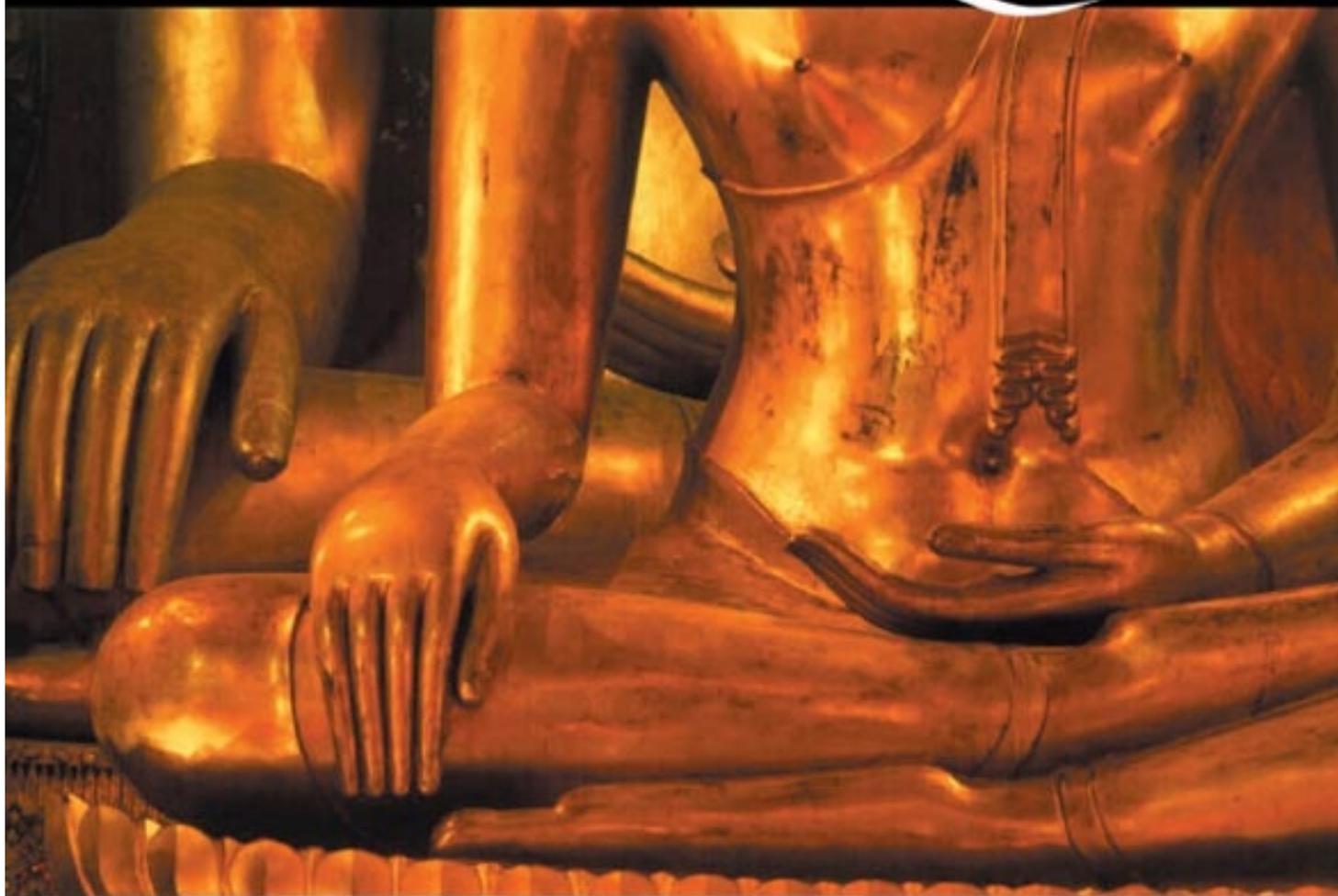


MEDITATION TECHNIQUES



OF THE BUDDHIST
AND TAOIST MASTERS

DANIEL ODIER

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AND TAOIST MASTERS

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Translated by John Maboney



Inner Traditions
Rochester, Vermont

TO KHEMPO KALO RINPOCHE

Khempo Kato Rinpoche of the Kagyupa Order, one of the great sages who continue the teachings and oral tradition of Milarepa



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INTRODUCTION



In limiting this work to the contemplative techniques of Buddhism and Taoism, I intend to go directly to the essential and leave aside everything that does not have a direct relationship with the Way that leads to Nirvana and to the Tao.

Most books dedicated to Buddhism single out a particular school. They then expose the doctrines in detail, often stopping before treating the essential: the different techniques of meditation.

In the course of my many trips to the Orient, in the monasteries of each school, I strove to understand and to live what the books rarely describe in detail for the good reason that Orientalists often prefer philosophical studies to direct experience.

In order to restore the essence of this experience, I have chosen to treat this subject with the greatest scrutiny and clarity possible, while at the same time preserving the integrity of my research.

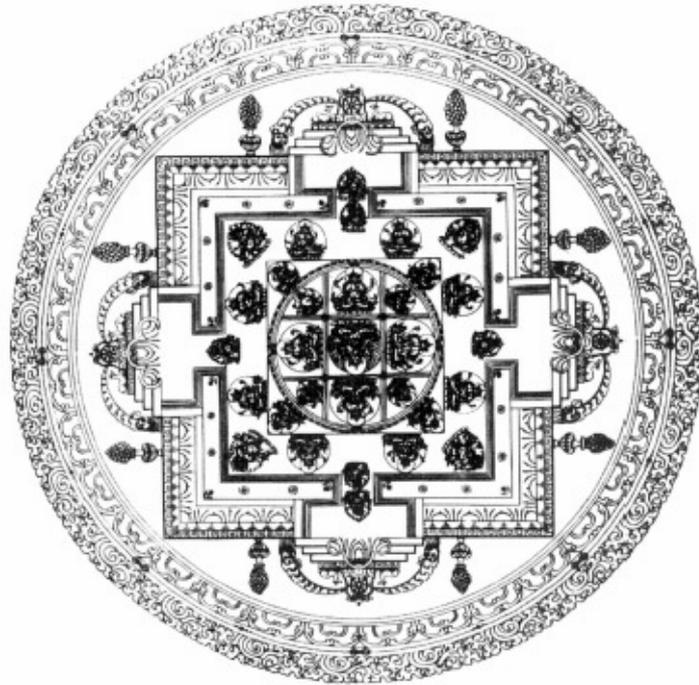
The whole interest of a direct physical experience is that it allows the setting aside of books and teachings in order to encounter men or sages who are the realization of a complete doctrine and whose presence is irreplaceable. This alone can open a mind burdened with knowledge to the realization of the void.

To meet a master, a man who says everything by his simple presence, is to open oneself to an intense and profound upheaval that passes like a tidal wave over all the ideas that one might make of a doctrine.

PART I

*

BUDDHISM



Buddha, guardian of the entrance to Swayambunath, one of the great places of pilgrimage in Nepal



His skull will show a protrusion. His hair braided over the right shoulder will be azure. On his wide, smooth forehead between His eyebrows there will be a small, raised circle of silver hairs. His eyes, shaded by long eyelashes like those of a heifer, will be large, white and black. His ear lobes will be three times longer than normal. He will have forty solid identical teeth, which will shelter a long and slim tongue, giving him an excellent sense of taste. His jaw will have the strength of a lion's. Along with a fine, golden-colored skin, He will have a limber and firm body like the stalk of the arum, a large chest like the breast of a bull, round shoulders, solid thighs, gazelle legs and seven well-distributed protruding contours. His hands will be large. His arms, hanging, will touch his knees. His extremely long fingers and toes will be joined by a thin membrane. His hair will grow strand by strand, and the hair on His arms will grow upward. What needs to be hidden will remain so. His heels will be thick, and His palms will be united.

Under each of His feet a thousand-spoked wheel will be traced, and He will stand perfectly upright on symmetrically equal feet And His speech will have the sound of that of Brahma.¹

CHAPTER ONE



THE LIVES OF THE BUDDHA

Some definite statements can be made concerning the life of the Buddha through careful research, in-depth study, comparison of original texts, and information obtained from archaeological research.

The Buddha was born in 556 B.C. in a small village of Nepal in the region of Tirai, Kapilavastu. He belonged to a tribe named Shakya of which his father was king. There is no information that tells whether Buddha was an Aryan or of the yellow race. When he was about twenty-seven years old, he left Kapilavastu and became a wandering ascetic. Near the hamlet of Uruvela, in India, about a hundred kilometers from Patna, he entered a cave and practiced an extremely rigorous meditative asceticism. When he was about thirty-seven years old, he achieved Illumination and left for Benares where he found five ascetics who became his first disciples. There he gave his first sermon, in which he exposed the Four Truths and the Way of Deliverance, the Noble Way of the Eight Paths. Buddha continued to spread his teaching to an increasing number of disciples and founded the Sangha, the congregation of monks. In the area of Patna, rich lay people allowed through their donations the development of several centers where Buddha and his disciples lived during the period of the monsoons, which made travel impossible. After a life of teaching, Buddha died at the age of eighty-one following a sickness or poisoning. The teachings of the Buddha were transmitted orally for about 400 years before being written down with commentaries in the course of the following centuries.

THE LEGENDARY LIFE

Although the lives of the great initiators of humanity were more internal than external, their disciples were able to give a fairly accurate account of their teachings. However, their imagination had to compensate for the unknown details of the masters' lives.

Buddha did not escape from this any more than Jesus did. Everything begins with a virginal birth and culminates by a promise of a future return.

Maya-Devi, pure and radiant, marries King Shuddhodana, after a foreboding dream and a series of miraculous omens, and finds herself transported by the gods to the top of the Himalayas, where a tree shoots forth. Led into a golden palace by celestial attendants, Maya-Devi sees a yellow elephant possessing six tusks of ivory and a rosy head. After offering to the queen a lotus that he holds in his trunk, the miraculous animal stabs one of his tusks into the right side of the queen, who feels nothing.

Ten months later, the queen, hidden by a thicket of leaves, lies down at the foot of a fig tree. Instantaneously the soil is covered with thick grass from which ten thousand lotuses spring forth. Without her experiencing the least pain, the Buddha emerges from her right side. A giant lotus provides a bed for him. The Buddha rises, takes seven steps toward the north, south, east and west and takes possession of the world. He announces his last incarnation and says that he will free man from suffering brought on by birth, old age and death. As soon as the infant finishes speaking, he becomes

similar to others.

Soon the young Prince Siddhartha amazes teachers and sages with the extent of his knowledge. No one is equal to him in athletics, such as horseback riding and archery. Still, the young Prince spends long hours in the marvelous gardens of the palace where, near ponds covered with lotuses, he falls into delicious contemplations. One day Siddhartha goes into the fields with his father, who has him admire the thick furrows of earth raised by the plow. The young Prince sees the beauty of the spectacle, but he also sees the suffering of the buffalo, the hardship of the laborer and the death of the worms cut by the plowshare. He sees in nature that the struggle for life means the law of the survival of the fittest. His love for each breath of life is so strong that he asks his father if he can remain where he is in order to meditate. In spite of the movement of the sun, the shadow of the tree that shelters him does not move, and Siddhartha knows his first ecstasy.

The king, impressed by the attitude of his son, remembers the predictions of a brahman: 'Choosing the life of a wandering ascetic, he will attain Illumination after my death and will save the world!' Has he seen the first signs of this force that would propel his son from his realm?

Upon the king's return, he gives orders that no similar sights that could provoke such contemplations be allowed around the young prince. He constructs three palaces in which Siddhartha enjoys the most refined pleasures. Sometimes, however, fleeing his rich surroundings, Siddhartha goes into the gardens, and in a hut made from branches he enters ecstasy.

One day, he goes to the edge of the parks and sees beyond the ordered flower beds the wild abundance of the jungle. There, for the first time, he meets some ascetics. What force dwells in the beings with a look more luminous than precious jewels?

The king, aware of the melancholy of his son, thinks that it is time to find him a wife. He seeks out the most beautiful young women of his caste, who are presented to the Prince during a feast. Among the 108 candidates, each more beautiful than the other, only the last, Gopa Yasodhara, attracts the attention of Siddhartha.

'As the hidden seed springs up from the soil after a long dryness, their former love awakens immediately. They had already been united so many times, man and woman, tiger and tigress, vine and orchid, wind and feather, mountain and river

'A meeting of the minds: no need for him to remember the fawn, which for her sake, he had caught in the forest, and no need for her to remember the storm, which for thirty-three days had detained them, drunk with love, in a cave overhanging the swollen river. As long as the wheel of rebirth keeps turning, that which had been would continue to live in them.'² After conquering his rivals in the different tests of running, the bow, the sword and contests of learning, Siddhartha marries the beautiful Gopa. In three months, the king builds a palace even more beautiful than the preceding one so that Gopa and the Prince can taste the most intense sensual pleasures. At night, the craftsmen construct a wall around the paradise so that the Prince is surrounded by a vortex where everything is youth and beauty. The king gives these orders: everything that can be perceived as sickness, aging and death must be kept from his son. As soon as a dancer shows the least sign of fatigue, she must be immediately replaced. There is neither withering flower, dead leaf, nor flickering lamp within the walls of the palace.

Soon Gopa learns that she is going to give birth to a son. Siddhartha himself, in the midst of his vision, sees the meaning of his mission on earth. The Prince orders his carriage to be harnessed and asks to depart into the city, which is then garlanded with flowers. Old people and slaves are hidden

from him, and the entire realm is transformed into a place of happiness and beauty. Then, all of a sudden, in front of his carriage, appears a repulsively ugly human being at the threshold of death.

During the night, Siddhartha, by disguising himself, escapes into the village and sees it in its usual condition. He sees a funeral convoy that he follows to the place of cremation. The body rises up in the middle of the flames and firewood, and the skull explodes in the stench of burnt flesh. When the Prince returns, the entire palace is seized by weariness: flowers do not open, musical instruments are silent and the women seem exhausted.

Siddhartha meditates on what he has seen. He keeps Gopa at a distance from his bed, and the women, in spite of all the sensuous distractions that they are displaying in front of their beloved Prince, are not able to move him from his deep contemplation.

One evening, after having been entertained by the musicians and dancers, Siddhartha falls asleep. Toward the middle of the night, he awakes suddenly to a frightening scene. The half-asleep women look like cadavers, and the precious silks that cover their decrepit bodies are no longer anything but shreds of colorless fabric. Their mouths are open showing their rotted teeth, their skulls are bald, and a terrible odor comes from their bodies. Siddhartha rushes toward Gopa's room. She hasn't changed. Her body and face are as resplendent as ever.

At night, under the starry sky, Siddhartha leaves the palace on his white horse. He crosses the sleeping village and rapidly leaves it behind. At dawn, near the river Anoma, at the edge of the kingdom, he leaves his horse, and exchanges his princely robes for those of a hunter clothed in rags; then he cuts his braid of hair with one motion of the sword. The braid, flung into the air, is swept up into the sky and disappears.

Freed from the snares of sensual pleasures and wealth, Siddhartha goes in the direction of the Ganges plains. He crosses jungles, desert terrains, and cultivated fields; his mind, now free from every memory, opens itself to a new rapture.

After several days of travel, the Buddha arrives at the village of Vaishali, where he has come to follow the teachings of a celebrated brahman, Alara Kalama. After hearing the philosopher's subtle doctrine in which everything has a fixed place, Siddhartha challenges his teachings:

'You have not at all penetrated my heart because I have found neither compassion for suffering nor a way to remedy it. It is the liberation of man that I seek, and you, you do not even care whether man's plight is changed. You do not seek anything but power and only the subjugation of the gods is important to you.'³

Later, he meets a sage that the faithful come to see from all over Asia whom the disciples say is the incarnation of Rama. Siddhartha, after listening to the sage Uddaka, says to him:

'I am convinced, my venerable Master, that the path you expose will not lead me to indifference toward the attractions of the world, nor to the detachment of the passions, nor to the serenity of the soul. I will find there no end to the vicissitudes of being. Therefore, my wandering must continue until I find the true way.'⁴

Five men follow the Buddha, knowing that this ascetic will guide them to the beyond. However, he has not yet attained Illumination, and it is with fierce determination that he isolates himself in a cave near Rajagriha. Forgetting about the tigers, vultures and snakes that frequent the area, he plunges himself into a rigorous asceticism that almost leads to his death. His five companions, tired of waiting for a teaching that is not yet formulated, leave the Buddha while mocking his intentions. The Sage proceeds to the area of Uruvela where the sweetness of the landscape, a green meadow situated

between two rivers, the Nairanjana and Mohana, contrasts with the austerity of the cave. One day, the meeting of a zitherist inspires one of the principles of his later teachings: A very tight string will break, and a very loose string will not vibrate properly. The true way is that of the middle. It is the same for the body. Very great asceticism will destroy it, and too much pleasure will prevent it from vibrating: the true way is the way of the middle.

Once recovered from the austerities that almost lead to his death, the Buddha again begins to travel, covering several different regions.

After receiving a favorable omen, he chooses a fig tree, under which he sits at the close of day, and decides to die where he is if his meditation does not lead to the end of suffering. The forest animals whose eyes only are visible at the edge of the clearing, watch the Sage: movement and sound are stilled and the entire universe awaits the revelation of the Buddha, who is supported by a seat of cow grass which has grown beneath him.

There, he experiences the demonic forces of Mara, who tries to make him renounce his task. Why save the world: is it not sufficient to save yourself? After the long parade of the demonic forces, Mara, who cannot weaken his determination, sends Kama, God of the sensual passions, who offers the ascetic the beauty of his own daughters.

Mara, faced with this impenetrable determination, unleashes a terrible storm with heavy rain and thunder and lightning in order to disturb his meditation. Meteorites fall from the sky, and arrows are transformed into flowers before dropping around the ascetic.

During the first night, the Sage sees five hundred and fifty past existences. Each of them is retold in *the jataka*, a very popular collection of stories in Asia that is used to initiate children into the teachings of Buddhism:

A long time ago, when King Brahmadata ruled at Varanasi, the Bodhisattva was reincarnated into a family of farmers. When he became an adult, he earned his living by being a farmer.

At that time, there was a merchant who went to market with his wares carried by his donkey. When he arrived at a certain place, he removed the merchandise from the donkey's back, and covered the donkey with a lion's skin, releasing the donkey into the rice or barley fields.

At the sight of the donkey, the attendants of the field said:

'It is a lion!'

And they didn't dare go near it.

Then one day, the merchant went to the outskirts of the village and while he was cooking his morning meal, he covered the donkey with the lion's skin and released it into the barley field. The attendants of the field, taking the donkey for a lion, dared not go near it, and they ran to alert everyone. All the villagers took up arms. Sounding the horn and beating the drum, they returned to the field, making a lot of noise.

Frightened with the fear of death, the donkey began to bray. Then, seeing that it was a donkey, the Bodhisattva delivered this first stanza:

It is not the cry of a lion,
Nor a tiger, nor a panther!
Clothed in the skin of a lion,
It is a miserable donkey who brays.

The villagers then perceived that it was a donkey, and after having broken its bones with the blow

of a stick, they left with the skin of the lion.

Then the merchant arrived. Seeing his donkey who was about to die, he delivered this second stanza:

For a long time yet this donkey
Would have been able to graze the green barley
Clothed in the skin of a lion
But, in crying out, it caused its doom.

As he thus spoke, the donkey died: the merchant left it and went off.⁵

During the second night, the Buddha discovers the complexity of the universe. He sees the galaxies, the different suns, space, time, matter and the emptiness that formed it. He sees large bodies at the point of extinction, the meteors, comets, living stars and dead stars. As a rainbow unfolds in the sky, so the infinity of time unfolds before him: the past and the future, the cosmic periods of evolution and decay. Life's cycle appears to him at the cosmic level. He sees death engender life, obscurity light, and the indefinite form, in the continuity of rebirths.

During the course of the third night, the kingdom of nature and its laws appear clearly to him. The destruction of life in order to conserve life, as when his father first showed him the plow cutting the earth, appears to him in a different light: the lioness who kills the gazelle in order to nourish its young acts in harmony with its own nature: the bird who devours the worm and the snake who swallows small mammals do not act against their own nature.

Khempo Kalo Rinpoche at the gate of a hermitage located near Dalhousie, India



During the fourth night, new visions spring from those that preceded, revealing suffering, and how it is the result of human life and the inseparable companion of perception. He sees man's fear of his own inner nature. While trying to escape from suffering, man indulges in sensual and mental pleasure but he only recreates a greater sorrow. Man's search lies in one direction: he wants to free himself from suffering. The ways he adopts are superficial. Even when he indulges in religion he does not find peace. Then the vision of the Four Noble Truths is revealed to the Buddha.

1. Evil is the contact of the body, the mind and consciousness, which forms the illusory view of the world.
2. The origin of evil is destiny, the cause of rebirth.
3. The cessation of evil is the cessation of desire.

4. The life that leads to the cessation of evil is that of the Eight Paths: correct view, correct intention, correct action, correct speech, correct livelihood, correct effort, correct mindfulness, correct meditation.

Next, the Buddha again goes through the Twelve Hindrances, the causes of suffering. Then, accomplishing the inverse way, he shows the way of liberation.

The way of total deliverance is now laid out. The Buddha enters into the deepest ecstasy. Illumination frees him from ever having to suffer or be reborn.

The earth trembles twelve times, a breath penetrates the world and a light sets it aglow. At this precise moment, all evil actions cease. Everyone feels a light within. The animal world itself remains peaceful, and while the divinities rejoice, the demons lament. In her palace, Gopa knows that the Prince has arrived at the ultimate liberation.

For seven weeks, his body and consciousness remain perfectly still while Buddha is in ecstasy. However, the mischievous divinities are already tempting him to give up his teaching. His goal has been accomplished, so why remain on this earth to diffuse a message of liberation? Nirvana is waiting!

After forty-nine days, Buddha terminates his contemplation and decides to deliver to the world the secret of liberation. He seeks a man who has an elevated mind suited to a total comprehension and thinks of the sage Alara, a brahman whose teaching he had followed. But he finds out that he is dead. Then he thinks of the five disciples who were faithful to him for six years. They are at Deer Park in Benares.

The greeting he receives is cold. Has he learned anything? Then, confronted with the words of someone whose great modesty they can at least recognize, they open up to Light.

'I am the Holy, the Perfect, the supreme Buddha. Listen to me, O Monks! The way of total liberation has been found.' Then he reveals to them the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-fold Path and the twelve hindrances of cause and effect.

It is in Deer Park at Benares that the Buddha first diffuses his teaching. Day and night, the faithful gather to hear this revolutionary message.

Soon the Buddha gathers sixty disciples. He then leaves Deer Park for Uruvela, and it is on the way that he teaches his doctrine to the three musicians, who will follow him henceforth and play ecstatic music while he preaches.

Donations from the laity provide for the establishment of two locations at Sarvasti and Rajagriha from which the Buddha and his disciples will spread the doctrine untiringly north and south.

During his forty years of teaching, the disciples of the Buddha became more and more numerous. From village to village, with miraculous cures, the Buddha leads the men who will listen to him toward the understanding of the emptiness of the world and the emptiness of phenomena. As his disciples gradually progress, he outlines and deepens his teaching, which culminates in those practices of concentration and meditation that will be explained in detail in chapters that follow. For those who listen to him, he forges the purest instrument that man can utilize for his deliverance and shows that he himself owes the revelation of the law to meditative practices, to which he devotes himself. The considerable success that the Illuminated One has gained does not occur without arousing hatred and jealousy. Devadatta, unhappy about his defeat at the time of the competition that preceded the marriage of Gopa and Siddhartha, tries particularly hard to discredit the Master. However, his maneuvers go astray. He tries to kill the Buddha by unleashing upon him a mad elephant used to crush

the heads of these who are condemned to die. But the unchained elephant becomes peaceful at the signal of the Sage. Devadatta attempts other offensive acts, but each time he fails.

However, Devadatta is not the only enemy of the Buddha. The Jainists are also struggling against Buddhism, which is developing in a way parallel to their religion.

One day, the Perfect One receives a message that his father fears that he will die before seeing his son and profiting from his teaching. Buddha, accompanied by numerous disciples, leaves for Kapilavastu. Numbering twenty thousand, they advance slowly towards the small kingdom. All decked out, the village awaits the return of the Prince, who travels through the air at the last stage of his journey. The crowd expects an earthly king and instead see a poorly clothed man, wearied by a life of teaching and a difficult voyage. The king himself is disturbed by the appearance of his son. Only Gotama understands the glory of her husband, and that very night, as she sees him again, she attains Illumination without the Buddha having to reveal his teaching to her. (This direct transmission was rather frequent at the beginnings of Buddhism, and the Tibetans say that it is still produced today in exceptional cases when master and disciple are joined in the same emptiness.) The son of the Buddha also receives the teaching. Little by little, the other princes renounce the artificial joys of the court in order to follow the way of the Sage. The populace listen to his teaching, and many are touched by the Light. The Buddha admits women into the congregation and prescribes very strict rules for them. Before leaving Kapilavastu, he gives the law of the Five Paramita that his disciples must observe:

'Be compassionate and respect all life, be it ever so small. Stifle in yourself hatred, greed and anger.'

'Give and receive freely, but do not take anything wrongly through violence, fraud or false statements.'

'Never lie even on occasions which seem to absolve you from it.'

'Avoid drugs and drink, which disturb the mind.'

'Respect another's wife and do not commit any illegitimate carnal act nor any unnatural act.'

'These are the five rules of your life for each day.'

After having taught for forty years, the Buddha, at the age of eighty-one feels tired. He continues his teaching in spite of the onset of an illness. Near the small village of Kusinara, he lies down on the ground between two isolated trees in the middle of a field. A blacksmith prepares a meal for the monks and the Buddha. In order to honor the Sage, he serves him meat. It was this dish, legend tells us, that was the cause of the Master's death. Feeling that his end is near, the Buddha remains alone with Ananda, his preferred disciple. These are his last words as the *Mahaparanirvanasutra* gives them:

Then, in truth, the Blessed One spoke to the venerable Ananda: 'O Ananda do not think that we no longer possess the word of our deceased Master and that we no longer have the Master. O Ananda, do not consider things of this sort. The doctrine and discipline that I have taught and commented on will be your master when I am gone. What's more, O Ananda, after my disappearance, the monks will no longer have to bow and call each other "Friend" as they do today. But a younger monk will have to be greeted by an older monk by his own name, or by his family name or by the title of "Friend". An older monk will have to be greeted by a younger monk by the title of "Venerable" or "Lord." After my disappearance, O Ananda, if the community desires it, it can abolish the secondary and minor rules.'

Then, in Truth, the Blessed One spoke thus to the monks: 'In addition, O Monks, if one of you still experiences doubts concerning the Buddha, the Doctrine, the Community, the Way or the Path, then ask me so that you will not regret it later and say:

"When our Master was here, we did not try to question him face to face."

When he had thus spoken, the monks remained silent. Three times, the Blessed One repeated his demand, and three times the monks remained silent. He then said:

'Then in truth, O Monks, is it through respect for your Master that each of you does not question him, and speaks to one of your companions?'

The monks again remained silent. Then, in truth, the Venerable Ananda said to the Blessed One:

'It is marvelous, O Venerable One, it is amazing, O Venerable One! How confident I am in the community of monks! Not one monk experiences doubt or uncertainty concerning the Buddha, or the Doctrine, or the Community, or the Way or the Path.'

'The confidence that you express, O Ananda, is inferior to the knowledge of the Tathagata. There is truly no monk in this community who experiences doubt or uncertainty concerning the Buddha, the Doctrine, the Community, or the Way or the Path because the last of the five hundred monks has penetrated into the Truth. Consequently, he has been released from the law of rebirth into unhappiness and instead remains fixed on the Way of Deliverance and has as his goal the complete Awakening.'

Then, in truth, the Blessed One spoke thus to the monks:

'Now, O Monks, I say this to you: The components of the Self are submitted to dissolution. Strive to attain your goal diligently!'

Such were the last words of the Tathagata.

Then, in truth, the Blessed One entered the first meditation. Leaving the first meditation, he entered the second meditation . . . the third meditation . . . the fourth meditation . . . the domain of infinite space . . . the domain of infinite awareness . . . the domain of extinction . . . the domain where there is neither perception nor the absence of perception . . . the cessation of sensations and perceptions.

Then the Venerable Ananda asked the Venerable Anuruddha:

'O Venerable Anuruddha, is the Blessed One completely extinguished?'

'No, Friend. Ananda, the Blessed One is not completely extinguished. He has attained the cessation of sensations and perceptions.'

Thus, the Blessed One, having left the meditation of the cessation of sensations and perceptions, entered the domain without perception or absence of perception . . . the domain of extinction . . . the domain of the infinity of awareness . . . the domain of infinite space . . . the fourth meditation, the third meditation, the second meditation, the first meditation. Having left the first meditation, he entered the second meditation.. . the third meditation...the fourth meditation.. .Immediately after he left the fourth meditation, the Blessed One was completely extinguished.

As soon as the Blessed One was completely extinguished, there occurred a great trembling of the earth, terrifying and horrible, and the thunder of the divine drums burst forth.



It is, O monks, a realm where there is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor wind; it is not the realm of infinite space, nor that of infinite consciousness, nor the realm of nothingness, nor a realm without perception or the absence of perception, nor this world or the other, nor sun or moon. I speak of the realm as neither leaving nor coming nor continuing, death or rebirth, because it has no cause, no progression and no support: it is the end of suffering.

Udana, VIII, I

CHAPTER TWO



THE FOUNDATIONS OF BUDDHISM

SUFFERING

In spite of the limitations of language, the Buddha transmitted to us a teaching on the plane of relative truth that goes right to the heart of the greatest human problem -suffering and its ending. In his teaching, he has deliberately rejected every unrelated question and focused himself entirely on the realization of the goal.

The point of departure of Buddhist thought is a simple assertion: the suffering of man. If the suffering of humanity appears to all men with a more or less great intensity, the interior and fundamental suffering of each man is only visible to those rare minds who are free of it. Despite this, man still continues his pursuit of a utopic happiness.

The Buddha taught: 'It is difficult to shoot arrow after arrow into a narrow keyhole located a long distance away and not to miss the target a single time. It is still more difficult to pull and pierce a fragment of hair split one hundred times with the point of a piece of hair split in the same way. It is still more difficult to penetrate the truth that all that exists is suffering.'

'All the earthly goals have only one inevitable end: suffering. Acquisitions end in dispersion, constructions in destructions, meetings in separations, birth in death. The body is full of suffering, sensation and perception are full of suffering, activities are full of suffering, and consciousness is full of suffering.'

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

After his Illumination, the Buddha taught the essence of his doctrine in the Deer Park in Benares:

'Lend me your ears, O Monks! The state without death has been found. I will present and reveal this doctrine; in following these precepts, in very little time, in this very life, you will understand the final goal of the holy life, you will realize immortality and remain there.'

1. *What is therefore the holy Truth about Evil?* Birth is evil, decay is evil, sickness is evil, death is evil. To be joined to what one does not like is to suffer. To be separated from what one likes is to suffer. Not to have what one desires is to suffer. In short, all contact with any one of the five *skandhas* implies suffering.
2. *What is therefore the holy Truth about the origin of Evil?* It is this appetite that leads to rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and activity, seeking its pleasure now here and now there; namely, the appetite for sensory experiences, the appetite for perpetuating oneself, and the appetite for extinction.
3. *What is therefore the holy Truth about the cessation of Evil?* It is the total cessation of the

appetite, the act of keeping oneself from it, of renouncing it, of rejecting it, of delivering oneself from it, and of not attaching oneself to it.

4. *What is therefore the holy Truth about the ways that lead to the cessation of Evil?*

It is the Eight-fold Path:

- Correct View,
- Correct Intention,
- Correct Action,
- Correct Speech,
- Correct Livelihood,
- Correct Effort
- Correct Mindfulness,
- Correct Meditation.

THE SELF AND THE FIVE SKANDHAS

In the conclusion of his first of the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha said: 'All contact with any one of the five *skandhas* implies suffering.'

The illusion of Self is a creation of the union of the *skandhas*, or components of Self. It has nothing to do with the realization of absolute truth. Man and the world are illusions that our ignorance alone makes us see as real. In fact, the Self and the phenomena that appear to us as reality are only a dream, an illusion, an echo, a cloud, a reflection, a shadow, a mirage, an hallucination, as it is written in the *Diamond Sutra*. All contact with any one of the components of Self is a sign of ignorance. The play of these aggregates prevent man from realizing the emptiness of his own fundamentally pure nature. Illumination is the fruit of the transcendence of the illusory contacts with the five *skandhas*, which are:

1. Form or materiality, which includes the elements earth, water, fire, air, as well as every form emanating from them, and these from every physical phenomenon.
2. Sensation and the perceptions of the senses.
3. Concepts and all the notions that form the conscious intellect.
4. The tendencies or potentialities of the mind, the thoughts, the creations of the imagination.
5. Conscious knowledge, discrimination and the fact of being conscious of something.

THE SELF

In Buddhism, illumination is the realization of the emptiness of Self. The concept of Self that man hopes to save, to unite with the Divine and to enjoy in Heaven, disappears through successive clarifications in Buddhism. The Buddha devoted himself to curtailing this dream in order to point out to man the necessity of standing on his own in order to find the state without suffering, the state where Self no longer exists:

What I see appears and disappears, and because of its impermanence, brings me suffering, and I cannot be myself.

Now, my body, in its wholeness, appears and disappears without end, and due to its impermanence

brings me suffering. Therefore, the body is not my Self.

Now, I see that not only my body but also my mind, all consciousness, appear and disappear endlessly and due to their impermanence bring me suffering. Therefore, neither the body nor the mind is my Self.

Now, all things recognizable in me and around me appear and disappear, and due to their impermanence suffering occurs. Therefore, nothing recognizable is my Self.¹

Death is only the end of an illusion. However, Buddha spoke of the creation of an astral body. Paracelsus later did in the West: 'From the physical body of the monk departs another body having form and consisting of mind, with all the principal and secondary organs, just as when someone pulls a blade of grass from its casing and then thinks: The casing and the blade of grass are two things. However, I pulled the blade from its casing.'

But does this subtle body remain after death? Here is the response of the Buddha:

With the dissolution of the body, all sensations and with them all consciousness in general, will expire just as if, O disciples, there were a shadow cast by a tree, and a man with an axe and a basket came and cut down the tree at the root; after he cuts it at the root, he would have to unearth the roots and pull them out with the finest rootlets; then he would have to cut the trunk into pieces, to split the pieces into fragments. Next he would have to dry them in the wind and sun, burn them and reduce them to ashes; and these ashes he would have to throw into the wind or to scatter into a river of impetuous torrents. Thus, this shadow cast by the tree would be completely destroyed, such as a palm tree torn from the sun would be annihilated and could no longer be reborn in the future. Likewise, at the dissolution of the body, all sensations and all consciousness will also be completely extinguished.²

The immortality of Self is only another illusion that causes our blindness and suffering.

Does that mean that death is the end of suffering, and that it is nothingness? This is what you find in most texts referring to Buddhism. However, it is an error. Buddhism is not nihilistic. Only the abandonment of Self allows the realization of the state without suffering.

After his Illumination, in the first sermon at Benares, Buddha said: 'You will realize immortality and remain in it.'

THE TWELVE HINDRANCES TO LIBERATION

The law that the Buddhists call the law of Karma is the chain of cause and effect. It is in ending the twelve bonds that the meditator attains Illumination. This law rules the entire universe and, as long as Karma exists, birth is the fruit, the sorrow, and the dependent consequence of it.

In order to abolish birth and suffering, the Buddha went back to its origin and through this inverse way, he pointed out the way of liberation.

The Bonds of Suffering

On ignorance, Karma depends,

On Karma, consciousness depends,

On consciousness, name and form depend,

On name and form, the sense organs depend,

On the six sense organs, contact depends,

On contact, sensation depends,

On sensation, desire depends,

On desire, attachment depends,

On attachment, existence depends,

On existence, birth depends,

On birth, sorrow, old age, lamentations, misery, regret, despair and death depend. Thus, the elements of suffering flow into each other.

Liberation from Suffering

Through the dispersion and cessation of ignorance, Karma ceases,

Through the cessation of Karma, consciousness ceases,

Through the cessation of consciousness, name and form cease,

Through the cessation of name and form, the six sense organs cease,

Through the cessation of the six sense organs, contact ceases,

Through the cessation of contact, sensation ceases,

Through the cessation of sensation, desire ceases,

Through the cessation of desire, attachment ceases,

Through the cessation of attachment, existence ceases,

Through the cessation of existence, birth ceases,

Through the cessation of birth, sorrow, old age, lamentations, misery, despair, griefs and death cease

Thus the entire chain of the aggregates of suffering disappears.

THE DESTRUCTION OF IGNORANCE

Every doctrine of the Buddha, in its practical realization, is attached to the problem of the destruction and cessation of ignorance. With the Noble Path of the Eight-fold Way, the Buddha proposes a precise method of realization: Correct views – Correct speech – Correct action – Correct way of life – Correct effort Correct will – Correct attention – Correct meditation.

Up above Southern clouds whirl.

Down below a pure river ripples,

Between the two the eagle soars.

Herbs of every species mingle.

Dancing trees wave

The bees sing and *Khor-ro-ro*,

The flowers perfume, and *chi-Ii-Ii*,

The birds warble, and *kyru-ru-ru*.

To father, conqueror of the Four Demons

To interpreter Marpa, salute!

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