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The Buddha

The Story of the Awakened One

The historical Buddha

In January 1898 an Englishman, W. C. Peppé, digging into a mound on his estate at Piprāhwā just the Indian side of the Indian–Nepalese border, unearthed a soapstone vase some six inches in height with a brief inscription around its lid. The inscription, written in the Brāhmī script and dating from about the second century BCE, was in one of the ancient Indian dialects or Prakrits collectively referred to as Middle Indo-Aryan. The precise interpretation of the inscription remains problematic, but it appears to claim that the vase is 'a receptacle of relics of the Blessed Buddha of the Śākyas'.[1] The circumstances of this find and the find itself actually reveal a considerable amount about the nature and long history of what we know today as 'Buddhism'.

Peppé was among the early excavators of ruined Buddhist *stūpas* or monumental burial mounds. Such stūpas vary considerably in size. The largest were made to enshrine the relics of the Buddha himself or of Buddhist 'saints' or *arhats* (Pali *arahat*), while smaller ones contained the remains of more ordinary men and women.[2] Today countless stūpas are to be found scattered across the Indian subcontinent (where over the past hundred years a few have been restored to something of their former glory) and also other countries where Buddhism spread. Buddhism was, then, in origin an Indian phenomenon. Beginning in the fifth century BCE, its teachings and institutions continued to flourish for some fifteen centuries on Indian soil, inspiring and moulding the intellectual, religious, and cultural life of India. During this period Buddhism spread via the old trade routes far beyond the

confines of India right across Asia, from Afghanistan in the west to Japan in the east, affecting and touching the lives of millions of people. Yet by around the close of the twelfth century Buddhist institutions had all but disappeared from India proper, and it is in the countries and cultures that lie beyond India that Buddhism flourishes today. None the less all the various living traditions of Buddhism in some way look back to and revere a figure who has a certain basis in history—a figure who lived and died in northern India several centuries before the beginning of the Christian era and belonged to a people known as the Śākyas (Pali Sakya). He is Śākya-muni, 'the sage of the Śākyas', or as our inscription prefers to call him *buddho bhagavā*—'the Blessed Buddha', 'the Lord Buddha'.

So who, and indeed what, was the Lord Buddha? This is a question that might be answered in a number of different ways, a question about which both the Buddhist tradition and the historian have something to say. The nature of the Buddha is a subject that the Buddhist tradition itself has expounded on at length and to which we will return below but, in brief, the word *buddha* is not a name but a title; its meaning is 'one who has woken up'. This title is generally applied by the Buddhist tradition to a class of beings who are, from the perspective of ordinary humanity, extremely rare and quite extraordinary. In contrast to these Buddhas or 'awakened ones' the mass of humanity, along with the other creatures and beings that constitute the world, are asleep—asleep in the sense that they pass through their lives never knowing and seeing the world 'as it is' (*yathā-bhūtaṃ*). As a consequence they suffer. A buddha on the other hand awakens to the knowledge of the world as it truly is and in so doing finds release from suffering. Moreover—and this is perhaps the greatest significance of a buddha for the rest of humanity, and indeed for all the beings who make up the universe—a buddha teaches. He teaches out of sympathy and compassion for the suffering of beings, for the benefit and welfare of all beings; he teaches in order to lead others to awaken to the understanding that brings final relief from suffering. An ancient formula still used in Buddhist devotions today puts it as follows:

For the following reasons he is a Blessed One: he is an Arhat, a perfectly and completely awakened one, perfect in his understanding and conduct, happy, one who understands the world, an unsurpassed trainer of unruly men, the teacher of both gods and men, a blessed buddha.[3]

Such is a buddha in general terms, but what of the particular buddha with whom we started, whose relics appear to have been enshrined in a number of stūpas across the north of India and to whom the Buddhist tradition looks as its particular founder—the historical Buddha? Let us for the moment consider the question not so much from the perspective of the Buddhist tradition as from the perspective of the historian.

The Buddha and the Indian 'renouncer' tradition

We can know very little of the historical Buddha with any degree of certainty. Yet within the bounds of reasonable historical probability we can form quite a clear picture of the kind of person the Buddha was and the main events of his life. The oldest Buddhist sources, which provide us with a number of details concerning the person and life of the Buddha, date from the fourth or third century BCE. Unfortunately when we turn to the non-Buddhist sources of a similar date, namely the earliest texts of the Jain and brahmanical traditions, there is no explicit mention of the Buddha at all.[4] It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that non-Buddhist sources thus provide us with no corroborative evidence for the picture of the Buddha painted in early Buddhist texts. Essentially the latter present the Buddha as a *śramaṇa* (Pali *samaṇa*). This term means literally 'one who strives' and belongs to the technical vocabulary of Indian religion, referring as it does to 'one who strives' religiously or spiritually. It points towards a particular tradition that in one way or another has been of great significance in Indian religious history, be it Buddhist, Jain, or Hindu. Any quest for the historical Buddha must begin with the *śramaṇa* tradition. Collectively our sources may not allow us to write the early history of this movement but they do enable us to say a certain amount concerning its character.

The tradition is sometimes called the 'renouncer (*saṃnyāsin*) tradition'. What we are concerned with here is the phenomenon of individuals' renouncing their normal role in society as a member of an extended 'household' in order to devote themselves to some form of religious or spiritual life. The 'renouncer' abandons conventional means of livelihood, such as farming or trade, and adopts instead the religious life as a means of livelihood. That is, he becomes a religious mendicant dependent on alms. What our sources make clear is that by the fifth century BCE this phenomenon was both widespread and varied. Thus while 'renouncers' had in common the fact that they had 'gone forth from the household life into homelessness' (to use a phrase common in Buddhist sources), the kind of lifestyle they then adopted was not necessarily the same. This is suggested by some of the terms that we find in the texts: in addition to 'one who strives' and 'renouncer', we find 'wanderer' (*parivrājaka/paribbājaka*), 'one who begs his share [of alms]' (*bhikṣu/bhikkhu*), 'naked ascetic' (*acelaka*), 'matted-hair ascetic' (*jaṭila*), as well as a number of other terms.[5] Some of these wanderers and ascetics seem to have been loners, while others seem to have organized themselves into groups and lived under a teacher. Early renouncers seem to have been for the most part male, although with the growth of Buddhism and Jainism it is certainly the case that women too began to be numbered among their ranks.

Three kinds of activity seem to have preoccupied these wanderers and ascetics. First, there is the practice of austerities, such as going naked in all weathers, enduring all physical discomforts, fasting, or undertaking the vow to live like a cow or even a dog.[6] Secondly, there is the cultivation of meditative and contemplative techniques aimed at producing what might, for the lack of a suitable technical term in English, be referred to as 'altered states of consciousness'. In the technical vocabulary of Indian religious texts such states come to be termed 'meditations' (*dhyāna/jhāna*) or 'concentrations' (*samādhi*); the attainment of such states of consciousness was generally regarded as bringing the practitioner to some deeper knowledge and experience of the nature of the world. Lastly there is the development of

various philosophical views providing the intellectual justification for particular practices and the theoretical expression of the 'knowledge' to which they led. While some groups and individuals seem to have combined all three activities, others favoured one at the expense of the others, and the line between the practice of austerities and the practice of meditation may not always be clear: the practice of extreme austerity will certainly alter one's state of mind.

The existence of some of these different groups of ancient Indian wanderers and ascetics with their various practices and theories finds expression in Buddhist texts in a stock description of 'six teachers of other schools', who are each represented as expounding a particular teaching and practice. Another list, with no details of the associated teachings and practices, gives ten types of renouncer. In fact two other ancient Indian traditions that were subsequently of some importance in the religious life of India (the Ājīvikas and the Jains) find a place in both these ancient Buddhist lists; the Jain tradition, of course, survives to this day.[7] But one of the most significant groups for the understanding of the religious milieu of the historical Buddha is omitted from these lists; this is the early brahmanical tradition. To explain who the brahmins (*brāhmaṇa*) were requires a brief excursus into the early evolution of Indian culture and society.

The brahmanical tradition

It is generally thought that some time after the beginning of the second millennium BCE groups of a nomadic tribal people began to move south from ancient Iran, through the passes of the Hindu Kush and down into the plains of the Indus valley. These people spoke dialects of Old Indo-Aryan, that is, of Sanskrit and they are known as the Āryas. The Āryas who moved into India were descendants of nomadic pastoralists who had occupied the grasslands of central Asia, some of whom similarly moved west into Europe.

Once in India the Āryas' cultural influence gradually spread southwards and eastwards across the plains of northern India. By the time the Buddha was born, probably early in the fifth

century BCE, the Āryas had been in India perhaps a thousand years and their cultural influence extended down the Ganges valley as far as Pāṭaliputra (modern Patnā). The coming of the Āryas into India did not bring political unity to northern India, but it did bring a certain ideology that constitutes one of the principal components of Indian culture. This Aryan vision of society was principally developed and articulated by a hereditary group within Aryan society known as *brāhmaṇas* or, in the Anglo-Indian spelling, brahmins. The original literature of the brahmins is known as the *Vedas*, the oldest portions of which, found in the *Ṛg Veda*, date from about 1500 BCE. By the time of the Buddha, Vedic literature probably already comprised several different classes: the four collections (*saṃhitā*) of verses attributed to the ancient seers (*ṛṣi*), the ritual manuals (also known as *brāhmaṇas*) giving instruction in the carrying out of the elaborate Vedic sacrificial ritual, and 'the forest books' (*āraṇyaka*) explaining the esoteric meaning of this sacrificial ritual. The final class of Vedic literature, the Upaniṣads, containing further esoteric explanations of the sacrificial ritual, was still in the process of formation.

Two aspects of the brahmanical vision are of particular importance, namely an understanding of society as reflecting a hierarchy of ritual 'purity', and a complex system of ritual and sacrifice. From the brahmanical perspective society comprises two groups: the Āryas and the non-Āryas. The former consists of the three hereditary classes (*varṇa*) in descending order of purity: *brāhmaṇas* (whose prerogative and duty it is to teach and maintain the Vedic tradition), *kṣatriyas* or rulers (whose prerogative and duty is to maintain order and where necessary inflict appropriate punishment), and the *vaiśyas* (whose prerogative and duty is to generate wealth through farming and trade). These three classes are termed 'twice born' (*dvija*) by virtue of the fact that traditionally male members undergo an initiation (*upanayana*) into a period of study of the Vedic tradition under the supervision of a brahmin teacher; at the end of this period of study it is their duty to maintain the household sacrificial fires and, with the help of brahmins, carry out various sacrificial rituals in accordance with the prescriptions of Vedic tradition. The non-Āryas

make up the fourth class, the *śūdras* or servants, whose basic duty it is to serve the three other classes. While it is important not to confuse these four classes (*varṇa*) and the countless castes (*jāti*) of later Indian society, it is none the less the ideology of the relative ritual purity of the classes that underpins the medieval and modern Indian 'caste system'.

The brahmins' hereditary ritual status empowered them to carry out certain ritual functions that members of other classes were excluded from, but at the time of the Buddha not all brahmins were full-time 'priests'. Precisely how brahmins related to the various groups of wandering ascetics is not clear.[8] In part we can see the brahmanical vision of society and that of the wandering ascetics as opposed to each other, in part we can see the two as complementing each other. To accept the brahmanical view of the world was to accept brahmanical authority as an aspect of the eternal structure of the universe and, as such, unassailable. Yet wandering ascetics threatened brahmanical supremacy by offering rival visions of the world and society. On the other hand, within brahmanical circles we find the development of certain esoteric theories of the nature of the sacrificial ritual and philosophical views about the ultimate nature of man and his relationship to the universe at large. These theories may to some extent have drawn on ideas developing amongst the groups of wandering ascetics; at the same time they may have substantially contributed to the development of the tradition of the wanderers itself, since it is clear that brahmin circles were an important recruiting ground for the various groups of wandering ascetics. Yet it seems clear that in certain respects the Buddha's teachings were formulated as a response to certain brahmanical teachings.[9]

The Buddha and history

It is in this milieu that the historian must understand the historical Buddha as existing. And given this milieu, the bare 'facts' of the Buddha's life as presented by tradition are historically unproblematic and inconsequential.

The precise dates of the Buddha's life are uncertain. A widespread Buddhist tradition records that he was in his eightieth

year when he died, and the dates for his life most widely quoted in modern published works are 566–486 BCE. These dates are arrived at by, first, following a tradition, recorded in the Pali sources of 'southern' Buddhism, that the great Mauryan king, Aśoka, was consecrated 218 years after the death of the Buddha, and, secondly, taking 268 BCE as the year of Aśoka's accession. This is done on the basis of the Aśokan rock-edict reference to rulers in the wider Hellenic world who can be dated from other ancient sources. But both the figure 218 and the accession of Aśoka in 268 BCE are problematic. In contrast to the southern 'long chronology', northern Buddhist Sanskrit sources adopt a 'short chronology', placing Aśoka's accession just 100 years after the death of the Buddha, while recent research suggests that Aśoka's accession may be plausibly placed anywhere between 280 and 267 BCE.[10] But such figures as 218 and 100 should properly be seen as ideal round numbers.[11] Moreover, as was first pointed out by Rhys Davids and more recently by Richard Gombrich, a time lapse of rather less than 218 years from the Buddha's death to Aśoka's accession is suggested by the figures associated with the lineage of teachers found in a Pali source, namely an ancient Sri Lankan chronicle, the *Dīpavaṃsa*.[12] While there is no scholarly consensus on the precise dates of the Buddha, a detailed examination of all the available data and arguments by scholars in recent years has resulted in a general tendency to bring the date of the Buddha considerably forward and place his death much nearer 400 BCE than 500 BCE.

The earliest Buddhist sources state that the future Buddha was born Siddhārtha Gautama (Pali Siddhattha Gotama), the son of a local chieftain—a *rājan*—in Kapilavastu (Pali Kapilavatthu) on what is now the Indian–Nepalese border. He was thus a member of a relatively privileged and wealthy family, and enjoyed a comfortable upbringing. While the later Buddhist tradition, in recounting the story of his youth, certainly likes to dwell on the wealth of Siddhārtha's family and the extravagance of his princely upbringing, there is something of a cultural misunderstanding involved in the notion that the Buddhist tradition presents the Buddha as born a royal prince, the son of a great king.

In representing the Buddha as a *rājan* or *kṣatriya* the tradition is effectively recording little more than that he was, in European cultural terms, a member of a locally important aristocratic family. At some point he became disillusioned with his comfortable and privileged life; he became troubled by a sense of the suffering that, in the form of sickness, old age, and death, sooner or later awaited him and everyone else. In the face of this, the pleasures he enjoyed seemed empty and of little value. So he left home and adopted the life of a wandering ascetic, a *śramaṇa*, to embark on a religious and spiritual quest. He took instruction from various teachers; he practised extreme austerities as was the custom of some ascetics. Still he was not satisfied. Finally, seated in meditation beneath an *aśvattha* tree on the banks of the Nairañjanā in what is now the north Indian state of Bihar, he had an experience which affected him profoundly, convincing him that he had come to the end of his quest. While the historian can make no judgement on the nature of this experience, the Buddhist tradition (apparently bearing witness to the Buddha's own understanding of his experience) calls it *bodhi* or 'awakening' and characterizes it as involving the deepest understanding of the nature of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation. The Buddha devoted the rest of his life to teaching this 'way to the cessation of suffering' to groups of wanderers and ordinary householders. In the course of his wanderings across the plains that flank the banks of the Ganges he gathered a considerable following and by the time of his death at about the age of 80 he had established a well-organized mendicant community which attracted considerable support from the wider population. His followers cremated his body and divided up the relics which were enshrined in a number of stūpas which became revered shrines.

That the subsequent Buddhist tradition is founded upon and inspired by the teaching activity of a charismatic individual who lived some centuries before the beginning of the Christian era can hardly be doubted. In the words of the great Belgian scholar Étienne Lamotte, 'Buddhism cannot be explained unless we accept that it has its origin in the strong personality of its

founder.'[13] Given this premiss, none of the bare details of the Buddha's life is particularly problematic for the historian—something we should bear in mind in the face of certain modern scholarly discussions of the life of the Buddha, such as André Bareau's, which, in dwelling on the absence of corroborative evidence for many of the details of the traditional life of the Buddha, introduces a note of undue scepticism with regard to the whole account.

Of course, as the Buddhist tradition tells it, the story of the life of the Buddha is not history nor meant to be. The whole story takes on a mythic and legendary character. A wealth of detail is brought in capable of being read metaphorically, allegorically, typologically, and symbolically. Much of this detail is to modern sensibilities of a decidedly 'miraculous' and 'supernatural' kind. The story of the Buddha's life becomes not an account of the particular and individual circumstances of a man who, some 2,500 years ago, left home to become a wandering ascetic, but something universal, an archetype; it is the story of all those who have become buddhas in the past and all who will become buddhas in the future, and, in a sense, of all who follow the Buddhist path. It is the story of the Buddhist path, a story that shows the way to a profound religious truth. Yet for all that, many of the details of his early life given in the oldest sources remain evocative of some memory of events from a distant time. If we persist in distinguishing and holding apart myth and history, we are in danger of missing the story's own sense of truth. Furthermore, the historian must recognize that he has virtually no strictly *historical* criteria for distinguishing between history and myth in the accounts of the life of the Buddha. And at that point he should perhaps remain silent and let the story speak for itself.[14]

The legend of the Buddha

Sources

The centrepiece of the legend of the Buddha is the story of the Buddha's life from his conception to the events of his awakening and his first teaching. This narrative must be accounted one

of the great stories of the world. Part of the common heritage of Buddhism, it is known throughout Asia wherever Buddhism has taken root. The core of this story and not a few of its details are already found in the Sūtra and Vinaya collections of early Buddhist texts (see next chapter).[15] In literary works and in sculptural reliefs that date from two or three centuries later, we find these details embellished and woven together to form a more sustained narrative. The classical literary tellings of the story are found in Sanskrit texts such as the *Mahāvastu* ('Great Story', first century CE), the *Lalitavistara* ('Graceful Description', first century CE), in Aśvaghoṣa's poem the *Buddhacarita* ('Acts of the Buddha', second century CE), and in the Pali *Nidānakathā* ('Introductory Tale', second or third century CE), which forms an introduction to the commentary on the *Jātaka*, a collection of stories of the Buddha's previous births.[16] New narratives of the life of the Buddha have continued to be produced down to modern times.[17]

Tibetan tradition structures the story of the Buddha's life around twelve acts performed by all buddhas, while Theravādin sources draw up a rather longer list of thirty features that are the rule (*dhammatā*) for the lives of all buddhas.[18] The substance of these two lists is already found in the oldest tellings of the story. What follows is in effect the story of these twelve acts and (most of) the thirty features, told with a bias to how they are recounted in the early discourses of the Buddha and Pali sources, together with some comments aimed at providing a historical perspective on the development of the story.

The legend

The Buddhist and general Indian world-view is that all sentient beings are subject to rebirth: all beings are born, live, die, and are reborn again and again in a variety of different circumstances. This process knows no definite beginning and, ordinarily, no definite end. The being who becomes a buddha, like any other being, has known countless previous lives—as a human being, an animal, and a god. An old tradition tells us that the life before the one in which the state of buddhahood is reached is always

spent as a 'god' (*deva*) in the heaven of the Contented (Tuṣita/Tusita). Here the bodhisattva (Pali *bodhisatta*)—the being intent on awakening—dwells awaiting the appropriate time to take a human birth and become a buddha. Dwelling in the Tuṣita heaven is the first of the twelve acts, but how does the bodhisattva come to be dwelling here? The answer, in short, is that it is as a result of having practised 'the perfections' (*pāramitā/pāramī*) over many, many lifetimes.

Long ago, in fact incalculable numbers of aeons ago, there lived an ascetic called Sumedha (or Megha by some) who encountered a former buddha, the Buddha Dīpaṃkara. This meeting affected Sumedha in such a way that he too aspired to becoming a buddha. What impressed Sumedha was Dīpaṃkara's very presence and a sense of his infinite wisdom and compassion, such that he resolved that he would do whatever was necessary to cultivate and perfect these qualities in himself. Sumedha thus set out on the path of the cultivation of the ten 'perfections': generosity, morality, desirelessness, vigour, wisdom, patience, truthfulness, resolve, loving kindness, and equanimity. In undertaking the cultivation of these perfections Sumedha became a bodhisattva, a being intent on and destined for buddhahood, and it is the life in which he becomes the Buddha Gautama some time in the fifth century BCE that represents the fruition of that distant aspiration. Many *jātakas*—'[tales] of the [previous] births [of the Bodhisattva]'—recount how the Bodhisattva gradually developed the 'perfections'. Such stories, like the story of the Buddha's life, are deeply embedded in Buddhist culture and serve to emphasize how, for the Buddhist, the being who dwells in Tuṣita as one intent on buddhahood is a being of the profoundest spiritual qualities.

The appearance of such a being in the world may not be unique, but is nevertheless a rare and special circumstance, for a buddha only appears in the world when the teachings of a previous buddha have been lost and when beings will be receptive to his message. So it is said that surveying the world from Tuṣita the Bodhisattva saw that the time had come for him to take a human birth and at last become a buddha; he saw that the 'Middle Coun-

try' of the great continent of Jambudvīpa (India) was the place in which to take birth, for its inhabitants would be receptive to his message. The Bodhisattva was conceived on the full moon night of Āṣāḍha (July); that night his mother, Mahāmāyā, dreamt that a white elephant carrying a white lotus in its trunk came and entered her womb. The second and third acts, descent from Tuṣita and entering his mother's womb, had been accomplished.

Māyā carried the Bodhisattva in her womb for precisely ten lunar months. Then on the full moon of Vaiśākha (May), passing by the Lumbinī grove on her way to her home town, she was captivated by the beauty of the flowering *śāla* trees and stepped down from her palanquin to walk amongst the trees in the grove. As she reached for a branch of a śāla tree, which bent itself down to meet her hand, the pangs of birth came upon her. Thus, 'while other women give birth sitting or lying down', the Bodhisattva's mother was delivered of her child while standing and holding on to the branch of a śāla tree. As soon as the Bodhisattva was born he took seven steps to the north and proclaimed, 'I am chief in the world, I am best in the world, I am first in the world. This is my last birth. There will be no further rebirth.'

Such is the legend of the Bodhisattva's birth, the fourth act. By the middle of the third century BCE a site reckoned to be the place of his birth had become a centre of pilgrimage, and the great Mauryan emperor Aśoka—or, as he preferred to call himself, Piyadassi Beloved of the Gods—whose empire extended across virtually the entire Indian subcontinent, had inscribed on a pillar at Lumbinī:

> When King Piyadassi, Beloved of the Gods, had been anointed twenty years, he himself came and worshipped [here], because this is where the Buddha, sage of the Śākyas, was born.[19]

The Bodhisattva was thus born among the Śākya people into a *kṣatriya* family whose name was Gautama. Seven days after his birth his mother died and was reborn in the Tuṣita heaven. The child was named Siddhārtha—'he whose purpose is accomplished'. Despite the strange and marvellous circumstances of his birth, as he grew up the child appears to have forgotten he was

the Bodhisattva: he had no memory of his dwelling in Tuṣita or any of his other previous births. However, certain predictions of his future destiny were made to his father, Śuddhodana. Soon after his birth the infant Bodhisattva was examined by brahmin specialists in 'the thirty-two marks of the great man' (*mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa/mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇa*).[20] This notion may be of some antiquity in Indian tradition. These marks take the form of signs on the body that indicate that the possessor is a Great Man. Such marks may not be visible to the ordinary eye, but it is said that certain brahmins kept the knowledge that was capable of interpreting these marks. According to Buddhist tradition two destinies are open to one who possesses these marks in full: either he will become a great 'wheel-turning' (*cakravartin/cakka-vattin*) king ruling the four quarters of the earth in perfect justice, or he will become a buddha. On hearing that the brahmins had pronounced his son was one who possessed the thirty-two marks, Śuddhodana determined that his son should become a wheel-turning king. To this end he arranged matters that Siddhārtha should have no occasion to become unhappy and disillusioned with his life at home: he would be sheltered from all things unpleasant and ugly such as old age, sickness, and death; whatever he wanted to make him happy, that he should have. In this way Śuddhodana hoped that he might prevent Siddhārtha from renouncing his home-life for the life of a wandering ascetic and thus assure that he became not a buddha but a wheel-turning king. We are told that Siddhārtha married a young and beautiful wife, Yaśodharā, and had a son, Rāhula, by her.

All this relates to the fifth of the twelve acts, the Bodhisattva's enjoyment of proficiency in worldly skills and sensuality. The oldest sources say virtually nothing of the Bodhisattva's life before the time he left home. They indicate that he did indeed have a wife and son, but apart from that all we have is a stock description of a life of luxury enjoyed by the very wealthy and privileged placed into the mouth of the Buddha himself:

I was delicate, most delicate, supremely delicate. Lotus pools were made for me at my father's house solely for my use; in one blue lotuses

flowered, in another white, and in another red. I used no sandal wood that was not from Benares. My turban, tunic, lower garments and cloak were all of Benares cloth. A white sunshade was held over me day and night so that I would not be troubled by cold or heat, dust or grit or dew . . . Yet even while I possessed such fortune and luxury, I thought, 'When an unthinking, ordinary person who is himself subject to ageing, sickness, and death, who is not beyond ageing, sickness, and death, sees another who is old, sick or dead, he is shocked, disturbed, and disgusted, forgetting his own condition. I too am subject to ageing, sickness, and death, not beyond ageing, sickness, and death, and that I should see another who is old, sick or dead and be shocked, disturbed, and disgusted —this is not fitting.' As I reflected thus, the conceit of youth, health, and life entirely left me.[21]

This brings us straight to the sixth act, disenchantment with his life of pleasure. In the developed account this experience of disenchantment with the world is related in terms of the story of the Bodhisattva's rides with his charioteer. As he leaves the confines of his luxurious apartments, he encounters for the first time in his life a decrepit old man, a severely ill man, and a corpse being carried to the funeral pyre by mourners. The experience is traumatic, and when he then sees a wandering ascetic with serene and composed features Gautama resolves that he will leave his home and take up the life of a wandering ascetic himself. The Bodhisattva's 'great going forth' (*mahāpravrajyā/mahāpabbajjā*), the seventh act, took place on the night of the Āṣāḍha full moon. Accompanied by his charioteer, Channa, he went forth on his horse, Kanthaka. According to traditional reckoning he was then 29 and this was the beginning of a six-year quest for awakening. During these six years he first spent time with and practised the systems of meditation taught by Ārāḍa Kālāma (Pali Āḷāra Kālāma) and then Udraka Rāmaputra (Pali Uddaka Rāmaputta). Although he mastered their respective systems, he felt that here he had not found any real answer to the problem of human suffering. So next, in the company of five other wandering ascetics, he turned to the practice of severe austerities. The old texts preserve a hauntingly vivid description of the results of this practice, the eighth act:

My body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little my limbs became like the jointed stems of creepers or bamboo; my backside became like a buffalo's hoof; my backbone, bent or straight, was like corded beads; my jutting and broken ribs were like the jutting and broken rafters of an old house; the gleam of my eyes sunk deep in their sockets was like the gleam of water seen deep down at the bottom of a deep well.[22]

But by his gruelling penance he again felt he had not found what he was searching for. Then he recalled an experience from his youth. One day seated quietly beneath the shade of a rose-apple tree his mind had settled into a state of deep calm and peace. Buddhist tradition calls this state the first 'meditation' or *dhyāna* (Pali *jhāna*). According to the later Buddhist understanding, this state is the gateway to a state of perfect mental calm and equilibrium known as the fourth *dhyāna*. As he reflected, it came to the Bodhisattva that it was by letting the mind settle in this state of peace that he might come to find what he was looking for. This required that he nourish his body and regain his strength. His five companions thought he had turned away from the quest and left him to his own devices. In the full legend this is the occasion of the young woman Sujātā's (or, according to some, Nandabalā's) offering of milk-rice to the Bodhisattva. Now nourished, he seated himself beneath an *aśvattha* or pīpal tree (*ficus religiosa*), henceforth to be known as 'the tree of awakening' or Bodhi-tree. It was once more the night of the Vaiśākha full moon and he made a final resolve: 'Let only skin, sinew and bone remain, let the flesh and blood dry in my body, but I will not give up this seat without attaining complete awakening.'[23] The gods from many different world-systems gathered around the tree sensing that something momentous was about to happen.

Again the oldest accounts describe the gaining of awakening in generally sober psychological terms, most often by reference to the successive practice of the four *dhyānas* and the gaining of three 'knowledges', culminating in the knowledge of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation—what come to be known as 'the four noble truths'; the awakening is also described in terms of gaining insight into the causal chain

of 'dependent arising'.[24] These are classic elements of Buddhist thought and we shall return to them later. Perhaps because they do not exactly make for a good story, the later legend of the Buddha recounts the awakening in terms of the story of the Bodhisattva's encounter with Māra. This is a story rather more vivid and immediately accessible than the abstract technical concepts of Buddhist meditation theory.

Māra is a being who in certain respects is like the Satan of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. His name means 'bringer of death' and his most common epithet is 'the Bad One' (*pāpīyāṃs/pāpimant*). Māra is not so much a personification of evil as of the terrible hold which the world—in particular the world of the senses—can have on the mind. Māra is the power of all kinds of experience to seduce and ensnare the unwary mind; seduced by Māra one remains lost in the enchantment of the world and fails to find the path that leads through to the cessation of suffering. So as the Bodhisattva sat beneath the tree firm in his resolve, Māra, mounted on his great elephant, approached. He came accompanied by his armies: desire, aversion, hunger and thirst, craving, tiredness and sleepiness, fear, and doubt. His one purpose was to break the Bodhisattva's resolve and shift him from his seat beneath the pīpal tree. The gods who had gathered around the tree in anticipation of the Bodhisattva's awakening fled at the sight of Māra's approaching armies, and the Bodhisattva was left to face Māra and his armies alone.

Some relate how at this point the beautiful daughters of Māra came before the Bodhisattva and tested his commitment to his purpose by offering themselves to him.[25] But the Bodhisattva was unmoved. Māra then sent various storms against him. When this too failed, Māra approached to claim the Bodhisattva's seat directly. He asked him by what right he sat there beneath the tree. The Bodhisattva replied that it was by right of having practised the perfections over countless aeons. Māra replied that he had done likewise and, what was more, he had witnesses to prove it: all his armies would vouch for him, but who would vouch for the Bodhisattva? The Bodhisattva then lifted his right hand and touched the ground calling on the very earth as his witness.

This is the 'earth-touching gesture' (*bhūmi-sparśa-mudrā*) depicted in so many statues of the Buddha through the ages. It signals the defeat of Māra and the Buddha's awakening. As the Buddha touched the earth Māra tumbled from his elephant and his armies fled in disarray. With the ninth and tenth acts, the defeat of Māra and the attainment of complete awakening, Siddhārtha had accomplished his goal.

The legend of the Buddha is dense and rich at this point and we must pass over many of its details. But according to tradition the Buddha spent as many as seven weeks seated beneath and in the vicinity of the Bodhi-tree enjoying the bliss of emancipation. Once a great storm arose as the Buddha was seated in meditation and a Nāga, a great serpent, came and spread its hood over the Buddha to protect him. Again this scene is often depicted, especially in images of Cambodian provenance.

The Buddha had achieved his purpose; he had come to an understanding of suffering, and had realized the cessation of suffering. In Buddhist terms, seated beneath the tree he had a direct experience of 'the unconditioned', 'the transcendent', 'the deathless', nirvāṇa (Pali *nibbāna*); he had come to know directly the deep and underlying way of things that is referred to in India as Dharma (Pali *dhamma*). It is said that at that point his mind inclined not to teach:

> This Dharma that I have found is profound, hard to see, hard to understand; it is peaceful, sublime, beyond the sphere of mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation takes delight in attachment, is delighted by attachment, rejoices in attachment and as such it is hard for them to see this truth, namely . . . nirvāṇa.[26]

Even the oldest tradition seems to know the story of how the great god, the Brahmā called Sahampati, or 'mighty lord', came then and stood before the Buddha and requested him to teach. The implications of this story are various. Sometimes it is suggested that it has been created as a device to show that even the gods already recognized at that time in India acknowledge the Buddha's superiority. But there are perhaps other meanings. There are reasons for thinking that the realm of Brahmā is associated

with compassion in early Buddhist thought.[27] There is also a strong Buddhist tradition that the teaching should only be given to those who ask and thereby show their willingness to hear receptively. Thus even today, in certain traditions of Buddhism, when a layman makes a formal request to a Buddhist monk to teach Dharma he consciously repeats Brahmā's original request by using the very words of the ancient formula.

> Then the Brahmā Sahampati, lord of the world, with joined palms requested a boon: There are beings here with but little dust in their eyes. Pray teach Dharma out of compassion for them.[28]

In a deer park outside Benares the Buddha approached the five who had been his companions when he practised austerities and gave them instruction in the path to the cessation of suffering that he had discovered. In this way he performed a buddha's eleventh act: 'setting in motion' or 'turning the wheel of Dharma' (*dharma-cakra-pravartana/dhamma-cakka-ppavattana*), and soon, we are told, there were six *arhats* in the world—six in the world who had cultivated the path to the cessation of suffering and realized the unconditioned.

For the Buddha this was the beginning of a life of teaching that lasted some forty-five years. Many stories and legends are recounted of the Buddha's teaching career. Indeed, fourteen of the thirty features given in the Pali sources as the rule for all buddhas relate to it. To a large extent these incidents are preserved by the earlier tradition in no systematic order, and it is left to later tradition to organize them into a sequential narrative.[29] Most of these legends must be passed over here but it is worth just mentioning some since they form part of the common heritage of Buddhism and are again and again alluded to by later tradition in literary texts and in paintings and stone relief. There is the story of how the Buddha gained his two greatest disciples, the monks Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana; of how the monk Ānanda came to be his attendant; of how the Buddha performed the extraordinary 'miracle of the pairs', causing fire and water to issue from every pore of his body, and then ascended to the heaven of the 'Thirty-Three Gods' to give his profoundest

teachings to his reborn mother. There is the story of the quarrelling monks at Kauśāmbī and of how the Buddha retired to the Pārileyyaka forest where he was attended by a lone elephant who had grown weary of the herd, of how a monkey came to the Buddha and offered him honey. There is the story of the dispute with his cousin Devadatta, who attempted to kill him by releasing a rogue elephant which the Buddha subdued by the strength of his 'loving kindness' (*maitrī/mettā*).

As we shall see, it is one of the great emphases of Buddhist teaching that the things of the world are impermanent and unreliable. To the extent that the Buddha is of the world then he is no exception. There is a majestic and poignant account of the Buddha's last days preserved in the ancient canon under the title of 'the great discourse of the final passing' (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*). According to tradition it was some time in his eighty-first year that the Buddha fell ill:

> I am now grown old, Ānanda, and full of years; my journey is done and I have reached my sum of days; I am turning eighty years of age. And just as a worn out cart is kept going with the help of repairs, so it seems is the Tathāgata's body kept going with repairs.[30]

As the Buddha lay dying between two blossoming śāla trees, it is related how the monk Ānanda, who unlike many of his other disciples had not achieved the state of arhatship or perfection, lent against a door and wept. Then the Buddha asked for him:

> Enough, Ānanda, do not sorrow, do not lament. Have I not formerly explained that it is the nature of things that we must be divided, separated, and parted from all that is beloved and dear? How could it be, Ānanda, that what has been born and come into being, that what is compounded and subject to decay, should not decay? It is not possible.[31]

The Buddha's death constituted his 'full going out' (*parinirvāṇa/parinibbāna*), the twelfth and final act of all buddhas. Before his death the Buddha had given instructions that his remains should be treated like those of a wheel-turning monarch and enshrined in a stūpa where four roads meet. After the Buddha's body had been cremated, various messengers arrived from districts in

northern India each demanding a share of his relics. The relics were thus divided into eight parts and eight different stūpas were built over them.

This is where we began this chapter. It is possible that the stūpa excavated by Peppé represents an enlargement of an older stūpa —one that the Śākyas erected over their share of the relics at Kapilavastu. The reliquary unearthed by Peppé appears to date from the second century BCE. More recent excavations at the site have unearthed further reliquaries—without any inscriptions—from deeper within the stūpa. These may date from the fourth or fifth century BCE. In that case Peppé's reliquary would seem to have been deposited when the stūpa was undergoing reconstruction some centuries after the death of the Buddha.

The nature of a buddha

The Buddha is presented to us as in certain respects simply a man: the *śramaṇa* or ascetic Gautama, the sage of the Śākya people. Yet at the same time he is presented as something much more than this: he was a *buddha*, an awakened one, the embodiment at a particular time and place of 'perfection', a Tathāgata, one who comes and goes in accordance with the profoundest way of things. At this point we need to begin to consider more fully what it is to be a buddha.

I have already referred to a generally accepted Indian view of things that sees ordinary humanity, ordinary beings, as being born, dying, and being reborn continually. This process is the round of rebirth known as *saṃsāra* or 'wandering', and it is this that constitutes the universe. Beings wander through this vast endless universe attempting to find some permanent home, a place where they can feel at ease and secure. In the realms of the gods they find great joy, and in the worlds of hell great suffering, but their sojurn in these places is always temporary. Nowhere in this universe is permanently secure; sooner or later, whatever the realm of rebirth, a being will die to be reborn somewhere else. So the search for happiness and security within the round of rebirth never ends. And yet, according to the teaching of the Buddha, this does

not mean that the search for happiness and security is futile and without end, for a buddha is precisely one who finds and follows the path to the end of suffering.

Now the question of what happens to a buddha when he dies takes us to the heart of Buddhist philosophical thinking. Here Buddhist thought suggests that we must be very careful indeed about what we say, about how we use language, lest we become fooled. The Buddha cannot be reborn in some new form of existence, for to exist is, by definition, to exist at some particular time and in some particular place and so be part of the unstable, shifting world of conditions. If we say that the Buddha exists, then the round of rebirth continues for the Buddha and the quest for an end to suffering has not been completed. On the other hand, to say that the Buddha simply does not exist is to suggest that the Buddhist quest for happiness amounts to nothing but the destruction of the individual being—something which is specifically denied in the texts.[32] Hence the strict doctrinal formulation of Buddhist texts is this: one cannot say that the Buddha exists after death, one cannot say that he does not exist, one cannot say that he both exists and does not exist, and one cannot say that he neither exists nor does not exist.[33] One cannot say more here without beginning to explore certain other aspects of Buddhist metaphysics and ontology, and this I shall leave for later chapters. The important point is that a Buddha is understood as a being who has in some way transcended and gone beyond the round of rebirth. He is a Tathāgata, one who, in accordance with the profoundest way of things, has come 'thus' (*tathā*) and gone 'thus'.[34]

So what does this transcendence imply about the final nature of a buddha? If one is thinking in categories dictated and shaped by the theologies of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and also modern Western thought, there is often a strong inclination to suppose that such a question should be answered in terms of the categories of human and divine: *either* the Buddha was basically a man *or* he was some kind of god, perhaps even God.[35] But something of an imaginative leap is required here, for these are not the categories of Indian or Buddhist thought. In the first place,

according to the Buddhist view of things, the nature of beings is not eternally or absolutely fixed. Beings that were once humans or animals may be reborn as gods; beings that were once gods may be reborn as animals or in hellish realms. Certainly, for the Buddhist tradition, the being who became *buddha* or awakened had been born a man, but equally that being is regarded as having spent many previous lives as a god. Yet in becoming a buddha he goes beyond such categories of being as human and divine.

A story is told of how once a brahmin saw on the Buddha's footprints one of the thirty-two marks, wheels complete with a thousand spokes, with rims and hubs.[36] He thought that such footprints could hardly be those of a human being and followed them. On catching up with the Buddha, he asked him whether he was a god or some kind of angel or demon. The Buddha replied that he was none of these. The brahmin then asked if he was a human being. The Buddha replied that he was not. The brahmin was puzzled. So what was the Buddha?

> Just as a blue, red, or white lotus, born in water and grown up in water, having risen above the water stands unstained by water, even so do I, born in the world and grown up in the world, having overcome the world, dwell unstained by the world. Understand that I am a buddha.

A buddha is thus a being *sui generis*: a buddha is just a buddha.[37] But, in principle, according to Buddhist thought, *any* being can follow the path of developing the perfections over countless lives, and eventually become a buddha. That is, all beings have the potential to become buddhas.

Thus something has happened to Gautama the man that means that the categories that normally apply to beings no longer properly apply. Ordinarily a human being's behaviour will sometimes be motivated by greed, hatred, and delusion and sometimes by such things as selflessness, friendliness, compassion, and wisdom. The different deeds, words, and thoughts of a being are an expression of these conflicting emotions and psychological forces. But for a buddha all this has changed. He has rooted out any sense of pride, attachment, or hostility. The thoughts, words, and

deeds of a buddha are motivated only by generosity, loving kindness, and wisdom. A buddha can think, say, and do nothing that is not based on these. This is the effect or 'fruit' of what happened as he sat in meditation beneath the tree of awakening.

The bodies of the Buddha

One early Buddhist text puts it that the Buddha is 'one whose body is Dharma, whose body is Brahma; who has become Dharma, who has become Brahma'.[38] Now *dharma* and *brahma* are two technical terms pregnant with emotional and religious meaning. Among other things Dharma is 'the right way to behave', 'the perfect way to act'; hence it is also the teaching of the Buddha since by following the teaching of the Buddha one follows the path that ends in Dharma or perfect action. We have already come across the term Brahmā denoting a divine being (p. 24), but in Buddhist texts *brahma* is also used to denote or describe the qualities of such divine beings; thus *brahma* conveys something of the sense of the English 'divine', something of the sense of 'holy' and something of the sense of 'perfection'. Like the English word 'body' the Sanskrit/Pali word *kāya* means both a physical body and figuratively a collection or aggregate of something—as in 'a body of opinion'. To say that the Buddha is *dharma-kāya* means that he is at once the embodiment of Dharma and the collection or sum of all those qualities—non-attachment, loving kindness, wisdom, etc.—that constitute Dharma. Thus the nature of a buddha does not inhere primarily in his visible human body—it is not that which makes him a buddha—but in his perfected spiritual qualities.

Another passage of the ancient texts relates how the monk Vakkali was lying seriously ill on his sick-bed; when the Buddha arrives Vakkali explains to him that, although he has no sense of failure in his conduct, he is troubled by the fact that because of his illness he has not been able to come and visit the Buddha. The Buddha responds: 'Enough, Vakkali. What point is there in your seeing this decaying body? He who sees Dharma sees me; he who sees me sees Dharma.'[39]

This kind of thinking gives rise in developed Buddhist thought to various theories of 'the bodies of the Buddha'. Such

theories are often presented as a distinguishing feature of later Mahāyāna Buddhism. This is misleading. Certainly, there is a rather sophisticated understanding of 'the three bodies' (*trikāya*) of the Buddha worked out and expounded in the writings of the fourth-century CE Indian Mahāyānist thinker Asaṅga (see Chapter 9). But this theory stands at the end of a process of development, and some conception of the bodies of the Buddha is common to all Buddhist thought. What is common is the distinguishing between the 'physical body' (*rūpa-kāya*) and the 'dharma-body'.

The physical body is the body that one would see if one happened to meet the Buddha. Most people, most of the time, it seems, would see a man who looked and dressed much like any other Buddhist monk. However, recalling the stories of the brahmins who examined the Buddha's body after his birth and the brahmin who followed his footprints, some people some of the time see—or perhaps, more precisely, experience—a body that is eighteen cubits in height and endowed with the thirty-two marks of the great man as described in the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta*, 'the discourse on the marks of the great man'.[40] This apparently extraordinary body appears in part to be connected with theories of the 'subtle body' developed in meditation. All this then is the physical body—the body as it appears to the senses. The Dharma-body, as we have seen already, is the collection of perfect qualities that, as it were, constitute the 'personality' or psychological make-up of the Buddha.

A Buddha's physical body and Dharma-body in a sense parallel and in a sense contrast with the physical and psychological make-up of other more ordinary beings. According to a classic Buddhist analysis that we shall have occasion to consider more fully below, any individual being's physical and psychological make-up comprises five groups of conditions and functions: a physical body normally endowed with five senses; feelings that are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral; ideas and concepts; various desires and volitions; and self-consciousness. Any being might be considered as consisting in the accumulation of just these five 'heaps' or 'aggregates' (*skandha/khandha*) of physical and psychological conditions. And in this respect a buddha is no different. Yet a buddha has transformed these five into an

expression and embodiment of Dharma. Thus rather than, or as well as, consisting in the accumulation of these five aggregates, the psychological make-up of the Buddha might be considered as consisting in the accumulation of another set of five 'aggregates', namely, the various qualities of perfect conduct (*śīla/sīla*), meditation (*samādhi*), wisdom (*prajñā/paññā*), freedom (*vimukti/vimutti*), and knowledge and understanding (*vimukti-jñāna-darśana/vimutti-ñāṇa-dassana*).[41]

Śrāvaka-buddhas, pratyeka-buddhas, and samyak-sambuddhas

In this chapter we have seen how the Buddhist tradition regards a particular historical individual—Siddhārtha Gautama—as an instance of a certain kind of rare and extraordinary being—a buddha. Such a being having resolved to become a buddha by making a vow in the presence of some previous buddha of a far distant age, practises the perfections for countless lives and finally, born as a man, attains buddhahood by finding 'the path to the cessation of suffering'; he then goes on to teach this path to the cessation of suffering to others so that they may reach the same realization as he has done, so that they too may become 'awakened' or *buddha*. Both Gautama and those who come to realization by following his teachings—the arhats—may be referred to as 'buddhas' since both, by the rooting out of greed, hatred, and delusion, have come to understand suffering and the path to its cessation. And yet, as the tradition acknowledges, some difference between Gautama and the arhats must remain. Gautama, *the* Buddha, has found the path by his individual striving without the immediate help of an already awakened being and then gone on to show others the way.[42] His followers on the other hand may have come to precisely the same understanding and realization as Gautama but they have done so with the assistance of his unequalled abilities as teacher.

We have then here two kinds of buddha: 'the perfectly, fully awakened one' (*samyak-/sammā-sambuddha*) like Gautama, and the arhat or 'one who has awakened as a disciple' (*śrāvaka-/sāvaka-buddha*). Thus while on the one hand wishing to stress that the 'awakening' of Gautama and his 'awakened' disciples is the

same, the Buddhist tradition has also been unable to resist the tendency to dwell on the superiority of Gautama's achievement. Apart from becoming 'awakened' as a samyaksam-buddha or arhat, Buddhist texts also envisage a third possibility: that one might become awakened by one's unaided effort without hearing the teaching of a buddha and yet fail to teach others the way to awakening. Such a one is known as a 'solitary buddha' (*pratyeka-/pacceka-buddha*).

The sense that the achievements of these three kinds of 'buddha' are at once the same but different—the Buddha's achievement being somehow superior—is a tension that lies at the heart of Buddhist thought and, as we shall see, explains in part certain later developments of Buddhist thought known as the Mahāyāna. How does the Buddha's superiority to arhats and pratyeka-buddhas manifest itself? In order to answer this question it is useful to return to a question raised earlier concerning the Buddha's nature as man or god. In the context especially of early Buddhism and Buddhism as practised today in Sri Lanka and South-East Asia, once it has been established that theoretically the Buddha is neither a god nor a 'Saviour', there has been a tendency amongst observers to conclude that the Buddha ought then to be seen by Buddhists as simply a man—as if this was the only alternative. A further conclusion is then drawn that, since Buddhism teaches that there is no 'saviour', the only way to 'salvation' must be through one's own unaided effort.

True, the Buddha did not create the world and he cannot simply 'save' us—and the Buddhist would say that it is not so much that the Buddha lacks the power as that the world is just not like that: no being could do such a thing. Yet although no saviour, the Buddha is still 'the teacher of gods and men, the unsurpassed trainer of unruly men'; in the Pali commentaries of fifth-century Sri Lanka he is often referred to as simply *the* Teacher (*satthar*). That is, we have here to do with a question of alternative religious imagery and metaphor: not the 'Father' or 'Saviour' of Judaism or Christianity, but the Teacher. If one is not familiar with the Indian cultural context it is easy to underestimate the potency of the image here. For a Buddhist no being

can match the Buddha's abilities to teach and instruct in order to push beings gently towards the final truth of things. A buddha may not be able to save us—that is, he cannot simply turn us into awakened beings—yet, if awakening is what we are intent on, the presence of a buddha is still our best hope. Indeed some contemporary Buddhists would suggest that it is no longer possible to reach awakening since conditions are now unpropitious; rather it is better to aspire to be reborn at the time of the next buddha or in a world where a buddha is now teaching so that one can hear the teachings directly from a buddha. For the Buddhist tradition, then, the Buddha is above all the great Teacher; it is his rediscovery of the path to the cessation of suffering and his teaching of that path that offers beings the possibility of following that path themselves.

As Teacher, then, the Buddha set in motion the wheel of Dharma. As a result of setting in motion the wheel of Dharma he established a community of accomplished disciples, the Saṅgha. In the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha the Buddhist thus has 'three jewels' (*tri-ratna/ti-ratana*) to which to go for refuge. Going to the three jewels for refuge is realized by the formal recitation of a threefold formula: 'To the Buddha I go for refuge; to the Dharma I go for refuge; to the Saṅgha I go for refuge.' Going to these three jewels for refuge is essentially what defines an individual as a Buddhist. Having considered the Buddha, let us now turn to consider his teaching and how that teaching is put into practice by those who take refuge in the three jewels.