom – from incompleteness, frustration, and suffering. At other times he settled disputes among his followers, or legislated for the best sort of life to live to attain this complete freedom. According to Buddhist tradition, soon after the Buddha's death those monks who had achieved the goal – enlightenment (Pali, *nibbana*; Sanskrit, *nirvana*) – met to recite what they remembered of the Buddha's discourses at the First Buddhist Council. (It is often stated there were three such councils in classical times, although only two are accepted by all Buddhist traditions.)

ORAL TRANSMISSION

The emphasis from the beginning was on memory and recitation. For the first few centuries, the Buddhist scriptures were handed down orally – which partly explains the importance in Buddhism of the oral transmission from teacher to pupil – rather than in written form. Different groups of monks specialized in preserving different texts, or collections of scriptures; and transmission through oral recitation in groups proved to be a very effective way of preserving the Buddha's words – at least as accurate as writing, since interpolation of additional – and perhaps controversial – material or omission is much more difficult, as it would immediately be noticed. According to one Buddhist tradition, the scriptures were not written down until the first century BCE. The decision to resort to writing was perhaps partly due to fear in time of social and political stress that the teachings might become lost through the death of significant numbers of important reciters by disease, war, or famine – something that seems to have happened, for example, with some of the scriptures of Jainism.

THE BUDDHIST CANON

The texts recited at the First Council form the basis of the Buddhist scriptural canon. They are divided into:

- sutras* (Pali, *sutta*) – the general discourses of the Buddha and, sometimes, the teachings of his authorized followers
- vinaya* – texts relating to the structure and discipline of the monastic order.

With time, a further section of the canon was added, the *abhidharma* (Pali, *abhidhamma*): perhaps 'higher [or 'more precise'] teaching'. This section consists mainly of works that develop an elaborate description of how the psycho-physical world looks when seen 'as things really are' by an enlightened person, rather than through everyday unenlightened vision. The canonical *abhidharma* texts probably date from after the death of the Buddha, but all claim direct origin from him.

These three sections together form the 'Three Baskets' (Pali, *Tipitaka*; Sanskrit, *Tripitaka*), which are themselves subdivided. For example, in the Pali Canon, the *sutra* 'basket' is divided into four sections – plus one supplementary section – known as *Nikayas*. Perhaps the best known of these is the 'Collection of Long Discourses' (*Digha Nikaya*).

It was some centuries before the canon became more or less closed, such that – at least in theory – no more works could be added to it and given the prestige of 'coming directly from the Buddha himself'. Some scholars think the *Sutta Pitaka* was closed 150 years after the Buddha, while the other sections were closed later. There are also some Buddhist texts which have all the authority of canonical scriptures, but are not technically part of the canon at all – for example the monastic rule, still recited regularly by monks and nuns.

DIFFERENT VERSIONS

There is a tradition that the Buddha recommended preserving and transmitting his teachings in local languages rather than Sanskrit, the pan-Indian language of education. Hence, from quite early times, Buddhist scriptures were in a number of languages and also underwent translation. Moreover, as the various Buddhist monastic traditions and doctrinal schools were formed, different versions of the canon began to appear, often in different Indian languages. Nowadays, the comparative study of different canonical versions of recognizably the same text forms a fruitful area of scholarly research.

Scriptures require some sort of authoritative body to preserve and transmit them down the ages. In Buddhism, particularly in the Indian world, this has always been the monastic order, the *Sangha*. The only Buddhist monastic tradition to have survived from the early centuries to the present day is the 'Way of the Elders' (*Theravada*); the canon preserved by the *Theravada* – the sole version to have survived in its entirety and in its ancient Indian language – is the 'Pali Canon', written in the *Pali* language. Although old – and of inestimable importance for the study of Buddhism – the Pali Canon is only one of a number of Buddhist canons that existed in ancient times. Other individual

canonical works, or collections, have survived, either in other Indian languages, or in ancient translations, for example into Chinese or Tibetan, made as part of Buddhist missionary activity.

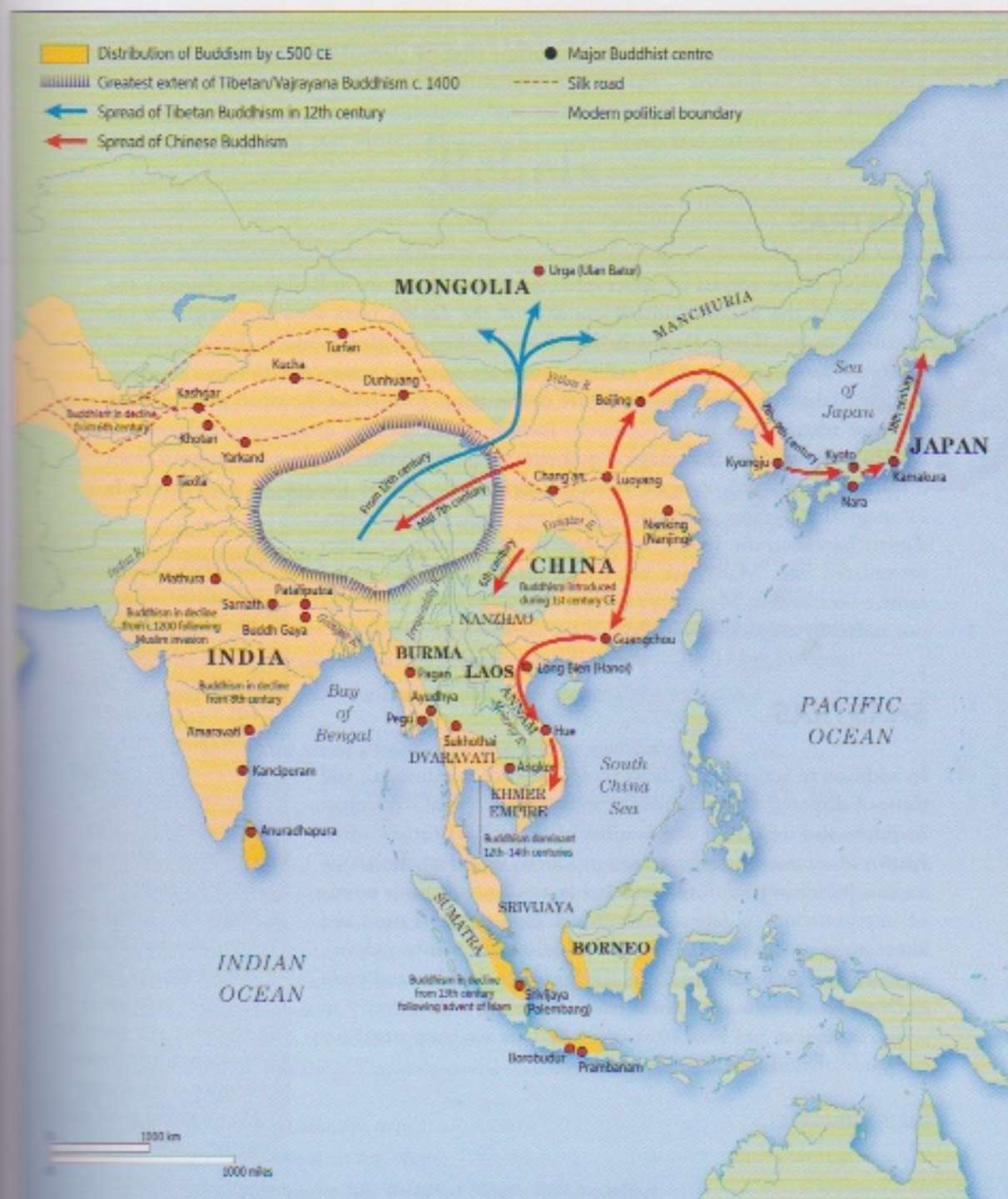
With time, and with greater reliance on writing than on oral transmission, certain Buddhist traditions and schools in India started to preserve their scriptures in Sanskrit, which is why Buddhist terms are often given in both their Sanskrit and Pali forms – usually very similar: for example, *nibbana* (Pali), *nirvana* (Sanskrit). As Buddhism spread across India, using just one language made sense, rather than relying on different translations in different areas. Educated people would be familiar with Sanskrit, and a monk with a Sanskrit text could take it anywhere, without needing to have it translated, explaining in the vernacular what the text meant to less educated people as part of his teaching mission. This change to the use of Sanskrit can be seen occurring in the greatest post-canonical scriptural development in Indian Buddhism, the appearance of the Mahayana *sutras*. A number of the early Mahayana *sutras* show signs of having been translated into Sanskrit out of other Indian languages, in which, presumably, they were originally composed.

APOCRYPHAL SCRIPTURES

The earliest form in which we know Mahayana Buddhism is in its scriptures. Indeed, for followers of Mahayana, scriptural support appears to be older by some centuries than archaeological evidence. Mahayana *sutras* are apocryphal, and their ideas often seemingly new and radical. As apocryphal *sutras*, although they claim to be the words of the Buddha himself, this claim is hotly disputed within Buddhism, and the extant versions of these *sutras* cannot possibly be that old. Elements of at least some early Mahayana *sutras* may have originated in inspiring, meditative visions and revelations, held to be from a Buddha, who was thus thought to be still accessible to us on some 'higher plane'. Although there may have been attempts to add such *sutras*, they are not included in any official canon preserved by any known Indian monastic tradition.

Apocryphal *sutras* were not created in India alone. For example, many Mahayana apocryphal *sutras* were composed in China, and unknown in India in classical times. Even today, outside areas usually associated with Mahayana – for example, the monastically Theravada world of Sri Lanka – apocryphal Buddhist *sutras* are still produced, claiming to spring from some sort of special revelation, but not accepted as canonical by the mainstream, local Buddhist monastic order.

It has been suggested that the origin and survival of Mahayana as a movement required the existence of writing. Religions often produce controversial texts claiming to be the words of, or in some sense inspired by, their founder; but such works disappear unless taken up and preserved by enthusiasts down the ages. In traditional Buddhism, canonical works have been preserved and transmitted to future generations by the monastic *Sangha*. But the *Sangha* was unlikely to preserve apocryphal texts, and certainly not texts such as the early Mahayana *sutras*, which inclined sometimes to be critical of



The Spread of Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism

the existing monastic hierarchy. Hence, so long as the canon was transmitted orally, the preservation of significant new perspectives – such as that of Mahayana, claiming the authority of the Buddha – was all but impossible. However, the writing down of the scriptures made possible the preservation and transmission of apocryphal works and perspectives. A written text could survive, providing someone was willing to preserve it.

TANTRAS

The other major corpus of apocryphal, scriptural literature in Buddhism claiming the authority of the Buddha himself consists of the *Tantras*, texts associated with the use of ritual magic. Their origins in Buddhism – they are also found in Hinduism and Jainism – are obscure, and the earliest *Tantras* are certainly some centuries later than the earliest Mahayana *sutras*. This literature is very large. To practise the ritual prescriptions of these texts, which in time came to include techniques for attaining enlightenment as well as more mundane magical activities, requires initiation, close instruction from a teacher (*guru*), and vows of secrecy. Tantric texts involve the use of such methods as magical diagrams, utterances (*mantras*), and visualizations. *Tantras* have become linked with, and in places such as Tibet assimilated into, Mahayana; but recent research has also found tantric literature in Myanmar (Burma) and Cambodia, countries not normally associated with Mahayana perspectives.

SHASTRAS

In addition to scriptures – those accepted by all as canonical, and those of disputed authority, held by some as apocryphal – Buddhist literature also includes a vast number of exegetical treatises, often known as *shastras*. These have been produced by great scholars of various Buddhist traditions and schools, to clarify difficult points of interpretation, to defend their understanding against rivals and alternatives, or, like the 'Treasury of Abhidharma' (*Abbidharmakosha*), to serve as critical compendia of the Buddhist doctrine and path. Such exegetical treatises have been produced in each country in which Buddhism has been established, and are very important for the study of Buddhist doctrinal history.

PAUL WILLIAMS

Asked by some citizens of Kalama for guidance, the Buddha said: 'Be not led by reports or tradition or hearsay. Be not led by the authority of religious texts, nor by mere logic or inference, nor by considering appearances ... But, O Kalamas, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome (akusala) and wrong and bad, then give them up ... And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome (kusala) and good, then accept them and follow them.'

Anguttara Nikaya 3.65 (1996)

CHAPTER 20

Beliefs

A disciple of the Buddha, Malunkyaputta, complained that the Buddha had not answered some of the most important questions of life – Is the world eternal? Is the soul the same as the body? and so on. The Buddha replied with a story.

A man is wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends and relatives brought a surgeon to him. The man said, 'I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble, a brahman, a merchant or a worker. I will not let the surgeon pull out the arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me ... until I know whether he was tall or short or of middle height ... until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a longbow or a crossbow ... until I know whether the bowstring that wounded me was fibre or reed or sinew or bark ...

All this would not be known to the man and he would die.

Abridged from the Culamalunkya Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 63 (I, 246).

So, the Buddha added, will those die who insist they must know the answers to speculative questions about the nature of reality before starting to live the holy life. For such questions are not beneficial to the real task, the cessation of suffering.

This story points to the heart of what Buddhism is about. Buddhism is less a set of beliefs than a path, leading from suffering to the cessation of suffering, from ignorance to compassion and wisdom. The Buddha's first invitation to those who wished to follow him as monks or nuns in the fifth century BCE was: 'Come, live the holy life, in order that you make an end of suffering.' The only credal statement in Buddhism, therefore, is:

I go to the Buddha for refuge;

I go to the Dhamma for refuge;

I go to the Sangha [the Buddhist community] for refuge.



These are the 'Three Jewels' or 'Three Gems': anyone who places them at the centre of life, by 'going for refuge' to them, is a Buddhist. The *Dhamma* (Pali; Sanskrit, *Dharma*) – literally, 'that which constitutes', or 'the way things are' – is what the Buddha 'awoke to' at his enlightenment, and what he taught for forty years after. For Buddhists, it is the truth about the nature of existence; the truth that upholds the cosmos; the truth that all Buddhas have taught. Across the different schools of Buddhism, the *Dhamma* is expressed in a variety of ways; however, there are elements that all schools hold in common.

LIVING THE HOLY LIFE

Living the holy life involves a way of seeing reality and a way of acting. The way of seeing begins with experience rather than metaphysics: the experience that something in life is dislocated, flawed, unsatisfactory, and full of suffering, and the realization that one reason for this is that everything is impermanent. We are separated from loved ones. We lose our strength. We grow old, sicken, and die. Everything we cherish – youth, strength, possessions, relationships – passes away. Buddhism speaks of three defining characteristics of existence: impermanence (Pali, *anicca*; Sanskrit, *anitya*), unsatisfactoriness (Pali, *dukkha*; Sanskrit, *duḥkha*), and not-self (Pali, *anatta*; Sanskrit, *anatman*). The characteristic of not-self arises when the concept of impermanence is applied to the self. As with all external phenomena, everything in our bodies and minds is changing, everything is conditioned. There is no unchanging 'self', 'soul', or ego. Mahayana Buddhists use the word 'emptiness'. All things – the self included – are 'empty' of their own nature.

This is the start of the Buddhist view of existence, but not the end. The message of the Buddha was that the suffering or unsatisfactoriness of life is not haphazard, random, or immovable. It has a cause, as all other phenomena have a cause, and if this cause is eradicated, suffering will not arise. The cause abides within the mind, and the Buddha identified it as 'craving': self-centred desire for sensual pleasures and life itself. Remove this craving, and suffering will cease, giving way to the liberation of *nibbana* (Sanskrit, *nirvana*). It is this 'view' that forms the first three of the Four Noble Truths:

- The Noble Truth of *Dukkha*: that there is an incompleteness and unsatisfactoriness at the heart of existence;
- The Noble Truth of the Origin of *Dukkha*: that the cause is craving or thirst (Pali, *tanha*; Sanskrit, *trṣṇā*), the thirst for sensual pleasures, the thirst for continued existence, and the thirst for annihilation;
- The Noble Truth of the Cessation of *Dukkha*: that there is an end, based on the law of cause and effect – that is, if craving is destroyed, *dukkha* cannot arise;
- The Noble Truth of the Path to the Cessation of *Dukkha*: the Eightfold Path (see below).

Whatever harm an enemy may do to an enemy, or a hater to a hater, an ill-directed mind inflicts on oneself a greater harm.

Dhammapadam, v. 42

The Buddhist view of the world is, therefore, of a world dis-eased (that is, ill at ease), a world entrapped in craving, where *dukkha* reigns supreme because people have not seen the *dhamma*, the truth about existence. It is a world where people are trapped in mental prisons of their own making. But it is a world where liberation awaits all who can change the way they look at the world and work towards freedom from the craving that is rooted in ignorance and expressed through greed and hatred.

THE WAY TO LIBERATION

The Noble Truths are the 'house' into which everything else fits in Buddhism.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Noble Eightfold Path, the way to the ending of suffering:

- right view
- right resolve
- right speech
- right action
- right livelihood
- right effort
- right mindfulness
- right concentration or meditation

This is often reduced to just three categories: morality (Pali/Sanskrit, *sila*); concentration or meditation (Pali/Sanskrit, *samadhi*); and wisdom (Pali, *panna*; Sanskrit, *prajna*). Sometimes the following verse from the *Dhammapadam*, a text known and loved throughout the Buddhist world, is quoted:

*The avoidance of evil, the undertaking of good, the cleansing of one's mind;
this is the teaching of the awakened ones.*

Dhammapadam, v. 183

MORALITY

Morality is the bedrock of the Buddhist path. It involves 'the avoidance of evil, the undertaking of good'. Without moral discipline, the holy life cannot be lived. Most lay Buddhists place the following five precepts at the centre of their life:

- to abstain from harming any living being
- to abstain from taking what is not given
- to abstain from sexual misconduct
- to abstain from false speech
- to abstain from anything that clouds or intoxicates the mind, such as drugs and alcohol.



The Golden Buddha, Phra Pruttha Maha Suwan Patimakon, is the world's largest solid gold statue, and sited at the Temple of Wat Traimit, Bangkok, Thailand. It was created roughly 700 years ago.

unwholesome action bad fruit. This does not mean Buddhist morality is essentially selfish. Rather, self and other are seen to be interconnected. What is good for others is good for self; what would not be done to oneself would not be done to another.

MEDITATION

The task of meditation is to cleanse the mind. It ties in with the heart of the Buddha's message: that the cause of our dis-ease lies in our craving, in the three unwholesome roots of greed, hatred, and delusion. Since it is our minds and hearts that generate this craving, according to Buddhism, the only way to uproot craving is to work on the mind and heart. Buddhism offers numerous meditation methods, but these can be reduced to two main

Many would insist that these precepts involve not only abstention, but cultivation. A commitment not to harm involves the development of loving-kindness and compassion. The commitment to abstaining from taking what is not given involves recognizing the dignity and worth of other people, as does abstaining from sexual misconduct. Abstaining from false speech involves cultivating honesty and integrity.

An ancient text in the Theravada tradition, the *Karaniyametta Sutta*, describes loving-kindness in the following way: 'Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.' One way to do this is to meditate on loving-kindness (*metta*). The first step is to imagine oneself surrounded by loving-kindness. Then this loving-kindness – sometimes imagined as a white, warm light – is thrown further and further outwards into the world. First of all those dear to the meditator are brought to mind. Then the radius widens, eventually reaching those who are disliked, or even hated. It is a transformative practice that spills into everyday conduct.

Morality, for many Buddhists, is also linked with the law of action, the law of *karma* (Sanskrit; Pali, *kamma*), that moral action will produce good fruit, and

practices: tranquillity meditation (Pali/Sanskrit, *samatha*) and insight meditation (Pali, *vipassana*; Sanskrit, *vipasyana*).

Tranquillity meditation is not unique to Buddhism. It is a method through which an object of meditation is used to concentrate the mind and gain one-pointedness. The most popular object is the breath: some Buddhists pay attention to the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils; others watch the rise and fall of the abdomen. The meditator sits with the back upright; in some traditions the eyes are closed, in others they remain partly open. When the mind wanders away from the object, it is brought back, gently and non-judgmentally, to the breath. Traditionally, forty other meditation objects can be chosen, under the direction of a teacher. This kind of meditation may lead to what Buddhists call 'meditative absorptions' or *jhanas* (Pali; Sanskrit, *dhyanas*), states of intense absorption and mental refinement.

Vipassana means 'seeing clearly' – seeing the body and the mind clearly – and is unique to Buddhism, and distinct from altered states of consciousness. Its aim is direct verification of the *Dhamma* through observation of the body and the mind. Many exercises have been developed within the Buddhist tradition to aid this. One method used widely is 'bare attention', or 'choiceless awareness', a form of mindfulness that emphasizes the present moment. Whatever arises in the mind and the body becomes the object of meditation, of awareness. It may be a reaction of attraction or aversion to an external noise, a feeling of pain in the legs, or thoughts of hatred, jealousy, or love. Nothing is judged good or bad, nothing clung to. Everything is watched, noted, and allowed to pass; its impermanence and not-self seen. The

The Pure Mind

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that never leaves him.

'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me' – in those who harbour such thoughts hatred will never cease.

'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me,' – in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred will cease.

For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule.

The world does not know that we must all come to an end here: but those who know it, their quarrels cease at once.

He who lives looking for pleasures only, his senses uncontrolled, immoderate in his food, idle, and weak, Mara (death) will certainly overthrow him, as the wind throws down a weak tree.

He who lives without looking for pleasures, his senses well controlled, moderate in his food, faithful and strong, him Mara will certainly not overthrow, any more than the wind throws down a rocky mountain.

The Dhammapadam 1.1–8, transl.

by Max Muller and Max Fausbøll, 1881, adapted.



Thai Buddhist temple.

greed, hatred, and delusion in everything is seen, as well as what triggers them. Each period of meditation becomes a voyage of discovery into the way the mind and body function. Other methods include noticing the impermanent or insubstantial nature of experience, and dismantling the experience of selfhood by examining it in the light of Buddhist teachings.

Buddhists believe meditation is the principal means through which greed, hatred, and delusion or ignorance can be uprooted and transcended. Central to 'delusion' (Pali, *moha*) is the belief that we have an unchanging 'I' or ego that has to be placed at the centre of all things, to be protected, promoted, and pampered. Meditation shows that the things we believe to be 'self' – our feelings, our thoughts, our pain – are impermanent and empty.

REBIRTH

Buddhists stress that there is continuity after death, but that the ultimate goal of religious practice is not an after-death state. The term most often used is 'rebirth', which most Buddhists prefer to 'reincarnation', since they do not believe there is an unchanging soul

to reincarnate, but rather an ever-changing process of cause and effect. Death is believed to lead continually to rebirth after rebirth, until greed, hatred, and delusion are eradicated. For the Theravada Buddhist, one can be reborn into any of five realms:

1. the hells;
2. the animal world;
3. the realm of the hungry ghosts;
4. the realm of humans; and
5. the realm of the gods.

Mahayana Buddhists have added another heavenly realm:

6. that of the demi-gods.

Each realm is linked to a particular emotion or characteristic, and they are states of mind as well as states of being. So one who is in the grip of hatred and anger is, in one sense, already in the hell realm.

The goal of the Buddhist path is to go beyond all of these realms by attaining *nirvana*, through eradicating greed, hatred, and delusion. Some Buddhists see this as a well-nigh impossible immediate goal. For them, rebirth in a heavenly realm, through following the five precepts and developing loving kindness, is goal enough. Others insist that *nirvana* is possible in this very life. Whether it is seen as possible now, or in the distant future, all Buddhists speak of it with joy and wonder. *Nirvana* is the end of suffering and rebirth, attained when the fire of craving is put out. It is the highest ethical state, but also beyond all human ethical constructs. It is defined by wisdom and compassion, yet beyond anything that the unenlightened person can conceive. It is absolute security and bliss. It is liberation. Some Mahayana Buddhists link it with realizing one's Buddha nature. Theravada Buddhists speak of reaching the state of the *arahat*. What happens after death to those who have realized their Buddha nature, or reached the state of the *arahat*, is left open. The message of the texts is that it is beyond all human concepts.

Some Buddhists in the Mahayana tradition have an additional goal: the liberation of all beings. They take what is known as the *bodhisattva* vow, an aspiration to achieve enlightenment not for oneself alone, but for the sake of all beings. This is sometimes envisaged as a commitment to stay within the realm of birth and rebirth until all beings have been liberated.

ELIZABETH J. HARRIS

Monks, there are to be seen beings who can admit freedom from suffering from bodily disease for one year, for two years, for three, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years; who can admit freedom from bodily disease for even a hundred years. But, monks, those beings are hard to find in the world who can admit freedom from mental disease even for one moment, save only those in whom the asavas ('corruptions' such as ignorance) are destroyed.

Anguttara Nikaya Text II, 143.



I AM A BUDDHIST

I was born in Brisbane, Australia, into a Roman Catholic family, and have Japanese, Irish, and English ancestry. For seventeen years I strove to be a good Catholic boy, until the time of the Vietnam War. All the Christian religious teaching I had received included as a central premise the commandment, 'Thou shall not kill.' I was therefore confused when I learned that Australia had introduced conscription for seventeen-year-old boys. This seemed to me to be hypocrisy and made me question the religion I had taken for granted. Eventually, I decided to explore my Japanese heritage.

I had already become interested in the martial arts of judo and karate. However, as I pursued my interest, I learnt that karate means 'empty hand' and judo means 'the gentle way'; that it is not violence and coercion that lead to success, but rather becoming so developed and aware that one cannot be hurt. However, much training is required to remain focused and alert. There is a saying concerning being attacked by a sword, 'The beginner can only see where the sword is, and cannot move. The master sees everywhere that the sword is not, and quietly moves there.'

Later I discovered the calm, smiling, accepting faces of the Buddha statues, which attracted me strongly. Here, in front of them, was a place where I could sit, and no one was going to criticize me; where I could let my guard down and just be a boy – relaxed and happy. Over the years, the Buddha faces became more real, as I began to

meet Buddhist monks and nuns, people who could explain in great detail why and how they looked so peaceful. In essence, it was because they had given up worrying. 'If something can be done, then do it. Do not worry. If something cannot be done, then it cannot be done. Do not worry.'

This is one of the most valuable things I have discovered as a Buddhist. It is always possible to do something useful in every situation. No matter how difficult or impossible something might seem, there is always an explanation, and always something to do next. For example, if I fail at a task and feel awful, Buddhist teaching instructs me to examine who I think I am. Am I just a collection of other people's judgments, good or bad? Or do I truly have a reality and an essence that is already complete and whole, yet is at the same time developing with everything – good or bad – that I do? This deep understanding helps me to move forward in life. If suddenly there is a mountain in front of me – whether literally or figuratively – I can either sit down defeated or start climbing upwards step by step. It is only by climbing a mountain that one becomes a good mountain climber. The same is true of every human situation. I can only become a more compassionate person by acting compassionately, a good leader by leading well, a good follower by learning to give loyalty to those who have been appointed to lead.

My Buddhist teacher tells me I must learn to love problems like chocolate! He means that problems provide opportunities to develop the wisdom

REBIRTH

Buddhists believe that after death, the soul is reborn into a new body. This is called rebirth. The soul is reborn into a new body, which may be a human, an animal, or a god. The soul is reborn into a new body, which may be a human, an animal, or a god. The soul is reborn into a new body, which may be a human, an animal, or a god.

to see the best way forward in every situation. Although the experience of happiness should be fully enjoyed, it is impermanent and constantly changing – just like problems. Nothing lasts forever.

After many years, I have learnt that, if my heart and my mind are truly in a compassionately wise state, the results will usually be effective and useful to myself and other people. To this end, I start each day with prayers and readings from the Buddhist lineage that I follow – the Tibetan Gelugpa lineage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. As my teacher advises, to sit in formal meditation for at least forty-five minutes each day. In this way, I can set my motivation and focus for the coming day, which on a 'normal' day is full of competing demands on my time, energy, and attention. Although I have a formal time of meditation, I seek to stay in a 'meditative state of mind' all day, which is the goal of all spiritual practice: to live the faith in the 'real world' and thereby show that it is alive and well.

In the evening, I briefly review what has happened during the day, and determine to try to be even more mindful the following day. Also, I pray that the Buddhas and gurus will watch over me throughout the night, and teach me in my dreams. This is a way of reaching through the limited conceptual mind into the core being of who I really am, and why I am really here – not the collection of public facades that I have to wear for my various roles and positions.

There are four special days of the Buddhist year which I fast:

1. Wesak,
2. The Descent to teach in this world,
3. The day of the Buddha's first teaching – the Four Noble Truths,
4. Tibetan New Year.

I also try to fast on all full moon days – many Buddhists still use a lunar calendar. During the two weeks when the moon is waning, I practise reducing my negative activities; and in the two weeks of the waxing moon, I practise developing my positive qualities.

Over Christmas, I often go on a retreat and fast for forty-eight hours, drinking just a little fruit juice or black tea. I find it relatively easy, especially if I do it in a Buddhist centre, with no television, radio, or music to distract me. I am not a strict vegetarian, although some Buddhists are. As one who follows a Tibetan tradition, I am not required to be. The Tibetans, because of their environment, are not vegetarians: not many crops grow above the snow line, and yak meat is very warming in a stew. That said, the overall emphasis in Buddhism is always to try to reduce harm with every thought, word and deed.

Every week I go to my local temple to hear my teacher discuss his views on the scriptures and how to apply them in modern life. This keeps me in touch with 'real reality', rather than the reality of the newspapers and television.

Paul Seto

Buddhism in the Modern World



What can Buddhism offer to the contemporary world? In what ways is it challenging society? In what ways is it reinforcing the traditional? To answer these questions it is first necessary to look at some of the forces that have influenced the development of Buddhism in the last two hundred years.

EUROPEAN COLONIALISM

Sri Lanka (Ceylon) was the first predominantly Buddhist country to be affected by European colonialism. When the British occupied Colombo in 1796, Sri Lanka had already known two colonial powers: the Portuguese and the Dutch, though both ruled only part of the island. The British brought the whole under foreign rule, by bringing down the previously independent Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. Myanmar (Burma) was the second Buddhist country to be affected by European colonialism. In 1795, the Burmese authorities allowed a British Resident in Yangon (Rangoon). Three Anglo-Burmese wars followed, until in 1885 all of Myanmar came under British rule. Independence for both Sri Lanka and Myanmar came in 1948. Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were the third Buddhist areas, coming under French rule. For Cambodia, the process began in 1864, and by the 1890s the French had almost complete control over the internal running of the country. Significant also was Western penetration into China: between 1839 and 1865 the West, through military action and forced treaties, gained rights of residence and, in some parts of the country, jurisdiction.

This imperialistic movement affected Buddhism in two main ways. Firstly, Western visitors to these countries started to study Buddhism and interpret it to the West, working in tandem with European-based orientalists. In the early years of the nineteenth century, some drew on oral sources in Asia, but, as the century progressed, the texts took precedence, leading to an increasingly textualized interpretation of Buddhism in the West. Secondly, Asian Buddhism itself underwent revival, as it attempted to resist the Christian missionary activity that accompanied colonialism. In Sri Lanka, for instance, archival records suggest that Buddhists at first sought coexistence with Christians; they were willing to procure Buddhist texts for them and teach them the language of the texts, Pali. When they discovered, however, that the missionaries would use their knowledge to

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undermine Buddhism, hospitality turned to confrontation, and to the development of 'Protestant Buddhism' – a form of Buddhism that both 'protested' against Christianity and borrowed elements from it, from the Young Man's Buddhist Association and hymns to Protestant Christianity's emphasis on texts and devaluing of ritual. Myanmar witnessed a similar revivalist development, influenced by Sri Lanka, and in both countries revival movements and independence movements gave strength to each other. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Chinese Buddhism also underwent revival, again in response to the impact of the West, although its impact was lessened by the growth of secular ideologies.

SECULAR IDEOLOGIES AND AUTHORITARIANISM

In the middle years of the twentieth century, Buddhism in Cambodia, China, Korea, Laos, Tibet, and Vietnam was adversely affected by secular ideologies, Communism in particular. Communist leaders in China, after the establishment of the Chinese People's Republic in 1949, simply expected Buddhism to die away. When it did not, particularly from 1966–76, the years of the Cultural Revolution, there were violent attacks on Buddhist leaders and religious buildings.

It was the British withdrawal from India that gave Communist China the opportunity to invade Tibet. The process began in 1950 and culminated in 1959, when China imposed direct rule on the country and the Dalai Lama fled. Systematic suppression of Tibet's Buddhist heritage followed: the looting of monasteries; the destruction of libraries and religious images; the execution of some monks; and the torture and imprisonment of others. In the late 1970s, there was some relaxation of this policy, leading to a limited renewal of Buddhism in the country.

Cambodia gained its independence from the French in 1953. In 1975, Phnom Penh fell to the Khmer Rouge under Saloth Sar (Pol Pot, 1925–98). Although before victory the Khmer Rouge had seemed to praise Buddhism, after 1975 Buddhism was



Buddhist prayer flags on the mountainside, Nepal.

systematically dismantled, together with everything else that evoked Cambodia's former culture. Almost all Buddhist temples were razed, Buddhist monks were killed or given degrading labour, and Buddhist libraries gutted. In the Buddhist Institute in Phnom Penh, 40,000 documents were destroyed. When the Vietnamese defeated Pol Pot in 1979, the country was in ruins, and there was only a handful of Buddhist monks left.

Since 1979, Cambodia has painstakingly – and in the context of ongoing violence and war – attempted to rebuild its Buddhist heritage, gaining help from countries such as Sri Lanka, Japan, and Germany. The first priority was to rebuild the temples, after which came teachers and books. In 1992, the Buddhist Institute was re-opened. A deeper challenge than any of these has been to spark an interest in spiritual values in those Cambodians who had only known violence.

BUDDHISM ENTERS THE WEST

One consequence of China's invasion of Tibet was that thousands of Tibetans fled the country. Most went to India, Nepal, and Bhutan, but some travelled to Europe and America, internationalizing the Tibetan story, and spreading Tibetan forms of Buddhism. For instance in 1967 two Tibetans – Chogyam Trungpa Tulku Rinpoche (1939–87) and Dr Akong Tulku Rinpoche (b. 1939) – founded Kagyu Samye Ling monastery, near Eskdalemuir, southern Scotland, which has now become the largest Tibetan Buddhist centre in Europe, attracting numerous Westerners, a good number of whom have become monks and nuns.

Tibetan Buddhism, however, was not the first form of Buddhism to enter the West. In the nineteenth century, Buddhists came to British universities from countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar. Then, in 1893, the Anagarika Dharmapala (1864–1933), a key figure in the Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka, visited Britain – although his principal goal was to attend the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago – returning in 1896 and 1907. The first formal Buddhist mission to Britain, however, came from Myanmar in 1908, led by the second British person to become a Buddhist monk, Venerable Ananda Metteyya (Allan Bennett, 1872–1923), who was then living in Myanmar. The Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was formed to welcome him. Allan Bennett had come to Buddhism through theosophy, and through Edwin Arnold's poem on the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*, published in 1879. This poem's presentation of the Buddha as compassionate hero drew on both Theravada and Mahayana textual sources and attracted countless readers.

The history of Buddhism in Britain and the West between 1908 and 1959 is a complex one. In 1924, the work of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was taken over by a lawyer, Christmas Humphreys (1901–83), who combined it with a Buddhist centre he had started within the Theosophical Society, to form the Buddhist Lodge. In 1943 this was renamed The Buddhist Society, London, which continues today as the Buddhist Society. One of the inspirations for Christmas Humphreys was Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki (1870–1966), the Japanese Zen master who did more than any other person

to bring Zen Buddhism to laypeople in the West. As a young man, he lived in La Salle, Illinois, but in 1921 became Professor of Buddhist Philosophy at Otani University, Tokyo. Following World War II, he resumed contact with the West, influencing a generation of Westerners, and producing more than thirty volumes on Buddhism and Zen in English.

Almost all schools of Buddhism are now present in the West, and new Buddhist organizations are emerging to meet the needs of Westerners. In Britain, for instance, Theravada Buddhism has a strong presence, with monasteries and educational centres catering for Buddhists from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, and for Western converts. The Japanese Mahayana schools are represented – Zen, Pure Land, Tendai – and also newer lay movements such as Soka Gakkai, with its many Western followers, and Rissho Koseikai. The different Tibetan schools have also taken root, and there are movements such

as the one founded in 1967 by the British Buddhist, Sangharakshita (Dennis Lingwood, b. 1925), the Triratna Buddhist Order, which aims to offer a Buddhism to Westerners that combines the best of all schools. Never in the history of Buddhism has one area of the world received so many forms of Buddhism within the same short time span.

Asian countries such as Thailand and Japan have been particularly affected by the internationalization of capital, and the individualism and consumerism that has followed in its wake. Since the mid-twentieth century, both countries have experienced phenomenal economic growth, which has led to an undermining of Buddhism's emphases on non-greed and community. On the other hand, new counter-cultural Buddhist voices have emerged, challenging forms of Buddhism that place individual well-being above the health of the whole community.

BUDDHISM, WAR, AND PEACE

Conditioned by forces such as those mentioned above, Buddhists are entering many contemporary debates. Their contribution falls into two broad categories: the dynamics of social engagement, and the benefits – and indeed necessity – of meditation as a way of preventing hatred, anger, and violence.



Young Buddhist monks in Cambodia.

In Cambodia, after the fall of Pol Pot, in a situation of ongoing violence, a remarkable Buddhist movement, The Coalition for Peace and Reconciliation, grew up under the leadership of Maha Ghosananda (1929–2007), a monk who escaped the Pol Pot regime because he was in Thailand in 1975. During the 1990s, annual peace walks, or Pilgrimages for Truth (*Dhammayietras*), were held, passing through areas still torn by conflict. Monks and nuns, laywomen and men, took part, sometimes risking their lives as they walked through crossfire. Such costly witnesses for peace have characterized Buddhism in the modern world. However, Buddhists have not stood for non-violence in all situations.

Buddhism's nonviolent stance sets it against war in general. However, like followers of other faiths, Buddhists have struggled when this principle comes up against pressing and complex issues, and some strands of Buddhism developed a philosophy of the 'just war'. At times, this justification of war has seemed to predominate over nonviolence. For example, Japanese Buddhists aligned with – or at least did not resist – the militarization of Japan in the middle years of the twentieth century, an attitude criticized by Buddhists born later in the century, after the horror of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. In Sri Lanka, some Buddhist monks and laypeople have supported a military solution to the ethnic war that ravaged the country after 1983, arguing that defence of Buddhism is justified if it is seen to be threatened, though other Sri Lankan Buddhists have rejected this stance.

The monk's vow

*I shall eat whatever
is given to me with
appreciation.*

From *The Monastic Code of
Discipline, Vinaya IV 189*

BUDDHISM AND WOMEN

In the Buddha's time, women received higher ordination and became nuns (Pali, *bhikkhunis*; Sanskrit, *bhiksunis*). This higher ordination was lost in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, and never transmitted to countries such as Tibet and Thailand. Even without higher ordination, however, women have left their families to become nuns, but have not officially been able to follow the complete *bhikkhuni* rule of discipline. This began to change after the founding in 1987 of Sakyadhita ('Daughters of the Buddha'), an international organization of Buddhist women. At Sakyadhita conferences, fully-ordained nuns from Mahayana countries such as Taiwan and Korea met 'contemporary nuns' from countries such as Sri Lanka. This eventually led to ordination ceremonies, at which nuns from countries such as Taiwan, together with sympathetic Theravada monks, ordained nuns from countries that had no higher ordination. This is a story still in process.

Restoring to all Buddhist women the opportunity to gain higher ordination is not simply about regaining lost 'rights'; it is about affirming what women can contribute to Buddhism. Whether all Buddhist women gain the option to renounce as fully-ordained nuns or not, Buddhist women are now coming together with urgency to meditate, to co-operate in joint projects, and to share their vision of a world transformed by the Buddha's teaching.

ENGAGED BUDDHISM

In 1989, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists was formed. Its founders included Sulak Sivaraksa (b. 1933), a lay Buddhist from Siam – he will not call himself Thai – and Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1929), an exiled monk from Vietnam, who founded the Order of Interbeing in 1965. The Network asserted that Buddhism was not only about individual peace and liberation, but also about creating a better world now. Drawing on Buddhist concern for the elimination of suffering and the concept of interconnectedness, it sought to draw attention to the fact that the causes of much oppression, poverty, and suffering lay in unjust structures and the corporate greed of the rich. Engaged Buddhist movements are now found throughout the world. The members of the Amida Trust in Britain, for instance, draw inspiration from the Pure Land Tradition of Japan – which emphasizes that rebirth in the 'Pure Land', from where it will be easy to attain *nirvana*, is possible through relying on the compassion of the Buddha Amitabha – but direct this towards working for a 'Pure Land' here and now, a task they link with the original message of the Buddha.

Engaged Buddhists insist that meditation and social engagement go hand in hand, in line with the Buddha's message that we need to know how our minds and hearts work, if we are to act with wisdom rather than with greed and hatred. A growth of meditation centres catering for laypeople in Asia and the West is putting this message across strongly. In traditional Asian Buddhism, meditation practices – except for the most elementary – were linked with monastic life. Now, whether in Sri Lanka, Thailand, the USA, or Europe, meditation is becoming an important part of life for laypeople as well.

INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Although mistrust of Christianity is found in countries such as Sri Lanka, where Buddhists have experienced aggressive Christian missionary activity, many Buddhists across the world are involved in building bridges of understanding between faiths. Rissho Kosei-kai, for instance, a Japanese Buddhist lay movement started in 1938, was one of the founders of the World Conference on Religion and Peace in 1970, a pioneering international interfaith organization. In 1987 the US-based Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies was formed, and in October 1997 the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Buddhism is changing, partly due to the interpenetration of Western and Eastern forms of Buddhism. The result is that Buddhism has become a positive, dynamic force in the world; one of the insights it can offer the world is that social engagement and compassionate action must go hand in hand with work on self, the work of meditation, the work of wisdom.

ELIZABETH J. HARRIS