



An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics

Peter Harvey

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AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHIST ETHICS

This systematic introduction to Buddhist ethics is aimed at anyone interested in Buddhism, including students, scholars and general readers. Peter Harvey is the author of the acclaimed *Introduction to Buddhism* (Cambridge, 1990), and his new book is written in a clear style, assuming no prior knowledge. At the same time it develops a careful, probing analysis of the nature and practical dynamics of Buddhist ethics both in its unifying themes and in the particularities of different Buddhist traditions. The book applies Buddhist ethics to a range of issues of contemporary concern: humanity's relationship with the rest of nature; economics; war and peace; euthanasia; abortion; sexual equality; and homosexuality. Professor Harvey draws on texts of the main Buddhist traditions, and on historical and contemporary accounts of the behaviour of Buddhists, to describe existing Buddhist ethics, to assess different views within it, and to extend its application into new areas.

PETER HARVEY is Professor of Buddhist Studies at the University of Sunderland. Co-founder of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, he was the first Professor specifically of 'Buddhist Studies' in the UK. He also serves on the editorial board of the very successful Internet *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* and that of *Contemporary Studies in Buddhism*.

AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHIST ETHICS

Foundations, Values and Issues

PETER HARVEY

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Not to do any evil,
to cultivate what is wholesome,
to purify one's mind:
this is the teaching of the Buddhas

(Dhammapada, verse 183)

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Abbreviations

Note that below:

Th. = a text of the Pali Canon or later Theravān literature

My. = a Mahāyāna text in Sanskrit, Chinese or Tibetan

- A.* *Aṅguttara.Nikāya* (Th.); (tr. F. L. Woodward and E. M. Hare), *The Book of Gradual Sayings*, 5 vols., London, PTS, 1932–6.
- A. A.* Commentary on *A.*; untranslated.
- AKB.* *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣyam* [of Vasubandhu; a Sarvāstivāda work]; (tr. from Louis de La Vallée Poussin's French translation by Leo M. Pruden, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*), Berkeley, Calif., Asian Humanities Press, 1988–90. References are to chapter and section numbers in original text.
- Asl.* *Atthasālinī* [Buddhaghosa's commentary on *Dhs.*] (Th.); (tr. Pe Maung Tin), *The Expositor*, 2 vols., London, PTS, 1920 and 1921.
- ASP.* *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta* (My.); (tr. L. Jampal), *The Range of the Bodhisattva: A Study of an Early Mahāyānasūtra, Āryasatyakaparivarta*, *Discourse of the Truth Teller*, Columbia University Ph.D. thesis, reproduced on microfiche, Ann Arbor, UMI, 1991 (Tibetan text and translation, with introduction, pp. 1–73). References are to page numbers of the translation.
- Asta.* *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* (My.); (tr. E. Conze), *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines, and its Verse Summary*, Bolinas, Four Seasons Foundation, 1973.
- Bca.* *Bodhi-caryāvatāra* [of Śāntideva] (My.); translations as in: Shantideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhisattvacharyavatara)*, tr. from Tibetan by S. Batchelor, Dharamsala, India, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1979. References to chapter and verse. Other translations are:

- Crosby, K. and Skilton, A., *Śāntideva: The Bodhicaryāvatāra*, World's Classics, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Matics, M. L., *Entering the Path of Enlightenment: The Bodhicaryāvatāra of the Buddhist Poet Śāntideva* (from Sanskrit), London, George Allen & Unwin, 1971.
- BCE Before the Christian era.
- BPS Buddhist Publication Society
- Bv.* *Buddhavaṃsa* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), in *Minor Anthologies*, vol. III, London, PTS, 1975. Also includes translation of *Cp.*
- c.* *circa.*
- CE Christian Era.
- Cp.* *Cariyāpīṭaka* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), in *Minor Anthologies*, vol. III, London, PTS, 1975. Also includes translation of *Bv.*
- D.* *Dīgha Nikāya* (Th.); (tr. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids), *Dialogues of the Buddha*, 3 vols., London, PTS, 1899–1921. Also translated by M. Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, London, Wisdom Publications, 1987, in one volume.
- D. A.* Commentary on *D.*; untranslated.
- Dhp.* *Dhammapāda* (Th.); (tr. Nārada Thera), *The Dhammapāda*, London, John Murray, 1954 (the same translation, accompanied by the Pali text, is also published by the Buddhist Missionary Society, Kuala Lumpur, 1978 – available from Wisdom Publications, London); (tr. Acharya Buddhārakkhita), *The Dhammapāda: The Buddha's Path of Wisdom*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, BPS, 1985. In verse.
- Dhp. A.* *Dhammapāda Commentary* (Th.); (tr. E. W. Burlingame), *Buddhist Legends*, 3 vols., Harvard Oriental Series, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1921; repr. London, PTS, 1979.
- Dhs.* *Dhamma-saṅgaṇī* (Th.); (tr. C. A. F. Rhys Davids), *Buddhist Psychological Ethics*, London, PTS, 1900, 3rd edn, 1974.
- It.* *Itivuttaka* (Th.); (tr. F. L. Woodward), *As it was Said*, in *Minor Anthologies, Part II*, London, PTS, 1935; also tr. J. D. Ireland, *The Itivuttaka: The Buddha's Sayings*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, BPS, 1991.
- Ĵ.* *Ĵātaka with Commentary* (Th.); (tr. by various hands under E. B. Cowell), *The Ĵātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, 6 vols., London, PTS, 1895–1907.
- Khṇ.* *Khuddaka-pāṭha* (Th.); (tr. with its commentary, Bhikkhu Ñānamoli), *Minor Readings and Illustrator*, London, PTS, 1960.
- Khṇ. A.* Buddhaghosa's commentary on *Khṇ.*

- Kvu.* *Kathāvasthu* (Th.); (tr. S. Z. Aung and C. A. F. Rhys Davids), *Points of Controversy*, London, PTS, 1915.
- M.* *Majjhima Nikāya* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), *Middle Length Sayings*, 3 vols., London, PTS, 1954–9. Also tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Boston, Mass., Wisdom, 1995, in one volume.
- M. A.* Commentary on *M.*; untranslated.
- Miln.* *Milindapañha* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), *Milinda's Questions*, 2 vols., London, PTS, 1963 and 1964.
- Miln. T.* Commentary on *Miln.*, untranslated.
- Mvs.* *Mahāvastu* [of the Lokottaravāda school]; (tr. J. J. Jones), *The Mahāvastu, Translated from the Buddhist Sanskrit*, 3 vols., London, PTS, 1949–56.
- Nd. II.* *Cullaniddesa* (Th.); untranslated.
- Ps.* *Paṭisambhidā-magga* (Th.); (tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli), *The Path of Discrimination*, London, PTS, 1982.
- PTS Pali Text Society.
- Pug.* *Puggala-paññatti* (Th.); (tr. B. C. Law), *Designation of Human Types*, London, PTS, 1969.
- Pv.* *Petavatthu* (Th.); (tr. H. S. Gehman), *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part IV* (also includes a translation of *Vv.* by I. B. Horner), London, PTS, 1974. References to chapter and story number.
- RPR.* *Rāja-parikathā-ratnamālā* [of Nāgārjuna] (My.); (tr. J. Hopkins and Lati Rinpoche), *Nagarjuna and the Seventh Dalai Lama, The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1975 (also includes translation of a short text by the Seventh Dalai Lama). Reference is to verse number.
- S.* *Samyutta Nikāya* (Th.); (tr. C. A. F. Rhys Davids and F. L. Woodward), *The Book of Kindred Sayings*, 5 vols., London, PTS, 1917–30.
- S. A.* Commentary on *S.*; untranslated.
- Skt Sanskrit.
- Sn.* *Sutta-nīpāta* (Th.); (tr. K. R. Norman), *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nīpāta) Volume I* (in paperback, *The Rhinoceros Horn and Other Early Buddhist Poems*), London, PTS, 1984; revised translation by Norman, with detailed notes, *The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nīpāta) Volume II*, Oxford, PTS, 1992. Also tr. H. Saddhattissa, *The Sutta-Nīpāta*, London, Curzon Press, 1985. In verse.

- Ss.* *Śikṣā-samuccaya* (My.); (tr. C. Bendall and W. H. D. Rouse, *Śikṣā Samuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine, Compiled by Śāntideva Chiefly from the Early Mahāyāna Sūtras*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1971 (1st edn, 1922). References are to translation pagination.
- Sob.* *Suvarṇa-bhāṣottama Sūtra* (My.); (tr. R. E. Emmerick), *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, London, Luzac & Co., 1970. Reference to Sanskrit pagination, as indicated in Emmerick's translation.
- Taishō* *Taishō Daizōkyō*: Japanese edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, published 1924-9.
- Thag.* *Thera-gāthā* (Th.); (tr. K. R. Norman), *Elders' Verses*, vol. 1, London, PTS, 1969. In verse.
- Thig.* *Therī-gāthā* (Th.); (tr. K. R. Norman), *Elders' Verses*, vol. II, London, PTS, 1971. This translation is also found, with C. A. F. Rhys Davids' 1937 translation of the texts and extracts from the commentary, *Psalms of the Sisters*, in C. A. F. Rhys Davids and K. R. Norman, *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns*, Oxford, PTS, 1989. In verse.
- Thig. A.* Commentary on *Thig.*; (tr. W. Pruitt), *The Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs*, Oxford, PTS, 1998.
- Ud.* *Udāna* (Th.); (tr. F. L. Woodward), *Verses of Uplift*, in *Minor Anthologies Part II*, London, PTS, 1935. Also tr. P. Masefield, *The Udāna*, Oxford, PTS, 1994, and J. D. Ireland, *The Udāna: Inspired Utterances of the Buddha*, Kandy, Sri Lanka, BPS, 1990.
- Ud. A.* Commentary on *Ud.* (tr. P. Masefield), *The Udāna Commentary*, vol. 1, Oxford, PTS, 1994.
- Uss.* *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra* (My.); (tr. Heng-ching Shih), *The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts*, Berkeley, Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, 1994 (translation from Chinese of Taishō, vol. 241034a-1075b, no. 1488). References are to translation pagination.
- Vc.* *Vajracchedikā Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* (My.); (tr. and explained by E. Conze), in *Buddhist Wisdom Books: The Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1958.
- Vibh.* *Vibhaṅga* (Th.); (tr. U. Thittila), *The Book of Analysis*, London, PTS, 1969.
- Vin.* *Vinaya Piṭaka* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), *The Book of the Discipline*, 6 vols., London, PTS, 1938-66. *Vin.* III and IV are translated as *Book of the Discipline*, vols. 1, II and III, and *Vin.* I and II are translated as *Book of the Discipline*, vols. IV and V. Note, also, that in

Horner's translations, the page number of the original Pali text, which appears in bold in the midst of the English, means 'Page *x* ends here.' In all other translations by the PTS, it means 'Page *x* starts here.'

- Vin. A.* Commentary on *Vin.*; untranslated directly into English, but translated from the Chinese translation: Bapat and Hirakawa, 1970.
- Vism.* *Visuddhimagga* [of Buddhaghosa] (Th.); (tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli), *The Path of Purification*, 3rd edn, Kandy, Sri Lanka, BPS, 1975, and 2 vols., Berkeley, Calif., Shambhala, 1976.
- Vv.* *Vimānavatthu* (Th.); (tr. I. B. Horner), *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, Part IV* (also includes a translation of *Pv.* by H. S. Gehman), London, PTS, 1974. References to story number.
- Vv. A.* Commentary on *Vv.*; untranslated.
- WFBR* *World Fellowship of Buddhists Review*.

Most of these works are still in print; reprints have only been mentioned where the publisher differs from the original one. Translations given in this book are not necessarily the same as the cited translations, particularly in the case of translations from Pali. For Theravāda texts, the references are to the volume and page number of the edition of the text by the PTS, or to the verse number for texts in verse. The page numbers of the relevant edition of an original text are generally given in brackets in its translation, or at the top of the page. The volume number of the translation generally corresponds to the volume of the PTS edition of the texts, except for the *Vinaya* (see above).

A note on language and pronunciation

Most of the foreign words in this work are from Pali and Sanskrit, which are closely related languages of ancient India. Pali is the scriptural, liturgical and scholarly language of Southern Buddhism, one of the three main cultural traditions of Buddhism. Sanskrit, or rather ‘Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit’, is the language in which many of the scriptures and scholarly treatises of Mahāyāna Buddhism came to be written in India. Northern and Eastern Buddhism, where the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism predominates, generally use the Tibetan or Chinese translations of these texts. Many works on Buddhism give only Sanskrit versions of words, but this is artificial as Sanskrit is no longer used by Buddhists (except in Nepal), but Pali is still much in use.

This work therefore uses Pali versions of terms for most of early Buddhism, for Southern/Theravāda Buddhism, and when discussing Buddhism in general. Sanskrit versions are used when particularly discussing Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism, for some early schools which also came to use Sanskrit, and when discussing Hinduism. Sanskrit is also used for certain key terms that have come to be known in English: *Nirvāṇa* (Pali *Nibbāna*), *karma* (Pali *kamma*), *Bodhisattva* (Pali *Bodhisatta*) and *Stūpa* (Pali *Thūpa*). In many cases, Pali and Sanskrit terms are spelt the same. Where they are spelt differently, the Pali spelling is the simpler.

Both Pali and Sanskrit have more than twenty-six letters, which means that when they are written in the roman alphabet, the extra letters need to be represented by the use of diacritical marks. Once the specific sounds of the letters are known, Pali and Sanskrit words are then pronounced as they are written, unlike English ones. It is therefore worth taking account of the diacritical marks, as they give a clear guide to pronunciation. The letters are pronounced as follows:

- (i) **a** is short and flat, like the *u* in ‘hut’ or ‘utter’
i is short, like *i* in ‘bit’
u is like *u* in ‘put’, or *oo* in ‘foot’

e is like *e* in ‘bed’, only pronounced long

o is long, like *o* in ‘note’ (or, before more than one consonant, more like *o* in ‘not’ or ‘odd’).

(ii) A bar over a vowel makes it long:

ā is like *a* in ‘barn’

ī is like *ee* in ‘beet’

ū is like *u* in ‘brute’.

(iii) When there is a dot under a letter (**ṭ, ḍ, ṇ, ṣ, ṙ, ḷ**), this means that it is a ‘cerebral’ letter. Imagine a dot on the roof of one’s mouth that one must touch with one’s tongue when saying these letters. This produces a characteristically ‘Indian’ sound. It also makes **ṣ** into a *sh* sound, and **ṙ** into *ri*.

(iv) **ś** is like a normal *sh* sound.

(v) Aspirated consonants (**kh, gh, ch, jh, th, dh, th, dh, ph, bh**) are accompanied by a strong breath-pulse from the chest, as when uttering English consonants very emphatically. For example:

ch is like *ch-h* in ‘church-hall’

th is like *t-h* in ‘hot-house’

ph is like *p-h* in ‘cup-handle’.

When aspirated consonants occur as part of a consonant cluster, the aspiration comes at the end of the cluster.

(vi) **c** is like *ch* in ‘choose’.

(vii) **ñ** is like *ny* in ‘canyon’; **ññ** is like *nnyy*.

(viii) **m̄** is a pure nasal sound, made when the mouth is closed but air escapes through the nose, with the vocal chords vibrating; it approximates to *ng*.

(ix) **ñ** is an *ng*, nasal sound said from the mouth, rather than the nose.

(x) **h̄** is like a normal *h* sound, but followed by a faint echo of the preceding vowel.

(xi) **v** may be somewhat similar to English *v* when at the start of a word, or between vowels, but like *w* when combined with another consonant.

(xii) Double consonants are always pronounced long: for example *nm* is as in ‘unnecessary’.

All other letters are pronounced as in English.

ō is used to denote a long *o* in Japanese (as in ‘note’, rather than ‘not’). For Tibetan words, this book gives a form which indicates the pronunciation, followed by the Wylie form of writing Tibetan in roman script, which includes unpronounced letters.

Introduction

Buddhist ethics as a field of academic study in the West is not new, but in recent years has experienced a considerable expansion, as seen, for example, in the very successful Internet *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. The schools of Buddhism have rich traditions of thought on ethics, though this is often scattered through a variety of works which also deal with other topics. This book aims to be an integrative over-view of ethics in the different Buddhist traditions, showing the strong continuities as well as divergencies between them. It seeks to do this in a way that addresses issues which are currently of concern in Western thought on ethics and society, so as to clarify the Buddhist perspective(s) on these and make Buddhist ethics more easily available to Western thinkers on these issues. In exploring Buddhist ethics, this work aims to look at what the scriptures and key thinkers have said as well as at how things work out in practice among Buddhists, whose adherence may be at various levels, and who naturally operate in a world in which their religion is only one of the factors that affect their behaviour. Even when Buddhists fall short of their ethical ideals, the way that they tend to do so itself tells one something about the way the religion functions as a living system.

Chapters 1–3 prepare the way for looking at ethical issues by exploring the framework of Buddhist ethics in terms of the foundations of ethics in Buddhism's world-view(s), and the key values which arise from this. While the ethical guidelines of different religions and philosophies have much in common, each is based on a certain view of the world and of human beings' place in it. Such a world-view gives particular emphases to the related ethical system, gives it a particular kind of rationale, and provides particular forms of motivation for acting in accord with it. A religion is more than beliefs and ethics, though, so its ethics also need to be understood in the context of its full range of practices.

The term ‘ethics’ is used in this work to cover:

- (1) thought on the bases and justification of moral guidelines (normative ethics), and on the meaning of moral terms (meta-ethics);
- (2) specific moral guidelines (applied ethics);
- (3) how people actually behave (descriptive ethics).

David Little and Sumner Twiss, in their work on comparative religious ethics, have defined a ‘moral’ statement as one which addresses problems of co-operation among humans. It gives an ‘action-guide’ for individuals and groups so as to initiate, preserve or extend some form of co-operation, by guiding actions, character, emotions, attitudes etc. that impinge on this. Morality is ‘other-regarding’: focused on the effect of our actions etc. on others (1978: 28–9). While this is a reasonable view, it is an incomplete one for Buddhist morality, as this is also concerned with the quality of our interactions with non-human sentient beings too.

Moral ‘action-guides’ demand attention, though they sometimes conflict with each other – should one protect someone by lying to someone else? – and may conflict with religious action-guides, such as in the story of Abraham and the burning bush, where he is prepared to kill his son through faith in God. Actions done for purely prudential reasons – I do not want to go to jail, or to hell – are not really done from *ethical* considerations, though they may help form behavioural traits that are supportive of moral development. Religions sometimes use prudential considerations, for example karmic results, to help *motivate* actions benefiting others, without *justifying/validating* such actions on prudential, non-moral grounds. Broadly, religious-based ethical systems support ethics by motivating and justifying positive other-regarding actions and discouraging actions harmful to others, and strengthening the character-traits which foster moral action.

Little and Twiss regard a ‘religious’ statement as one that expresses acceptance of a set of beliefs, attitudes and practices based on a notion of a sacred source of values and guidance, that functions to resolve the ‘ontological problems of interpretability’ (1978: 56). That is, religion is focused on making sense of life, including suffering, death and evil, so as to help people understand, and resolve, the human predicament. Morality and ethics can exist apart from religion, for example in humanism or utilitarianism, or ethics can be integrated into a religious system. The same prescription, for example ‘do not kill’, may be justified by a purely ethical reason, for example this has a bad effect on the welfare of others, or a purely religious one, for example it is forbidden by God, or a mixture, for example it is forbidden by God because it harms others.

In a Buddhist context, the effect of actions on the welfare of others is itself a key consideration, as is the effect of an action on spiritual progress, and what the Buddha is seen as having said on it. Religions often move imperceptibly from ethical concerns, relating to material welfare of others, to more 'spiritual' ones such as self-discipline and renunciation, though these may, in turn, have ethical spin-offs.

The history of Buddhism spans almost 2,500 years from its origin in India with Siddhattha Gotama (Pali; Siddhārtha Gautama in Sanskrit; c. 480–400 BCE), through its spread to most parts of Asia and, in the twentieth century, to the West. While its fortunes have waxed and waned over the ages, over half of the present world population live in areas where Buddhism is, or has been, a dominant cultural force.

The English term 'Buddhism' correctly indicates that the religion is characterized by a devotion to 'the Buddha', 'Buddhas' or 'Buddhahood'. 'Buddha' is not, in fact, a proper name, but a descriptive title meaning 'Awakened One' or 'Enlightened One'. This implies that most people are seen, in a spiritual sense, as being asleep – unaware of how things really are. In addition to 'the Buddha' – i.e. the historical Buddha, Gotama, from its earliest times the Buddhist tradition has postulated other Buddhas who have lived on earth in distant past ages, or who will do so in the future. The Mahāyāna tradition also postulated the existence of many Buddhas currently existing in other parts of the universe. All such Buddhas, known as *sammā-sambuddhas* (Pali; Skt *samyak-sambuddhas*), or 'perfect fully Awakened Ones', are nevertheless seen as occurring only rarely within the vast and ancient cosmos. More common are those who are 'buddhas' in a lesser sense, who have awakened to the truth by practising in accordance with the guidance of a perfect Buddha such as Gotama.

In its long history, Buddhism has used a variety of teachings and means to help people first develop a calmer, more integrated and compassionate personality, and then 'wake up' from restricting delusions: delusions which cause attachment and thus suffering for an individual and those he or she interacts with. The guide for this process of transformation has been the *Dhamma* (Pali; Skt *Dharma*). This means the eternal truths and cosmic law-orderliness discovered by the Buddha(s), Buddhist teachings, the Buddhist path of practice, and the goal of Buddhism, the timeless *Nirvāṇa* (Skt; Pali *Nibbāna*). Buddhism thus essentially consists of understanding, practising and realizing *Dhamma*.

The most important bearers of the Buddhist tradition have been the monks and nuns who make up the Buddhist *Saṅgha* (Pali; Skt *Samgha*):

‘Community’ or ‘Order’. From approximately a hundred years after the death of Gotama, certain differences arose in the *Saṅgha*, which gradually led to the development of a number of monastic fraternities, each following a slightly different monastic code (*Vinaya*), and to different schools of thought. All branches of the *Saṅgha* trace their ordination-line back to one or other of the early fraternities; but of the early schools of thought, only that which became known as the Theravāda has continued to this day. Its name indicates that it purports to follow the ‘teaching’ which is ‘ancient’ or ‘primordial’ (*thera*): that is, the Buddha’s teaching. While it has not remained static, it has kept close to what we know of the early teachings of Buddhism, and preserved their emphasis on attaining liberation by one’s own efforts, using the *Dhamma* as guide.

Around the beginning of the Christian era, a movement began which led to a new style of Buddhism known as the Mahāyāna, or ‘Great Vehicle’. This has been more overtly innovative, so that for many centuries, Indian Mahāyānists continued to compose new scriptures. The Mahāyāna is characterized, on the one hand, by devotion to a number of holy saviour beings, and on the other by several sophisticated philosophies, developed by extending the implications of the earlier teachings. The saviour beings are both heavenly Buddhas and heavenly *Bodhisattvas* (Skt; Pali *Bodhisatta*), ‘beings for enlightenment’ who are near the end of the long *Bodhisattva* path – much elaborated and emphasized by the Mahāyāna – that leads to Buddhahood. In the course of time, in India and beyond, the Mahāyāna produced many schools of its own, such as Zen.

Our knowledge of the teachings of the Buddha is based on several canons of scripture, which derive from the early *Saṅgha*’s oral transmission of bodies of teachings agreed on at several councils. These canons gradually diverged as different floating oral traditions were drawn on, and systematizing texts peculiar to each school were added. The Theravādin ‘Pali Canon’, preserved in the Pali language, is the most complete extant early canon, and contains some of the earliest material. Most of its teachings are in fact the common property of all Buddhist schools, being simply the teachings which the Theravādins preserved from the early common stock. The Mahāyāna, though, added much to this stock. While parts of the Pali Canon clearly originated after the time of the Buddha, much must derive from his teachings. There is an overall harmony to the Canon, suggesting ‘authorship’ of its system of thought by one mind.

The early canons contain a section on *Vinaya*, or monastic discipline, and one on *Suttas* (Pali; Skt *Sūtras*), or ‘discourses’ of the Buddha, and some contain one on *Abhidhamma* (Pali; Skt *Abhidharma*), or ‘further teachings’, which systematizes the *Sutta*-teachings in the form of detailed analyses of human experience. The main teachings of Buddhism are contained in the *Suttas*, which in the Pali Canon are divided into five *Nikāyas* or ‘Collections’, the first four (D., M., S., A.; sixteen volumes) generally being the older. The Pali Canon was one of the earliest to be written down, in Sri Lanka in around 80 BCE, after which little, if any, new material was added to it. The extensive non-canonical Pali literature includes additional *Abhidhamma* works, historical chronicles, and many volumes of commentaries. An extremely clear introduction to many points of Buddhist doctrine is the *Milindapañha* (*Miln.*), a first-century CE text which purports to record conversations between a Buddhist monk and Milinda (Menander; c. 155–130 BCE), a king of Greek ancestry.

Mahāyāna texts were composed from around the first century BCE, originating as written works in a hybrid form of the Indian prestige language, Sanskrit, rather than as oral compositions. While many are *Sūtras* attributed to the Buddha, their form and content clearly show that they were later restatements and extensions of the Buddha’s message. The main sources for our understanding of Mahāyāna teachings are the very extensive Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist Canons. While most of the Pali Canon has been translated into English, only selected texts from these have been translated into Western languages, though much progress is being made.

Of the above sources, *Vinaya* (*Vin.*) texts often include material relevant to ethics, both in the form of specific rules for monks and nuns and in the reasons given for these and mitigating factors for offences against them. Ethical material is scattered throughout the Theravāda *Suttas* and Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, with some particularly focusing on ethical matters. The *Abhidhamma* literature contains material on the psychology of ethics, and the commentaries of all traditions contain useful explications of moral points in the scriptures as well as stories with a moral message. One sees this particularly in the commentary to the *Jātakas*, which expands on canonical verses about past lives of the Buddha to develop morality tales.

All traditions also have treatises by named authors which include ethical material. Of these, the following are particularly of note. In the Theravāda tradition, Buddhaghosa (fifth century CE) wrote the

Visuddhimagga (*Vism.*), whose ninth chapter contains some excellent material on lovingkindness and compassion. He also compiled many commentaries, which are often treatises in their own right. In the Sarvāstivāda tradition, an early school which has died out, is the compendious *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣyam* (*AKB.*) of Vasubandhu (fourth century CE), which influenced the Mahāyāna tradition. In the Mahāyāna tradition, the poet Śāntideva (seventh century CE) produced both the *Bodhi-caryāvatāra* (*Bca.*), an outline of the *Bodhisattva*-path with some inspiring material on compassion and patience, and the *Śikṣā-samuccaya* (*Ss.*), a compendium of quotations from Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, often on ethical themes. Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250 CE) wrote the *Rāja-parīkathā-ratnamālā* (*RPR.*) as advice to a king on how to rule compassionately, and Asaṅga (fourth or fifth century CE), in his *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, gives material on the ethics of the *Bodhisattva* (Tatz, 1986). Of course, contemporary Buddhists in Asia are also involved in ethical thought, action and innovation, as will be seen in the course of this book, and Buddhists in the West, whose numbers have grown steadily since the 1960s, are also participating in this process.

In reading Buddhist texts, stylistic features peculiar to them become apparent. The *Suttas* contain chunks of material which are repeated several times in a story or analysis, as they originated as oral literature which found this mode of composition congenial. They also contain many numbered lists, such as the Four Noble Truths, the five hindrances, and the seven factors of awakening. These aided the memorizing of oral material as well as reflecting what seems to have been the Buddha's very analytical turn of mind, breaking things down into their components. While he sometimes explicitly showed how these factors then related to each other and to the purpose for which the list was made, this is sometimes only implicit, and has to be teased out.

While Buddhism is now only a minority religion within the borders of modern India, its spread beyond India means that it is currently found in three main cultural areas. These are those of: 'Southern Buddhism', where the Theravāda school is found, along with some elements incorporated from the Mahāyāna; 'Eastern Buddhism', where the Chinese transmission of Mahāyāna Buddhism is found, and the area of Tibetan culture, 'Northern Buddhism', which is the heir of late Indian Buddhism where the tantric or Mantrayāna version of the Mahāyāna is the dominant form. In recent years, it has become possible to start talking about 'Western' Buddhism, too, but this as yet has no overall cultural cohesion, as it is drawing on all the Asian Buddhist traditions, as well as innovating in certain ways.

The main countries of Southern Buddhism are Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand, along with Cambodia and Laos, where religion has suffered because of wars and Communism in recent decades. Northern Buddhism is found mainly in Tibet, now absorbed into the People's Republic of China, among Tibetan and Mongol people in the rest of north-west China, in Mongolia – recently free of Communism – in the small kingdom of Bhutan, alongside Hinduism in Nepal, and among Tibetan exiles living in India. Eastern Buddhism is mainly found in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and Singapore, as well as in Communist China, Vietnam and North Korea. The world's Buddhist population (excluding Western and Asian Buddhists in the West) is roughly 495 million: 105 million Buddhists of the Southern tradition, 25 million of the Northern tradition, and perhaps 365 of the Eastern tradition, though it is difficult to give a figure for the number of 'Buddhists' of this tradition, particularly China, on account of traditional multi-religion allegiance and the current dominance of Communism in the People's Republic of China.

Buddhism's concentration on the essentials of spiritual development has meant that it has been able to co-exist with both other major religions and popular folk traditions which catered for people's desire for a variety of rituals. There has hardly ever been a 'wholly' Buddhist society, if this means a kind of religious one-party state. In the lands of Eastern Buddhism, Buddhism has co-existed with Confucianism, a semi-religious system of social philosophy which has had a strong influence on people's ethics in this area. Buddhism has been very good at adapting to different cultures while guarding its own somewhat fluid borders by a critical tolerance of other traditions. Its style has been to offer invitations to a number of levels of spiritual practice for those who have been ready to commit themselves.

CHAPTER I

The shared foundations of Buddhist ethics

Life is dear to all. Comparing others with oneself, one should neither kill nor cause to kill. Whoever, seeking his own happiness, harms . . . beings, he gets no happiness hereafter. *Dhammapada* 130–1

Fundamental features of Buddhism's world-view relevant to ethics are the framework of karma and rebirth, accepted by all schools of Buddhism, with varying degrees of emphasis, and the Four Noble Truths, the highest teachings of early Buddhism and of the Theravāda school. In the Mahāyāna tradition, an increasing emphasis on compassion modified the earlier shared perspective in certain ways, as will be explored in chapter 3.

SOURCES OF GUIDANCE TO BUDDHISTS

In ethics as in other matters, Buddhists have three key sources of inspiration and guidance: the 'three treasures' or 'three refuges': the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha*. The Buddha is revered as (1) the 'rediscoverer' and teacher of liberating truths and (2) the embodiment of liberating qualities to be developed by others. In addition, in the Mahāyāna, heavenly Buddhas are looked to as contemporary sources of teaching and help. The *Dhamma* is the teachings of the Buddhas, the path to the Buddhist goal, and the various levels of realizations of this goal. The *Saṅgha* is the 'Community' of Noble Ones (Pali *ariyas*; Skt *āryas*): advanced practitioners who have experienced something of this goal, being symbolized, on a more day-to-day level, by the Buddhist monastic *Saṅgha* (Harvey, 1990a: 176–9).

The *Dhamma*, in the sense of teachings attributed to the Buddha(s), is contained in voluminous texts preserved and studied by the monastic *Saṅgha*. The advice and guidance that monks and nuns offer to the laity are based on these texts, on their own experience of practising the Buddhist path, and on the oral and written tradition from earlier generations of monastics and, sometimes, lay practitioners. Lay people are under no strict *obligation* to do what monks or nuns advise, but rather *respect* for their qualities and way of life is the factor that will influence

them, depending on the degree of the lay person's own devotion to the Buddhist way.

A common source of material for popular sermons is the *Jātaka* collection, containing stories which purport to be of the previous lives of Gotama when he was a *Bodhisattva* (see Jones, 1979). They occur in the canonical collections of all the early schools, became popular subjects for Buddhist art by the third century BCE, and were also taken up in the Mahāyāna. The stories often function as morality tales, being full of heroes, heroines and villains. The form of a *Jātaka* is a prologue purporting to be about events in the Buddha's day, the story itself, about a past time, and then a brief epilogue which identifies the Buddha with the hero of the story, and certain disciples or relatives with others in it. In the stories of the past, Gotama is mostly human, but sometimes a god and sometimes a (talking) animal. In the case of the Theravādin *Jātaka* collection of 547 stories (see *J.*), the form in which we now have them consists of some verses, seen as canonical, set in a lengthy prose frame, which was compiled by a later commentator, probably in Sri Lanka. Many stories are also found in the commentary on the *Dhammapada* (*Dhp. A.*), dating from fifth-century CE Sri Lanka, which gives around fifty *Jātakas*, plus other stories set at the time of the Buddha.

As regards the order of priority among sources relevant to resolving points of monastic discipline – and by extension, one could say matters relevant to lay ethical discipline – the fifth-century Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa gives:

- (1) scripture in the form of *Vinaya*, but it could be seen more widely for non-monastic matters;
- (2) that which is 'in conformity with scripture';
- (3) the commentarial tradition (*ācariyavāda*);
- (4) personal opinion (*attanomati*), based on logic, intuition and inference independent of (1)–(3), but whose conclusions should be checked against them (*Vin. A.* 230).

Here Damien Keown comments that conscience is not irrelevant, but scripture is 'a check that one's own moral conscience is calibrated correctly', and that 'it is not the text itself that is important, but the fact that it is "in conformity with the nature of things"' (1995a: 16). Nevertheless, less scholastic monks than Buddhaghosa might put more emphasis on the living oral tradition and meditation-based insights. Mahāyānists would also take 'scripture' to include Mahāyāna texts not acceptable as authoritative to Buddhaghosa.

The teachings attributed to the Buddha(s) are seen as an authoritative

guide to the nature of reality and the best way to live, based on the vast, meditation-based knowledge of such spiritually ‘awakened’ beings. Such teachings are not to be simply *accepted*, though, but used, investigated and, as far as is possible for a particular individual, *confirmed* in experience. This emphasis on testing out the teachings is seen in the well-known *Kālāma Sutta* (*A.* 1.188–93). Here, the Buddha advises the Kālāma people not to accept teachings simply through tradition, speculative reasoning, personal preferences, what one thinks *should* be true, or respect for a particular teacher. Rather:

When you, O Kālāmas, know for yourselves: ‘these states are unwholesome and blameworthy, they are condemned by the wise; these states, when accomplished and undertaken, conduce to harm and suffering’, then indeed you should reject them. (p. 189)

Accordingly, the Buddha then gets them to agree that greed, hatred and delusion (*lobha*, *dosa* (Pali; Skt *dveṣa*), *moha*) are each states which are harmful to a person when they arise. Being overcome by any of them, he or she kills, steals, commits adultery, lies, and leads others to do likewise, so that he or she suffers for a long time (on account of the karmic results of his or her actions, in this life or beyond). The Kālāmas are then led to agree that the arising of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion is beneficial, without such bad consequent actions and results. Accordingly, these states can be seen to be wholesome, unblameworthy, praised by the wise and conducive to happiness, so that the Kālāmas should ‘undertake and abide in them’.

Here, personal experience, checked out by reference to the guidance of wise people, is taken as the crucial test of what mental states, and consequent behaviour, to avoid or indulge in. Using this criterion is seen to put a high value on states of mind which are the opposite of greed, hatred and deluded unclarity or misorientation, for they can be seen to conduce to happiness rather than suffering. Moreover, it is suggested that people are trustworthy guides to the extent that they are free of greed etc., as seen in a passage on how there can be a reliable ‘awakening to truth’ (*M.* 11.171–6). A lay person first assesses a monk for the presence of states of greed, hatred or delusion, which might lead to lying or bad spiritual advice. If he sees that the monk’s mind is purified of these, he reposes trustful confidence (*saddhā*) in him. A series of activities then follows, each being ‘of service’ to the next: ‘approaching’, ‘drawing close’, ‘lending ear’, ‘hearing *Dhamma*’, ‘remembering *Dhamma*’, ‘testing the meaning’, ‘reflection on and approval of *Dhamma*’, ‘desire-to-do’,

‘making an effort’, ‘weighing up’, ‘striving’; and finally, ‘he realizes, with his person, the highest truth itself; and penetrating it by wisdom, he sees’. Thus there is a progression from trust in one who has overcome greed, hatred and delusion to the development of insight which itself destroys these in the practitioner.

Ethical behaviour is seen as greatly aided by formally undertaking to follow specific ethical precepts, done by reciting or chanting them, whether by oneself or after a monk, who is then seen as ‘administering’ these precepts to one (see chapter 2). Such acts are seen to set up beneficial tendencies in the mind, and to support the sense of letting oneself and others down if one then breaks a precept one has undertaken to follow. Accordingly, the great Mahāyāna writer Asaṅga said that the essence of ethics is ‘To correctly receive it from someone, to have a quite purified intention, to make correction after failure, and to avoid failure by generating respect and remaining mindful after that’ (Tatz, 1986: 47).

The role of ‘conscience’, in Buddhism, is performed by a small group of qualities, starting with *hiri* (Pali – or *hirī*, which is also the Skt form) and *ottappa* (Pali; Skt *apatrapya*), seen as the immediate cause of virtue and as two ‘bright states which guard the world’ (*A.* 1.51). *Hiri* is ‘self-respect’, which causes one to seek to avoid any action which one feels is not worthy of oneself and lowers one’s moral integrity. *Ottappa* is ‘regard for consequences’, being stimulated by concern over reproach and blame for an action (whether from oneself or others), embarrassment before others (especially those one respects), legal punishment or the karmic results of an action (*Asl.* 124–7). Heedfulness (Pali *appamāda*; Skt *apramādyā*), a combination of energy (Pali *virīya*; Skt *vīrya*) and mindfulness (Pali *sati*; Skt *smṛti*) (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 51), is also said to be the basis of all virtues (*S.* v.44). Mindfulness is alert presence of mind, cultivated strongly in meditation practice, which enables one to be more aware of one’s mental states, including intentions and motives. It is complemented by ‘clear comprehension’ (Pali *sampajañña*; Skt *sampajānya*), which acts to guide one’s actual behaviour to be in harmony with one’s ideals and goals.

REBIRTH AND KARMA

In Buddhism, ‘right view’ (Pali *sammā-ditṭhi*; Skt *samyak-dṛṣṭi*) is seen as the foundation of moral and spiritual development. While this begins in the form of correct belief, it can go on to become direct personal knowledge. As outlined at *M.* III.72, preliminary ‘right view’ is the belief that:

- (1) 'there is gift, there is offering, there is (self-) sacrifice': these are worthwhile;
- (2) 'there is fruit and ripening of deeds well done or ill done': what one does *matters* and has an effect on one's future;
- (3) 'there is this world, there is a world beyond': this world is not unreal, and one goes on to another world after death;
- (4) 'there is mother and father': it is good to respect parents, who establish one in this world;
- (5) 'there are spontaneously arising beings': some of the worlds one can be reborn in (for example some heavens) are populated by beings that come into existence without parents;
- (6) 'there are in this world renunciants and brahmins¹ who are faring rightly, practising rightly, and who proclaim this world and the world beyond having realized them by their own super-knowledge': spiritual development is a real possibility, actualized by some people, and it can lead, in the profound calm of deep meditation, to memory of past rebirths in a variety of worlds, and awareness of how others are reborn in such worlds.

The realms of rebirth

In Buddhism, one's present life is seen as one of a countless number of lives stretching back into the past, with no discernible beginning to the series. Such lives take various forms. They may be relatively pleasant, as in the case of rebirth as a human or in one of the many heaven worlds (for example Law, 1973). They may be unpleasant, though, as in the case of rebirth as some kind of animal, as a 'departed one' (Pali *peta*; Skt *preta*; *Khp.* 6) in the form of a frustrated ghostly being, or in one of a number of hells, where life is like an extended nightmare of intense suffering (*M.* III.165–7, 183–7) with feelings that are 'exclusively painful, sharp, severe' (*M.* I.74–6).² The Mahāyāna poet Śāntideva, for example, cites the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* as describing murderers being eaten alive by birds in hell, 'But each time he is devoured, so each time he is reborn more sensitive than before' (*Ss.* 75–6).

None of these realms lasts for ever, though, for all end in death and

¹ 'Renunciants' refers to Buddhist or Jain monks and nuns, or other ascetics, 'brahmins' to the most-respected people in the pre-Buddhist Brahmanical religion, an early form of Hinduism.

² Some passages also refer to *asuras* or jealous gods. The Sarvāstivādins saw them as a sixth, and lowest rebirth (McDermott, 1984: 5). The Theravādins, though, saw them as belonging to either the ghost-realm or heaven-realms, depending on their type (*Kūu.* 360).



Plate 1. The Tibetan 'Wheel of Life'. At its hub, a cock, snake and pig symbolize greed, hatred and delusion, which keep beings within the round of rebirths. Around the hub is a disk showing beings rising to better rebirths and falling to worse ones. The main sections show the realms of rebirth: going clockwise, those of humans, ghosts, hell-beings, animals and gods. Around the rim, the twelve links of Conditioned Arising (see p. 33) are shown. The wheel is held by a being who symbolises death, indicating that all rebirths end in death. The Buddha points beyond the wheel of rebirths to *Nirvāṇa*.

then (for the unenlightened), another rebirth (Harvey, 1990a: 32–7). Thus even life in the hells, though long lasting, is not eternal. This means that there is hope even for Adolf Hitler: at some time in the far far distant future, he might even become enlightened! – *if* he were to strive to develop moral and spiritual perfection. At the other end of the scale, the life-span in the many heaven worlds varies from 9 million human years (but only 500 ‘divine years’!) up to 84,000 aeons, an aeon being a huge time-span (*Vibh.* 422–7). And yet even the gods die, to be reborn and die again.

The Buddhist perspective on the cycle of rebirths is that it is not a pleasant affair, but that all unenlightened people are reborn whether they like it or not, and whether they believe in rebirth or not. The process of life and rebirth is not seen to have any inherent purpose; for it was not designed and created by any being. Thus it is known as *samsāra*, or ‘wandering on’ from life to life. Thus the only sensible aim, for one who understands *samsāra* to some extent, is to strive, firstly, to avoid its more unpleasant realms, and ultimately to transcend it altogether, by attaining *Nirvāṇa* (Skt; Pali *Nibbāna*), and to help others to do so. Most Buddhists therefore aim to attain a heavenly or a human rebirth, with *Nirvāṇa* as the long-term goal. Buddhist heavens, then, are *this* side of salvation; for *Nirvāṇa* is beyond the limitations of both earthly and heavenly existence.

Within the round of rebirths, worlds belong to one of three broad categories. The ‘realm of sense-desire’ comprises the worlds of hells, ghosts, animals, humans and the six lowest heavens. In all these, beings’ likes and dislikes dominate and distort their perception of the world. The ‘realm of (elemental) form’ comprises sixteen heavens, paralleling deep states of meditative calm, which are progressively more subtle and refined, and where various sorts of *brahmā* deities live. Their perception is not distorted by sense-desire, but they have faults such as pride. The ‘formless realm’ consists of four extremely subtle realms which, being devoid of *anything* visible, tangible etc., are purely mental.

Karma and its effects

The movement of beings between rebirths is not seen as a haphazard process, but as ordered and governed by the law of karma. Karma (Pali *kamma*) literally means ‘action’, and the principle of the ‘law of karma’ is that beings are reborn according to the nature and quality of their

actions. Past actions are said to ‘welcome’ one in a future life like a person being welcomed by kinsmen (*Dhp.* 219–20), so that:

Deeds are one’s own . . . beings are heir to deeds, deeds are matrix, deeds are kin, deeds are arbiters. Deeds divide beings, that is to say by lowness and excellence. (*M.* III.203)

This is explained as referring to the karmic effect of various actions. A person’s actions mould their consciousness, making them into a certain kind of person, so that when they die their outer form tends to correspond to the type of nature that has been developed. What begins as a trace in the psyche later crystallizes out as an aspect of a person and their world.

Prior to the time of the Buddha, the basic idea of karma and rebirth had been expressed in the Brahmanical (early Hindu) compositions known as *Upaniṣads*. Here, though, there was as much emphasis on karmas/actions being *ritually* right as on their being *ethically* right. In Buddhism, though, the emphasis is strongly on the ethical aspect of action as the relevant factor in causing karmic results.

It is said that acts of hatred and violence tend to lead to rebirth in a hell, acts bound up with delusion and confusion tend to lead to rebirth as an animal, and acts of greed tend to lead to rebirth as a ghost. It is also said that ‘By constantly committing evil deeds we are reborn in hell, by doing many we become spirits [i.e. ghosts], and when we do only a few we are reborn as an animal’ (Guenther, 1959: 79). Rebirth in a hell is also seen as particularly due to both doing evil actions and encouraging others to do them, by approving of and praising such actions. Abstaining from evil actions and encouraging others to do so leads to a heavenly rebirth (*A.* v.306–8). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is also held that obstructing a *Bodhisattva* – a heroic, compassionate being – in a good deed has terrible karmic consequences, for it hinders the welfare of many beings (*Bca.* IV.9).

Actions can also lead to karmic fruits in a human life. This might be the present life, or a future human life, be this one’s next life, or one that comes after one or more other types of rebirth. In textual descriptions of such fruits, one sees that they reflect back on a person something which is particularly appropriate to the nature of the relevant action. In the present life, killing or harming living beings conduces to being short-lived; stealing to loss of wealth; sensual misconduct to rivalry and hatred from others; lying to having to eat one’s false words; backbiting to the

break-up of friendships; harsh words to having to listen to unpleasant sounds; frivolous chatter to unacceptable, ineffective speech; intoxication to madness (*A.* iv.247–8). As regards the fruits of actions in a future human life: mercilessly killing and injuring living beings leads to being short-lived; striking living beings lead to being often ill; being easily angered leads to being ugly; being jealous and spiteful leads to being of no account; being stingy leads to being poor; being haughty and disrespectful leads to being of a lowly family; and not asking about what is morally wholesome and unwholesome leads to being weak in wisdom. The opposite good actions lead to a heavenly rebirth or the opposite kinds of human life.³ Poor, ill or ugly people are not to be presently blamed for their condition, however, for the actions of a past life are behind them, and the important thing is how they behave in the present and how others act towards them.

Living an ethical life is variously said to lead to: wealth, through diligence; a good reputation; joyful recollection of moral purity; self-confidence in all types of company, without fear of reproach or punishment; easier progress in meditation; dying without anxiety, and rebirth in a heaven world.⁴ It is said that to develop generosity and moral virtue to a small degree leads to rebirth as a human of ill fortune; to develop them to a medium degree leads to being a human of good fortune; to develop them to a high degree leads to rebirth in one of the six sense-desire realm heavens. To reach the heavens of the (elemental) form realm requires meditation, which leads to the attainment of one or other *jhāna*, lucid trances which ‘tune’ the mind to this level of existence (*A.* iv.241–3). The different affiliations of unwholesome and wholesome impulses is nicely expressed by Śāntideva thus:

‘If I give this, what shall I (have left to) enjoy?’ – such selfish thinking is the way of ghosts; ‘If I enjoy this, what shall I (have left to) give?’ – such selfless thinking is the quality of the gods. (*Bca.* viii.125)

The status and working of the law of karma

The law of karma is seen as a natural law inherent in the nature of things, like a law of physics. It is not operated by a God, and indeed the gods are themselves under its sway. Good and bad rebirths are not, therefore, seen as ‘rewards’ and ‘punishments’, but as simply the natural results of certain kinds of action. Karma is often likened to a seed, and

³ *M.* iii.203–6; cf. *Mih.* 65, *Uss.* 74–6 and *ASP.* 169–72.

⁴ *D.* ii.86; *M.* iii.170–1; *M.* 1.33.

the two words for a karmic result, *vipāka* and *phala*, respectively mean 'ripening' and 'fruit'. An action is thus like a seed which will sooner or later, as part of a natural maturation process, result in certain fruits arising to the doer of the action.

What determines the nature of a karmic 'seed' is the will behind an act: 'It is will (*cetanā*), O monks, that I call karma; having willed, one acts through body, speech or mind' (*A.* III.415). *Cetanā* encompasses the motive for which an action is done, its immediate intention (directed at a specific objective, as part of fulfilling a motive), and the immediate mental impulse which sets it going and sustains it (Keown, 1992: 213–18). 'Karma' is the overall psychological impulse behind an action, that which sets going a chain of causes culminating in a karmic fruit. Actions, then, must be intentional if they are to generate karmic fruits: accidentally treading on an insect does not have such an effect, as the Jains believed.

Nevertheless, thinking of doing some bad action is a bad mental action (karma), especially when one gives energy to such a thought, for example by jealousy or anger, rather than just letting it pass. Deliberately putting such a thought down is a good mental karma. The mind is thus seen as constantly generating good and bad karma – whether mild or heavy – by the way it attends to and responds to objects of the senses, memory or imagination (Payutto, 1993: 6–8).

An important point to note, here, is that an action's being good does not consist in its having pleasant karmic results. Rather, it is seen as having pleasant results because it is itself good or wholesome (see Keown, 1992: 178). It is thus said that good actions are those which are *themselves* 'bright' as well as being 'with bright result' (*M.* I.390). Why is the moral tone of an action seen to cause certain results? It is said that wrong view leads on to wrong thought, and this to wrong speech and thus wrong action, while right view has the opposite effect (*A.* V.211–12). As wrong actions thus come from the misperception of reality, they can be seen to be 'out of tune' with the real nature of things. As they thus 'go against the grain' of reality, they naturally lead to unpleasant results. Thus it is said to be impossible that wrong conduct of body, speech or mind could result in a 'fruit that was agreeable, pleasant, liked', or for right conduct to lead to a 'fruit that was disagreeable, unpleasant, not liked' (*M.* III.66).

The 'karmic fruitfulness' of actions

Good actions are said to be 'lovely' (*kalyāṇa*) and to be, or have the quality of, *puñña* (Pali; Skt *puṇya*), a term which can be used as an adjective or a

noun. As an adjective, Cousins sees it as the ‘fortune-bringing or auspicious quality of an action’ (1996: 153), while as a noun ‘it is applied either to an act which brings good fortune or to the happy result in the future of such an act’ (1996: 155). Thus we see:

Monks, do not be afraid of *puññas*; this, monks, is a designation for happiness, for what is pleasant, charming, dear and delightful, that is to say, *puññas*. I myself know that the ripening of *puññas* done for a long time are experienced for a long time as pleasant, charming, dear and delightful. After developing a heart of lovingkindness for seven years, for seven aeons of evolution and devolution, I did not come back to this world . . . [being reborn in a delightful heaven for that time]. (*It.* 14–15; cf. *A.* iv.88–9)

Puñña is usually, rather limply, translated as ‘meritorious’ (adjective) or ‘merit’ (noun). However, ‘meritorious’ implies deservingness, but what is referred to is something with a natural power of its own to produce happy results (cf. Cousins, 1996: 155); it does not depend on anyone to give out what is due to the ‘deserving’. A *puñña* action is ‘auspicious’, ‘fortunate’ or ‘fruitful’, as it purifies the mind and thus leads to future good fortune (McDermott, 1984: 31–58). Indeed, through other Indo-European languages it may be related to the English words ‘boon’ and ‘bounty’ (the Thai word for *puñña* is *bun*). As the noun *puñña* refers to the auspicious, uplifting, purifying power of good actions to produce future happy results, one might translate it as ‘goodness-power’, but this offers no convenient related adjective. A better translation would be ‘(an act of) karmic fruitfulness’, with ‘karmically fruitful’ as the adjective. This makes a connection with the fact that actions (karmas) are often likened to ‘seeds’ and their results are known as ‘fruits’ (*phalas*) or ‘ripenings’. While such *phalas* can be the results of either good or bad actions, and *puñña* relates only to good actions, the English word ‘fruit’ can also mean only edible, pleasant fruit such as apples, without referring to inedible, unpleasant ones. The link to ‘fruitfulness’ is also seen in the fact that the *Saṅgha* is described as the best ‘field of *puñña*’, i.e. the best group of people to ‘plant’ a gift ‘in’ in terms of karmically beneficial results of the gift (see pp. 21–2).

The opposite of *puñña* is *apuñña*, which one can accordingly see as meaning ‘(an act of) karmic unfruitfulness’ or ‘karmically unfruitful’, i.e. producing no pleasant fruits, but only bitter ones. A synonym for *apuñña* is *pāpa*, which, while often translated as ‘evil’, really means that which is ‘infertile’, ‘barren’, ‘harmful’ (Cousins, 1996: 156) or ‘ill-fortuned’ (Cousins, 1996: 148). A good way of rendering these meanings would be to see *pāpa* as an adjective as meaning ‘(karmically) deadening’, and as a

noun as ‘(karmic) deadness’, meaning that what is so described has a deadening effect on the psyche, making it more constricted and lifeless, rather than having an uplifting, fruitful effect.

Buddhists are keen to perform ‘karmically fruitful’ actions; for *puñña* is an unlosable ‘treasure’, unlike physical goods (*Khp.* 7). The early texts refer to three ‘bases for effecting karmic fruitfulness’ (*puñña-kiriya-vatthus*): giving (*dāna*), moral virtue (*sīla*) and meditation, and later texts add to this list (see p. 61). Nevertheless, an act of giving is not such a basis if it is done ‘through fear, or with hope of reciprocity, or through attachment, etc.’, rather than ‘Through desire to render homage or service’ (*AKB.* IV.113a).

Karmic fruitfulness and motive

It is said that ‘the mental aspiration of a moral person is effective through its purity’ (*D.* III.259–60). That is, when such a person gives a gift to a monk or brahmin with the hope of being reborn in a certain way, this will occur, whether the heart is set on rebirth as a rich human, or in any of the six heavens of the desire-realm, or even in the world of the *brahmās*. Yet if such an aspiration is really going to work, it must not be itself the sole motive of the giving, for this is seen to affect the nature of the beneficial karmic result. If a person gives something to a monk ‘with longing, with the heart bound (to the gift), intent on a store (of karmic fruitfulness), thinking “I’ll enjoy this after death”’, it is said that he will be reborn for a while in the lowest of all the heavens. A series of what seem to be meant as progressively higher motives is then outlined: giving because one feels ‘it is auspicious (*sāhu*) to give’; wishing to continue a family tradition of giving; wishing to support those who do not cook for themselves; because great sages of the past were supported by alms; because giving leads to mental calm, joy and gladness; or because giving enriches the heart and equips it for meditation (*A.* IV.60–3). Giving from the last of these motives is then said to lead to rebirth in the first heaven of the realm of (elemental) form, where the *brahmās* dwell. Thus doing a good action simply because it is seen to have pleasant results is not the highest of motives – it is better to value goodness in itself, and the peace and wisdom that it facilitates (Payutto, 1993: 54–6). Accordingly, the Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa says, on moral virtue:

That undertaken just out of desire for fame is inferior; that undertaken just out of desire for the fruits of karmically fruitful actions is medium; that undertaken for the sake of the Noble state thus, ‘This is to be done’, is superior. (*Vism.* 13)

A generous supporter of the Buddha and his monks and nuns was Anāthapiṇḍika ('Feeder of the Poor'), who never showed any interest in the results of his generosity, though the Buddha often spoke of these to him. 'He just gives, joyful in the chance to do so' and 'would be less than a perfect giver if he gave for the sake of the rewards that, according to his Master, are derived from the gift' (Falk, 1990: 129). Nevertheless, acting so as to generate karmic fruitfulness is an effective motive for getting people to begin to act in a more generous and moral way.

While Buddhists often see a large gift as generating more karmic fruitfulness than a small one, a small gift from a poor person is said to be worth as much as a large one from a rich person (*S.* 1.20–2). Here, purity of mind makes up for the smallness of a gift, for 'where there is a joyful heart, no gift is small' (*J.* II.85; *Vv.* 1). Thus, 'If you have a little, give little; if you have a middling amount, give a middling amount; if you have much, give much. It is not fitting not to give at all' (*J.* v.382). Thus it is emphasized that even the poor have the means to give, be this as little as leftover noodles as food for ants (*Uss.* 113).

The karmic fruitfulness of a gift is not seen to depend on its usefulness to the recipient (which may be variable and unpredictable), but on the donor's state of mind when giving.⁵ Indeed, a person with nothing to give can do an act of karmic fruitfulness by helping someone else to give (*Uss.* 113) or by simply rejoicing at another person's giving, which is a good mental act in itself. This even applies to the joyful contemplation of one's own past wholesome deeds (*Miln.* 297). Indeed, two types of beneficial meditation are said to be the recollection of one's own unbroken virtue and of one's liberal generosity (*Vism.* 223–34), though the karmic fruitfulness of actions is said to dwindle if one brags about the relevant good act (*Ss.* 147). It is said that an act of karmic fruitfulness is greater than its opposite, as regretting a bad action can stop one repeating it, but one has no need to regret a karmically fruitful action, and it leads on to further spiritual progress – joy, calm, concentration and insight – which generates more karmic fruitfulness (*Miln.* 84).

The state of mind in which an act is done is partly a matter of motive, but also of the manner in which it is done. This is also seen as having an effect on the karmic result. It is said that to give 'disrespectfully, without due consideration, not with one's own hand, of something unwanted (by oneself), not with a view to the future (i.e., not recognizing the giving as having a karmic fruit)' leads to a karmic fruit where the mind does not

⁵ At least, this is the Theravādin view (*Kvu.* 343–7) – a few other early schools disagreed.

incline to the enjoyment of the best of sense-pleasures (i.e. being miserly with what one has (*S.* 1.91–2)), and to one’s family and workpeople not being considerate towards one (*A.* iv.392–3). This is how a bad man gives, a good man giving in the opposite way (*M.* iii.22–4). More specifically, it is said: (1) giving with faith (*saddhā*) leads to the giver having wealth and being handsome; (2) giving respectfully or carefully leads to the giver’s wife, family and workpeople listening carefully to him and helping him in an understanding way; (3) giving at the appropriate time leads to wealth coming at the appropriate time; (4) giving with no reluctance in the heart leads to the mind inclining to enjoyment of the best of sense-pleasures; (5) giving without harm to self or other leads to future wealth being free from harm from fire, water, kings, thieves or unfriendly heirs (*A.* iii.172–3). The Mahāyāna tradition agrees with such passages from Theravāda texts; for Śāntideva cites the *Akṣayamati Sūtra* as saying that a ‘gift’ is no real gift if it harms someone, or is less than has been promised, or is accompanied by contempt, boasting or hostility, or causes distress, or is of what would otherwise have been thrown away, or is not given with one’s own hand, or is improper, or given at the wrong time (*Ss.* 248).

The Saṅgha as the best ‘field of karmic fruitfulness’

The karmic fruitfulness of an act of giving is said to be great not only if the state of mind of the donor is pure, but also if the recipient is very virtuous or holy. Thus ‘even so little as a handful of rice-beans . . . bestowed with devout heart upon a person who is worthy of receiving a gift of devotion will be of great fruit, of great splendour’ (*Vv.* 1). A gift is said to be ‘purified’ by the donor, the recipient, both or neither, according to whether they are virtuous and of good character or not. To be ‘purified’ by a donor, a gift must be ‘rightfully acquired, the mind well pleased, firmly believing in the rich fruit of karma’ (*M.* iii.257). Even if a gift is given by an evil person, in the opposite way, it may be ‘purified’ by the virtue of the recipient. While a gift to an animal yields a hundred-fold, and to an unvirtuous human a thousandfold, one to an ordinary virtuous person yields a hundred thousandfold, and one to a spiritually Noble person has an immeasurable fruit. A gift of the virtuous to the virtuous has the greatest fruit, though (*M.* iii.255–7; cf. *A.* i.161–2).

A gift given to renunciants and brahmins who are not endowed with the qualities of the path to *Nirvāṇa* is of little fruit, like a seed sown on poor, ill-watered soil. The opposite applies for a gift to those endowed

with the factors of the Eightfold Path (see p. 37), which leads to much good karma and conduces to spiritual accomplishment (*A.* iv.237–8). The well-trained Noble *Saṅgha* (which includes some lay people) is said, in a well-known chant, to be ‘worthy of respect, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts, worthy of salutation, an unsurpassed field of karmic fruitfulness for the world’ (*D.* iii.5; *M.* iii.80). For this description to apply to a monk, he should be such that objects of any of the senses do not engender attachment, elation or depression so as to disturb his calm concentration (*A.* iii.157–61, 279). He controls his senses, uses his robe and alms-food without greed, patiently endures unpleasant sensations or abuse, avoids situations in which he might be suspected of misconduct, abandons lustful or cruel thoughts, and develops the seven factors of awakening, beginning with mindfulness (*A.* iii.387–90). He is endowed with straightforwardness, speed of understanding, gentleness, patience and restraint (*A.* iii.248; cf. *A.* i.244–6). One can summarize this by saying that the saintly members of the Noble *Saṅgha* (see pp. 39–40), being of exemplary, inspiring character, engender much joy in those who give to them, such that the giving generates a powerful purifying effect in the givers’ minds, leading to abundant karmic fruitfulness.

As Noble persons are relatively few in number, the best ‘field of karmic fruitfulness’ normally available is the monastic *Saṅgha*, which symbolizes the Noble *Saṅgha* and is also likely to contain some members of it. According to the Theravādin *Milindapañha*, even a monk of poorly developed virtue ‘purifies gifts of faith’ through the good effects of participating in the life of the *Saṅgha*, and associating with those more strongly intent on spiritual development. In any case, the gift of a virtuous person to a monk will always be purified by the giver (*Miln.* 257–8). When giving to the *Saṅgha*, it is best to give without discrimination or favouritism, even if one knows that some monks are more spiritually advanced than others (*A.* iv.215), and irrespective of whether a monk is a relative or friend (Bunnag, 1973: 59–60). It is also better to give to the *Saṅgha* of monks or nuns as a whole, or to a group specified by them, than to an individual monk or nun (*M.* iii.255–6). As the alms-giver bestows long life, a good appearance, happiness and strength on the recipient of alms, then such qualities, in a human or heavenly rebirth, are said to be the karmic results of alms-giving (*A.* iv.57). This means that the monks’ virtuous way of life can be of powerful benefit to others. Accordingly, it is said that the Buddha was not uncompassionate when he went with his monks on alms-round in an area where there was famine, for giving is the source of good fortune (*S.* iv.322–5).

Nevertheless, the 'field' of giving can also be excellent when one gives to the sick or a parent or other benefactor (*AKB*. iv.117a–b and 118).

Karma and fatalism

While belief in the law of karma can sometimes degenerate into a form of fatalism, the Buddha emphasized that deterministic fate (*niyati*) and karma are very different. The idea of karma emphasizes the importance of human action and its effects: people make their own 'destiny' by their actions. Karma and fatalism differ on two scores. Firstly, humans have freedom of choice; their present actions are not the karmic results of previous actions, though karmic results may influence the type of action that a person tends to think of doing, because of the character he or she has developed. Secondly, not everything that happens to a person is seen as due to karma. Any unpleasant feelings or illnesses that one has can arise from a variety of causes: 'originating from bile, phlegm, or wind, from union (of bodily humours), born from seasonal changes, born from disruptive circumstances, arriving suddenly [due to the action of another person], or born of the fruition of karma' (*S*. iv.230–1; *A*. v.10).

The aspects of life which are seen as the result of past karma include one's form of rebirth, social class at birth, general character, crucial good and bad things which happen to one, and even the way one experiences the world. Out of the mass of sense-data, one only ever gets 'edited highlights' of what lies around one. Some people tend to notice pleasant things, while others tend to notice unpleasant things; these differences are said to be due to karma (cf. *S*. i.91–2).

As a person never knows what aspect of any situation may have been determined by karma, difficult situations are not to be passively accepted, but a person should do his or her best to improve them. Only when things happen in spite of efforts to avert them might they be put down to past karma (Ingersoll, 1966: 210–15). If the situation can be averted or changed, fine, but then any anxiety or suffering it led to may be still seen as due to past karma. As an aid to planning courses of action in a karma-influenced world, many traditionalist Buddhists use divination methods such as astrology at certain points in their lives, so as to try to gauge what their karma has in store for them (Ingersoll, 1966: 207–9). The idea of the influence of karma, while not fatalistic, does encourage a person to live patiently with a situation. Rather than making new bad karma by getting angry with society, family, or other people, blaming them for his or her lot, he or she can view the situation

as the result of his or her own past actions. This attitude arises from a person's taking responsibility for the shape of his or her life. Thus the Buddha criticized theories which saw all experiences and associated actions as due either to past karma, the diktat of a God, or pure chance (*A.* 1.173; *M.* 11.214). Like people of other religions, however, Buddhists sometimes have an idea of fate, in parallel with their idea of karma, or they may even use past karma as an excuse for continuing with present bad karma.

Flexibility in the working of karma

It is mostly at the human level that good and bad actions are performed. The gods are generally seen to have little scope for doing either good or evil, and most simply enjoy the results of the previous good actions which led to their existence. Animals, ghosts and hell-beings have little freedom for intentional good or bad actions, though Vasubandhu claims that hell-beings can do *some* good and bad actions, but any good actions will only bring fruits in a later life (*AKB.* 1V.51d). Moreover, the higher animals can sometimes act virtuously, if not in a self-consciously moral way. Beings in the lower rebirths generally just reap the results of previous bad actions. When these results come to an end, the results of some previous good actions will come to fruition and buoy up the being to some better form of life, until sooner or later the being reaches the human level again.

The law of karma is not regarded as rigid and mechanical, but as the flexible, fluid and dynamic outworking of the fruits of the volition associated with actions. Thus the full details of its working out, in specific instances, are said to be 'unthinkable' (*acinteyya*) to all but a Buddha (*A.* 1V.77).

Delayed results of karma

Karma does not just bring results in the next life: an action can have effects later in the present life, the next life, and also in some subsequent ones. Only very evil or good actions are certain to bring their result in the immediately following rebirth. When King Ajātasattu became his disciple, the Buddha said (not to his face) that he was done for, with his fate sealed, as he had earlier killed his own father (*D.* 1.85). One who has deliberately killed his or her mother or father, or an *Arahat*, or has shed the blood of a Buddha, or caused a schism in the monastic *Saṅgha*, is said to have done an action with immediate karmic effect (*Vibh.* 378), leading

to rebirth in a hell for the remainder of an aeon (*M.A.* iv.109–10).⁶ No good actions can avert such a rebirth in the next life (*Asl.* 358). Such people cannot be monks or nuns (*Vin.* i.88–90), and cannot understand *Dhamma* even if they try (*Miln.* 310). On the other hand, those who are ‘Noble persons’, through some degree of experience of *Nirvāṇa*, will as a result certainly be free of all sub-human rebirths (*Pug.* 13), so that their insight has an invariable effect on their next rebirth.

All other actions are indeterminate as to when they will bring their results. It is thus said that the next life of one who lives a moral life and is of right view might be in a heaven *or* a hell (*M.* iii.209–15). The latter will be the case if he or she did a strong evil deed in a previous life that had not yet produced its result, if he or she took to evil deeds late in life, or if he or she firmly took up a wrong view at the time of dying. That might be the case if an habitually generous person were to come to regret his generosity as worthless, and resent those who had not repayed his kindness. In that case, he would die in a bad state of mind and make a bad transition to the next life. This accords with *It.* 13–14, which says that one who dies at a time when his mind is corrupted is reborn in a hell, while one who dies while his mind is clear and calm is reborn in a heaven. In a similar way, a generally immoral person, with wrong view, might be reborn in a heaven if there were some previously unexpended strong good karma from the past, if he took to good ways late in life (cf. *S.* iv.321–2), or firmly took up a right view at the time of dying. Nevertheless, the results of the good or bad actions would catch up with the person sooner or later, perhaps in an attenuated form, just as a smouldering fire will burst into flames at some time in the future (*Dhp.* 71).

The effect of character

The karmic result of an action is not necessarily of precisely the same nature and magnitude as the action itself. Killing a goat does not necessarily lead to being reborn as a goat and being killed – though it may do (*J.* i.167). The Buddha says that if ‘just as a man does an action, so does he experience (its fruit)’ were the case, there would be no opportunity for spiritual improvement, no way of growing beyond previous unvirtuous ways. He goes on (*A.* i.249–53) to say that, for a person whose virtue, mind and wisdom are undeveloped, a small evil deed may lead to rebirth

⁶ The terrible results of killing a parent do not occur if the act was unintentional (*Kvu.* 593), if the intended victim was another person (*AKB.* iv.103d), or if the parent is not known to be a parent (*Uss.* 179), though *Vin. A.* 445 differs on the last two points (Harvey, 1990: 275).

in a hell, just as a pinch of salt in a cup of water makes it undrinkable. For a person with developed virtue, mind and wisdom, though, the same action will produce its karmic results in the present life, with little, if any, in a future life, just as a pinch of salt does not make the river Ganges undrinkable. This seems to imply that, in a spiritually developed person, a small moral slip will have less effect, as it will be ‘diluted’ by his or her generally moral nature. For a spiritually undeveloped person, described here as having a ‘small self’, the same act has a greater impact. It, so to speak, ‘flavours’ a person’s character more, setting up greater reverberations within it, in tune with other such reverberations. The good person suffers less from his or her bad action, though as most of the karmic results come in *this* life for him or her, this may not be immediately apparent. The Mahāyāna *Upāsaka-sīla Sūtra* also holds that one with self-discipline and spiritual effort may change some karmic effects from being serious ones in a future life into lighter ones in the present life (*Uss.* 180–1).

Remorse and the acknowledgement of fault

An important way in which the karmic result of a bad action can be lessened is by a person’s regretting it, thinking that ‘that evil deed cannot be undone by me’ and resolving not to do it again (*S.* iv.320). This can be seen to lessen the psychological impact of the act, so as to reduce its karmic fruit. In the Sarvāstivādin view, an action is not ‘accumulated’ (*upacita*), with a full karmic result, if it is not repeated (the number of times is dependent on the nature of the action), so as to be ‘complete’, or is regretted.⁷ The notion of regret, or acknowledgement of fault, as lessening the karmic fruit of an action is also affirmed in the Mahāyāna (*Ss.* 147, 59). It is said that a *Bodhisattva* who quarrels with another *Bodhisattva*, but who confesses this fault and promises future restraint, escapes from the consequences of that action (Conze, 1968: 52). In a recent Tibetan account, based on canonical sources, it is said that to confess, with regret, even to the actions of killing one’s father and an *Arahat*, will lessen – to some extent – the terrible bad karma of such actions (Tharchin, 1984: 47).

The importance of regretting a bad action is seen in the refrain, ‘It is a mark of progress in the discipline of the Noble Ones, if anyone recognises the nature of his transgression and makes amends as is right, restraining himself for the future.’⁸ Among monks and nuns, the

⁷ *AKB.* iv.120; cf. McDermott, 1984: 141–2.

⁸ *D.* iii.55; *S.* ii.127–8, 205; *Vin.* ii.192; *Vin.* iv.18–19.

acknowledgement, to another monk or nun, that one has broken a monastic rule is a vital part of monastic discipline. Likewise, in the Mahāyāna, *Bodhisattvas*, whether monastic or lay, should conceal their good points as well as acknowledge their faults (Ss. 100–1).

Regret has an impact on karmic results even in the case of good actions. Thus it is said that a man who, in a past life, had given alms to an enlightened ascetic, but then regretted doing so, was born as a rich man – because of his giving – but as a miser unable to enjoy his wealth, because of his regret (S. 1.91–2).

The Mahāyāna makes much of the power of acknowledgement of past evil, particularly when done to heavenly Buddhas or *Bodhisattvas* (*Bca.* 11). In this tradition, such actions, if sincere and devout, are seen as able to remove past bad karma. Chapter 8 of Śāntideva's *Śikṣā-samuccaya* describes how to purify oneself from evil deeds. It cites the *Catur-dharmaka Sūtra* as saying that, to overcome the accumulation of evil, the *Bodhisattva* should: (1) practise self-reproach, by immediately regretting any bad action; (2) follow any bad action by counteractive good ones; (3) resolve to abstain from such bad actions and (4) express faith in the three refuges, and not neglect the compassionate aspiration to Buddhahood (the *bodhi-citta*) (Ss. 159). On (1), Ss. 160 cites the *Suvarṇa-prabhāṣottama Sūtra*'s chapter on acknowledging faults, which says that one should call on all Buddhas to look on with compassion, acknowledge all the evil deeds one has done, and say:

On account of the evil done by me previously even in hundreds of aeons, I have a troubled mind oppressed with wretchedness, trouble and fear. With an unhappy mind I continually fear evil acts. Wherever I go there is no enjoyment for me anywhere. All the Buddhas are compassionate. They remove the fear of all beings. May they forgive my sin⁹ and may they deliver me from fear. May the Tathāgatas [Buddhas] take away for me the defilement of impurities (and) acts. And may the Buddhas bath me with surging waters of compassion. (*Svb.* 31)

Counteractive good actions are seen as the development of deep insight, or clearly understanding the difference between evil and good action, with the latter stopping the effect of bad karma. It is also said that reciting a certain hundred-syllable *mantra* 8,000 times, while meditating on Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas*, makes one's evil pass away (Ss. 168–9). In one

⁹ 'Sin' is a word loaded with Christian theological connotations. It alludes to an evil action as not only morally wrong, but as against the will of God, and setting up a gap between the perpetrator and God. While it is inappropriate as a translation in Theravāda Buddhism, it does not seem too inappropriate here, where an action is seen, in effect, as against the will of the Buddhas.

Tibetan account, it is said that, while the death of the *Arahat* Udrayana was due to his having killed an enlightened ascetic in a past life, his being able to become an *Arahat* was due to his immediate regret at this deed, followed by building a shrine to the ascetic and making offerings there, with continual confession of his evil deed (Tharchin, 1984: 77). In line with the above, Eastern Buddhism contains a rite in which a person repeatedly bows before an image in a spirit of repentance for any past evil deeds that have been committed.

In the Theravāda tradition, while the Buddha is generally seen as no longer contactable by humans, there is a chant from Sri Lanka in which a person, expressing reverence to the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha*, asks each to 'forgive' or 'be patient' (*khamatu*) if they have been wronged in any way (Saddhatissa and Webb, 1976: 10–13). Likewise, a chant from Thailand asks the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha* to 'accept' (*paṭiggaṅhātu*) any wrong actions done towards them, using the same sort of wording as used by monks when acknowledging, to another monk, monastic transgressions (Mahāmakaṭṭha, 1990: 72–5).

However much Buddhism may value genuine remorse, it does not – certainly in its Theravāda form – encourage feelings of guilt; for such a heavy feeling, with its attendant anguish and self-dislike, is not seen as a good state of mind to develop, being un conducive to calm and clarity of mind. Indeed, it can be seen as an aspect of the fourth spiritual hindrance, of agitated 'restlessness and worry'. Such a feeling might arise as part of the natural karmic result of an action, but is not to be actively indulged in. In the Mahāyāna, Śāntideva says that a *Bodhisattva* should not be *excessively* regretful for wrong actions, citing the *Upāli-paripṛcchā* as saying that a *Bodhisattva* retains his great virtue if he returns to the aspiration for Buddhahood not more than a few hours after doing an evil deed (Ss. 173).

Rebirth, karma and motivation

Belief in rebirth and karma clearly has an impact on the way people view their actions: good and bad actions *matter*; they are of consequence, not things with no impact on life. Good actions are thus encouraged because, through their goodness, they lead to pleasant, uplifting effects for the doer. Bad actions are discouraged as their badness leads to unpleasant karmic results. Thus Melford Spiro found that, in Burma, the two most common reasons given for keeping the precepts are fear of hell and the fact that the precepts were ordained by the Buddha (1971: 449).

The idea of the cycle of rebirth also provides a perspective on life which is supportive of sympathy and respect for other beings. Within the round of rebirths, all beings are part of the same cycle of lives. Each human being has been an animal, ghost, hell-being and god in the past, and is likely to be so again at some time in the future. Any form of suffering one witnesses in another human or other being has been undergone by oneself at some time (*S.* II.186): thus one should not cling to rebirths and should have compassion for other sentient beings. In one's innumerable past lives, the law of averages dictates that most beings one comes across, however one may dislike them now, have at some time been close relatives or friends (*S.* II.189–90), so that loving-kindness towards them is appropriate. Thus in *Jātaka* story no. 68 (*J.* I.308–9), a man and his wife address the Buddha as their son, and say that it is the duty of children to comfort their parents in old age. As the man and woman are not the Buddha's recognized parents, they explain that, in past lives, the man had been his father, uncle and grandfather 500 times each; likewise the woman had been his mother, aunt and grandmother 500 times each.

Such teachings, of course, urge a kindness and non-violence towards all forms of life. Humans are part of the same cycle of lives as other beings, and are not separated from them by a huge gulf. Nevertheless, the more complex and developed a being is, the worse it is to harm or kill it; so it is worse to kill a human than an animal (see p. 52).

Working with a rebirth perspective also helps sustain a long-term motivation for moral and spiritual practice. While death means that one loses all physical possessions, and is parted from one's loved ones and one's life's 'attainments', the purification of character that is developed by ethical and meditative practice is seen as something that death does not destroy (*Khp.* 7). It becomes part of one's mental continuum that will 'spill over' into another life. In that life, the spiritual development of this life may be neglected or further built on: but at the very least, it can act as a positive residue of this life, to be used as a foundation for further development. The opposite applies in the case of bad character-traits.

In the Tibetan tradition, there is a series of reflections, drawing on central Buddhist principles, to help motivate spiritual practice. The first reflection concerns the rarity of human life. Given the other forms of rebirth, and the fact that there are many more animals (including birds, fish, insects etc.) than humans, being born as a human is a rare and precious opportunity for spiritual improvement. To gain a human or divine rebirth, or have two in a row, is said to be rare (*S.* V.475–6; cf. *Dhp.* 182).

As against the number of beings born in other realms, those reborn as humans are like a pinch of sand compared to the size of the earth (*S.* II.263), or the number of India's pleasant groves compared to its rough terrain (*A.* I.35). The chance for a being in a hell to be reborn as a human is less than that of a blind turtle, surfacing once a century, to happen to put its head through a ring moved by the winds across the surface of the sea. Even if a human rebirth is attained, the person will be poor, ugly and ill, and will tend to do evil actions which will send him or her back to hell (*M.* III.169; *Bca.* IV.20).

The Tibetan Buddhists talk of having attained a 'precious human rebirth' (Guenther, 1959: 14–21): a marvellous opportunity for spiritual growth that should be used wisely and respected in others. As it may be cut short at any time by death, it should not be frittered away: 'So if, when having found leisure such as this, I do not attune myself to what is wholesome, there could be no greater deception, and there could be no greater folly' (*Bca.* IV.23). In the lower realms, there is much suffering and little freedom of action. In the heavenly realms, life is blissful in comparison with human life, but this tends to make the gods complacent, particularly those in the highest heavens, so that they may also think that they are eternal, without need of liberation. The human realm is a middle realm, in which there is enough suffering to motivate humans to seek to transcend it by spiritual development, and enough freedom to be able to act on this aspiration. It is thus the most favourable realm for spiritual development.

Not *any* human rebirth has this precious quality, though. The early texts say that one cannot lead the holy life of the monk at a time when Buddhism has died out, or in a region devoid of Buddhist monastics and lay followers, or if one has a wrong view which denies the efficacy of karma and the possibility of spiritual development, or is stupid or deaf and dumb (*D.* III.264–5). Śāntideva cites the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra* on the hard-to-attain favourable circumstances which make liberation possible: (1) rebirth as a human, (2) at a time when there has been a Buddha, (3) the perfection of one's bodily senses, (4) hearing the *Dharma*, (5) the company of good men, (6) a true 'good friend' (teacher), (7) the means for 'instruction in the true rule of life' and (8) the holy life (*Ss.* 2). Reflecting on this, he says 'If the arising of a Tathagata, faith, the attainment of a human body, and my being fit to cultivate virtue are scarce, when will they be won again?' (*Bca.* IV.15).

The second of the Tibetan reflections is on the uncertainty as to when one's life will end: no-one knows how much longer they have

before they die – it might not be long. In line with this, the early texts say that human life, however long it lasts, is comparable to a line drawn on water (*A.* iv.138). Those entering a hellish rebirth, moreover, are told that they have ignored the significance of the suffering of birth, ageing, sickness and death, not being motivated to do karmically fruitful deeds by the realization that they were themselves still liable to such states (*M.* iii.179–83). It is emphasized that death and old age come to all people, whatever their social class: ‘As though huge mountains made of rock, so vast they reach up to the sky, were to advance from every side, grinding beneath them all that lives, so age and death roll over all’ (*S.* 1.2). Once the Buddha advised a good king distracted by the affairs of state that if he, King Pasenadi, were told that such mountains were advancing on him, he would of course be full of fear at such a destruction of human life, given that a human rebirth is so hard to obtain. When asked what he could do in such circumstances, Pasenadi says he could only ‘live in accord with *Dhamma*, live rightly, do what is wholesome and do karmically fruitful actions’.

The third reflection is that, after death, one will be reborn according to one’s karma – and the backlog of one’s karma from this and previous lives might not be such as to lead to a human rebirth next time. The fourth reflection is that, in whatever form one is reborn, suffering will be part of that life, whether as hellish agony, human pain and worry, or the more subtle unsatisfactoriness of a heaven realm. The fifth reflection is that such suffering can only be transcended by attaining *Nirvāṇa*, and the sixth is that to attain *Nirvāṇa*, one needs to practise under the guidance of a spiritual preceptor. Accordingly, one should apply oneself to spiritual practice *now*, for the benefit that this will bring both to oneself and others: ‘As from a heap of flowers many a garland is made, even so many good deeds should be done by one born mortal’ (*Dhp.* 53).

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

In early Buddhism and in the Theravāda tradition, the most central teaching is that on the Four Noble Truths (Harvey, 1990a: 47–72). These express spiritually ennobling insights which basically assert that:

- (1) the processes of body and mind and the experience of life are *dukkha* (Pali; Skt *duḥkha*): unsatisfactory, frustrating and productive of suffering, whether in a gross or subtle form;
- (2) this situation is caused by ‘craving’ (Pali *taṇhā*; Skt *trṣṇā*), demanding desires which lay one open to frustration and disappointment, and

keep one within the round of rebirths, with its attendant ageing, sickness and death;

- (3) this situation can be transcended by destroying craving, and associated causes such as attachment, hatred and delusion, in the experience of *Nirvāṇa*. Once this is attained during life, a person will no longer be reborn, but will pass into final *Nirvāṇa* at death, beyond space, time and *dukkha*;
- (4) the way to attain this goal is the ‘middle way’ consisting of the Noble Eightfold Path.

The first of these ‘Truths’ is elaborated through an analysis of personality through five kinds of unsatisfactory processes:

- (1) material form (*rūpa*), consisting of various physical processes;
- (2) feeling (*vedanā*), consisting of the ‘taste’ of any experience as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral;
- (3) identification (Pali *saññā*; Skt *sañjñā*), consisting of the interpretative function of mind, acting so as to label sense-objects, either correctly recognizing them or misperceiving them;
- (4) constructing activities (Pali *saṅkhāras*; Skt *saṃskāras*), consisting of will (*cetanā*), and various other active mental processes such as moods and emotions;
- (5) discernment or discriminative consciousness (Pali *viññāṇa*; Skt *viññāna*), the basic awareness of there being an object of the senses or mind, and the discernment of it as having various parts or aspects, which are then labelled by identification.

These comprise the five ‘groups’ (Pali *khandhas*; Skt *skandhas*), or ‘personality factors’. All of them are seen as mutually conditioning each other, as well as being affected by sense-objects. They are seen as in a state of constant change, whether of a subtle or more obvious kind. Consequently, they are seen as impermanent (Pali *anicca*; Skt *anitya*), so as to be unstable and not fully satisfactory (Pali *dukkha*; Skt *duḥkha*), and to be all ‘not-Self’ (Pali *anatta*; Skt *anātma*): not a permanent, self-secure I or Self. It is emphasized, though, that normally we erroneously look on ourselves and the world as made up of permanent, desirable, substantial things. We are thus attached to aspects of ourselves and the world, and so suffer when they change or disappear.

Nevertheless, in this collection of impersonal, ever-changing and conditioned events or processes, there are relatively stable, repeated patterns of arising that account for the persistence of what one might call a person’s ‘character’. Moreover, the dynamic pattern which is a person, though devoid of a permanent Self or essence, flows on from life to life,

driven by the forces of craving and karma. This process is explained by Conditioned Arising (Pali *paṭicca-samuppāda*; Skt *pratītya-samutpāda*; Harvey, 1990a: 54–60), which at an abstract level is the principle that mental and physical phenomena only arise or exist when their appropriate conditioning factors arise or exist. In its usual concrete application, Conditioned Arising spells out a specific sequence of twelve conditioned and conditioning states that explains the ongoing flow of personality and rebirths: (1) spiritual ignorance or misperception underlays the (2) intentions and concerns of unenlightened people – karma – so that these direct (3) consciousness into noticing certain things and into being reborn in a certain way. Thus (4) the sentient body is sustained in life or develops in the womb at the start of a new life. This supports the (5) senses, the basis of (6) sensory stimulation and thus (7) feeling. Thus (8) craving for and against pleasant and unpleasant feelings arises, hence (9) grasping and (10) further involvement in the stream of existence. This leads on to (11) rebirth in either a new situation or a new life, which leads on to (12) ageing and then death of these: *dukkha*.

Suffering

The emphasis that all the conditioned processes that compose a person, and all worlds of rebirth, are impermanent, *dukkha* and not-Self forms an important part of the philosophical basis of ethics in Buddhism. The aim of overcoming *dukkha*, both in oneself and others, is the central preoccupation of Buddhism, and one towards which ethical action contributes. As Buddhists come to appreciate the extent of *dukkha* in their own lives, and to see that they so often contribute to it by their deluded response to life's happenings, the natural human feeling of sympathy (*anukampā*) for others – solidarity with them in the shared situation of *dukkha* – is elicited and deepened.¹⁰ Accordingly, the importance of 'comparing oneself with others' is stressed, for both self and other 'yearn for happiness and recoil from pain' (*M.* 1.341). When explaining the five basic ethical precepts (see pp. 67–8 below), the Buddha once gave the following reflection as a reason for keeping them:

For a state that is not pleasant or delightful to me must be so to him also; and a state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?¹¹

¹⁰ Aronson, 1980: 1–23; Keown, 1992: 73–7.

¹¹ *S.* v.353–4; cf. *M.* 1.97 and Tatz, 1986: 87, 255.

In a more general context, the Buddha is also reported to have said: ‘Having traversed the whole world with my thought, I never yet met with anything that was dearer to anyone than his own self. Since the self of others is dear to each one, let him who loves himself not harm another’ (*Ud.* 47, *S.* 1.75). Thus, on finding some boys tormenting a snake and poking it with sticks, the Buddha said:

All tremble at punishment,
Life is dear to all.
Comparing others with oneself,
One should neither kill nor cause to kill. (*Dhp.* 130)

Likewise:

Comparing oneself to others in such terms as ‘Just as I am, so are they, just as they are, so am I’, one should neither kill nor cause others to kill. (*Sn.* 705)

These passages emphasize that other beings are just like oneself in desiring pleasure and disliking pain, so that there is no good reason to add to the common lot of suffering by inflicting it on others. Doing so, moreover, harms oneself as well as others, for:

Whoever, seeking his own happiness,
Harms with sticks
Pleasure-loving beings,
He gets no happiness hereafter. (*Dhp.* 131).

The benefit of self and other are intertwined, because of the law of karma, so that concern to lessen one’s own suffering goes hand-in-hand with lessening that of others. Helping others helps oneself (in terms of karmic results and good qualities of mind that are developed), and helping oneself (by purifying one’s character) enables one to help others better.

Impermanence

While impermanence often leads to suffering, it also means that people, having no fixed Self, are always capable of change for the better,¹² and should be respected accordingly, rather than dismissed as unworthy by saying, for example, ‘Oh, *he’s* a thief.’ A famous example of such change is reported in Buddhist texts, which tell of a time when the Buddha deliberately visited the haunt of the murderous ascetic-bandit

¹² Though if they have committed one of the heinous acts with immediate karmic result (see pp. 24–5), they will not be able to attain enlightenment in the present lifetime.

Anguḷimāla, as he saw that he needed only a little exhortation to change his ways, become a monk, and soon attain *Nirvāṇa* (*M.* 11.97–105).

Whatever a person is like on the surface, it is held that the depths of their mind are ‘brightly shining’ and pure (*A.* 1.10). This depth purity, referred to as the ‘embryo of the Truth-attained One’ (*Tathāgata-garbha*) – or ‘Buddha-nature’ – in the Mahāyāna, represents the potential for ultimate change: the attainment of enlightenment, and as such is a basis for respecting all beings.

The changes involved in the round of rebirths are also relevant to ethics, for they enable one to consider beings aside from their present roles, character and nature. No matter how ‘bad’ beings may be, they will have been different in previous lives, and at some point in their incalculable number of lives, they must have crossed paths with one and been good to one: ‘It is not easy, monks, to find a being who has not in the past been one’s mother, or one’s father, brother, sister, son or daughter’ (*S.* 11.189–90). Viewing them in such a light enables one to have a positive regard for them. Not only past, but also future changes are relevant. In advising that one should always attend to the good points of people, so as to overcome ill-will towards them, the Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa advises that if a person is so evil as to have no apparent good points, then compassion should be had towards him or her on account of the great suffering that he or she will undergo as a karmic result of such evil (*Vism.* 340).

Labelling someone as having a certain fixed nature often has a bad effect on him or her, whereas respecting him or her helps elicit change for the better. This cannot be forced, however: it is up to him or her. Nor should one passively accept negative traits in oneself as unchangeable. They need acknowledgement, but as they, like all else, are conditioned phenomena, they can be changed if their causes are understood and undermined. The same applies to wholesome states of mind: they can decay if not sustained by appropriate practice, so they are not grounds for being complacent or conceitedly looking down on others. Indeed, to do so or to treat others badly is just the way to undermine one’s existing wholesome states.

From the Buddhist point of view, there are three forms of ‘conceit’ (*māna*), all based on the delusion of having a fixed ‘I’ as one’s nature. Looking at others and comparing oneself to them, one then either sees oneself as ‘superior’, ‘inferior’ or (in a competitive or complacent way) ‘equal’ (*S.* 11.88), rather than simply calmly assessing what qualities one presently has, and how these might be strengthened or weakened.

Not-Self and respecting others

The teaching that no permanent Self or I exists within a person is also a support for ethics. While it does not itself support a positive regard for persons as unique entities, as the Christian emphasis on the value of individual persons does, it works in other ways. Primarily, it undermines the attachment to self – that ‘I’ am a positive, self-identical entity that should be gratified, and should be able to brush aside others if they get in ‘my’ way – which is the basis of lack of respect for others. It undercuts selfishness by undercutting the very notion of a substantial self. Anger, for example, feeds off the notion that ‘I’ have been offended.

The idea of not-Self does not deny that each person has an individual history and character, but it emphasizes that these are compounds of universal factors. In particular, it means that ‘your’ suffering and ‘my’ suffering are not inherently different. They are just suffering and so the barrier which generally keeps us within our own ‘self-interest’ should be dissolved, or widened in its scope till it includes all beings. The aspect of the not-Self teaching which emphasizes that we are not as in control of our own minds as we would like to think also adds a leavening of humility and a sense of humour to our attitude to the weaknesses of ourselves and others, for it is said that all those who have not yet had any glimpse of *Nirvāṇa* are ‘deranged’ (*Vibh. A.* 186).

‘Respect for persons’ is in many ways a key basis of Western ethics. It may be summed up as comprising four main elements (Smart, 1972):

- (1) the right to ‘individuation’: to be treated not just as *a* human being, but as a particular one, with all one’s personal difference;
- (2) the right to ‘acceptance’: to be taken as one is, good or bad;
- (3) the right to ‘self-direction’: to autonomy and the making of one’s own choices;
- (4) the right to impartial treatment.

Buddhism has not traditionally expressed its ethics in terms of ‘rights’ (see pp. 119–20), but more in terms of the appropriateness and benefit of treating others well. This is partly because no unchanging ‘owner’ of inalienable ‘rights’ is accepted, and because ‘demanding rights’ can lead to anger and greed if one is not careful. Nevertheless, the Buddhist perspective on how one should treat others provides analogues to the above four ‘rights’ (Harvey, 1987):

1 *Individuation*: while there is no permanent Self, each person is seen as a particular, individual combination of changing mental and physical processes, with a particular karmic history. This means that specific spir-

itual advice must be adapted to a person's character, to help them evolve in a better direction. The goal may largely go beyond individual differences, but the path must take account of them.

2 *Acceptance*: good and bad qualities are not fixed parts of an unchanging 'Self', so one should never tie a person down to what he or she has done or been in the past. Persons should always be addressed with regard to their present state, and openness to possible future changes. The faults that others have or have had are also something that we have or have had at some time.

3 *Self-direction*: any worthwhile change must come from within, by understanding and personal development.¹³ It cannot be forced from without. People can be offered opportunities to change, but it is up to them if they take them.

4 *Impartial treatment*: all have the potential for *Nirvāṇa*, in this or a future life, and all bring themselves into their situations, good or bad, by their own karma. Thus all should be viewed with equanimity and impartiality.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path is the Middle Way of practice that leads to the cessation of *dukkha*. The Path has eight factors, each described as right or perfect (Pali *sammā*; Skt *samyak*): (1) right view or understanding, (2) right resolve, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness and (8) right concentration or unification. These factors are also grouped into three sections (*M.* 1.301). Factors 3–5 pertain to *sīla* (Pali; Skt *śīla*), moral virtue; factors 6–8 pertain to *samādhi*, meditative cultivation of the heart/mind (*citta*); factors 1–2 pertain to *paññā* (Pali; Skt *prajñā*), or wisdom.

The eight factors exist at two basic levels, the ordinary (Pali *lokiya*; Skt *laukika*), which leads to good rebirths, and the transcendent (Pali *lokuttara*; Skt *lokottara*) or Noble (Pali *ariya*; Skt *ārya*), which builds on this preliminary development to go beyond rebirths, to *Nirvāṇa*. There is thus both an ordinary and a Noble Eightfold Path (*M.* III.71–8). Most Buddhists seek to practise the ordinary Path, which is perfected only in those who are approaching the lead up to 'stream-entry'. At stream-entry, a person gains a first glimpse of *Nirvāṇa* and the 'stream' which leads there, and

¹³ This statement would not, though, be accepted, by some forms of Pure Land Buddhism, one form of the Mahāyāna in China, Korea and Japan (see pp. 142–3), for it sees salvation as coming from the heavenly Buddha Amitābha.

enters this, the *Noble Eightfold Path*. Each Path-factor conditions wholesome states, and progressively wears away its opposite 'wrong' factor, until all unwholesome states are destroyed.

Ordinary 'right view' (Pali *sammā-dit̥ṭhi*; Skt *samyak-dṛṣṭi*) relates mainly to such matters as karma and rebirth (as described on pp. 11–12 above), making a person take full responsibility for his or her actions. It also covers intellectual, and partial experiential, understanding of the Four Noble Truths. Noble right view is true wisdom, knowledge which penetrates into the nature of reality in flashes of profound insight, direct seeing of the world as a stream of changing, unsatisfactory, conditioned processes (*S.* II.16–17). Right resolve concerns the emotions, with thought rightly channelled towards peaceful freedom from sensuality, and away from ill-will and cruelty to lovingkindness and compassion. At the transcendent level, it is the focused applied thought of one practising the Noble Path. Right speech, at the ordinary level, is the well-established abstaining from lying, divisive or harsh speech, and empty gossip. At the transcendent level, each of the three factors relating to 'virtue' is a person's spontaneous restraint from wrong speech, action or livelihood, or immediate acknowledgement to another person when such acts are done. Right action is abstaining from wrong bodily behaviour: onslaught on living beings, taking what is not given, and wrong conduct with regard to sense-pleasures. Right livelihood is avoiding ways of making a living which cause suffering to others: those based on trickery and greed (*M.* III.75), or on trade in weapons, living beings, meat, alcoholic drink or poison (*A.* III.208).

The three last factors of the Path are of the Noble level when they are accompanied by other factors at this level (*M.* III.71). Right effort is directed at developing the mind in a wholesome way. The first effort is to avoid the arising of unwholesome states of mind which express attachment, hatred or delusion. The second seeks to overcome or undermine unwholesome states which nevertheless arise. The third is directed at the meditative development of wholesome states of mind, while the fourth is the effort to maintain and stabilize wholesome qualities of mind which have been generated. Right mindfulness (Pali *sati*; Skt *smṛti*) is a crucial aspect of any Buddhist meditation, and is a state of keen awareness of mental and physical phenomena as they arise within and around one, and carefully bearing in mind the relationship between things. Right concentration or unification (*samādhi*) refers to various levels of deep calm known as *jhānas* (Pali; Skt *dhyānas*): states of inner collectedness arising from attention closely focused on a meditation object.

The order of the eight Path-factors is seen as that of a natural progression, with one factor following on from the one before it. Right view comes first because it knows the right and wrong form of each of the eight factors; it also counteracts spiritual ignorance, the first factor in the chain of Conditioned Arising, leading to *dukkha* (see p. 33). From the cold knowing of right understanding blossoms a right way of thinking, which has a balancing warmth. From this, a person's speech becomes improved, and thus his or her action. Once he or she is working on right action, it becomes natural to incline towards a virtuous livelihood. With this as basis, there can be progress in right effort. This facilitates the development of right mindfulness, whose clarity then allows the development of the calm of meditative concentration. Neither the ordinary nor the Noble Path is to be understood as a single progression from the first to eighth factor, however. Right effort and mindfulness work with right understanding to support the development of all the Path-factors: the Path-factors mutually support each other to allow a gradual deepening of the way in which the Path is trodden.

Noble persons

Any person not yet on the Noble Path is known as a *puṭhujjana* (Pali; Skt *prthagjana*), an 'ordinary person' who lacks the mental balance of those on the Noble Path, the eight kinds of spiritually 'Noble' (*ariya*) persons. These comprise the Noble *Saṅgha*, which with the Buddha and *Dhamma* are the 'three refuges' of a Buddhist (see p. 8). The Noble persons are those who have been permanently changed, to some degree, by insight into *Dhamma*: the Stream-enterer, Once-returned, Non-returned and *Arahat* (Pali; Skt *Arhat*), and those established on the specific paths which lead up to each of these states. The Stream-enterer is one who gains a first glimpse of *Nirvāṇa*, and so will be free from rebirth at anything less than a human level (*S.* v.357), and be bound to become an *Arahat* within seven lives at most (*A.* 1.235). The Once-returned is one whose remaining lives will include only one in the 'sense-desire-realm' (see p. 14), as a human or god in a lower heaven. The Non-returned will not be reborn again in the desire-realm, but will be reborn in one or more of the 'pure abodes', a small group of heavens in the '(elemental) form-realm'. Here, the Non-returned will go on to become an *Arahat*. The *Arahat* is one who fully experiences *Nirvāṇa* during life, and who destroys the causes of *any* more rebirths. At death, he or she passes into final *Nirvāṇa*, beyond all time, space, conditions and *dukkha*.

The progression through these grades of sanctity is measured by the number of the ten spiritual ‘fetters’ which have been destroyed. The Stream-enterer destroys the first three:

- (1) ‘views on the existing group’, which takes a permanent Self as existing in some relation to one or all of the five personality groups;
- (2) vacillation in commitment to the three refuges and the worth of morality;
- (3) grasping at moral precepts and vows.

The Stream-enterer has unblemished morality (*S.* II.69–70), not in the sense that no unwholesome action is ever done, but in the sense that, if it is, he or she always freely acknowledges having done such a deed (*Sn.* 232). There is no grasping at moral precepts because, though they are carefully followed, there is no belief that these alone will lead to becoming an *Arahat*: meditation and wisdom are also needed. Moreover, a person keeps the precepts without thinking what he or she will gain by doing so.¹⁴ The Once-returned destroys the gross forms of the next two fetters:

- (4) sensual desire;
- (5) ill-will.

The Non-returned destroys even subtle remnants of them, so as to have great equanimity. The *Arahat* destroys the remaining five fetters:

- (6) attachment to the (elemental) form heavenly world;
- (7) attachment to the formless heavenly worlds;
- (8) the ‘I am’ conceit, perhaps now in the form of lingering spiritual pride;
- (9) restlessness;
- (10) spiritual ignorance.

In order for such negative traits to be eradicated from the mind, other positive ones must also be developed: the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, and other associated ones such as the ‘seven factors of awakening’: mindfulness, *Dhamma*-investigation, vigour, joy, tranquillity, mental unification and equanimity.

The place of ethics on the Path

From the perspective of the Four Noble Truths, ethics is not for its own sake, but is an essential ingredient on the path to the final goal. This is

¹⁴ *D. A.* III.784, though *Vibh.* 365 sees this fetter as believing that non-Buddhist precepts and vows lead to spiritual purification.

well expressed in a passage which explains that ‘purity of virtue’ leads onward to ‘purity of mind’, this to ‘purity of view’, and this, through various stages of increasing spiritual insight, to ‘utter *Nirvāṇa* without attachment’, ‘unshakeable freedom of mind’ (*M.* 1.149–50). It is emphasized that while each stage supports the next, the ‘holy life’ is not lived for any of them except the final one. This is because at any lower stage of spiritual progress, there is still attachment and a person may become complacent, conceited or arrogant about his or her attainments, thus hindering further progress. The foundational importance of ethics for the rest of the Path is, however, crucial:

So you see, Ānanda, wholesome virtues have freedom from remorse as object and profit; freedom from remorse has gladness; gladness has joy; joy has tranquillity; tranquillity has happiness; happiness has concentration; concentration has seeing things as they really are; seeing things as they really are has turning away and non-attachment; turning away and non-attachment have release by knowing and seeing as their object and profit. So you see, Ānanda, wholesome virtues lead gradually up to the summit. (*A.* v.2)

In this process of development, the cultivation of one stage leads naturally on to the cultivation of the next, so that the components of the Path support one another and interact to form a harmonious whole. The basis for them all, however, like the earth for plants or a foundation for a building, is moral virtue (*Mih.* 33–4).

In terms of the division of the Path into virtue, meditation and wisdom (always given in this order), the Path can be seen to develop as follows. Influenced and inspired by good examples, a person’s first commitment will be to develop virtue, a generous and self-controlled way of life for the benefit of self and others. To motivate this, he or she will have some degree of preliminary wisdom, in the form of some acquaintance with the Buddhist outlook and an aspiration to apply it, expressed as *saddhā*, trustful confidence or faith. With virtue as the indispensable basis for further progress, some meditation may be attempted. With appropriate application, this will lead to the mind becoming calmer, stronger and clearer. This will allow experiential understanding of the *Dhamma* to develop, so that deeper wisdom arises. From this, virtue is strengthened, becoming a basis for further progress in meditation and wisdom. Accordingly, it is said that wisdom and virtue support each other like two hands washing each other (*D.* 1.124). With each more refined development of the virtue–meditation–wisdom sequence, the Path spirals up to a higher level, until the crucial transition of stream-entry is reached. The *Noble* Path then spirals up to Arahatsip.

Defilements such as greed, hatred and delusion exist in the form of unwholesome activities of body and speech, unwholesome thoughts, and the latent tendencies in the mind which are the root of all these. Moral virtue restrains the external expression of the defilements, meditation undermines active defilements in the mind, and liberating insight destroys defilements in the form of latent tendencies. These three levels of development can perhaps be seen in the popular verse:

Not to do any evil,
 To cultivate what is wholesome,
 To purify one's mind:
 This is the teaching of the Buddhas. (*Dhp.* 183)

Wise, skilful, wholesome actions

In the Pali Canon, the term *puñña* (see pp. 17–18) occurs mainly in the context of giving and other aspects of lay practice, as a pan-Indian term for good, beneficial actions. However, a more frequently occurring term for good actions, with more particularly Buddhist connotations, is *kusala* (Pali; Skt *kuśala*) (Cousins, 1996: 154–5). A *kusala* action is a blameless one (*A.* 1.263), which is ‘wise’ or ‘skilful’ in producing an uplifting mental state and spiritual progress in the doer (unless he or she has already attained the goal), or ‘wholesome’, in that it involves a healthy state of mind – stable, pure, unencumbered, ready-to-act, calm and contented (Payutto, 1993: 19). The opposite term, for a bad action, is *akusala*: ‘unwholesome’ or ‘unskilful’. L. S. Cousins traces the meaning of *kusala/kuśala* in pre-Buddhist and Buddhist sources and summarizes thus:

1. An original meaning of ‘intelligent’ ‘wise’;¹⁵
2. Expert in magical and sacrificial ritual (in the [pre-Buddhist] *Brāhmaṇas*); for brahmins, of course, this would precisely constitute wisdom.
3. A) Skilled in meditational/mystic (/ascetic?) practices (in the early Pali sources and, no doubt, in other contemporary traditions), including skilled in the kind of behaviour which supported meditation, etc., i.e. *śīla* [keeping moral precepts], etc.
 B) Skilled in performing *dāna* [giving] and *yañña* [sacrifice], now interpreted in terms of central Buddhist ethical concerns; and associated with keeping the precepts and so on.

¹⁵ Though in an unpublished paper commenting on Cousins’ account, ‘*Kūśala*: Good or Skilful or What? Reconsidering the Meaning of *kusala/kuśala* in Buddhist Texts’ (UK Association for Buddhist Studies conference, 6 July 1988), Lambert Schmithausen has argued that such a usage was originally only applied to *persons* and not actions or states.

4. *Kusala* in later Buddhist and Jain sources becomes generalized to refer to something like wholesome or good states.

So there is no reason to doubt that by a later period (i.e. in the commentaries and perhaps later canonical sources) *kusala* in non-technical contexts means something which could be translated as ‘good’. (1996: 156)

Under 3.A), Cousins sees the meaning as states ‘produced by wisdom’ that contribute to the development of various qualities leading to awakening (1996: 137). While this meaning often occurs in the *Suttas*, and is emphasized in the Canonical *Abhidhamma*, the *Suttas* also often see *kusala* as meaning ‘blameless’ (Cousins, 1996: 139–40).

The criteria for determining whether an action is *kusala* or *akusala* will be discussed below. Before that, the somewhat ambiguous relationship between karmically fruitful actions and *Nirvāṇa* will be discussed.

The Arahāt as ‘beyond fruitful and deadening actions’

At the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path stands the *Arahāt*, who is actually said to have ‘passed beyond’ *puñña* and *pāpa* (*Sn.* 636) and to have ‘abandoned’ them (*Sn.* 520): ‘Not clinging to karmically fruitful or deadening actions, he abandons what has been taken up, and does not fashion (anything more) here’ (*Sn.* 790). He or she constructs no karmically fruitful or unfruitful action (*S.* 11.82). What could this mean? It certainly does not mean that an *Arahāt* abandons moral behaviour: an *Arahāt* is said to be fully endowed with moral virtue and insight (*Dhp.* 217), one with the highest wholesomeness (*M.* 11.25), incapable of killing (*D.* 11.235). The Buddha, himself an *Arahāt*, is foremost in moral virtue (*D.* 1.174), even though this is only part of his perfection (*D.* 1.3). The *Nirvāṇa* experienced by the *Arahāt* during life is said to be the destruction of attachment, hatred and delusion (*S.* 11.251). As the *Arahāt* is one in whom attachment/greed, hatred and delusion, the roots of unwholesome action, have been destroyed (*S.* 11.252), he or she is no longer capable of morally unwholesome action, though he or she may inadvertently break a monastic rule, such as not eating after noon, through ignorance of worldly matter (*Miln.* 266–7). His or her actions are morally wholesome, but arise spontaneously, without resistance from unwholesome traits (*D.* 11.217). This is one sense in which the *Arahāt* has ‘abandoned karmic fruitfulness’: he or she no longer has to deliberate about doing the ‘right thing’.

A second way in which he or she is beyond karmic fruitfulness is that his or her actions no longer have either good or bad karmic fruits. It is

said that karma is conditioned by craving (*S.* v.86–7; *Miln.* 51) – destroyed by the *Arahat* – and that only when there is greed, hatred and delusion can fruit-bearing karma originate (*A.* 1.134–5). While non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion are causes of action, like their opposites, the wholesome actions springing from them are said to conduce to the future cessation of (good or bad) karma, while the unwholesome actions springing from their opposites are said to conduce to the continued arising of karma in the future (*A.* 1.263). In one who still has remnants of greed, hatred and delusion, acts rooted in non-greed etc. still bring good karmic results. In one in whom they are destroyed, actions are wholesome, but do not generate future fruits. Thus the Buddha once spoke of four kinds of action (*M.* 1.389–91):

- (1) that which is dark, and with dark result: harmful actions that lead to rebirths with harmful experiences in them;
- (2) that which is bright and with bright result: non-harming actions that lead to rebirth with non-harmful experiences in them;
- (3) that which is both dark and bright and with dark and bright result: a mixture of the first two;¹⁶
- (4) that which is ‘neither dark nor bright, neither dark nor bright in result, the action that conduces to the destruction of actions’: the will to get rid of the first three types of action.

Elsewhere, *Nirvāṇa* is said to be ‘neither black nor white’ (*A.* III.384–6), and the fourth type of action is said to be the Noble Eightfold Path.¹⁷ This path is also said to be ‘the way leading to the stopping of karma’, with the stopping of karma being ‘that stopping of bodily action, verbal action and mental action by which one touches freedom’.¹⁸ That is, the Noble Eightfold Path leads up to a profoundly still experience, *Nirvāṇa*, in which the capacity of actions to bring future karmic fruits comes to an end.

The *Arahat* is one for whom both unwholesome and wholesome moral conduct (*sīla*) are said to have ‘stopped’ completely (*M.* II.26–7). Unwholesome conduct is stopped by replacing wrong conduct with right conduct. Wholesome conduct is stopped by being ‘virtuous (*sīla-vā*), but not *sīla-maya*’. Now, ‘*maya*’ means something like ‘made of’ or ‘consisting in’. At *It.* 51, there is reference to the ‘basis of effecting an act of

¹⁶ That is, an action in which good and bad motives are juxtaposed. As the *Abhidhamma* texts deny that wholesome and unwholesome mental states can be literally simultaneous (*Kvu.* 344), this means that there is a flicking between good and bad motives in certain actions: for example, in an act of giving, genuine generosity may alternate with a desire to show someone up as less generous than oneself. ¹⁷ *A.* II.236; see Payutto, 1993: 73–81. ¹⁸ *S.* IV.132–3; cf. *A.* III.415.

karmic fruitfulness' 'consisting in moral virtue (*sīla-maya*)'. The commentary (*M.A.* II.270) explains the term at *M.* II.26–7 as meaning that the *Arahat* has nothing further to add to his or her already developed moral virtue, and accordingly I. B. Horner translates 'and has no addition to make to moral habit'.¹⁹ K. N. Jayatilleke translates the term as meaning 'not virtuous through conditioning' (1972: 26), and *Bhikkhus* Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi translate 'but he does not identify with his virtue', meaning that he or she is not attached to it, seeing it as not-Self, like everything else.²⁰ The upshot of these different readings is the same, though: the *Arahat*, standing at the culmination of the Noble Eightfold Path, has perfected all its factors, including those relating to moral virtue. He or she has nothing further to add to this moral and spiritual perfection, but his or her virtue is not constrained by ideas of what he or she *ought* to do: he or she just naturally acts in a virtuous way, without being attached to virtue. Thus an *Arahat* says that he is non-violent because of his destruction of attachment, hatred and delusion, not because of grasping at precepts and vows (*Vin.* I.184).

As the Noble Eightfold Path leads to rendering karmic fruitfulness ineffective, karmic fruitfulness is clearly seen to have some limitations. Thus it is sometimes said that a monk may think of returning to the lay life because he can then enjoy life's pleasures and still perform karmically fruitful acts (see, for example, *Vin.* I.182). Also relevant is a distinction between 'ordinary' and Noble right view (see p. 38 above). The first, concerning belief in karma and rebirth (see pp. 11–12 above), is said to have 'cankers [mental limitations holding the mind back from *Nirvāṇa*], it is on the side of karmic fruitfulness, it ripens in cleaving (to another rebirth)'. The second, wisdom or direct insight, is said to be 'Noble, cankerless, transcendent, a factor of the path [the Noble Eightfold Path to *Nirvāṇa*]' (*M.* III.72). The point here seems to be that 'karmically fruitful' actions, while they have the beneficial result of leading to good rebirths, have limitations in that they cannot, unaided, lead to *Nirvāṇa*, which transcends all rebirths – and their unsatisfactory nature – whether bad or good. To attain *Nirvāṇa*, wisdom or insight is also needed. While 'karmically fruitful' actions strengthen character-traits which facilitate the development of wisdom, the latter is an extra step. Moral virtue is said to be the 'gateway to the city of *Nirvāṇa*' (*Vism.* 9), though not to go all the way. Karmic fruitfulness is necessary for movement towards

¹⁹ *Middle Length Sayings*, vol. II (London: PTS, 1957), p. 226.

²⁰ *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom, 1995), p. 651.

Nirvāṇa – thus some texts even say the latter is attainable by karmic fruitfulness (*Khp.* 7) – but not itself sufficient. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to see actions orientated to karmic fruitfulness and actions of the Noble Path as radically different, as King (1964) and Spiro (1971) have in their analyses of Burmese Theravāda Buddhism. They see the former kind of actions as the sphere of the laity and the latter as the sphere of the monks. That this is a false dichotomy has been well argued by Keown (1992: 83–105), Aronson (1980: 78–96) and Katz (1982: 175–80). Both monks and laity can and do practise both types of action, and the first type is the very foundation – and continued sustainer – of the second. It is not the case that moral virtue (a prime source of karmic fruitfulness) is a mere instrumental means towards a goal consisting only of insight (see Keown, 1992: 8–14). One standing at the goal of Buddhism has *both* moral virtue *and* deep insight, for he or she has perfected all factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, covering moral virtue and meditation as well as wisdom.

PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION

Criteria for differentiating good and bad actions

The criteria for deciding what action is ‘wholesome’ (*kusala*) and what is ‘unwholesome’ (*akusala*) (see pp. 42–3) are of three kinds:

- (1) the motivation of the action;
- (2) the direct effects of the action in terms of causing suffering or happiness;
- (3) the action’s contribution to spiritual development, culminating in *Nirvāṇa*.

The three possible motivating ‘roots’ of ‘unwholesome’ action (*M.* 1.47) are:

- (1) greed (*lobha*), which covers a range of states from mild longing up to full-blown lust, avarice, fame-seeking and dogmatic clinging to ideas;
- (2) hatred (Pali *dosa*; Skt *dveṣa*), which covers mild irritation through to burning resentment and wrath;
- (3) delusion or spiritual misorientation (*moha*), the veiling of truth from oneself, as in dull, foggy states of mind through to specious doubt on moral and spiritual matters, distorting the truth or turning away from it, and misconceptions, such as that it is acceptable to kill animals as a religious sacrifice or to eat, or to kill criminals (*AKB.* iv.68d).

The opposites of these are the three ‘roots’ of wholesome action:

- (1) non-greed, covering states from small generous impulses through to a strong urge for renunciation of worldly pleasures;
- (2) non-hatred, covering friendliness through to forbearance in the face of great provocation, and deep lovingkindness for all beings;
- (3) non-delusion, covering clarity of mind through to the deepest insight into reality.

While phrased negatively, these three are nevertheless seen as positive states. The importance of seeing the harmfulness of the unwholesome roots and the benefit of the wholesome ones is emphasized in the *Kālāma Sutta* (p. 10 above). The three roots of the unwholesome are intertwined. Greed and hatred are grounded in delusion, and greed may lead to hatred. It is said that greed is a lesser fault, but fades slowly, hatred is a great fault, but fades quickly, and delusion is a great fault and fades slowly (*A.* 1.200). This gives a clear indication of Buddhist values, especially the need to develop wisdom, so as to overcome delusion. It is also said that common motives for evil deeds are partiality, enmity, stupidity and fear (*D.* III.181–2), and that greed, hatred and delusion can each lead a person to abuse others with the thought ‘I am powerful’ (*A.* 1.201–2).

An action is also assessed in terms of its direct effect in terms of causing suffering or happiness. This is shown by a passage where the Buddha advises that one should reflect before, during and after any action of body, speech or mind, to consider whether it might conduce to the harm of oneself, others or both, so that it is unwholesome and results in *dukkha*. If one sees that it will, one should desist from the action. If one sees that the action conduces to the harm of neither oneself nor others, nor both, it can be seen to be wholesome, with a happy result (*M.* 1.415–16). The ‘harm’ to oneself which is relevant here is spiritual harm, or material harm if this arises from self-hatred (for example by harsh asceticism, *M.* 1.342–9): an act which benefits others at the expense of material harm to oneself is not unwholesome. Harm to oneself is also seen to arise as an immediate result of unwholesome action: ‘One who is thus caught up, whose mind is thus infected, in the karmically deadening, unwholesome states born of greed . . . of hatred . . . of delusion, experiences suffering, stress, agitation and anxiety in this present life’ (*A.* 1.202).

An action is also assessed in terms of its contribution to spiritual development, culminating in *Nirvāṇa*, which criterion is seen to lead on from the one just described above. Thus it is said that unwholesome conduct is that which causes injury, that is, having *dukkha* as fruit, because it leads

to the torment of oneself, others or both, *and* conduces to the arising of further unwholesome states and the diminution of wholesome ones: that is, having unhealthy effects on the psyche. Wholesome actions are of the opposite kind (*M.* II.114–15). Moreover, ‘wrong resolve’, for example, is said not only to conduce to the harm of self and other but to be ‘destructive of intuitive wisdom, associated with distress, not conducive to *Nirvāṇa*’, while ‘right resolve’ has the opposite effect (*M.* I.115–16).

Overall, one can say that an ‘unwholesome’ action is one that arises from greed, hatred or delusion, leads to immediate suffering in others and/or oneself – and thus to further karmic suffering for oneself in the future – and contributes to more unwholesome states arising and liberating wisdom being weakened. ‘Wholesome’ actions have the opposite characteristics. They arise from a virtuous motive, are free of all direct harm to self and other, contribute to the improvement of the character of the person who performs them, and thus assist in moving a person along the Path to *Nirvāṇa*.

While saying that an action is ‘karmically fruitful’ refers to its potency to produce happiness as a karmic result, saying that it is ‘wholesome’ has a different emphasis. Any karmically fruitful action is also wholesome, but there is a range of mental states which are referred to as wholesome, but are not specifically said to be karmically fruitful.²¹

Using the above criteria, one list of what is unwholesome is: (1) onslaught on living beings, (2) taking what is not given, (3) sensual misconduct, (4) lying speech, (5) divisive speech, (6) harsh speech, (7) gossip, (8) covetousness, (9) ill-will and (10) wrong view. That is, it is wrong action of body ((1)–(3)), speech ((4)–(7)) and mind ((8)–(10)). What is wholesome is restraint from each of these (*M.* I.47). Such actions are said to be ‘of unwholesome will (*akusala-sañcetanikā*), yielding *dukkha*, ripening in *dukkha*’ (*A.* v.292). Of these actions, only those relating to body and speech would normally be seen as coming under the purview of the English words ‘morality’ or ‘ethics’; indeed, the Pali word *sīla*, or ‘moral virtue’, has a similar range. That which is ‘wholesome’ or ‘unwholesome’, then, goes beyond the purely moral/immoral to include states of mind, which may have no direct effect on other

²¹ For example, constructing activities (*saṅkhāras*) involved in actions are said to be of three types: karmically fruitful, karmically unfruitful, and imperturbable (*āneñjā*) (*D.* III.217). The third of these is seen by the commentary (*D. A.* 998) as wholesome (*kusala*) acts of will that lead to rebirth in the formless realms, an idea supported by *A.* II.184. As such rebirths contain only neutral feelings, but not pleasant or unpleasant ones (*Vibh.* 267), actions leading to them are not said to be karmically fruitful or unfruitful, though they are wholesome as they can contribute to spiritual development.

people. All the factors of the Eightfold Path, for example, are seen as 'wholesome'.

Comparisons with Western ethical systems

Various scholars have reflected on the question of what is the nearest analogy to Buddhist ethics in Western ethical theory. One theory it is commonly likened to is Utilitarianism,²² which holds that a specific act (Act Utilitarianism), or a general type of action (Rule Utilitarianism) is right if, and only if, it results in a greater amount of happiness, or a reduction in unhappiness, for anyone affected by it. That is, the rightness of an action consists in the nature of its effects. However, in Buddhism, while good actions are seen as leading to future happiness as a karmic fruit, they do so because they are right; they are not right *because* they happen to lead to happy karmic fruits (see p. 17 above).²³ That good actions are seen as having happy karmic fruits for the agent will be *one* factor relevant to his or her motivation for doing such acts:

Buddhism says that, if one wants to attain prosperity, amicable social relationships or a good reputation, self-confidence or calm and joy, a good rebirth or progress towards *Nibbāna*, then act in such and such a way: for this is how such things are fostered. If one behaves otherwise, then one will suffer in this and subsequent lives, as a natural (karmic) result of unwholesome actions. (Harvey, 1990a: 196)

Nevertheless, happy fruits are not what make good actions good. Motive and intention are crucial, though when simple joy is observed to arise from an action, it is often a sign that it is a good action, and the immediate effect of an action on the happiness of others is *one* factor in assessing it.

A danger in Utilitarianism (particularly Act Utilitarianism) is that it tends to a perspective of 'the end justifies the means', so a means which one might want to say is evil might be 'justified' by the goal it is seen to lead to. In Buddhism, certainly in its Theravāda form (though see chapter 3 on the Mahāyāna idea of 'skilful means'), this is not possible: only wholesome means have the ability to conduce to truly wholesome ends. Admittedly, the goal of Buddhism, *Nirvāṇa*, is equivalent to the end of *dukkha*, the end of suffering, a goal which a Utilitarian would share. But *Nirvāṇa* is also the destruction of attachment, hatred and

²² See, e.g., Dharmasiri, 1989: 24–7; Kalupahana, 1976: 61.

²³ Keown, 1992: 8–23, 165–91.

delusion (*It.* 38–9), and the Path to this is good or wholesome because it is intrinsically related to this goal, not contingently so: it is not the Path which *just happens* to conduce to it. As it consists of actions rooted in non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion, the Path has natural affinities to *Nirvāṇa*, the destruction of the opposites of these. Moreover, it is not that *Nirvāṇa*, the absence of greed, hatred and delusion, is (arbitrarily) chosen as the ultimate goal, and then actions seen as ‘good’ if they happen to conduce to this (cf. Dharmasiri, 1989: 24). Actions rooted in non-greed etc. can be recognized as good or wholesome whether or not one is a Buddhist with *Nirvāṇa* as one’s ultimate goal (see p. 47).

This shows that a better broad Western analogue to Buddhist ethics is Aristotelian ethics, as argued by Keown (1992, especially pp. 193–227), supported by Tatz (1986: 1) and Shaner (1989: 175) for Mahāyāna ethics and Mahāyāna-shaped Japanese ethics respectively. For Aristotle, ethics is about developing one’s *ethos* or ‘character’ by the cultivation of virtues – wholesome dispositions and inclinations – which conduce to the goal of *eudaimonia*. This goal involves true happiness and a human flourishing in which the psyche is marked by excellencies of both reason and character (Keown, 1992: 193, 203, 209–10). Both Aristotle and Buddhism aim at human perfection by developing a person’s knowledge and character, his or her ‘head’ and ‘heart’ (Keown, 1992: 72, 209). In Buddhist terminology, this is done by eliminating both spiritual ignorance and craving, which feed off each other, by cultivating intellectual, emotional and moral virtues sharing something of the qualities of the goal towards which they move (Keown, 1992: 194). In both Aristotelian and Buddhist ethics, an action is right because it embodies a virtue which conduces to and ‘participates’ in the goal of human perfection. Both are ‘teleological’ in that they advocate action which moves towards a *telos* or goal/end with which they have an intrinsic relationship (Keown, 1992: 184, 194). This is as opposed to being simply ‘consequentialist’, like Utilitarianism: judging an act by the effects it happens to have (Keown, 1992: 23, 202) – though some Utilitarians would dispute this distinction.

Another possible Western analogue for Buddhist ethics is Kantian ethics, which sees what is good as residing in a good will, which respects other people as ends in themselves rather than as means to one’s own ends. While there are clearly some similarities with Buddhist ethics, Buddhism does not ignore the actual results of action on others as opposed to the will or motive behind it. More importantly, Kantian

ethics is deontological, or based on duty. For Buddhism, though, moral constraints are not imposed on people without regard to their own good (Keown, 1992: 202²⁴), and the Buddha said that he gladly taught others out of compassion and sympathy, not because he felt that this was a burdensome duty (S. I.206). A moral life is not seen as a bald 'ought', but as an uplifting source of happiness, in which the sacrifice of lesser pleasures facilitates the experiencing of those which are more enriching and satisfying, for both oneself and others. Nevertheless, duty is not a concept foreign to Buddhism; it is simply that what one *should* do is also seen as what is enriching and rewarding.

Overall, the rich field of Buddhist ethics would be narrowed by wholly collapsing it into any single one of the Kantian, Aristotelian or Utilitarian models, though Buddhism agrees with each in respectively acknowledging the importance of (1) a good motivating will, (2) cultivation of character, and (3) the reduction of suffering in others and oneself. This is because the first two of these are seen as crucial causes of the third of them, while aiming at the third, in a way which does not ignore aspects of the full karmic situation, is a key feature of the first two.

A key aspect of Western ethical systems is that moral prescriptions should be universally applicable to all people who can understand them. Buddhism, though, is generally gradualist in approach, so while it has ethical norms which all should follow from a sense of sympathy with fellow beings (such as not killing living beings), others only apply to those who are ready for them, as their commitment to moral and spiritual training deepens. This most obviously applies to the monastic level of commitment as compared with that of an ordinary lay person. A monk or nun vows to follow over 200 precepts or training rules, as compared with the usual five of a lay person. Many of these relate to behaviour which does not directly harm other beings – and thus do not come under the scope of ethics, as such – but are simply part of a training system to help a person overcome his or her greed, hatred and delusion: the roots of any behaviour which *does* harm others.

The level of morality and general conduct of a monk or nun is expected to be of a higher level than that of a lay person, because he or she has made the commitment to be ordained. Actions which would be totally unacceptable for a monk or nun, such as sexual intercourse, are acceptable (within certain limits) for a lay person.

²⁴ Keown's treatment, here, is better than that of Dharmasiri, 1989: 27–8.

Intention, knowledge and degrees of unwholesomeness in actions

The degree of unwholesomeness of an action is seen to vary according to the degree and nature of the volition/intention behind the action, and the degree of knowledge (of various kinds) relating to it. A bad action becomes more unwholesome as the force of the volition behind it increases, for this leaves a greater karmic ‘trace’ on the mind. The Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa discusses the unwholesome act of ‘onslaught on breathing (i.e. living) beings’ as follows:

‘Onslaught on breathing beings’ is, as regards a breathing being that one perceives as living, the will to kill it, expressed through body or speech, occasioning an attack which cuts off its life-faculty. That action, in regard to those without good qualities (*guṇa-*) – animals etc. – is of lesser fault when they are small, greater fault when they have a large physical frame. Why? Because of the greater effort involved. Where the effort is the same, (it is greater) because of the object (*vatthu-*) (of the act) being greater. In regard to those with good qualities – humans etc. – the action is of lesser fault when they are of few good qualities, greater fault when they are of many good qualities. But when size or good qualities are equal, the fault of the action is lesser due to the (relative) mildness of the mental defilements and of the attack, and greater due to their intensity. Five factors are involved: a living being, the actual perceiving of a living being, a thought of killing, the attack, and death as a result of it. There are six methods: with one’s own hand, by instigation, by missiles, by contrivance (trap or poison), by sorcery, by psychic power.²⁵

Here, one can see that an act is made worse by a stronger or more perverse volition motivating and accompanying it. To kill a virtuous human, or one deserving respect such as a parent (cf. p. 24; *D.* 1.85; *Vibh.* 378), is particularly perverse, just as giving to a virtuous person is particularly good (see p. 21; *A.* iv.237–78). That killing in a state of intense defilement is worse would mean that premeditated killing, from a mix of greed, resentment and also delusion, would be very bad. Other aspects of the above quotation will be discussed in later chapters, as appropriate. One can see similar principles at work, though, in the Mahāyāna *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra*, which holds that the object of the act of killing can be heavy (such as a parent) or light (an animal), and the thought behind it heavy or light dependent upon the degree of viciousness in it. In such an act, there is the motivating root, the means, and sometimes the thoughts and actions which come after it as its completion, such as eating an animal one has

²⁵ *M. A.* 1.198; cf. translation of Conze, 1959: 70–1; cf. almost identical passages at *Khp. A.* 28–9 and *Asl.* 97, and cf. also *AKB.* iv.73a–b.

killed (*Uss.* 165). Of these, just the means, just the completion, the root and means, or the means and completion may be heavy. 'If the object is the same, it is the thought that makes the difference of heavy or light retribution' (*Uss.* 180).

One can also outline a five-fold gradation of types of bad action according to the degree of both intention and knowledge involved:

(1) *An action performed without intending to do that particular action, for example accidentally treading on an insect, without any thought of harming.*

Such an action is not blameworthy and generates no bad karmic results. There is no offence for a monk if he kills a living being unintentionally, not realizing that his actions would harm a living being (*Vin.* IV.125). Likewise, in regard to the case of the monastic offence – entailing defeat in the monastic life – of deliberately killing a human, there is no actual offence entailing defeat 'if it was unintentional, if he did not know, if he were not meaning death, if he was out of his mind, the first offender (who caused the rule to be made)'.²⁶ It is also said that to crush worms accidentally while crushing sugar-cane for its juice is not blameable (*Miln.* 166), nor was the Buddha blameable when, after a certain sermon of his, monks of wrong view vomited blood (*Miln.* 165–7). Again, *Ud.* 28–9 says that a certain monk was not to be blamed for addressing other monks as if they were outcastes, for it was merely a habit arising from his last 500 lives, in which he had been a member of the brahmin class, who were accustomed to speak in such a harsh manner. The text explains that the monk had no hatred in his heart when saying this, and its commentary (*Ud. A.* 193), which actually sees him as an *Arahat*, says that his harsh speech was not something that he himself desired. In the *Jātakas* is another story on non-intentional action. A captured partridge is hit by a hunter so that its cry attracts other birds to their deaths. As it has no bad intention, and only plays a passive part in the hunter's actions, it is not blameworthy (*J.* III.64–6). What, though, of an act which is not *intended* to harm any being, but is such that one knows, or has strong reasons to expect, that a being or beings will be harmed? For example, crushing the sugar-cane when one knows, or strongly suspects, that it contains worms? Or driving a car on a hot day when it is very likely that many insects will be killed? Are these cases of (a) culpable carelessness, or (b) simply a lack of extra-mile altruism? In the *Vinaya*, certain forms of careless behaviour, such as throwing a stone off a cliff, are small offences (*Vin.* III.82).

²⁶ *Vin.* III.78; cf. *Vin.* II.91. Of course, it would still be a *moral* offence for the first offender to act in this way. Likewise, lesser acts which are normally monastic offences are excused if committed by a first offender (see, e.g., *Vin.* III.155).

Nevertheless, the *Kurudhamma Jātaka* (*J.* III.366–81), of which Andrew Huxley gives a good analysis (1995c), emphasizes the idea that unintended harm to others should not be counted against one, and that it is not wise to agonize over such matters (see also Harvey, 1999).

(2) *If one knows that a certain kind of action is evil, but does it when one is not in full control of oneself, for example when impassioned.*

This is a lesser evil than doing it with full knowledge of what one was doing, and with full intention. The *Milindapañha* discusses the case of a *Jātaka* story (*J.* III.514–19) in which the *Bodhisattva*, as an ascetic, sacrifices (or almost does?) many animals when a king says that he can marry his beautiful daughter if he does so (*Miln.* 219–21). The *Miln.* says that this was an action done when he was ‘out of his mind (*visaññinā*) with passion, not when he was thinking of what he was doing (*sañcetanena*)’. The action was not in accordance with his nature, for he was ‘unhinged, impassioned. It was when he was out of his mind, thoroughly confused and agitated, with thoughts confused, in a turmoil and disturbed’, like a madman. Thus it is said that ‘Evil done by one who is unhinged . . . is not of great blame here and now, nor is it so in respect of its ripening in a future state.’ Indeed, if an actual madman kills, his action is pardonable. Likewise, a monk who breaks a monastic rule when mad does not commit an offence (*Vin.* IV.125). Here, one can say that the actions of a madman are blameless (as at (1) above), while actions done when impassioned are of little blame – though getting into such a state can be held to be blameworthy. Actions done when drunk can perhaps be assessed in a similar way.

(3) *If one does an evil action when one is unclear or mistaken about the object affected by the action.*

This is moderately blameable. Thus, while it is an offence requiring expiation for a monk to kill a non-human living being intentionally, it is a lesser offence, of ‘wrong-doing’, if (a) he is in doubt whether it is a living being, or (b) if he tries to damage a non-living thing that he thinks is, or might be, living, for example by shooting an arrow at it. There is no offence, though, if he fires an arrow at a living being not knowing that it is a living being (*Vin.* IV.125). An attempt to use such reasoning to lessen the evil of an action can be seen in the actions of the Buddhists of Zanskar, a Kashmiri valley bordering Tibet, who feel that they have to kill predatory wolves. The killing is done as indirectly as possible: after the wolves have been lured into high-walled stone traps, large stones are thrown over the wall by a group of people – consequently nobody knows for sure whether their stones are among those that kill a wolf. In this way,

the people seek to put a distance between themselves and what they see as a practically necessary evil. This is comparable to the way in which, in the West, only *some* of the rifles used in a firing squad are loaded with live bullets, so that nobody knows whether they have fired one of the fatal shots.

(4) *An evil action done where one intends to do the act, fully knows what one is doing, and knows that the action is evil.*

This is the most obvious kind of wrong action, with bad karmic results, particularly if it is premeditated. Thus Buddhaghosa states, at the start of this section, that in the case of killing a living being, the precept against this is only broken if five factors are present: ‘a living being, the perception of a living being, a thought of killing, the action of carrying it out, and death as a result of it’. If any of these factors is absent, as when death results from a person striking something that he does not realize is living, the precept is not broken.

(5) *An evil action done where one intends to do the act, fully knows what one is doing (as in (4)), but do not recognize that one is doing wrong.*

This is seen as the worst kind of action. Such an action is discussed at *Miln.* 84, which says that if an evil action is done ‘unknowingly (*ajānato*)’, it has a worse karmic effect than if it is done ‘knowingly’. This is illustrated by saying that a person taking hold of a red-hot iron ball is more severely burnt if he does so unknowingly. This suggests that an evil action – such as an onslaught on a living being (*Miln.* 158) – is worse if it is done without hesitation, restraint or compunction. This will be the case if an action is not seen to be wrong,²⁷ as there will be no holding back on the volitional force put into the action. On the face of it, this may seem unjust; but perhaps not on further reflection. In an English court of law, the ‘ringleader’ of a crime is often punished more harshly than those who had been led on, half-reluctantly. The leader may well be held to see no wrong in the action, but the others have some compunction. Relevant to this is the case of doing a so-called ‘necessary evil’, for example killing an enemy to prevent one’s country being invaded. Here, a recognition that such an act is still evil is preferable to a glorying in the act. Indeed, some of the worst crimes of the twentieth century

²⁷ *Miln. T.* 29, on *Miln.* 158, talks of the ‘non-knowing of evil (*pāpa-ajānana*)’. Note that in the monastic discipline, the only viewpoint that a monk can be disciplined for is the persistent claim, even when admonished, that what the Buddha calls ‘stumbling-blocks’ – namely sense-pleasures – are not stumbling-blocks in the monastic life (*Vin.* iv.133–6). Elsewhere, this ‘evil’ view is said to be very karmically unfruitful (*apuñña*) (*M.* i.132). That is, it is seen as very bad to have a view which denies the genuine spiritual unskillfulness of something.

have been carried out under the banner of an ideology which saw them as 'right' actions: Hitler's Holocaust, Stalin's purges and the Khmer Rouge's murder of many Cambodians. If one has the wrong view, for example that one belongs to the 'master race' and that Jews are 'vermin' who should be killed, one is not likely to hold back in one's evil actions. Here, wrong physical action is both accompanied by and strengthened by wrong view (cf. Payutto, 1993: 62–5).

In all the above, intention, knowledge and ignorance are crucial factors, though there are different kinds of 'ignorance', only some of which excuse an action. If one knows that sentient beings should not be harmed, but not that one's action is actually harming one, this 'ignorance' of a matter of ordinary fact excuses one. The spiritual ignorance which leads one to deny that harming living beings is wrong is no excuse, however, but compounds a wrong action. Of course, lesser degrees of spiritual ignorance – lack of spiritual insight – are seen to affect all beings until they are enlightened. This forms a background to all unenlightened actions, good or bad, though it specifically feeds into wrong actions when they are 'rooted' in, that is, motivated by, delusion (and associated greed and hatred): 'whatever unwholesome states there are, all are rooted in spiritual ignorance . . . are fixed together in spiritual ignorance', like rafters in a roof-top (*S.* II.263). Among other things, spiritual ignorance feeds the 'I am conceit': the conviction that one has a permanent Self to protect and bolster up: the root of selfishness.

It is no coincidence that the Buddha's criticism of people is not couched in terms of their being evil or sinful, but usually in terms of their being 'fools'; thus, when dismissing a person, he always did so without anger (*Miln.* 186–8). It is said that a person is known as a 'fool' by immoral conduct of body, speech and mind, just as a wise person is known by moral conduct. Moreover, a fool neither recognizes a transgression for what it is (*A.* I.102–3) nor accepts another person's acknowledgement of having committed a transgression (*A.* I.59). That is, it is good to see one's own faults and pardon those of others. Indeed, 'a fool who knows he is a fool is to that extent a wise person; the fool who thinks he is wise is called a fool indeed' (*Dhp.* 63). Given this, it is clear that one is, for example, doing a slaughterer a favour if one tries to get him to see that what he is doing is wrong (though to do so in an aggressive manner is unwholesome as it is an expression of ill-will). Even if he carries on in his trade, he is better off if he is at least uneasy about what he is doing, and starting to have some compunction about his actions. The unease might unsettle whatever calm he had, but the Buddha, at least, was

willing to tell people things that they found unpleasant if it would be of spiritual benefit to them (*M.* 1.395).

Of course, this assumes that there is such a thing as objectively wrong action. Only then does it make sense to say that one could be *mistaken* in holding something not to be wrong. Given Buddhism's clear criteria of what is unwholesome action, it is quite happy to agree to this, with an action's 'wrongness' subsisting in a combination of the action itself and the state of mind in which it is done. It is not a matter of what a person happens to like or dislike (emotivism), or of what his or her society happens to approve or disapprove of (cultural relativism) (Keown, 1992: 64, 231–2).

Parallel things to the above could mostly be said for good actions: (1) an unintentionally beneficial action is not to one's credit; (2) a beneficial action done when one was in a disturbed state is only of little credit; (3) an action done when one is unsure that there is someone to benefit from it is moderately good; (4) an intentional good action is straightforwardly good. The straightforward parallel breaks down at (5), though: if one thinks that a right action is a wrong one but still does it, one will do it with compunction, so that it is a less good action than it would otherwise be. This perhaps shows the wholesome potency of 'right view'. Indeed, it is said that the thing which is the greatest cause of the arising or increase of unwholesome states, and the non-arising or decrease of wholesome states, is wrong view. It is likewise the greatest cause of rebirth in hell. For one of wrong, evil view, whatever deeds of body, speech or mind 'undertaken in complete accord with (that) view, whatever volitions, aspirations, resolves, activities, all those states conduce to . . . suffering' (*A.* 1.31–2; cf. *M.* III.178–9). The opposite is said of right view. As a wholesome mental action, right view is defined as holding that good and bad actions do have results beyond this life, and that spiritually developed people have knowledge of such things, wrong view being to deny this (see pp. 11–12). On the other hand, one who holds the false view that there are no good or bad actions, and no karmic results of these, have their 'roots of wholesomeness' (*kuśāla-mūlas*) cut off (*AKB.* IV.79a–c), though they return if they start to doubt this view or come to see that it is wrong (*AKB.* IV.80c).

A partial 'good' parallel to (5) would be doing a truly good action even though *others* say that it is a bad one. Here, great determination is needed, so the action can be seen as a very good one. Another partial parallel is the case of a young child doing a good action even though he or she has not been told that it is 'good', as at *Asl.* 103, where a young boy is told to

catch a hare to provide healing food for his sick mother; he cannot do so, though, for he intuitively recognises that it is wrong to kill; here natural right view enhances the action.

If the child *did* kill the hare, or he or an adult stole to feed a starving parent, this would be seen as an act which is a mixture of bad and good (cf. p. 44), in which the good aspect counterbalances the bad to an extent, especially if the act is done with recognition of its wrongness. Indeed, Buddhism acknowledges that poverty in a society makes theft more likely (*D.* 1.76–7). It is thus less blameable in such circumstances, though still not unblameworthy.

CONCLUSION

The above perspective thus views morality as part of a spiritual path which largely consists of cultivating a more wholesome character by undermining moral/spiritual defilements and cultivating counteractive virtues. This process of – generally gradual – transformation is seen to culminate in a state of liberation from all traces of greed/attachment, hatred and delusion, and their consequent suffering, through the experience of *Nirvāṇa*. Such a vision assumes that people have no fixed, unchanging Self, but are capable of radical transformation, brought about by attention to the nature of the mind and actions.

Attention is given to actions out of a concern for:

- (a) their motivating root;
- (b) the happiness/unhappiness that actions directly bring to the agent and others;
- (c) moral praise and blame, or sanctions within a monastic community;
- (d) contribution to spiritual development, or its opposite;
- (e) the natural karmic effects that are seen to arise, in the future, for the agent.

All of this entails that what one does, and how and why one does it, is of great import: for one's actions both express and shape one's character, and contribute to one's destiny. Much emphasis is put on the state of mind, and intention, lying behind any action; yet some actions are identified as always unwholesome to some degree, dependent on precise motivation. Consequently, it is good not only to seek to avoid such actions, but to vow formally to avoid them.

Criteria are spelt out to identify, in as objective a way as possible, which action-intentions should be recognized as morally unwholesome or wholesome. In this, ignorance of ordinary matters of fact is seen as

excusing what might otherwise be seen as an unwholesome action, but moral/spiritual ignorance is seen as compounding an action's unwholesomeness. That is, to perform an unwholesome action while regarding it as acceptable or wholesome is seen to be particularly perverse. In other words, it is held that some action-intentions – primarily those that deliberately cause harm to a sentient being – are wrong, and that it is wrong to deny this and to act on this denial, or from moral blindness.

Such moral objectivism is derived from:

- (a) the notion that we all have a natural sympathy for the plight of others, however much we try to ignore or bury it;
- (b) acting in accord with, and strengthening, this sympathy naturally leads to more happiness and less suffering for oneself and those one interacts with;
- (c) no substantial, permanent Self or I exists, and actions selfishly rooted in the I-view or -attitude are out of accord with reality, so as to be both morally unwholesome and naturally productive of unpleasant karmic result.

Of course, for Buddhism, an act is seen to have unpleasant karmic results because it is *wrong*; it is not seen as 'wrong' *because* it happens to produce bad karmic results. Reference to karmic fruits acts simply as a way to help motivate good actions, and to emphasize that they are in harmony with and registered by the basic structure of reality.

A final point is that it is better to do a wrong action with compunction than without it (though subsequent guilt-trips are not encouraged, as they lead to an agitated, beclouded mind-state). Moreover, a key aid to moral development is the formal avowal of moral precepts, which are seen to strengthen one's moral vision and help to increase the momentum of moral development. In other words, it helps to have some moral 'aims and objectives' that one agrees with and can happily affirm, even if one is not always so good at achieving them!

Key Buddhist values

Conquer anger by non-anger; conquer evil by good; conquer the stingy by giving;
conquer the liar by truth *Dhammapada* 223

Supported by and in part arising from the world-view(s) and ideals of Buddhism, what are the central values that have been and are espoused? While greed, hatred and delusion are seen as the roots of unwholesome actions, with their complete destruction being equivalent to *Nirvāṇa* (*S.* IV.251), non-greed, non-hate and non-delusion are regarded as the roots of wholesome action, and can thus be seen as the central values of Buddhism. While expressed negatively, they are equivalent to: generosity and non-attachment; lovingkindness and compassion; and wisdom, in the sense of clear seeing of the nature of life and the absence of delusion or misorientation.

A fuller list of wholesome qualities is found in the *Abhidhamma* literature. In its Theravādin form, this lists twenty-five wholesome or 'beautiful' mental qualities (Bodhi, 1993: 85–91, 96–7). The first seven are:

- faith (trust in one's sense of what is right),
- mindfulness (i.e. careful awareness),
- self-respect and regard for consequences,
- non-greed and non-hate, and
- equipoise (a balanced over-seeing of activities and events).

The next twelve consist of six pairs of qualities which each relate both to consciousness itself and to the 'body' of mental states which accompany it:

- tranquillity, a light sense of ease,
- open receptivity, readiness to act,
- competence, and straightforwardness.

All the above are seen as simultaneously present (though perhaps to varying degrees) in any wholesome mental state, as a basis for being fully human, and as a protecting, uplifting refuge. The remaining factors, when present, strengthen, deepen and channel wholesome mental energies: right speech, right action, right livelihood, compassion, empathetic joy, and wisdom.

These wholesome qualities counteract a variety of unwholesome ones. A brief list often found in the *Suttas* is that of the 'five hindrances': desire for sense-pleasures, ill-will, dullness and drowsiness, restlessness and unease, and vacillation, which can be seen as aspects of greed (1), hatred (2) and delusion (3–5). In the Theravādin *Abhidhamma*, the unwholesome qualities common to all unwholesome states of mind are: delusion, lack of self-respect, disregard for consequences, and restlessness. Of those only present in some unwholesome states: (1) some are related to greed, namely greed itself, fixed views, and conceit or self-importance; (2) some are related to hate, i.e. hate itself, jealousy, miserliness and unease; (3) some are related to delusion, i.e. dullness, drowsiness and vacillation (Bodhi, 1993: 83–5, 95).

The above analysis draws on psycho-spiritual teachings primarily aimed at meditators and those seeking the highest goal of Buddhism, but the values described are of more general relevance in Buddhism. As L. S. Cousins says:

Buddhist ethics can be looked at in several different ways. There is the situation of the man in the street who is concerned with life in the world of the senses. On a superior level arises the aim of experiencing the joy and peace of a higher consciousness [through meditation]. Higher still is the desire to achieve the ultimate goal with a direct realization of the supramundane . . . Superficially the last two of these aims are only the concern of a small minority, but in practice such a clear distinction cannot be drawn. The ethic designed for the ordinary man is intended both to be beneficial in its own right and to lead in the direction of the levels above. Normally a given individual will derive his standards from elements of all three, although the 'mix' may vary. (1974: 100)

GIVING

The primary ethical activity which a Buddhist learns to develop is giving or generosity, *dāna*, which forms a basis for further moral and spiritual development. In Southern Buddhism, it is the first of the ten 'bases for effecting karmically fruitful actions' (*puñña-kiriya-vatthus*): giving, keeping the moral precepts, meditative development, showing respect, helpful activity, sharing karmic fruitfulness, rejoicing at the karmic fruitfulness of others, teaching *Dhamma*, listening to *Dhamma*, and straightening out one's views.¹

¹ *D. A.* III.999; cf. Gombrich, 1971a: 73–4. In the *Suttas*, just the first three are given (*D.* III.218; *A.* IV.214; *It.* 51).

The key focus of giving is the monastic *Saṅgha*, or Community, whose 'homeless' way of life depends for its material support on the laity, to encourage their humility and to ensure that they do not become isolated from the laity. This supportive relationship is not a one-sided one, however, for while the laity provide the *Saṅgha* with such items as alms-food, robes, medicine, and monasteries to live in, the monks and nuns, by their teaching and example, return a greater one, for 'The gift of *Dhamma* excels all gifts' (*Dhp.* 354). Such acts of mutual giving thus form a key feature of the lay-monastic relationship:

Thus, monks, this holy life is lived in mutual dependence, for ferrying across the flood [of the cycle of rebirths], for the utter ending of *dukkha*. (*It.* 111)

Generosity is not only practised towards the *Saṅgha*, but, as a pervading value of Buddhist societies, is also practised towards family, friends, workpeople, guests (*A.* 11.67–8), the poor and homeless, and animals. Fielding Hall, a British official in nineteenth-century Burma, tells of an occasion when, on asking for a bill at what he took to be a village restaurant, he found that he had been fed as a guest in a private house.

In many countries, Buddhists demonstrate a great concern for doing karmically fruitful actions by deeds of giving, such as contributing to ceremonies on occasions like an ordination, a funeral, a sickness, or a festival. Karmic fruitfulness is generated not only by an individual's own giving, but also by rejoicing at the gifts of others. In Southern Buddhism, the touching of donated goods, or uttering the refrain *sādhu!* (roughly, 'well done!', 'amen!') is seen as involving a person in the donations of another person. Thus communities are bound together in communal acts generating karmic fruitfulness, and social obligations are carried out by contributing to a ceremony sponsored by someone who has helped one by contributions in the past. In the case of expensive ceremonies such as an ordination, a rich person may help sponsor the ordination of a poorer person's son. In this way the sponsor, the son and the parents all do a karmically fruitful act, with the mother being seen as benefiting particularly through 'giving' her son to the *Saṅgha*.

While giving may initially be performed for the sake of the material advantages that karmic fruitfulness brings, a motive which is then likely to take over arises from the joy and contentment that giving brings. Indeed, 'a gift should be given in faith so that as a consequence the mind becomes calm and clear' (Cousins, 1974: 100). The constant practice of giving also provides a foundation for moral development by fostering the breaking down of possessiveness and the growth of an open-hearted and

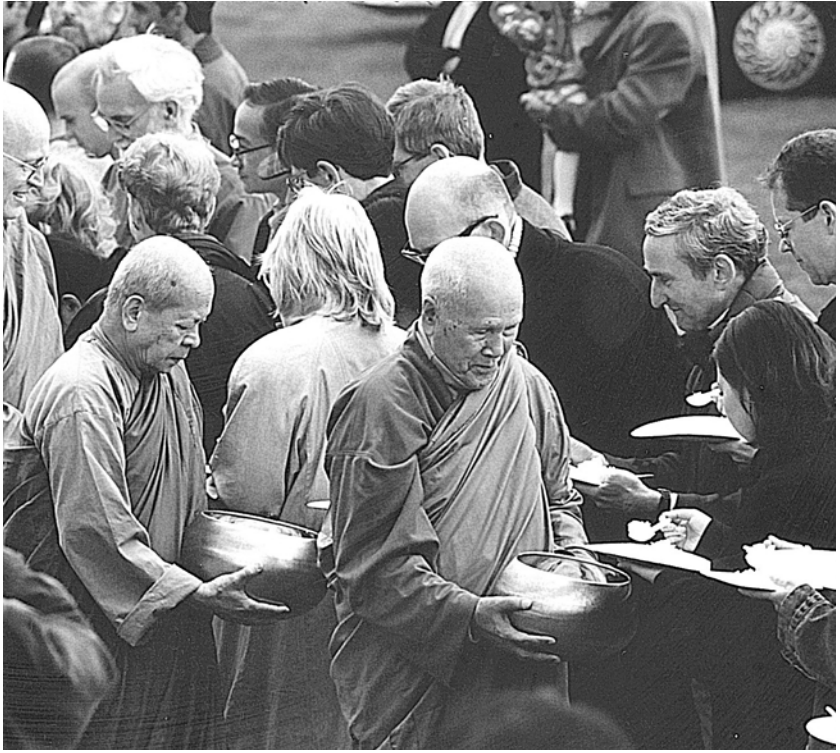


Plate 2. Lay people giving alms-food to monks at a festival at Ratanagiri monastery, north-east England.

sensitive attitude towards others. One expression of the ideal of generosity is expressed thus:

The Noble disciple lives at home with a heart free from the taint of stinginess, he is open handed, pure-handed, delighting in self-surrender, one to ask a favour of, one who delights in dispensing charitable gifts. (*A*. II.66)

Giving fosters not only moral development, but also spiritual progress, because of its aspect of renunciation and non-attachment. It is the first of the ten *Bodhisattva* 'perfections' in both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions.

The popular *Vessantara Jātaka*² expresses the pinnacle of the perfection of generosity. It tells of the *Bodhisattva* in a past life as Prince Vessantara, who so rejoices at generosity that he gives whenever he is

² *J*. VI.479–593; see Cone and Gombrich, 1977; a short version is found at *Cp*. story I.9.

asked for anything. One day, he gives away his city's auspicious white elephant, which causes him to be banished. Wandering in the forest with his wife Maddī and their two children, he meets an old brahmin who asks him for his children, to serve his young wife. Vessantara at first asks that his wife return from gathering food before the gift is made, but the brahmin refuses, as he fears that she will not agree to it (p. 543). With tears in his eyes, Vessantara then agrees to part with his children, though they do not want to go (p. 551); later his wife returns and is anguished at their absence. When Vessantara explains to her that he has given them away, and this for the sake of attaining Buddhahood, she accepts his action as right and even rejoices in it (p. 568). Later, the god Sakka tests Vessantara further, by appearing to him in the guise of another brahmin who asks for his wife. Vessantara gives, yet again (pp. 569–70), though Sakka then reveals himself and eventually the family is reunited, the children being watched over by the gods.

In discussing the issues raised by this story, the *Milindapañha* explains that the gift of the children was not excessive, for it was the supreme gift, one which showed great heroism, restraint and renunciation, going against deeply ingrained attachments (*Miln.* 274–84). Vessantara's wife and children were the dearest things in the world to him (cf. pp. 98, 100), yet he was willing to give even them, for the sake of future perfect Awakening, which would lead to the benefit of countless people. Vessantara is said not to have been callous, but to have suffered great anguish after giving his children; he knew, though, that an aspiring Buddha's generosity and non-attachment must be unstinting, and knew that his father would redeem the children anyway. It is also said that the children would not have lamented had they understood the nature of their father's action (*Miln.* 275). Such a story, of course, acts as an archetypal support for the idea of renunciation: of 'giving up' the pleasures and attachments of family life for the 'homeless' life of a monk or nun, who aims to grow towards the perfect non-attachment which leads to *Nirvāṇa*. In Southern Buddhism, Gotama's past life as Vessantara is seen as his last human one before he was born in the Tusita heaven, and then as the person who became the historical Buddha.

The Mahāyāna also emphasizes that a *Bodhisattva* should be joyful and unstinting in giving. He should eat only after offering food to his servants, or those about to travel or who have arrived from afar (*Uss.* 67–8). He should be willing even to give away his body-parts or life in aiding others. Highest of all, he should be able to give away his wife and children, though not his parents (Dayal, 1932: 175–6).

Sharing karmic fruitfulness

If generosity is seen as generating karmic fruitfulness, it is also seen as good to share this with others. In the Theravādin tradition, an act of karmic fruitfulness may be performed not only by empathizing (*anumodanā*) with someone else's good deed,³ but also by the sharing of its karmic fruitfulness – or, more exactly, 'what has been gained' (*patti*) – with another being. This practice may have originated as a Buddhist adaptation of the Brahmanical *śrāddha* ceremony, in which gifts were seen as transferred to deceased relatives by giving them to brahmins at memorial rites (Gombrich, 1971a: 226–40). In an early text, a brahmin asks the Buddha if *śrāddha* rites bring benefit to the dead, and the Buddha replies that the dead will benefit only if reborn as *petas* (Pali; Skt *pretas*), for these ghostly beings live either on the putrid food of their realm or on what is provided by gifts from relatives and friends (*A.* v.269–72). The *Petavatthu* (*Pv.*), from the later part of the Theravāda Canon, accordingly describes a number of instances where a gift is given in the name of a suffering *petā*, so that the *petā* attains rebirth as a god because of the karmic fruitfulness of the giving. *Miln.* 294 qualifies this by saying that only one of the four types of *petā* can benefit in this way. Theravāda rites for the dead therefore include the feeding of monks and the sharing of the karmic fruitfulness of the deed with the deceased, or whatever other ancestors may be *petas*, in the hope that this will ease their plight as *petas* or help them to a better rebirth. This is done especially seven days after a death, but also in yearly memorial services. The feeding of hungry ghosts, in a yearly festival, is also an important part of Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Another early text also has the Buddha say that it is wise to support monks and to dedicate the gift to the local gods, so that they will look with favour on the donor (*D.* ii.88). Accordingly, Theravādin donations to monks often conclude with a verse sharing the karmic fruitfulness of the gift to gods. These are seen as having less opportunity to do auspicious deeds themselves, but can benefit from shared karmic fruitfulness, which helps maintain them in their divine rebirth; in return, it is hoped that they will use whatever powers they have to aid and protect Buddhism, and the person making the donation. A boy being ordained as a novice or full monk will also share the karmic fruitfulness of this act

³ As also in Mahāyāna Buddhism (Conze, 1968: 45–9). On the practice within a Theravāda context, see: Gombrich, 1971a: 226–40, 251–2; Gombrich, 1971b; Malalasekera, 1967; Keyes, 1983.

with his mother, though she also generates this herself by ‘giving up’ her son to the monkhood.

Given the Buddhist stress on the idea that a person can only generate karmic fruitfulness by his or her own deeds, the idea of ‘sharing’ it is potentially anomalous (see *Kvu.* 347). To avoid such an anomaly, the Theravādin commentaries, dating from the fifth century CE or earlier, developed an orthodox interpretation (*Dhp.* A. 1.103–4). This was that the food etc. donated to monks was dedicated to an ancestor or god, so that the donation was done on his or her behalf, with his or her property. This interpretation is in tune with an early text which says that the duties of a child to his or her parents include that ‘I will give alms on their behalf when they are dead’ (*D.* III.189). The commentaries hold that provided they assent to this donation by rejoicing at it (*Vv.* A. 188), they will themselves generate karmic fruitfulness, both from the donation-by-proxy and from the mental act of rejoicing (*anumodanā*). In sharing karmic fruitfulness, a person does not lose any himself or herself, for his or her sharing is itself karmically fruitful. The sharing of karmic fruitfulness is simply a way of spreading the karmic benefits of good deeds to others, as a gesture of good will. This is expressed in the traditional metaphor to explain such sharing: lighting many lamps from one.

In the Mahāyāna tradition, karmic fruitfulness is often transferred to ‘all sentient beings’; though such an aspiration is found not only in Northern and Eastern, but also in Southern Buddhism, perhaps through Mahāyāna influence.

KEEPING THE LAY PRECEPTS

On a basis of developing *dāna*, the Buddhist goes on to develop his or her ethical virtue, or *sīla* (Pali; Skt *śīla*), by observing the self-discipline of keeping certain precepts. Indeed, keeping any of these precepts is itself seen as a form of giving – the best kind (*Uss.* 151): ‘great gifts’ to others of lack of fear and ill-will, as they feel unthreatened by a precept-keeper (*A.* IV.246). It is said that sub-human rebirths can be avoided by the practice of *dāna* and *sīla*, (*A.* IV.241–3). Moral restraint and self-control are much emphasized as means of protecting others and purifying one’s own character:

Irrigators lead waters,
 Fletchers bend the shafts,
 Carpenters bend the wood,
 The wise control themselves. (*Dhp.* 80)

Though he should conquer
 A thousand thousand men in battle,
 Yet he is the noblest victor
 Who should conquer himself. (*Dhp.* 103)

Through abstinence from unwholesome actions, the defilements which lead to them are restrained, and their opposites are strengthened, so that the natural purity in the depths of the mind has more opportunity to manifest itself. The Buddha's last words are said to have been 'all conditioned things are subject to decay: strive on with diligence!' (*D.* II.156). He emphasized that while he pointed the way to liberation, one must oneself make the effort to tread the path he showed. One should thus be one's own person: have *Dhamma* and oneself as one's refuge, by the practice of careful mindfulness, or moment-to-moment awareness (*D.* II.100). The fact that the second Noble Truth says that craving leads to suffering clearly underlines the importance of self-control. Desire, greed and attachment are seen as leading to quarrels and wars (*D.* II.58–9), to worry over guarding one's possessions (*M.* 1.85–6), and disappointment when what seems desirable is lost, dies or fades (*M.* 1.87–90).

The most commonly observed set of precepts followed by lay people are the 'five precepts' (properly, the 'five virtues': *pañca-sīlāni*). In Southern Buddhism, these are chanted in their Pali form, though their overall meaning, if not precise translation, is generally known (Terweil, 1979: 188; Gombrich, 1971a: 254):

1. I undertake the training-precept (*sikkhā-padam*) to abstain from onslaught on breathing beings.
2. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from taking what is not given.
3. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from misconduct concerning sense-pleasures.
4. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from false speech.
5. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from alcoholic drink or drugs that are an opportunity for heedlessness.

In the Mūla-Sarvāstivādin tradition used in Tibet, the precepts are given in a formula which affirms that a person will follow the precepts for all his or her life, as this accords with the practice of *Arahats* (Hirakawa, 1995: 11). Acting in accord with precepts is said to lead to confidence and a lack of fear (*A.* III.203), well-earned wealth, a good reputation, a peaceful death, and rebirth in a heaven (*D.* II.86). On the other hand, one who kills etc. 'digs up his own root in this very world' (*Dhp.* 247), and suffers a bad rebirth (see pp. 15–16).

Each precept is a 'training-precept', the same term as that for an item

of the monastic code, though while the monastic code goes into great detail on rules for monks and nuns, the lay precepts are left, in the *Suttas*, fairly general and non-specific. It has been left to later commentators, and the advice of the *Saṅgha* in various cultures, to make them more specific.⁴

Emphasis is sometimes laid on the need for a ‘middle way’ in keeping the precepts, avoiding the extremes of laxity and rigid adherence. In any case, Buddhism does not encourage the developing of strong guilt feelings if a precept is broken (see p. 28). Regretting misdeeds is wholesome, but Buddhism emphasizes a future-directed morality in which one always seeks to do better in the future, taking the precepts as ideals that one is seeking to live up to in an increasingly complete way.

While each precept is expressed in negative wording, as an abstention, one who keeps them increasingly comes to express positive virtues as the roots of unwholesome action are weakened. Each precept thus has a positive counterpart. The counterpart of the first is kindness and compassion, so as to be ‘trembling for the welfare of others’ (*D. 1.4*). That of the second is generosity and renunciation: in Buddhist cultures, greed is strongly disapproved of, and generosity much praised. The counterpart of the third is ‘joyous satisfaction with one’s own wife’ (*A. v.138*; cf. *Sn. 108*), contentment and fewness-of-wishes. Contentment is seen as the ‘greatest of wealths’ (*Dhp. 204*), and the height of this virtue is shown by a remark of the eleventh-century Tibetan saint Milarepa, who, living in threadbare cotton robes in a freezing Himalayan cave, said that, for him, ‘everything is comfortable’! (Evans-Wentz, 1951: 201). The counterpart of the fourth precept is being honest, trustworthy and dependable, a ‘bondsman to truth’ (*A. iv.249*; *M. 1.345*): searching it out, recognizing falsity, and attaining precision of thought. The counterpart of the fifth precept is mindfulness and awareness.

Closely related to keeping the precepts is the concept of ‘right livelihood’, a factor of the Eightfold Path (see p. 38). This refers to making one’s living in a way that does not involve one in habitually breaking the precepts by bringing harm to other beings, but that is, it is hoped, helpful to others and an aid to the development of one’s faculties and abilities (see pp. 187–9).

⁴ As regards textual discussions, for the Theravāda, see: *M. A. 1.198–202*, translated by Conze, 1959: 70–3, and related passages at *Asl. 97–101*. In the discussion at *Khp. A. 22–34*, the third precept is the third in a set of ten, and entails complete abstinence from sexual intercourse, while the third of the five precepts does not. For the Mahāyāna, see Lamotte, 1949: 782–819. For the Tibetan tradition, see Guenther, 1959: 75–7 and Patrul, 1994: 102–10. For the Chinese tradition, see *Uss. 165–74*. For reflections on the precepts in a Western context, giving a ‘socially engaged’ formulation, see Nhat Hanh et al., 1993.

The first precept: non-injury

The first precept corresponds to the Hindu and Jain concept of *ahiṃsā*, ‘non-injury’, and is generally regarded as the most important one: ‘Non-injury is the distinguishing mark of *Dhamma*’ (*Miln.* 185). Thus in Burma, while most lay people, when asked which is the most important precept, specify the one on sexual misconduct, they nevertheless agree that killing leads to the worst karmic results and that physical and verbal abuse is the most blameable behaviour (Spiro, 1971: 101–3).

Taking the first precept rules out the *intentional* killing of any living being, human or otherwise. The spirit of this precept is expressed thus:

Laying aside violence in respect of all beings, both those which are still and those which move . . . he should not kill a living creature, nor cause to kill, nor approve of others killing. (*Sn.* 394)

Abandoning onslaught on breathing beings, he abstains from this; without stick or sword, scrupulous, compassionate, trembling for the welfare of all living beings. (*M.* 1.345; cf. *D.* 1.4)

Injuring but not killing a being is clearly against the spirit of the precept, but does not fully break it – though a verse form of the precept at *A.* III.213 expresses it simply in terms of non-injury – and likewise death accidentally resulting from an attack does not break it (*Uss.* 171).

The object of this precept is not limited to humans, as all sentient beings share in the same cycle of rebirths and in the experience of various types of suffering. It is, however, worse to kill or injure a human than an animal, or a larger or more highly developed animal than a lesser one (see p. 52). The first precept is broken even if a being is killed by someone else being ordered to do this, when both the orderer and the agent break the precept, unless the agent mistakenly kills a being other than the intended one, when only he or she is responsible (*Khp. A.* 29–30). The first precept has many potential implications for behaviour, and these will be traced through the chapters of this book on nature, war, suicide and euthanasia, and abortion. Likewise, the chapter on economic ethics is relevant to the second and fourth precepts and those on sexual equality and homosexuality are relevant to the third.

The second precept: avoiding theft and cheating

The second precept is seen as ruling out any act of theft. In the equivalent rule for monks, a monk is completely defeated in the monastic life if

he steals an amount that makes him liable to prosecution (*Vin.* III.45). Something is seen as the ‘property’ of someone else, and thus not to be taken, if that person can do what he or she wants with it without punishment or blame (*Asl.* 98; *Khṇ. A.* 26). Theft is seen as worse according to the value of what is stolen, but also according to the virtue of the person stolen from (*Asl.* 98).

The second precept also covers fraud, cheating, forgery (*Asl.* 98) and falsely denying that one is in debt to someone (*Sn.* 119–21). The *Upāsakaśīla Sūtra* sees it as broken by claiming more compensation for a theft than is appropriate (cf. fiddling an insurance claim), accepting the gift of two robes when one only needs one, and giving to one monk what one has promised to another (*Uss.* 172–3). In Thailand, it is seen as broken by borrowing without permission and breaking a promise, as this takes a liberty which has not been given (Terweil, 1979: 188–9). The Burmese meditation teacher Mahāsi Sayadaw gives a good summary:

taking surreptitiously what belongs to another person without his knowledge . . . To cheat a buyer using false weights and measures, to fob off a worthless article on a buyer, to sell counterfeit gold and silver, not to pay due wages or conveyance charges or customs or taxes etc., to refuse to repay loans of money or property, or what is entrusted to one’s care and to refuse to compensate for any damage or loss for which one is responsible . . . using force to obtain other people’s property . . . intimidation and extortion of money or property, excessive and coercive taxation, unlawful confiscation of property for the settlement of debt, court litigation for illegal ownership through false witnesses and false statements. (1981: 65)

Gambling is generally included under the rubric of this precept in Thailand (Terweil, 1979: 188), and is otherwise criticized thus:

Gambling causes avarice,
Unpleasantness, hatred, deception, cheating,
Wildness, lying, senseless and harsh speech,
Therefore never gamble. (*RPR.* 147)

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* says:

There are these six dangers attached to gambling: the winner makes enemies, the loser bewails his loss, one wastes one’s present wealth, one’s word is not trusted in the assembly, one is despised by one’s friends and companions, one is not in demand for marriage, because a gambler cannot afford to maintain a wife. (*D.* III.183)

This is not to say, though, that Buddhists never gamble. Charles Bell reports that gambling on dominoes and dice has been popular in Tibet

(1928: 265–7). In Sri Lanka, however, on the advice of the 1956 Buddhist Committee of Enquiry, the government banned horse racing as associated gambling led to greater gain of wealth by the rich and further degradation of the poverty-stricken (Bond, 1988: 87, 96). Sri Lankans now bet on British horse races!

In Zen Buddhism, the spirit of this precept is seen to entail such things as not stealing time from oneself by daydreaming during time for meditation (Aitken, 1984: 28), not greedily exploiting workers (p. 30), and carelessness with precious things, for example meditation cushions (p. 34).

The third precept: avoiding sexual misconduct

The monastic ideal of Buddhism involves celibacy, but it is acknowledged that not everyone feels able or willing to follow this ideal:

The wise man should avoid the uncelibate life (*abrahmacariyam*) like a pit of burning coals. But if he is incapable of living a celibate life, he should not transgress against another's wife. (*Sn.* 396)

The third precept relates primarily to the avoidance of causing suffering by one's sexual behaviour. Adultery – 'going with the wife of another' (*A.* 1.189) – is the most straightforward breach of this precept. The wrongness of this is seen as partly in terms of its being an expression of greed, and partly in terms of its harm to others. The first of these is seen in the following verse:

Not to be contented with one's own wife but to be seen with prostitutes or the wives of others – this is a cause of one's downfall. (*Sn.* 108)

The second can be seen in the rationale for the precept: you would not like someone to commit adultery with your wife, so do not commit adultery with someone else's wife (*S.* v.354). Thus one should not go 'with others' women, who are as dear to them as life' (*D.* III.184), and Nāgārjuna says: 'the pleasure of husband and wife is to be two bodies but one flesh; to take away one who another loves and destroy this deep sentiment is a crime' (Lamotte, 1949: 801). What counts as 'adultery' varies according to the marriage patterns of different societies, though, and Buddhism has been flexible in adapting to these (see below, pp. 101–2). Adultery with a woman without her husband's knowledge, or with his compliance, still breaks the precepts on account of the malicious nature of the act (Lamotte, 1949: 801). Moreover, the precept is extended to intercourse with any woman who is, in modern parlance, 'in a relationship' with another man (*Asl.* 98).

The third precept does not relate only to not having sex with someone else's wife or partner. It is said that a man breaks the precept if he has intercourse with women who are engaged, or who are still protected by any relative (*M.* I.286; cf. *Vin.* III.139), or young girls not protected by a relative, this being seen as offending against the wishes of the king (*AKB.* IV.74a–b). Clearly, rape and incest are breaches of the precept, and Nāgārjuna includes intercourse with a courtesan or prostitute (Lamotte, 1949: 800). A breach is worse according to the virtue of the woman, as shown by the way in which she keeps the precepts (*Asl.* 98). In Thailand, flirting with a married woman may also be seen as a breach (Terweil, 1979: 188). In Sri Lanka, some see premarital sex as breaking the precept, but few stick to this view if the parties subsequently marry (Gombrich, 1971a: 255). In rural Thailand, young men are allowed to roam around freely, but young women are always kept under a careful watch. A young woman's parents prefer courting to be at her home, for example on the verandah (H. E. Smith, 1979: 27): sexual contact is to be avoided as it is seen as offending the spirits of the ancestors, who are seen as strict regarding morals, jealous, and loth to leave their former property in the hands of descendants. Nhat Hanh sees this precept as involving 'sexual responsibility' (1993: 29) and as entailing 'not to engage in sexual relations without love and long-term commitment' and 'to protect children from sexual abuse and prevent couples and families being broken by sexual misconduct' (pp. 3–4).

Buddhist discussion of the third precept mainly focuses on various circumstances in which men can be seen as breaking it. On women, the discussion is shorter and more direct. Thus Theravādin Bhikkhu Bodhi says that a married woman should have intercourse only with her husband (cf. Mahasi, 1981: 78), and no woman should have intercourse with men such as a close relative or those under a vow of celibacy (1984: 63). Of course, this does not see sexual activity by non-married adult women as a breach of the precept.

In addition to the above, socially taboo forms of sexuality have been seen as breaches of the third precept, doubtless because of the guilt feelings that they entail.⁵ Obsessive sexual activities also come within the precept, as do other obsessive forms of sensuality, for example gorging oneself with food. The fourth century CE *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* (IV.74a–b) holds that a man breaks the third precept by:

⁵ Cousins, 1974: 101. For a useful review of evidence on sexual practices in ancient India, as reflected in Buddhist texts, see Perera, 1993, though this sometimes adds in inappropriate opinions.

1. Intercourse with a forbidden woman, that is, the wife of another, one's mother, one's daughter, or one's paternal or maternal relations;
2. Intercourse with one's own wife through a forbidden orifice;
3. in an unsuitable place: an uncovered spot, a shrine or forest;
4. at an unsuitable time: when the wife is pregnant, when she is nursing, or when she has taken a vow. Some say: when she has taken a vow only with the consent of her husband.

On item 2, Nāgārjuna says that it is 'repugnant to the spirit of a woman', so that 'to be coerced into this unseemliness' breaks the precept (Lamotte, 1949: 801). The *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* of sGam po pa (1079–1153), founder of the Kagyu (bKa'brgyud) school of Tibetan Buddhism, concurs with and expands on the above. One should not have intercourse:

- i) in an improper part of the body, i.e. 'by way of the mouth or the anus';
- ii) in an improper place, i.e. 'near the retinue of a Guru, a monastery, a funeral monument (*stūpa*), or where many people have gathered';
- iii) at an improper time, i.e. 'with a woman who has taken a vow, is pregnant or nursing a child, or in daylight';
- iv) too often, i.e. 'more than five successive times';
- v) in a generally improper way, i.e. by coercion, or with a man. (Guenther, 1959: 76)

The *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra*, popular in China, includes i) and ii) in its list (Uss. 173). Holmes Welch also reports that Chinese Buddhists include visiting brothels, or intercourse in an improper place or time, such as in the living room in the afternoon, or with the use of instruments. Some see the precept as also requiring the putting away of concubines, others as simply not taking any more. Some see sexual intercourse not aimed at begetting children as to be avoided (Welch, 1967: 365).

While none of the above mention masturbation, it is included as a breach of the third precept in the *Kunzang Lama'i Shelung*, a very popular Tibetan work by Patrul Rinpoche, a nineteenth-century Lama of both the Nyingma (rNying-ma) school and an ecumenical movement (Patrul Rinpoche, 1994: 107). In the monastic discipline, a monk's intentional emission of semen is an offence entailing a formal meeting of the *Saṅgha*, i.e. its level of seriousness is just short of that requiring expulsion for a monk, with the Buddha explaining that the act is related to the very attachment, fetters and grasping that the *Dhamma* aims to transcend.⁶ Given that sexual intercourse entails expulsion for a monk or nun, it is

⁶ *Vin.* III.111–12. For a nun, rubbing her genitals is a lesser offence, one requiring expiation (*Vin.* IV.260–1).

not surprising that masturbation is an offence, too, if not quite so serious. As even sexual intercourse is, within certain bounds, acceptable for a lay person, the grounds for counting masturbation as a breach of the third lay precept are weak, though the act clearly goes against the Buddhist emphasis on overcoming attachment to sense-pleasures. Alan James, a contemporary Theravāda meditation teacher, says that masturbation breaks the precept because of fantasy-building and the wish to avoid the involvements that normally arise from sexual relationships (James and James, 1987: 42). Moreover, the Western Zen teacher Aitken Roshi, in interpreting the precept as meaning ‘no boorish sex’, sees this as any sexual activity, or even celibacy, ‘thinking just of one’s self’ (Aitken, 1984: 37–8). Nevertheless, in the *Upāsaka-sīla Sūtra*, masturbation is mentioned in relation to the third precept only if it is done in a public place or close to a religious building (*Uss.* 173).

The fourth precept: avoiding lying and other forms of wrong speech

The first three precepts relate to physical actions and keeping them is equivalent to the ‘right action’-factor of the Eightfold Path (see p. 38). Keeping the fourth precept is equivalent to the Path-factor of ‘right speech’, for while the precept specifically refers only to avoiding false speech, it is generally seen to entail avoiding other forms of ‘wrong speech’ (Mahasi, 1981: 207–8), which cause mental turmoil or other forms of suffering in oneself or others. This reading is reasonable in the light of the list of ‘ten unwholesome actions’, which refer to the three forms of ‘wrong action’, the four forms of ‘wrong speech’, and finally three forms of unwholesome mental action: covetousness, malevolence and wrong views (*M.* III.45–53) (see p. 48).

The fourth precept is generally seen as the second most important one (after the first precept): it is said that a person who has no shame at intentional lying is capable of any evil action (*M.* I.415). Moreover, in the Theravādin *Jātakas*, it is said (in the commentarial prose) that a developing *Bodhisattva* may at times break all the precepts but one: ‘he may not tell a lie, attended by deception that violates the reality of things’ (*J.* III.499). The Theravādins also count truthfulness as one of the *Bodhisattva* ‘perfections’. Likewise, in the Mahāyāna tradition, Śāntideva cites the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra* as saying that a *Bodhisattva* ‘never knowingly speaks an untruth, not to save his life’ (*Ss.* 53). The gravest way to break any precept would be lying so as to cause a schism in the *Sanḅha* (*AKB.* IV.105a–b). On the other hand, there is the idea that an ‘asseveration of

truth' (Pali *sacca-kiriyā*; cf. *sacca-vacana*; Skt *satya-vacana*), in the form of the solemn affirmation of a moral or spiritual truth, or the truthful admission of a failing, has a power to save the utterer, or someone else, from danger (Harvey, 1993: 67–75).

Any form of lying, deception or exaggeration, either for one's own benefit or that of another (*M.* III.48), is seen as a breach of the fourth precept, even non-verbal deception by gesture or other indication (*AKB.* IV.75; *Asl.* 99; *Khp.* A. 26), or misleading statements (*Uss.* 174). Thich Nhat Hanh sees the fourth precept as entailing 'not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure' (1993: 4). It is said to be a deluded wrong view to deny that the precept is broken by 'playful lying, lying to women, in marriage, or in danger of death' (*AKB.* IV.68d). Nevertheless, a small 'white lie' is much less serious than lying in a court of law: intentional lying is 'serious or light according to its subject-matter' (*Miln.* 193). It is 'more or less an offence according to whether the welfare destroyed is greater or smaller' (*Asl.* 99): for a lay person, this might vary from denying that one has something that one does not want to give to lying in a court so as to harm someone; for a monk, it might vary from an ironical joke to saying he has seen something which he has not.

Lying is to be avoided not only because it often harms others, but because it goes against the Buddhist value of seeking the truth, seeing things 'as they really are'. The more people deceive others, the more they are likely to deceive themselves; thus their delusion and spiritual ignorance increase. Moreover, one lie often leads to the 'need' for another to cover it up, leading to a tangle in which the liar always has to 'watch his back', increasingly falsifying what he is trying to protect, so as to become increasingly 'unreal'.

Of course, even truth can be harmful if spoken at the wrong time, so it should be withheld if to give it would lead to wholesome states of mind declining and unwholesome ones increasing in those one speaks to (*A.* II.173). Accordingly, well-spoken, unblameworthy speech is said to be 'spoken at the right time, in accordance with truth, gently, purposefully, and with a friendly heart' (*A.* III.243–4). This does not mean, though, that one should never say anything that would be disagreeable to the hearer. It is said that the Buddha only spoke, at the appropriate time, what was true and spiritually beneficial, whether or not it was disagreeable to others (*M.* I.395; cf. *M.* III.234). While, in Japan, right speech is seen to entail that it is not compassionate to tell a sick person the hard truth that he or she is terminally ill (Aitken, 1984: 51), one might question this if the

person could better prepare himself or herself for death if he or she knew of this. Nevertheless, the practice follows the advice of the *Upāsaka-sīla Sūtra*, which says that one should not tell an ill person that he or she is dying but should instead encourage him or her to take refuge in the Buddha *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha*, and to express remorse for the past actions that are leading to the illness, showing patience if the person reacts to this with anger (*Uss.* 133).

The other forms of 'right speech' seek to extend a person's moderation of speech, so as to decrease unwholesome mental states and increase wholesome ones. Such speech is free not only of falsehood, but also of divisive speech, harsh, abusive, angry words, and even idle chatter:

Abandoning divisive speech, he is restrained from divisive speech. Having heard something at one place, he is not one to repeat it elsewhere for causing variance among those people; or having heard something elsewhere, he is not one to repeat it among these people for causing variance among them. In this way he is a reconciler of those who are at variance and one who combines those who are friends. Concord is his pleasure, his delight, his joy, the motive of his speech. Abandoning harsh speech, he is restrained from harsh speech. Whatever speech is gentle, pleasing to the ear, affectionate, going to the heart, urbane, pleasant to the manyfolk, agreeable to the manyfolk: such speech does he utter. Abandoning frivolous chatter, he is restrained from frivolous chatter. He is one that speaks at the right time, in accordance with fact, about the goal, about *Dhamma*, about moral discipline. He utters speech which is worth treasuring, with opportune similes, purposeful, connected with the goal. (*M.* III.49)

This description clearly shows a very comprehensive concern with verbal behaviour. One who slanders and uses harsh speech is said to have a tongue which is like an axe: by its use, he causes himself much future suffering (*Sn.* 657). Speech which is not harsh should be unhurried, otherwise 'the body tires and the thought suffers and the sound suffers and the throat is affected; the speech of one in a hurry is not clear or comprehensible' (*M.* III.234). In the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, the *Bodhisattva* is said to avoid demeaning talk and thought, or to withdraw mindfully from it if it occurs: 'By familiarity with withdrawal from it, his former enjoyment of such behaviour becomes enjoyment of not behaving so and the behaviour becomes repugnant' (Tatz, 1986: 51). The avoidance of frivolous chatter is sometimes explained in the texts in terms of not boring other people (*S.* v.355), and is seen as worse according to how often it is indulged in (*Asl.* 100). While it is most often emphasized in a meditative setting, in general it stresses the need to use one's words wisely, to inform,

aid or express kindness to others, not just for the sake of opening one's mouth. Thus in Thailand, the fourth precept is seen as broken not just by straightforward lying, but also by 'exaggeration, insinuation, abuse, gossip, unrestrained laughter, deceitful speech, joking and banter' (Terweil, 1979: 189).

The fifth precept: sobriety

This precept is not listed under the Path-factors of either 'right action' or 'right speech', but can be seen to act as an aid to 'right mindfulness': when one is intoxicated, there is an attempt to mask, rather than face, the sufferings of life, there is no mental clarity or calm, and one is more likely to break all the other precepts. Thus a well-known story in Thailand is that of an exemplary man who was challenged to break just one precept for once. The only precept he could bring himself to break was the fifth, but on getting drunk, he went on to break the rest too!⁷ Buddhaghosa holds that while breach of the first four precepts varies in blameability according to the nature of the person or animal harmed (see p. 52), breach of the fifth precept is always 'greatly blameable' as it obstructs the practice of *Dhamma* and can even lead to madness (*Khp. A.* 29). Indeed, in Burma, about half the monks see the fifth precept, rather than the first (or fourth), as the most important, because of the consequences that can follow from breaking it (Spiro, 1971: 99–100). Drunkenness is described as 'the delight of fools' (*Sn.* 399), and in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*, the Buddha says that breaking the fifth precept leads to six dangers:

present waste of money, increased quarrelling, liability to sickness, loss of good name, indecent exposure of one's person, and weakening of one's wisdom. (*D.* III.182–3)

Moreover:

Drinking intoxicating liquors adversely affects one's ability to remember. It also becomes an obstacle to the good path, decreasing as well all great virtues, mundane and supramundane. (*ASP.* 229–30)

Intoxicants lead to worldly scorn,
Affairs are ruined, wealth is wasted,
The unsuitable is done from delusion,
Therefore never take intoxicants. (*RPR.* 146)

⁷ Terweil, 1979: 189–90. A similar tale, concerning a monk, is found in Tibet (Yuthok, 1995: 51).

Nāgārjuna lists thirty-five perils of drink (Lamotte, 1949: 817–18). Elsewhere, drink is said to destroy one's self-respect and fear of bad rebirths (*Uss.* 152), to lead to being deluded in this and future lives and insane in one's next life (*ASP.* 229–30; cf. *A.* iv.247–8), or to rebirth in a hell, as a frustrated ghost, a mad dog, and then an insane, ugly, deluded and cruel human (Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 150).

In a monastic rule whose wording is very close to the fifth lay precept, there is an offence if even the amount of alcoholic drink that a blade of grass can hold is taken (*Vin.* iv.110), though a small amount of alcohol is permissible as an ingredient in a medicine (*Vin.* i.205; *Vin.* iv.110). Nevertheless, in following the fifth lay precept, while some people seek to avoid any intoxicating or mind-altering substances, except for genuine medicinal purposes, others regard intoxication, and not the taking of a little drink, as a breach of the precept; or regard any drinking as breaking the precept, but take a drink nevertheless.⁸ Tibetans, for example, drink much barley beer (Bell, 1928: 214), though this is only slightly alcoholic (Tucci, 1980: 266), and may even be included in offerings at shrines (Tucci, 1980: 116). At dinner parties, hosts do their best to get their guests drunk (Bell, 1928: 158). In Thailand, drunkenness is not rare, alcohol is sometimes drunk at large community religious ceremonies, even within the precincts of monasteries, and it would be bad form for a guest to refuse proffered alcohol unless on medical grounds (Terweil, 1979: 191).

While breaking any of the first four precepts is seen as reprehensible by its very nature (*AKB.* iv.29a–c), there are different opinions as to whether breaking the fifth one is. The *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* (*AKB.* iv.34d) records that monks specializing in monastic discipline held – like the Theravādin Buddhaghosa (*Khp. A.* 24) – that it *was* reprehensible by nature, explaining that, in the *Upāli Sūtra*, the Buddha said that, even if sick, 'Those who recognize me as their master should not drink any strong liquor, even a drop on the point of a blade of grass.' However, those specializing in *Abhidharma*, or spiritual psychology, denied that it was always reprehensible by nature. It was so only when alcohol was taken by a person whose mind was defiled, as when an amount is drunk which the person knows will be inebriating, but not if a small amount is taken as a remedy, in a quantity that one knows will not be inebriating. Thus the *Upāli Sūtra* forbids alcohol to ill monks only inasmuch as the inebriating effect of a given amount of drink may vary. Thus breaking the fifth precept is only reprehensible by precept, but not by nature. The

⁸ Terweil, 1979: 189; Gombrich, 1971a: 255.

author of the *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* agrees with this position, seeing the precept as a support for heedful vigilance (*AKB*. iv.29.a–c; cf. *Uss*. 152). Similarly, the Mahāyāna commentator Jinaputra held that drinking alcohol:

is naturally reprehensible when done with a defiled thought; but when it can be done with an undefiled thought it is what the Lord has prescribed in order to guard against other offences – that is to say, it is reprehensible by precept. (Tatz, 1986: 321)

Its many dangers are a cause for further carelessness. Inasmuch as one cannot know the proper measure to drink, it is absolutely forbidden. On the other hand, it is done by those, among others, who lack desire-attachment, so it is not unvirtuous for them; drinking alcohol without desire-attachment is not reprehensible by nature. (Tatz, 1986: 322)

This seems to say that carefully drinking a small amount of alcohol, with no desire for intoxication, is not reprehensible in itself, but is best avoided for what it may lead on to. This accounts for why drinking is mentioned in the five precepts, but not, for example, as part of ‘wrong action’ or the ten ‘paths of unwholesomeness’.

While making a living by the sale of alcohol is seen as ‘wrong livelihood’, Buddhists are not generally puritanical about drinking. It would be seen as bad form for a Buddhist who is avoiding alcohol to look down on others who are drinking it in his or her company; rather, it would be appropriate to tune in to their happy frame of mind without having to resort to alcohol. Unlike some Muslim countries, no Buddhist country bans the sale or consumption of alcohol, though in Sri Lanka, where temperance is a widely accepted Buddhist ideal, 1956 saw an unsuccessful attempt to get the government to ban it, as part of a Buddhist revival (Bond, 1988: 62, 87, 96). In T’ang China (618–907), also, there were temperance tracts and advocacy of the drinking of tea rather than alcohol.

Smoking is not included in the fifth precept. In Thailand, for example, it is not uncommon to see monks smoking. While it would be seen as impolite to let smoke drift into the face of someone who disliked it, it would equally be seen as inappropriate for a non-smoker to be censorious about those who do smoke. Nevertheless, in pre-Communist Tibet, there were strict laws against smoking in the street of the capital (Bell, 1924: 235), and the import of tobacco was banned. The authorities saw it as annoying the spirits with its smell, so that they then caused illness in people. Monks were completely forbidden to smoke (Bell, 1928: 242–4).

The nature of the precepts and precept-taking

It can be seen that, when the implications of the precepts are spelt out, they become high ideals that are difficult to keep fully; in practice, people may say that they cannot do this, given their circumstances and nature (Spiro, 1971: 449–50). The precepts nevertheless remain respected ideals that are to be striven for.⁹ Each is in the form of a personal undertaking, a promise or vow to oneself, rather than a ‘commandment’ from without, though their difference from these, in practice, can be exaggerated (Gombrich, 1971a: 254–5).

It is usual, when ‘taking the precepts’, to chant them after ‘taking the refuges’ (Harvey, 1990a: 176–9). Translated from their Pali form, as used in Southern Buddhism, the latter are:

I go to the Buddha as refuge.
 I go to the *Dhamma* as refuge.
 I go to the *Saṅgha* as refuge.
 For the second time I go to the Buddha as refuge . . .
 For the third time I go to the Buddha as refuge . . .

While chanting the precepts can be done by a lay person at any time, they are frequently ‘taken’ by chanting them after a monk, who then takes on the role of ‘administering’ them. In such a context, the resolve to keep the precepts takes on an added psychological impact.

In Southern Buddhist lands, where Buddhism is the dominant religion, the five precepts are norms which people are expected to seek to live up to. In Sri Lanka, for example, rural people often say that they are the core of Buddhism (Southwold, 1983: 192). The refuges and precepts are usually chanted on a daily basis at home, and at any ceremony at a monastery. At major religious festivals, the precepts may be taken at the start of each of a number of ceremonies (Terweil, 1979: 183), as a kind of ‘ritual cleansing, a purification which enables the laymen to receive the benefits of the ceremony in a proper manner’ (Terweil, 1979: 188). People try to live up to the precepts as best they can, according to the level of their commitment and circumstances (Terweil, 1979: 190–3). Greater adherence to the precepts is also shown on the four sabbath-like ‘observance’ (Pali *uposatha*; Skt *upoadha*) days per lunar month, and on festival days.

In Eastern Buddhism, Chinese commentaries see the precepts as definitely more than promises to oneself.¹⁰ Whether for the laity or

⁹ For a discussion of whether this makes the precepts ‘absolutes’ or not, see King, 1964, 70–9.

¹⁰ Charles Jones, ‘Keeping Precepts’ posting to ‘Buddha-L’ Internet discussion forum, 25 July, 1995.

monastics, to be received in a valid manner, precepts need to be properly ‘transmitted’ from a monk or nun in a ritual, as asserted in the *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra* (*Uss.* 177). The *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, also influential in China, holds that precepts should be taken from monastics except in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after meditating for seven days until a vision of the Buddha appears and approves of such a form of precept-transmission. The *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra* holds that if precepts are taken without first taking the three refuges, they ‘are called worldly precepts, which are not firm; they are like color that is not fixed with glue’. Unlike the Buddhist precepts, taken with the refuges, they cannot destroy previous unwholesome karma, and do not purify a person (*Uss.* 150). In the Chinese precept-transmitting ritual, the ‘substance of the precepts’ (Skt *saṃvara*, literally ‘discipline’) is regarded as ‘a power issued by all Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* coming upon the recipient through the crown of the head like a cloud and circulating throughout the body’,¹¹ and has a force to help a person keep the precepts. As expressed by Hirakawa, ‘If one attempts to take the life of sentient beings, this power becomes manifest in one’s mind and stops one from taking life . . . When one vows to accept and keep the precepts, this power takes root and grows in one’s mind’ (1995: 10).

In Eastern Buddhism, Buddhism is only one ingredient in the religious situation, and the precepts are only taken by those with a fairly strong commitment to Buddhism, as may well have originally been the case in early Indian Buddhism. In China, they are first taken, usually during a period staying at a monastery, at a solemn ‘lay ordination’ ceremony, as an adjunct to the ordination of monks.¹² The lay ordination ceremony, at which *Bodhisattva* vows may also be taken, means that a person is formally recognized as a Buddhist, so that he or she is then an *upāsaka* (layman) or *upāsikā* (laywoman), and is given a religious name (Welch, 1967: 358–9). According to the *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra*, to take the *upāsaka* precepts, a man must have the permission of his parents, wife, servants, and the king, and, in a similar way to monastic ordinations, must be free of certain impediments such as illness, not being a normal male, having wronged a monastic or having abandoned his parents (*Uss.* 73).

In the Japanese Sōtō Zen school, devout lay people take the precepts at *Jūkai*, a week-long set of ceremonies held every spring, while staying

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Welch, 1967: 361–4. For a modern version of the precept-transmitting ceremony, see Nhat Hanh et al., 1993: 257–78.

at a temple. A person's first attendance at *Jūkai* also involves a 'lay ordination' ceremony. The precepts taken differ from the usual five, but consist of the 'three pure precepts' and the 'ten great precepts'. The former are 'Cease from evil, do only good, do good for others', and the latter are: not killing, not stealing, not misusing sex, not saying that which is untrue, not taking or selling drugs or alcohol, not speaking against others, not praising yourself and abusing others, not being mean in giving either *Dharma* or wealth, not being angry, not defaming the three treasures.¹³ In addition to taking the precepts, a person makes a general confession of past misdeeds and a piece of paper on which a Chinese character representing these is written is ceremonially burnt.

Partial precept-taking and the issue of precept-breaking

Given the importance of living by the five precepts, Buddhists have been concerned about various issues relating to their breaking, one being: if one of the five precepts is broken, is the undertaking to observe all five broken? In Southern Buddhism, the commentator Buddhaghosa held that a lay person can take a set of precepts either as a group or individually. If they are taken individually, a breach of one does not breach the set, and the whole set becomes effective again as soon as the broken one is retaken. If a set of precepts is taken as a group by a lay person, Buddhaghosa holds that the same situation pertains, though he cites some as holding that the breach of one precept breaks the undertaking to hold to the set (*Khp. A.* 28). Barend Terweil reports that in central Thailand, lay people usually ask for the five precepts using a Pali formula that says that they will be observed 'one by one, separately' (*visum visum*), so that if one is broken, the rest are not. Only on particularly solemn occasions do they ask for the five precepts in a way which means that a breach of one breaches the entire set (1979: 184–6). In Sri Lanka, too, very pious lay people sometimes take the five as a group, by saying the Pali for 'I undertake' at the end of the group, rather than at the end of each precept (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 73).

A related concern of Buddhists is whether it is worse to do a bad action covered by a precept if one has formally taken the relevant precept against it, or if one has not so committed oneself. This leads on to the question of whether it is acceptable to take only those of the five precepts that one feels able to keep. Taking only some of the five pre-

¹³ Kennett, 1972: 213–14; Aitken, 1984: 4–104.

cepts seems not to be a current practice in Southern, Theravāda Buddhism.

Etienne Lamotte (1988: 69) holds that in ancient Indian Buddhism, *upāsakas* could choose how many of the five precepts to follow, with one who followed only one, for example, being called an *eka-deśa-kārīn* (Skt), ‘holding to one rule’.¹⁴ Yet in the pre-Mahāyāna schools, there were different views on taking fewer than five precepts. The Sautrāntikas and the Mahā-saṃghikas accepted it, but the Dharmaguptakas, Mahīśāsakas and most Sarvāstivādins did not (Hirakawa, 1995: 19–21; *AKB*. iv.31a–c, 36c–d). Sarvāstivāda arguments included that taking the refuges also committed one to all five precepts, and that all five precepts should be taken to be an *upāsaka*, just as one had to undertake all the monastic precepts to become a monk; or that the refuges and just *some* precepts were sufficient to be an *upāsaka* (Hirakawa, 1995: 19–20). While the Pali *Suttas* of the Theravāda tradition say that one is an *upāsaka* simply by taking the three refuges, even before one takes the five precepts (*A*. iv.220), they do not refer to *upāsakas* who keep only some of the precepts. Mahāyāna texts are also divided on the issue, as seen in two texts which are both often attributed to Nāgārjuna: the *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-upadeśa* accepts the practice, whereas the *Daśa-bhūmika-vibhāṣā* does not.¹⁵

In contemporary Tibetan practice, all the precepts are recited in a precept-giving ceremony, but lay people privately commit themselves only to those that they feel capable of following, with those committed to only some of the five precepts still being known as *upāsakas* or *upāsikās*.¹⁶

In the Chinese precept-taking ceremony, the precepts are regarded as quite weighty vows, as implied by the above discussion. Thus a person may not take a particular precept if he or she thinks that he or she cannot live up to it in practice, though the first precept is never omitted (Welch, 1967: 361). In the ceremony, those who wish to take only some are simply silent when it comes to the response for the precepts they wish to avoid taking.¹⁷ Chinese Buddhists also sometimes ‘suspend’ the fifth precept if a doctor prescribes wine for an illness (Welch, 1967: 366) and in Taiwan, some, including monks, hold that one can formally abandon

¹⁴ Citing *Mahā-nāma Sūtra*, quoted in *Kōśa-vyākhyā*, p. 377.

¹⁵ Respectively Taishō 1509, 25.158c and Taishō 1521, 26.56.b–c, as cited by Hirakawa, 1995: 22.

¹⁶ John Dunne, ‘Precept-keeping’ and ‘Precept Keeping’ postings to ‘Buddha-L’ Internet discussion forum, respectively 2 December and 21 July 1995.

¹⁷ Charles B. Jones, ‘Precept Keeping’ posting to ‘Buddha-L’ Internet discussion forum, 4 December 1995.

a precept, before a Buddha image, if one comes to see that it will be too hard to keep it, for example if one will have to drink with business clients. Others, though, disapprove of the idea of abandoning precepts at will.¹⁸ This is a reflection of the fact that Taiwanese Buddhists have different views on whether partial precept-taking is acceptable. Those who allow it are more strict about those precepts that they do take, while those who do not accept partial taking are more permissive in allowing that a precept can be later abandoned if it proves unkeepable:

The former argue that the bad karma accrued from taking a precept and then breaking it is worse than if one had not taken it in the first place . . . [as] it accrues the bad karma of the act itself and the bad karma of precept-breaking.

The latter argue that it is better to take a precept even if one cannot keep it, because the act of making a vow has a wholesome effect on the consciousness. They also make it very easy to abandon a precept. One simply says, 'I herewith abandon the precept against . . .'.¹⁹

The latter view is to some extent supported by the *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* (IV.41a–b), which says that one who resolves to give up killing does not thereby overcome his moral indiscipline unless he also takes the first precept, for 'Illness does not improve without medicine, even though one may avoid the cause of illness.' Mark Tatz, drawing on Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, also says that 'To act morally in accordance with a vow is considered more beneficial than to act morally without one, because the moral conduct is associated with progress toward a higher goal' (1986: 13), and the respected Burmese meditation teacher Mahāsi Sayadaw holds that 'the mere intention to observe the moral precepts' is very beneficial (Mahasi, 1981: 30). One might add that to the extent that taking a precept helps one generally avoid the relevant action, a lapse or two from the precept is better than not taking it in the first place. Another consideration is that it is seen as worse to do a bad action when one does not recognize it as a bad action (see pp. 155–6). To take a precept against doing an action is a way of clearly acknowledging it as wrong, even if one subsequently does it. This need not imply, though, that someone who does not formally take a precept does not acknowledge the relevant action as wrong: he or she may simply feel that he or she is unable to live up to it, given his or her circumstances and nature. Of course, breaking a precept one has promised to follow also involves breaking a promise, but one can argue that unless this is a premeditated

¹⁸ Charles Jones, 'Keeping Precepts' posting to 'Buddha-L' Internet discussion forum, 21 July 1995.

¹⁹ Charles B. Jones, 'Precept Keeping' posting to 'Buddha-L' Internet discussion forum, 6 December 1995.

lie, it does not outweigh the goodness of the original promise/resolution.

What, though, of the many monastic rules undertaken by a monk or nun, but not by a lay person? The most obvious one of these is the avoidance of all sexual activity. Sexual activity is acceptable for a lay person, provided it is within certain moral bounds. A monk undertakes to avoid it, as a crucial part of his training to overcome all greed/attachment, hatred and delusion. Any act of sexual intercourse will then lead to 'defeat' in the monastic life, and expulsion from it. In this case, it is seen as better not to take the relevant precept, by remaining a lay person, or disrobing, than to take it and then break it. This is partly because of the solemnity of the monastic vows, and the obligation a monk has to make himself worthy of the alms of the lay-people who support him, and so not betray their faith. Moreover, sexual activity is not itself immoral, so it only becomes blameworthy if indulged in after vowing not to do so (or if done in a way involving suffering to others). Like most of the monastic precepts, it is generally not 'reprehensible by nature' but only by precept, as breaking it brings no direct harm to others (Tatz, 1986: 10; but see Harvey, 1999: 283).

Damien Keown, though, argues that a bad action is worse if one has taken a precept against it, on the principle that law-breakers 'who should have known better', such as policemen or lawyers, are treated more severely in courts as they 'a) knew exactly what they were doing, b) had vowed to uphold the principles they had betrayed and c) brought their office or profession into disrepute'.²⁰ This form of argument, though, is better suited to monks and their precepts than lay people. D. Gould's argument focuses more directly on the heart of the issue: 'The grave effect of breaking a solemn promise one has made to oneself is that one has created a tendency to ignore one's own wholesome decisions and has opened the door to a much less controllable mind.'²¹ The *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* says that to break a precept one has taken is committing an act against moral virtue (*śīla*) (*AKB*. IV.122.c), even though it seems to oppose partial precept-taking. While it does not actually say that breaking a precept is worse than doing the act without breaking a precept, this seems to be implied.

The *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra*, which is influential in China, holds strongly to the view that it is worse to do a bad action that one has taken a precept against:

²⁰ 'Keeping Precepts' posting to 'Buddha-L' Internet discussion forum, 24 July 1995.

²¹ 'Keeping Precepts' posting to 'Buddha-L' Internet discussion forum, 25 July 1995.

If two people commit an offense together and one has taken the precepts and the other has not, the former's offense is heavier and the latter's offense is lighter. And why is this? It is because he transgresses the Buddha's teaching. (*Uss.* 150)

Moreover, to break the worldly form of the first precept – that is, without first taking the three refuges – is less bad than breaking one of the precepts which are not transgressions by nature, if this has been taken in a Buddhist way (p. 150). The *Sūtra* agrees that sincerely keeping the precepts has immeasurable benefits (p. 73), with great blessings coming from even taking them for a short time (p. 159), yet it also holds that breaking them leads to countless bad rebirths (p. 73; cf. pp. 176–7). Thus it holds that:

- (1) to avoid killing after having taken the Buddhist precept against it is better than to avoid it without the precept;
- (2) to kill after having taken a Buddhist precept against it is worse than to kill without having taken this precept.

Indeed, for one who has not taken the first precept, the evil of killing is restricted to the actual time of killing, whereas for one who has taken the precept, the evil of any killing occurs not just at this time (p. 176). Thus taking a Buddhist precept is risky: it offers great rewards if kept, but great dangers if broken. Nevertheless, while the *Sūtra* sees breaking a precept one has taken as making one a 'stinking . . . outcast . . . defiled *upāsaka*' (p. 79), 'staining' the relevant precept, it can be subsequently purified by various reflections and good actions (pp. 157–8). Indeed, 'Even if one commits many great offences, the precepts are not lost. And why is this? It is because the power of the precepts is strong' (p. 150).

Is it possible to decide between these two views on precept-taking? Are we to say that it is 'just a matter of opinion', and that neither is objectively right or wrong? We can say that both views can be objectively right, without actually contradicting each other! Those who prefer not to take a precept that they think they might break, as they regard precept-breaking as a weighty act, will take any precept in a particularly solemn way. In doing so, they get the advantage of generating a strong, wholesome, positive impulse in the mind, but breaking such a *solemnly made* precept *will thereby* be a weighty act. Those who hold that it is better to take a precept even if it might be subsequently broken will regard a precept in a less solemn way, and *thereby*, if it is broken, it will be less serious than the breaking of a precept by the first type of person. Of course, taking a precept in a less solemn way will have a less positive impact on the mind, which is part of the reason why the second type of person holds that it is always good to take a precept. His or her (uncon-

scious) strategy is a ‘lower-risk’ one of lower potential gain, but lower potential risk. Thus we see that the Buddhist principle of the primacy of the nature of the act of will behind an act, and the dynamic interactions taking place in a world in which states of mind constantly condition each other, affects the issue.

Taking extra precepts

As an extension of the usual five precepts, a set of eight precepts may be taken by lay people (Terweil, 1979: 208–10). These go beyond purely moral concerns – related to that which is, or may be, reprehensible by nature – to forms of self-discipline that reduce stimulating sense-inputs that disturb calm and concentration, and develop non-attachment (*AKB*. IV.29a–c; *Khp. A.* 24). The difference between the eight and five precepts is firstly that the third precept is replaced by an undertaking to avoid *abrahmacariya*: ‘unchaste conduct’ or ‘conduct not of the holy life’, that is, sexual activity of any kind. Three more precepts are then undertaken after the usual fifth one:²²

6. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from eating at an unseasonable time.
7. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from seeing dancing, music vocal and instrumental, and shows; from wearing garlands, perfumes and unguents, from finery and adornment.
8. I undertake the training-precept to abstain from high or large beds (or seats).

The sixth precept entails not eating any solid food after noon, following the practice of monks. The seventh precept means avoiding, or keeping one’s distance from, entertainments, and avoiding make-up, perfume, jewellery and colourful clothes, so that, in Southern Buddhism, people wear plain white clothes (Gombrich, 1971a: 66). These particular disciplines are also followed by those observing the Zen *Jūkai* festival. The eighth precept is intended to diminish slothfulness or feelings of grandeur, and entails sitting and sleeping on mats. In practice, however, this is how most rural lay people in South-east Asia generally sleep anyway (Terweil, 1979: 210); luxurious beds are only used by the rich or noble.

In the Southern tradition, the eight precepts are generally only taken by more pious people over forty:²³ a few do so permanently, but more do

²² *Sn.* 400–2. For a discussion of these, and the ten precepts, see *Khp. A.* 34–7, with some discussion of the third of the eight or ten precepts included on pp. 22–37.

²³ Terweil, 1979: 195–210; Gombrich, 1971a: 66, 273–4.

so temporarily on some of the observance days (*uposathas*), while staying at a monastery for a day and a night, a practice which is also found in Chinese Buddhism (*Uss.* 146). There are four such observance days per lunar month, but observance of the eight precepts is more common on those falling in the three months of the rainy season, when monks remain in their monasteries for more intense practice. By taking extra precepts, lay people who are becoming less actively involved in the concerns of lay life undertake a discipline which approximates to that of monks. In Thailand a lay person is therefore known – while under the discipline of eight precepts – by the term for a male or female lay disciple, *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* (Terweil, 1979: 198), which terms are used in Mahāyāna Buddhism for anyone who seeks to observe some or all of the five precepts properly. Those who sometimes take eight precepts in the Theravāda tradition also observe the five precepts more faithfully than other people in daily life, and in Sri Lanka such people are known as *upāsakas* or *upāsikās* all the time (Gombrich, 1971a: 65). Unlike the five precepts, in Thailand the eight precepts are usually taken as a set, so that breaking any of them breaks all of them (Terweil, 1979: 208). As regards the third of the eight precepts, in rural Thailand, customary advice to married couples is that they should avoid sexual intercourse on observance days even if they are not formally taking this precept (Terweil, 1979: 208).

An extension beyond the eight precepts is found in the ten precepts. These are the same as the eight except that the seventh is split into its two parts, and there is the addition of an undertaking to ‘abstain from accepting gold and silver’. While the difference seems a small one, in practice it is large, for the ten precepts are not taken temporarily, but only on a long-term basis (Terweil, 1979: 212). The extra precept precludes the actual handling of money, as in the case of monks. The ten precepts are those observed by novice monks. A few elderly Theravāda men permanently follow the ten precepts, and wear white, but a greater number of women do so (see pp. 395–8). In Sri Lanka, the ten precepts of the householder are seen as easier to maintain than those of novices as the lay person takes them individually, so that all are not broken if one is, whereas novices take them as a group (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 73).

MONASTIC VALUES

The followers of the Buddha are termed the ‘four assemblies’ (*parisās*): male and female members of the monastic *Saṅgha*, and male and female

lay disciples: *upāsakas* and *upāsikās* (J. 1.148). In nearly all schools of Buddhism, the monastic life is acknowledged as on a generally higher level of virtue than lay life. Monastics have been the main bearers and preservers of the Buddhist tradition, and have been teachers, guides and examples to the laity. The Pali terms translated as ‘monk’ and ‘nun’ are *bhikkhu* (Skt *bhikṣu*) and *bhikkhunī* (Skt *bhikṣuṇī*), literally ‘almsman’ and ‘almswoman’. The original mendicancy of *bhikkhus*, still current to varying extents, symbolized renunciation of normal worldly activities and involvements; it was an aid to humility, and also ensured that they did not become isolated from the laity. A *bhikkhu* should be content with whatever food etc. he is offered, but should not exalt himself or disparage others on account of his contentment (A. II.27). The often close lay–monastic relationship makes *bhikkhus* unlike most Christian ‘monks’. They also differ from these in that their undertakings are not in principle taken for life, and in that they take no vow of obedience. The Buddha valued self-reliance, and left the *Saṅgha* as a community of individuals sharing a life under the guidance of *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. The job of its members is to strive for their own spiritual development, and use their knowledge and experience of *Dhamma* to guide others, when asked: not to act as intermediaries between God and humankind, or officiate at life-cycle rites. Nevertheless, in practice they have come to serve the laity in several priest-like ways.

Celibacy

The most obvious and central difference between a monk or nun and a lay person is the former’s commitment to celibacy: the total avoidance of sexual intercourse. The importance of celibacy is that sexual activity expresses quite strong attachment, uses energy which could otherwise be used more fruitfully, and generally leads to family responsibilities which leave less time for spiritual practice (see Wijayaratna, 1990: 89–108). Among the various Buddhist lists of states to be overcome on the spiritual path, desire for sense-pleasures (*kāma*) is prominent: it is the first of the five hindrances to meditative calming, and in lists of the three kinds of craving, the four sorts of grasping, and the four deep-seated ‘cankers’ on the mind, the first item always has sense-pleasures as its focus.

The three ‘roots of unwholesome action’, to be gradually weakened before *Nirvāṇa* brings their destruction, are greed, hatred and delusion. The practice of the precepts and lovingkindness enables a lay person to minimize hatred, and the practice of the precepts and generosity may reduce greed, but the monastic life with its fewer attachments has clear

advantages here. As a form of greed, attachment to sensual pleasures is a lesser fault than hatred or ill-will, but it is seen as taking a long time to uproot (see p. 47), and monastic life is seen as a powerful means to aid this.

Celibacy has to be practised in the right way, though. Rōshi Kyogen Carlson notes that it is:

an extremely powerful method for developing the will. Celibacy has to be undertaken with a gentle heart and compassion, otherwise it can lead to a certain coldness, and can be misused to develop personal power. (Carlson, 1982: 38)

Alan James, who spent time as a Theravādin monk, comments that a 'wrong' and 'right' form of celibacy can be found in religions. The first is a form of escapism based on a rejection and repression of sexuality, so that a person becomes 'wizened and dried out . . . bitter . . . sexless'. In the second, 'sexuality has been accepted and integrated into the lifestyle . . . not ignored and rejected', so as to be an 'open . . . full face which is happy and very definitely male or female' (James and James, 1987: 40). Indeed, it is sometimes said that an effect of cultivating the spiritual faculty of 'energy' (Pali *virīya*; Skt *vīrya*) is to glow with either manly or womanly energy,²⁴ and one woman who had an audience with the Dalai Lama later expressed surprise at how *masculine* he was!

An interesting reflection on the value of celibacy, from a Western Buddhist nun, sees celibacy as avoiding the cycle of 'clinging, unfulfilled expectation, the pain of separation' found in normal relationships, where 'often, the longing for a companion is a wish to complement one's missing or underdeveloped qualities' (Tsomo, 1988: 55):

Celibacy, on the other hand, represents a decision to rely on one's own inner authority. It is an attempt to achieve a balance and wholeness within, independent of the feedback of another person.

In such a state, one is free from both the 'gross complications of relationships' and the tendency to synthesize one's own direct experience of the world with that of another person. Thus one is 'free to experience life directly, participating wholeheartedly with undivided attention'. It is also harder to blame one's problems on other people (p. 57). And, of course, it enables one to go beyond sexual attachment, 'the major force that propels beings from one rebirth to the next' (p. 56).

²⁴ For a discussion of attitudes to sexuality in modern Theravāda and Zen Buddhism, see Clasquin, 1992.

The role of monasticism

The life of monks and nuns is not properly an ‘escapist’ or ‘selfish’ one, as is sometimes thought. A lay person can distract himself or herself from the realities of life and personal weaknesses with such things as entertainments, pastimes, drink and sex. The simple monastic life, however, is designed to have few distractions, so that there is less opportunity to ignore greed, hatred and delusion, and thus more opportunity to work at diminishing them and to guide others in doing so. Most monks and nuns seek to do this, though a few do take to monastic life as a lazy way of making a living. As regards being ‘selfish’, the whole aim of monastic life is to help diminish attachment to self and its consequent desires and aversions.

The Buddha felt that the life of a householder was somewhat spiritually cramping, so that it was difficult for a layperson to perfect the ‘holy life’:

The household life is cramping; it is a path choked with dust; to leave it is to come out into the open air. It is not easy for a householder to live the holy life in all its fullness, in all its purity, polished like a conch-shell. (*D.* 1.63)

Thus the *Milindapañha* refers to a layman’s life as ‘crowded with wife and children’ (*Miln.* 243). As the monastic life of one ‘gone forth from home into homelessness’ lacks many of the attachments and limiting involvements found in lay life, it is seen as having fewer obstacles to, and more opportunities for, persistent and consistent spiritual practice, which are needed to destroy delusion, along with greed and hatred.

It is said that if either a lay person or one who is ordained is rightly practising, he or she is ‘accomplishing the right path’: one cannot automatically say that a monk or nun is on the right path and a lay person not (*M.* 11.197). Nevertheless, a householder leads a busy life, with many responsibilities, and so cannot give as consistent attention to moral and spiritual matters as one who is ordained (*M.* 11.205). Moreover, one who has ‘gone forth’ (if practising rightly) is:

of few wishes, content, aloof, ungregarious, of stirred up energy, without desire, homeless, he fulfils the moral virtues, he is of submissive habits, and skilled in the practice of shaking off (the defilements),

so that all that he does ‘prosper quickly and without delay’ (*Miln.* 244).

The early texts do refer to many lay Stream-enterers, more than 1,000 eight-precept (celibate) lay Non-returners (*M.* 1.490–1) and a few lay

Arahats.²⁵ They describe one lay Non-returner, Ugga, as teaching *Dhamma* to monks if they do not themselves teach him (*A.* iv.211). If a gravely ill lay person can abandon all attachments and aspire to an end to rebirth, there is no difference, as regards release, between him and an *Arahat* monk (*S.* v.408–10). Nevertheless, it is said that there is no householder ‘not getting rid of the householder’s (mental) fetter(s)’ who makes an end of *dukkha*, i.e. becomes an *Arahat* (*M.* i.483).

While the conditions of lay life pose more obstacles, those who make the effort in spite of them can attain good spiritual progress (*Uss.* 24). Nevertheless, most Buddhist schools see monasticism as a superior way of life, one that all should respect and aspire to join in this or some future life. In Chinese Buddhism, it is said that even giving to bad monks is of great benefit, as any monk passes on the teachings and respects the three refuges (*Uss.* 155). In Southern Buddhism, it is said that a lay Stream-enterer should even bow to a monk of lesser attainment, as a way of showing respect for his way of life (*Miln.* 162–4). Moreover, a lay person who attains *Arahat*ship must ordain that day (if he is not to pass away), as the lofty nature of this state cannot be expressed in a lay context (*Miln.* 264–6).

Within the classical Mahāyāna, while the *Bodhisattva*-path gives an increased scope for lay practice, the monastic life is still highly regarded, and is seen as a necessary commitment at some point on the path. Śāntideva’s *Śikṣā-samuccaya* talks of the ‘innumerable faults’ of lay life, and affirms that the *Bodhisattva* should renounce it in each of his rebirths (*Ss.* 190, 15); though for enlightenment to be attained, the *Bodhisattva* precepts (see pp. 132–4) must be followed in addition to the monastic ones (p. 19).

The monastic code of discipline

Saṅgha life is regulated by the *Vinaya*, meaning ‘that by which one is led out (from suffering)’. The main components of this section of scriptures are a code of training-rules (Pali *sikkhāpadas*; Skt *śikṣāpadas*) for *bhikkhus*, one for *bhikkhunīs*, and ordinances for the smooth running of communal life and ceremonies. Each code is known as a *paññimokkha* (Pali; Skt

²⁵ *A.* iii.450–1; *Dhp.* 142. The later *Miln.* 348 talks of millions of lay people as having experienced *Nirvāna*, by which it mainly means Stream-entry up to becoming a Non-returner (pp. 349–50). It then goes on to outline various spiritual advantages, nevertheless, of being a monk or nun (pp. 351–62), and says that lay attainers had been monks or nuns in past lives (p. 353). On the question of lay *Arahats*, see *Kvu.* 268 and *Saddhatissa*, 1970: 115–221; Katz, 1982: 180–5.

prātimokṣa), containing: (1) the rules themselves, (2) the supposed situation which led the Buddha to promulgate each rule, often involving lay criticism of the behaviour of some monks, and (3) mitigating circumstances which nullify or reduce the usual consequences of digression from it.

The *pāṭimokkha* gradually evolved during the Buddha's life, and for perhaps a century after, on the basis of the original rules – 150 or so for monks. In the early texts, the Buddha says that he only made a rule when a particular form of harmful conduct was carried out by a monk or nun, which increased as the number of monastics, and the time from the simpler early days, grew (*M.* 1.445). Three versions of the code are still in use. The Theravādin code of 227 rules for monks (311 for nuns) is the one used in Southern Buddhism, the Mūla-Sarvāstivādin code of 258 rules for monks (366 for nuns) is used in Northern Buddhism, while the Dharmaguptaka code of 250 rules for monks (348 for nuns) is used in Eastern Buddhism.

The *pāṭimokkha* code has qualities which make it akin to a legal code, to a code of professional conduct, and to a set of training-rules for a (spiritual) athlete (cf. Huxley, 1995b). It is chanted on the observance days at the full and new moons. Before this, a monk must acknowledge any digression from the code to another monk. The code is then chanted by a senior monk, often now in an abbreviated form, and the silence of the others is taken as a sign that their conduct is pure, with any digressions acknowledged. In this way the ceremony serves as a vital liturgical expression of the communal purity of a particular local *Saṅgha*.

The monastic code covers much besides the primarily moral concerns of the five precepts which lay people follow. It is mainly 'formulated' virtue, abstaining from behaviour which goes against a specially formulated precept, not 'natural' virtue, abstaining from behaviour 'reprehensible by nature' (Harvey, 1999: 282–4; Tatz, 1986: 295, n. 374). Yet it supports natural virtue (see p. 78) as it trains the mind in dealing with the roots of immoral behaviour.

As an elaboration of the ten precepts, the code drastically limits the indulgence of desires, and promotes a very self-controlled, calm way of life, of benefit to the monks and nuns themselves and an example which 'inspires confidence' among the laity (*Vism.* 19). Overall, the rules are said to have been established for: protecting and ensuring the comfort of the *Saṅgha*; warding off ill-meaning people who might wish to join it; helping well-behaved monks and nuns; destroying present defilements and preventing future ones; benefiting non-Buddhists and increasing the number of Buddhists; and establishing discipline by observing the rules

of restraint (*Vin.* III.21). The rules are not so much prohibitions, as aids to spiritual training that require those observing them to be ever mindful. By constantly coming up against limiting boundaries, they are made more aware of their 'greed, hatred and delusion', and so are better able to deal with them. The rules are thus best seen as tools to help transform the mind and behaviour.

The rules are arranged in categories according to degrees of gravity.²⁶ The first relates to *pārājika* actions which 'entail defeat' in monastic life, and permanent dismissal. For monks, these are strong breaches of four of the ten precepts (*Vin.* III.1–109): intentional sexual intercourse of any kind; theft of an object that would lead to being taken to court; murder of a human being; and false claims of having attained deep meditative states or become a Noble person, whether made to the laity (a possible way of attracting more alms) or other monks. As serious karmic consequences are seen to follow from a monk's breaking these rules, it is held to be better to become a lay person, who can at least indulge in sexual intercourse, than live as a monk who is in danger of breaking the rule against this. For nuns, there are four extra *pārājika* offences (*Vin.* IV.211–22): (with sensual intent) touching a man or going to a rendezvous with him; not making known that another nun has broken a *pārājika* rule; and persistently imitating a monk suspended for bad behaviour.

The remaining rules explained here are those of the monks' *pāṭimokkha*. They do not entail expulsion if broken, but such penalties as: being put on probation, during which time a monk is treated as the most junior monk and excluded from official *Saṅgha* affairs; not speaking to a monk; censuring; forfeiting an article; or simply acknowledging the digression. These rules can be conveniently grouped in relation to the ten precepts:

- (1) harming living beings by directly killing them, digging the ground or destroying plants or trees;
- (2) consuming food or drink (except water) that has not been formally offered; 'corrupting families' by giving small gifts in the hope of receiving abundant alms in return;
- (3) actions of a sensual nature other than intercourse; sleeping in the same dwelling as a woman, or sitting in a private place with one;
- (4) false accusations of an offence involving 'defeat', and various other forms of wrong speech, unfriendly behaviour towards a fellow

²⁶ For general discussion of monastic discipline, see Prebish, 1980. On the Theravāda monastic rules, see: Wijayaratna, 1990; Thanissaro Bhikkhu, 1994; Khantipalo, 1979; Harvey, 1999; and Von Hinüber, 1995. For other monastic codes, see Prebish, 1975.

monk, and true claims to the laity of having attained higher states. Also, disparaging the lesser rules as vexing, pretended ignorance of a rule, or knowingly concealing a monk's digression from one of the more serious rules;

- (5) drinking alcohol;
- (6) eating after noon;
- (7) unseemly, frivolous behaviour, and going to see an army fighting or on parade;
- (8) inappropriate ways of wearing monastic robes: seventy-five rules in the Theravādin code (*Vin.* iv.185–206) seek to ensure that the monks (and novices) are graceful and dignified in the way that they wear their robes, walk, move, and collect and eat alms-food. Such a calm deportment is much valued by the laity;
- (9) using a high, luxurious bed, or sleeping in the same place as a layman for more than three nights;
- (10) receiving, handling or use in transactions of money (this does not prevent the acceptance and use of money by a monastery's lay stewards).

Entry into the monastic *Saṅgha* is by two stages. From the age of seven or eight, a child can take the lower ordination, or 'going forth' (Pali *paḍbajjā*; Skt *pravrajyā*), so as to become a *sāmaṇera* (Pali; Skt *śramaṇera*) or *sāmaṇerī* (Pali; Skt *śrāmaṇerikā*): a male or female 'little renunciant' or novice. These novices undertake the ten precepts (see p. 88). When aged twenty, a person can take higher ordination or 'admission' (*upasampadā*) as a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhunī*. Once someone is ordained, even as a novice, head hair is shaved off, as a sign of renunciation of vanity.

A new novice or monk generally acts as attendant to a senior monk, his teacher and companion in the monastic life, in a relationship explicitly modelled on that of father and son (*Vin.* i.45). In South-east Asia, short-term noviciates, lasting at least a few days or weeks, are quite common. These are to generate karmic fruitfulness for a parent or dead relative, or, in Burma, as a kind of rite de passage for boys near puberty. Some novices, of course, stay on until they become monks.

The Buddha discouraged monks from disrobing, and originally ordination was taken with the intention that it would be for life. However, the monastic status has never been irrevocable. In most Buddhist lands, a person is expected to be a monk or nun for life, but a system of temporary ordination has evolved in the Theravāda lands of South-east Asia (though not in Sri Lanka). Here, the tradition is that every male Buddhist should join the *Saṅgha* at some time for at least a limited period, usually

during the three-month rains period, when the number of monks may double. In practice about 50 per cent join, often several times during life. While the continuity of monastic life is kept up by a core of permanent monks, the system makes for a close lay–monastic relationship and a good level of lay religious knowledge and experience. Temporary monkhood is often a stage prior to marriage (see p. 102) or a way for old people to generate karmic fruitfulness for their next life.

Harmony, sharing and spiritual companionship

Harmony among members of the monastic *Saṅgha* has always been highly valued. Thus the Buddha said that among the conditions for the flourishing of the *Saṅgha* (in any particular locality) were that it should hold regular meetings at which ‘they meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry on their business in harmony’ (*D.* II.76–7). Another condition was that senior monks – i.e. those ordained longer – should be respected. This applied even if a junior monk was more learned or spiritually developed than his senior (*Vin.* II.161–2). This method provided a clear and unambiguous structure for respectful salutations within the *Saṅgha*.²⁷

The contemporary valuing, by the laity, of monastic unity is shown by Jane Bunnag’s observations on Thailand (1973: 104):

Many informants placed great value upon concerted action between *bhikkhus*, taking it as evidence of strong community spirit; by contrast they tended to disparage the independent behaviour of the monks at *Wat Yanasena* and elsewhere, as being anti-social and selfish. I was frequently told . . . ‘it is better (for monks) to eat together’.

Similarly, in Japanese Zen monasteries, there is an emphasis on monks training *together*, and not ‘alone up a mountain’ in their own thoughts, while supposedly working with others.

Harmony is fostered by friendly thoughts, words and deeds and shared virtues and outlook, but also by sharing possessions. Thus the Buddha counselled that a monk should enjoy impartially sharing even the contents of an alms-bowl with fellow monks (*M.* I.322; *M.* II.250–1). In Thailand, food, goods and money given to monks are indeed generally shared amongst them and also used to support boys who live at the monasteries to help the monks, often because they need somewhere to live while studying away from home.

²⁷ On monastic life as representing the ideal society, see Dharmasiri, 1989: 79–97.

On one occasion, the Buddha emphasized that ‘good friendship (*kalyāṇa-mittatā*), good association, good intimacy’ was the whole, not the half of the holy life (*S.* v.2), for good friendship is the most powerful (external) thing to foster the arising of wholesome states and the decline of unwholesome ones (*A.* i.14). The *Saṅgha*, in having shared values, ideals and practices, acts as a support for the individual monk or nun’s efforts. Such support is given by example, the practice of mutual acknowledgement of digressions from the monastic rules, and by gently pointing out faults of other monks, at which they should not take offence (*M.* i.95). A new monk’s guiding senior is his particular ‘good friend’. The best of ‘good friends’ are those who are gifted meditation teachers.

The monks also act as ‘good friends’ to the laity, through example, teaching, informal advice, chanting protective chants for them and being worthy ‘fields of karmic fruitfulness’ for them. In a variety of ways, the ethos of the *Saṅgha* thus radiates out into the lay society that supports it.

THE ETHICS OF INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

While Buddhism emphasizes a personal lay ethic of giving, moral restraint and right livelihood, and a more elaborate monastic code, it by no means neglects the area of lay inter-personal and social relationships. Nevertheless, discourses to the laity are not generally given in the form of disciplinary rules, as:

the wider lay society was so open to changing circumstances of space and time that the monks did not consider it as a subject appropriate for fixed rules. Consequently, only some basic rules and general principles were stipulated

as a basis for people to work out more specific codes in their circumstances (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 35). How this has worked out in practice varies considerably from culture to culture, but some central emphases of Buddhist social ethics can be outlined.

An important text in this area is the *Sigālovāda Sutta* (*D.* iii.180–93; cf. *Uss.* 71–2), described by the Emperor Asoka and Buddhaghosa as the *Vinaya*, or code of discipline (usually meaning the monastic code), of lay people (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 35). Here the Buddha comes across Sigāla, worshipping the six directions in pursuance of his father’s dying wish. The Buddha counsels him that there is a better way to serve the directions: by proper actions towards six types of persons. Before outlining these appropriate actions, he first teaches Sigāla the proper way for a lay person to conduct himself or herself in general. He or she should: keep

the precepts; not act from partiality, enmity, stupidity or fear; and avoid the six channels of dissipating wealth (see pp. 189–90). The Buddha then outlines how the six ‘directions’ are to be ‘protected’, so as to produce sound social relationships.

Parents and children

The first relationship dealt with is the child–parent one, with the parent seen as in the direction of the rising sun:

In five ways a child should minister to his parents as the eastern quarter: ‘Once supported by them, I will now be their support; I will perform duties incumbent on them; I will keep up the lineage and tradition of my family; I will make myself worthy of my heritage; I will give alms on their behalf when they are dead.’ In five ways do the parents, thus ministered to as the eastern quarter by their child, act in sympathy with him: they restrain him from vice, they exhort him to virtue, they train him to a profession, they contract a suitable marriage for him, and in due time they hand over his inheritance. (*D.* III.189)

Respect and support for parents is also emphasized in the *Maṅgala Sutta*:

Aid for mother and father,
And support for wife and children,
Work that is free from upset:
This is a supreme blessing. (*Khp.* 3)

The *Sigālovāda Sutta* affirms that parents only win the honour and respect of children by their kindly help to them (cf. *Uss.* 178). While the law of karma ensures that children get the parents they deserve (and parents get the children they deserve), it is said that the only way that a child can repay the debt of gratitude owed to his or her parents for caring for him or her in pregnancy and childhood is by getting them to develop or deepen a commitment to Buddhism and a virtuous life. Mother and father should be seen as like both the god Brahmā and ‘teachers of old’: they are worthy of offerings and help on account of their compassionately bringing up their children and introducing them to the world (*A.* 1.132; cf. *Khp.* *A.* 137–8). In Sri Lanka, it is held that ‘the mother is the Buddha at home’ (Dharmasiri, 1989: 71), in the sense that she is owed great respect for what she has done for her children. In rural Thailand, parents give great care and affection to their children, and in return get profound respect and deference (H. E. Smith, 1979: 18).

Deliberately killing one’s father or mother is listed among the heinous acts that definitely lead to an immediate hellish rebirth after death (see

p. 24). One is said to be an ‘outcaste’ not by birth but by actions, such as failing to support one’s ageing parents when one has the means to do so, or striking or angering one’s parents, brother, sister or mother-in-law (*Sn.* 124–5). In *Jātaka* story 222 (*J.* II.199–202), monkeys give up the leadership of a troop to look after their sick, blind mother, and later give up their lives so that a hunter will spare her. As regards respect for elders, *Jātaka* 37 (*J.* I.217–20) tells of a monkey, partridge and elephant who agree to respect whichever among them is the eldest (see also *Vin.* II.161). In Thailand, respect for elders is important, even respect for a slightly older sibling. Such relationships take on a patron–client form: ‘the senior member is expected to provide counsel and moral guidance, as well as material assistance when the need arises; whilst the junior partner should in turn pay heed to his advice, and give more tangible evidence of his deference by acting as general factotum for his superior’ (Bunnag, 1973: 13).

In East Asia, the practice of Buddhists was influenced by the Confucian ethic, which sees filial piety as the foundation of ethics, and the family head as in a strong position of authority over its members (Ch’en, 1973: 15–55). It is noticeable that one Chinese translation of the *Sigālovāda Sutta* gives one of the child’s duties as ‘not to disobey the commandments of the parents’ (Ch’en, 1973: 19). In Japan, Confucianism and the traditional political system concentrated authority in the family head, to whom absolute obedience was due. In the post-war era, though, American influence has led to laws liberating family members from this authority (Maykovich, 1978: 390). Nevertheless, the idea of the ‘return of benefits’ remains strong. As explained by the leader of Rishshō-kōseikai, a Japanese new religious movement based on Nichiren Buddhism, we are only able to live because of:

our ancestors, parents, and the food and clothes etc. produced by others. People should see that they are able to live only through favors that come from outside themselves . . . We, as individuals, can exist only by being supported by the whole universe. (Niwano, 1977: 143–4)

Understanding this leads to joy and gratitude and a desire to serve others.

Other relationships

Other social relationships are dealt with in the *Sigālovāda Sutta* as follows (*D.* III.189–91):

In five ways should a pupil minister to his teachers as the southern quarter: by rising [from his seat in salutation], by waiting upon them, by eagerness to learn, by personal service, and by attention when receiving their teaching. And in five ways do teachers, thus ministered to as the southern quarter by their pupil, act in sympathy with their pupil: they train him well, cause him to learn well, thoroughly instruct him in the lore of every art, speak well of him among friends and companions, and provide for his safety in every quarter . . .

In five ways should a wife as western quarter be ministered to by her husband: by respect, by courtesy, by faithfulness, by handing over authority to her [in the home], by providing her with adornment. In these five ways does the wife, thus ministered to by her husband as the western quarter, act in sympathy with him: her duties are well performed, she shows hospitality to kin of both, is faithful, watches over the goods he brings, and shows skill and artistry in discharging all her business.

In five ways should one minister to one's friends and familiars as the northern quarter: by generosity, courtesy and benevolence, by treating them as one treats oneself, and by being as good as one's word. In these five ways thus ministered to as the northern quarter, one's friends and familiars act in sympathy with one: they protect one when one is off one's guard, and on such occasions guard one's property; they become a refuge in danger, they do not forsake one in times of trouble, and they show consideration for one's family . . .

In five ways does a noble master minister to his servants and employees as the nadir: by assigning them work according to their strength, by supplying them with food and wages, by tending them in sickness, by sharing with them unusual delicacies, and by granting them leave at all appropriate times. In these ways ministered to by their master, servants and employees act in sympathy with their master in five ways: they rise before him, lie down to rest after him, are content with what is given to them, do their work well, and they carry about his praise and good name.

In these five ways should the householder minister to renunciants and brahmins as the zenith: by lovingkindness in acts of body, speech and mind, by keeping open house to them, by supplying their temporal needs. Thus ministered to as the zenith, renunciants and brahmins act in sympathy with the householder in six ways: they restrain him from evil, they exhort him to good, they love him with kindly good thoughts, they teach him what he has not heard, they correct and purify what he has heard, they reveal to him the way to a heavenly rebirth.

This text, then, places the lay person at the centre of a web of relationships and gives guidelines for how to ensure that these are mutually enriching. In these relationships, a person has no right to *expect* certain behaviour from others unless they are treated appropriately by him or her (cf. Dharmasiri, 1989: 18).

Marriage

Most of what is said above is self-explanatory, but it is worth considering the marriage relationship more deeply. In the above ideal, both parties have a balanced range of mutual obligations. Elsewhere, the Buddha, on asked to advise a man's daughters on how to conduct themselves in marriage, says that a woman should train herself as follows. (1) Regarding her husband 'she gets up before him, retires after him, willingly does what he asks, is lovely (*mānava-*) in her ways and gentle in speech', not being one to anger him; (2) she honours all whom her husband respects, whether relative, monk or brahmin; (3) she is deft and nimble in her husband's home-crafts, such as weaving; (4) she watches over servants and workpeople with care and kindness; and (5) she looks after the wealth her husband brings home.²⁸ It is also said that a wife is a man's 'best friend' (*paramā sakhā*) (*S.* I.37), and in a *Jātaka* story, the *Bodhisattva*, seeing how a king treats his wife in a shabby and selfish way, advises her, in the king's presence, to leave him unless his behaviour improves, for 'union without love is painful' (*J.* II.205).

While monogamy is the preferred and predominant marital model, Buddhism has also tolerated polygamy, and sometimes polyandry. The early texts refer to a variety of kinds of marriage existing in India at the time of the origin of Buddhism, whether these were for love or money, permanent or temporary,²⁹ and they not infrequently refer to problems such as jealousy arising between co-wives (for example *Thig.* 216–17). Until 1910, Thai kings had many wives. The great reformist ex-monk King Mongkut (1851–68) had twenty-seven official wives as well as around a hundred concubines or female servants (Thitsa, 1980: 6). In Burma, at that time, King Mindon had fifty-three recognized wives and many concubines. Today, in rural Thailand, marriages are almost entirely monogamous. A few well-to-do farmers might have more than one wife, and this is more common in urban areas. If a second wife is taken, the first must give permission, and is senior to the second. Both are usually provided with their own living quarters to manage independently (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 444). In 1935, an attempt was made to register marriages formally and get rid of polygamy, but it had little effect (H. E. Smith, 1979: 24–5). In pre-modern Japan, polygamy was a

²⁸ *A.* III.37–8; cf. *A.* IV.265–6 and *S.* I.6.

²⁹ *Vin.* III.139–40; cf. *Asl.* 98. See Horner 1930: ch. 1; Murcott, 1991: 21–4 and ch. 6.

recognized form of marriage. The 1868 Meiji code recognized monogamy as the rule, however (Maykovich, 1979: 386). Polyandry, in the form of one woman marrying several brothers, has existed as one of the marriage forms recognized in areas of Tibetan culture (Norberg-Hodge, 1991: 55–8).

As referred to in early Buddhist texts, marriages were generally, but not always, arranged, and were rarely in conflict with a daughter's own wishes (Horner, 1930: 30). Indeed, the parents are seen as arranging a marriage out of love for their daughter (*A.* iv.265). In Burma and Thailand, marriages are usually arranged by a young woman's parents, taking her wishes into account. If permission is refused, elopements are often recognized (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 434–5). In Japan, from at least 1600, arranged marriages were traditional. A woman was given to the family of the man she was to marry, so the family line could be continued by an heir. In line with Confucian-inspired values, individual wishes were ignored in the interests of the family.

As Buddhism has a monastic emphasis, marriage is not regarded as 'sacred', but as a secular contract of partnership. Thus in Burma, for example, marriages do not usually take place during the three-month 'rains' period of more intense monastic and lay practice. Nevertheless, in Thailand, a man is considered 'raw' before he has been a monk, but 'cooked' and mature enough to marry after a period as one: i.e. with the rough edges knocked off him (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 441). Marriage services are not conducted by Buddhist monks, though they may be asked to bless the couple at or after the marriage. A Japanese Buddhist, then, would be traditionally married by Shintō rites, though today 'Christian' white weddings are becoming popular. In Thailand, marriage is a personal agreement backed up by public opinion and social pressure (H. E. Smith, 1979: 28). A clear change of status is entailed, though the woman does not change her name or wear a ring. The simplest marriage ceremony is a household one in which the spirits of ancestors are informed that a couple will be man and wife, so that they should not be offended when they have intercourse. More elaborate ceremonies are in three parts. First comes the official betrothal. Then comes the blessing of monks and relatives. This includes monks chanting and sprinkling sacralized water over the couple, and the couple making offerings to the family ancestors and using a single spoon to offer rice to the monks. In this way they do a shared act of generating karmic fruitfulness, so as to link some of their future moments of happiness. In connection with this, it is said that a husband and wife, if matched in faith,

virtue, generosity and wisdom, will be reborn together after death if they wish (*A.* II.61–2). After the monks depart, a ritual is performed by an elder and parents. The third phase is when a person reputed to be happily married gives a range of advice to the couple as they lie on the marriage bed, such as that the husband should be just and considerate, and the wife should be gentle and understanding (Terweil, 1979: 146–52). After marriage, the most common pattern is for the couple to live with the bride's parents until they can obtain a house of their own (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 442).

While Buddhism has no objection in principle to divorce, it is not a frequent event, because of social pressures against it (see, for example, H. E. Smith, 1979: 28). Buddhism has traditionally held celibate monasticism in the highest regard, but it has also seen marriage and family life as highly suitable for those who cannot commit themselves to celibacy, and as an arena in which many worthwhile qualities are nurtured.

However, one form of Western Buddhism, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, has come to criticize strongly the nuclear family form of married life, seeing it as spiritually restricting and 'neurotic', reflecting a fragmentation in modern society (Subhuti, 1994: 162–64, 177). Couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are seen as sometimes bound together in projection and dependency, tending to make each a half-person (Subhuti, 1994: 173–4). The FWBO was founded by the monk Sangharakshita (Dennis Lingwood) in the UK in 1967, and is centred on the 'Western Buddhist Order', perhaps half of whose members live in single-sex communities. Members include both married people and those following a celibate, semi-monastic life. While at one stage of the FWBO's development, some Order members sought to 'keep clear of unhealthy attachment by happily enjoying a number of different sexual relationships' (Subhuti, 1983: 167), it is now emphasized that sexual desire should be gradually transcended (Subhuti, 1994: 171). Celibacy is not required, though, and the FWBO is now seeking to ensure that members living with their families do not feel marginalized.³⁰

LOVINGKINDNESS AND COMPASSION

In the ethical development of a Buddhist, importance is attached to the development of heart-felt feelings of lovingkindness and compassion, as

³⁰ Vishvapani, 'Buddhism Distorted' in the *Guardian* newspaper, 11 November 1997.

outgrowths from generosity, as aids to deepening virtue, and as factors undercutting the attachment to ‘I’ (see Aronson, 1980). Lovingkindness (Pali *mettā*; Skt *maitrī*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) are the first two of a set of four qualities which also include empathetic or appreciative joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (Pali *upekkhā*; Skt *upekṣā*). These are known as the ‘immeasurables’ or as the ‘divine abidings’ (*brahma-vihāras*), for when developed to a high degree in meditation, they are said to make the mind ‘immeasurable’ and like the mind of the loving *brahmā* gods. Lovingkindness is the aspiration for the true happiness of any, and ultimately all, sentient beings, for all these are like oneself in liking happiness and disliking pain. It is the antidote to hatred and fear, and is to be distinguished from sentimentality. Compassion is the aspiration that beings be free from suffering, feeling for them; it is the antidote to cruelty, and is to be distinguished from sadness. Empathetic joy is joy at the joy of others, happiness at their good fortune; it is the antidote to envy and discontent and is to be distinguished from giddy merriment. Equanimity is an even-minded, unruffled serenity in the face of the ups and downs of life – one’s own and that of others – and comes from developing the reflection that beings suffer and are happy in accordance with their own karma. It is the antidote to both aversion and approval, but should be distinguished from indifference (*Vism.* 318). It also ensures an impartiality towards all beings, so that lovingkindness etc. is felt towards all equally.

Lovingkindness is stressed in such verses as, ‘Conquer anger by lovingkindness; conquer evil by good; conquer the stingy by giving; conquer the liar by truth’ (*Dhp.* 223). It is also the theme of the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta*, a popular Theravādin chant:

He who is skilled in good, and who wishes to attain that State of Peace [*Nirvāṇa*], should act thus: He should be able, upright, perfectly upright, of pleasant speech, gentle and humble. Contented, easy to support [as a monk], unbusy, with senses controlled, discreet, modest, not greedily attached to families [for alms]. He should not commit any slight wrong on account of which other wise men might censure him. [Then he would think:] ‘May all beings be happy and secure, may they be happy-minded! Whatever living beings there are – feeble or strong, long, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen [i.e. ghosts, gods and hell-beings], those dwelling far or near, those who are born or those who await rebirth – may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded! Let none deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place, in anger or ill-will let them not wish any suffering to each other.’ Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Let his thoughts of boundless lovingkindness pervade the whole world: above, below and across without obstruction,

without any hatred, without any enmity. Whether he stands, walks, sits or lies down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness. This, they say, is divine abiding here. Not falling into wrong views, virtuous and endowed with insight, he gives up attachment for sense-desires. He will surely not come again to any womb [i.e. rebirth]. (*Khp.* 8–9)

Thus is lovingkindness, benevolence or friendliness, ideally to be radiated to all beings, in the same strength as a mother's love for her only child – though without the sentimentality and possessiveness that may be part of mother-love. The height of this ideal is expressed in almost superhuman terms: 'Monks, as low-down thieves might carve one limb from limb with a double-handed saw, yet even then whoever entertained hate in his heart on that account would not be one who carried out my teaching' (*M.* 1.129). In this context, the ideal is that the Buddha's disciples should think, 'kindly and compassionate we will dwell, with a mind of lovingkindness, void of hatred', suffusing that person, and then the whole world, with such an 'immeasurable' mind. Such a mind cannot be ignited into anger, just as one cannot set fire to a river (*M.* 1.128). This ideal is seen in the *Khanti-vādi Jātaka*,³¹ which tells of a past life of the Buddha in which he was developing the perfection of patience or forbearance (Pali *khanti*; Skt *kṣānti*), and was known as 'Teacher of Patience'. Here an arrogant king, annoyed to find his concubines listening to the teacher, seeks to test him and find out how deeply patience is established within him. The king therefore has him flogged with scourges of thorns, and when he says his patience is not skin deep but lies deep within his heart, he tests him further by having his hands and feet, and then his nose and ears, cut off. When the ascetic's patience is still unruffled, and he has no anger, but only compassion for the foolish king, the king kicks him over his heart and storms off (soon to die and be reborn in hell). Compassion for such assailants is appropriate, for their actions are such as to bring much suffering onto themselves, as future karmic results. Of course, to be able to live up to this ideal completely is only possible for one who has thoroughly seen through the delusion of the 'I am' conceit.

Such a degree of self-sacrificing forbearance is, for most people, a distant, yet inspiring ideal. Moreover, in many cases, firm, determined non-compliance with an oppressor would also be appropriate, ideally done in a way which is free from all anger and ill-will. While the doctrine of karma can sometimes degenerate into fatalistic acceptance, a more balanced approach is to do whatever one can to improve a situation, and

³¹ *J.* III.39–43, and in the *Jātaka-māla*: Khoroché, 1989: 193–204 and Conze, 1959: 26–30. Discussed by Gomez (1992: 32–3) and MacQueen, 1981.

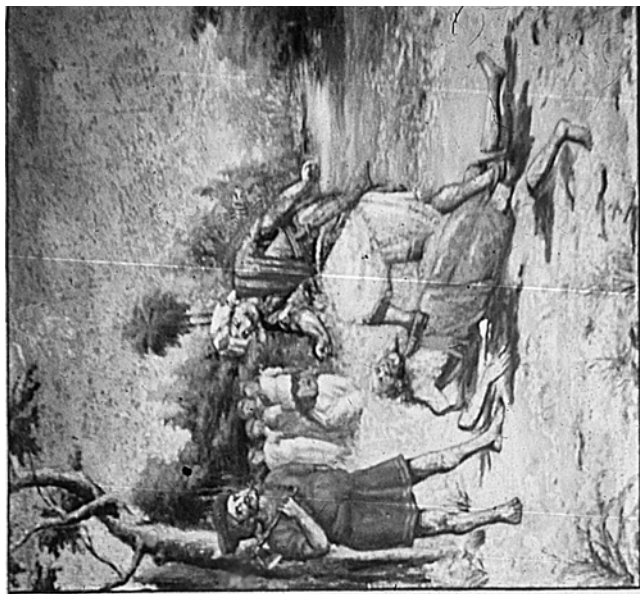


Plate 3. A temple mural in Sri Lanka showing the Buddha in a past life as the 'Teacher of Patience', who could not be roused to anger even when cut to pieces with a sword.

only once something has happened might one patiently accept it as (perhaps) due to one's past karma.

Lovingkindness is seen as a potent force:

Even three times a day to offer
 Three hundred cooking pots of food
 Does not match a portion of the merit
 Acquired by one instant of love. (RPR. 283)

In the *Jātaka* commentary (*J.* 1.199–200) is a story in which lovingkindness is described as a protective agent. The *Bodhisattva* and some companions are falsely accused of a crime and are sentenced to be trampled to death by an elephant. The *Bodhisattva* advises his companions to bear in mind the precepts, and develop lovingkindness equally to the slanderer, the sentencing king, the elephant and their own bodies. Consequently, a number of elephants refuse to go near them and flee. When asked if he has a drug or *mantra* to accomplish this, the *Bodhisattva* says that it has happened because he and his companions keep the precepts, develop lovingkindness, give gifts and perform public works, these being their *mantra* and *paritta*, or protective chant. The story also recalls that of the Buddha radiating lovingkindness to an elephant who has been enraged and sent charging down a road to kill him; the elephant comes to a halt and bows to the Buddha (*Vin.* II.194–5).

Lovingkindness can be practised in daily life by kindly dealings with other living beings, and avoidance of anger: 'Whoso, as a rolling chariot, checks uprisen anger, him I call a charioteer; other folk merely hold the reins' (*Dhp.* 222). To develop it some way towards the ideal, chanting on lovingkindness will help, but a more powerful way of purifying the heart of hatred is the cultivation of the meditation on lovingkindness.

Theravāda Buddhism puts considerable emphasis on this meditation, and a thorough and inspiring treatment of it and the other 'immeasurables' can be found in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, chapter ix.³² Before lovingkindness is to be meditatively directed to others, it must first be directed towards oneself (though Tibetans start with their mothers: see p. 127). To use a Christian phrase, if you are to 'love thy neighbour as thyself', but you dislike yourself in a variety of ways, you are not going to be doing your neighbour much of a favour. Self-dislike manifests itself in such forms as harping self-reproach, tension, agitation and holding oneself stiffly. Before spreading lovingkindness to others, a person must first come to feel what it is like to feel it for himself or herself, by coming

³² And see Nāṇamoli, 1958 and Dharmasiri, 1989: 42–52.

to accept himself or herself fully, 'warts and all'. This has nothing to do with complacency, but rather with a good-humoured but realistic attitude towards oneself. If a person can genuinely like and be friendly towards himself or herself in spite of his or her faults, then he or she can more fully accept other people with *their* faults. Thus, he or she neither complacently stays the same nor enters into hostile battle with his or her faults, but gradually melts these with the help of the warmth of loving-kindness, and becomes more open to others and their needs.

The lovingkindness meditation is generally done after another meditation has been used to put the mind in a calm state. The meditator seeks to generate positive aspirations for himself or herself and to experience feelings of loving, accepting patience towards himself or herself; the aim is to feel these as a warm joyful feeling in the chest. To help stimulate such feelings, certain appropriate words will be mentally said, such as: 'May I be well and happy, may my heart be pure and wholesome, may I be free from difficulties and troubles, mental or physical, may I be in harmony with those around me.' After a while, the meditator's mind may then be turned to aspects of himself or herself that he or she does not like, so as to send lovingkindness towards himself or herself as performer of such actions etc. Once lovingkindness has been experienced towards himself or herself, it is then generated towards certain selected others. These should be of the same sex, so as to prevent the lovingkindness from being tinged by feelings of sexual attraction. Firstly, the meditator visualizes the face of someone whom it is easy to like – a friend, or a respected teacher for whom he feels gratitude – and develops positive aspirations for that person, as already done for himself or herself. As the feeling of loving-kindness becomes more established, it is then focused on a neutral person, for example someone the meditator sees in the street every day but to whom he or she does not speak, and then towards someone for whom he or she feels hostility. In this way, he or she gradually moves from people whom it is easier to like to those it is most difficult, enabling the mind gradually to widen its circle of sympathies. The aim, here, is to break down the barriers which make the mind friendly towards only a limited selection of beings. On reflections used to undermine hatred and aid lovingkindness, see pp. 243–6. After lovingkindness has been experienced towards a hostile person, it is then radiated to all living beings in all directions. 'Radiating' is not just seen as a metaphor, for lovingkindness is seen as a mental force which can directly affect others.

In developing the meditation on compassion, Buddhaghosa outlines the following sequence. Firstly the mind dwells on an unfortunate, then on a friend, then on a neutral and then on a hostile person. Empathetic joy

is first developed by reflecting on the happiness of a very dear friend, and then it is focused on a neutral, and then on a hostile person. Equanimity is developed firstly towards a neutral person, then towards a dear person, a great friend, a hostile person, and finally oneself. In each case, the meditator begins with the easiest task and progresses to the most difficult.

In the Theravādin tradition, the Buddha is recorded as having said: 'Whoever, monks, would wait upon me . . . honour me . . . follow my advice, he should wait upon the sick' (*Vin.* 1.302). Practical expressions of compassion – in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna lands – have traditionally included monks looking after orphans in monasteries, and the rich and rulers caring for the poor or setting up hospitals. In his *Rāja-parikathā-ratnamālā*, the great Mahāyāna master *Nāgārjuna* advised:

Cause the blind, the sick, the lowly,
The protectorless, the wretched
And the crippled equally to attain
Food and drink without interruption. (*RPR.* 320)

In modern times, famine-relief societies have been formed (Taiwan), as well as orphanages and 'banks' for donated eyes for use in transplants (Sri Lanka). Temples sometimes care for boys on probation (Sri Lanka: Southwold, 1983: 80), or help cure heroin addicts (Thailand), and compassionate deeds are also directed towards animals. In Taiwan, the nun Cheng Yen has founded the Tzu Chi Foundation, with around 3 million followers, which runs a large programme of medical services in the country and provides emergency relief overseas (Ching, 1995). Richard Hayes tells a touching story of the monk Giac Duc. When the Americans were at the point of being defeated at the end of the Vietnam War, the monk was among a large group of people whom they sought to airlift to safety. Helicopters had to make repeated journeys to do this, but the monk ensured that he was the last one to be rescued. At one point, Buddhists and Christians were being taken out on different days, and he always claimed to belong to the group that was not being taken out that day!³³

SOCIAL ETHICS

Social cohesion and equality

Buddhism greatly values social harmony and cohesion, as seen in the value placed on the four 'foundations of social unity' (Pali *saṅgha-vatthus*; Skt *saṃgraha-vastus*), as found in the *Sigālovāda Sutta*:

³³ 'Lousy Dharma Practice' posting to 'Buddhist' Internet discussion forum, 30 August 1995.

giving (*dāna*);

kindly speech (Pali *piya-vācā*; Skt *priyavākya*);

helpful action (Pali *attha-cariyā*; Skt *tathārthacariyā*);

impartial treatment and equal participation (Pali *samānattatā*; Skt *samānārthatā*), or evenmindedness to pleasure and pain (Skt *samāna-sukha-duḥkhata*).³⁴

The good of self and others is seen as inter-twined:

How, monks, guarding oneself, does one guard others? By practice, by development, by continuous exercise . . . And how, monks, guarding others, does one guard oneself? By tolerance, by nonviolence, by having a mind full of loving-kindness, by care. (*S. v.169*)

As expressed by a noted Thai scholar monk:

The most basic point to be made about Buddhist social ethics is that in keeping with the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising [Conditioned Arising], individual betterment and perfection on the one hand and the social good on the other are fundamentally interrelated and interdependent. (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 31)

Friendship is thus the model for social harmony in the mundane sphere and the model for spiritual encouragement of the laity by the monks in the trans-mundane sphere. We might conclude that in Buddhist ethics everyone is a friend, meaning that everyone should be treated as a friend. (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 36)

A society of self-disciplined, self-reliant people will be peaceful, and in turn support individual growth and development (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 36). In this process, the importance of associating with good people is often stressed (see p. 97), so that good qualities are stimulated, reinforced and spread.³⁵

As regards social equality, the Buddha was critical of Brahmanical claims, associated with the system of four supposedly divinely ordained social classes – the *varṇas* of the so-called ‘caste system’ – that certain people were superior or inferior by birth.³⁶ He taught:

Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a brahmin. By (one’s) action one becomes an outcaste, by (one’s) action one becomes a brahmin. (*Sn. 136*)

³⁴ *D. iii.152, 232; A. ii.32, 248; A. iv.218, 363; Mvs. ii.395*; cf. Rājavaramuni, 1990: 36, 40. See Payutto, 1993: 69–71 for Thai Buddhism and Cleary, 1986: 116–20 for Sōtō Zen Buddhism.

³⁵ See e.g. *S. v.28; Sn. 259*; and see Rājavaramuni, 1990: 36.

³⁶ E.g. at *D. i.119, 199; D. iii.81; M. ii.125–33, 147–57, 178–96*. See Krishan, 1986 for further discussion.

Thus moral and spiritual development makes one a 'brahmin' – which term is used here in the sense of a truly noble spiritual person, an *Arahat* – while breaking the precepts lowers the respect in which others hold one. On ordination, differences of social background are to be ignored, just as waters entering the sea from different rivers all equally become 'sea-water'. Thus respect should be paid between monks according to length of time in the *Saṅgha*, irrespective of social background. Accordingly, when six ex-princes and their servant Upāli came to be ordained, the ex-princes asked that the Buddha ordain the servant first, so that he would be slightly senior to them, so helping to undermine their previously proud nature (*Vin.* II.183). Moreover, the Buddha often criticized brahmin claims to inherent supremacy (for example *M.* II.83–90). He argued that the human race was one species, not four (*Sn.* 594–656; *M.* II.196–7), that the social classes observable in society were not eternal, but had gradually evolved (*D.* III.93–5), that a person was designated as a farmer, trader, thief, Brahmanical priestly celebrant or king by the kind of work he did (*Sn.* 612–19), and that people of the four classes of Indian society (brahmins, warrior-nobles, farmers/tradespeople, and servants) were equally capable of good and bad action, and would reap karmic results accordingly. He argued that, just as, in battle, a king prefers a non-noble who is skilled in fighting skills to a 'noble' without such skills, gifts to a virtuous monk are of great fruit, no matter from what class he originally came (*S.* 1.98–9). When a monk points out to a king that a rich member of any of the four classes could have a member of any class as a servant, the king says: 'this being so, these four classes are exactly the same; I do not see any difference between them in this respect' (*M.* II.89).

While the Buddha thus criticized the developing class/caste system, he was no social revolutionary advocating the abolishment of all social divisions. He acknowledged the existence of these, but saw them as changeable and conventional, not divinely ordained, as in Brahmanism: 'what has been designated name and clan in the world . . . has arisen by common consent' (*Sn.* 648). Coming from a noble family himself, he tended to list the nobles as the first of the four classes, rather than the brahmins. He did not deny that the social class people were born into was due to their past karma. Nevertheless, he did not teach that people had an obligation to remain within the limitations of their parents' class (as in Brahmanism/Hinduism), if their talents and energy led elsewhere. For nineteenth-century Burma, Fielding Hall remarks, 'There was, and is, absolutely no aristocracy of any kind at all. The Burmese are a community of equals, in a sense that has probably never been known elsewhere'

(1902: 54). Neighbouring Thailand has had a class of royalty and nobility, but of small proportions, because of a uniquely Thai feature: in each generation, the offspring of nobility are reduced in rank by one grade.

As Buddhism spread beyond India, it tended to live with whatever social class system it met with. In Sri Lanka, on account of the influence of Hindus in nearby India, a sort of mild caste system developed. This mainly concerns those whom a person can eat with or marry, but it also, unfortunately, led to different monastic fraternities recruiting from different castes (Gombrich, 1971a: 294–317). It has also been the case that, in a number of Buddhist societies, such people as slaughterers, and, sometimes, fishermen, have been treated as social outcasts, because of their unwholesome way of life.

Engaged Buddhism

In the modern world, a number of Buddhists have come to advocate what has been called ‘Engaged Buddhism’, a term coined in 1963 by the Vietnamese Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh, at a time when war was ravaging his country.³⁷ This draws on traditional Buddhist ethical and social teachings, but applies them in a more activist way than has sometimes been the case in the past, so as to improve society. Christopher Queen holds that ‘the most distinctive shift of thinking in socially engaged Buddhism is from a transmundane . . . to a mundane liberation’, so as to focus on ‘the causes, varieties and remedies of worldly suffering and oppression’ through the reform of social and political conditions, as well as of the mind (Queen, 1996: 11). The roots of this change of emphasis lie in the meeting of Buddhism with Western values in the colonial era, especially in Sri Lanka from the late nineteenth century (Queen, 1996: 20–1). Here Buddhists responded to Protestant Christian domination, and criticisms of Buddhist social passivity, by a Buddhist resurgence. This borrowed some of the characteristics of the Christianity it was fighting against, so that it developed features that have led some to call it ‘Protestant Buddhism’, being both reformist and assigning a greater role to the laity. Social activist Buddhists in Asia often claim that they are simply reviving the best features of Buddhism from the pre-colonial era, before the colonial era cut back the social outreach of monks. While there is an element of truth in this, they are also developing new modes of Buddhism in response to the modern world, and in addition are

³⁷ Queen, 1996: 34. On ‘Engaged Buddhism’, see Queen and King, 1996 and Eppsteiner, 1988.

influencing, and being influenced by, some Western Buddhists in their emphasis on 'Engaged Buddhism'. This can be seen, for example, in the 'Order of Interbeing' that Nhat Hanh, now resident in France, has formed. Its members follow fourteen precepts formulated by him, some of which are:

Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering . . .
 Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry . . . Live simply . . .
 Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and prevent war. (Eppsteiner, 1988: 150–2)

Political ideals

A number of texts outline an ideal for a Buddhist ruler to follow so as to ensure a peaceful and harmonious society, free of poverty (cf. Saddhatissa, 1970: 149–64). Nothing is said on the duty of subjects towards their ruler, but Buddhism has generally not encouraged rebellions, on account of its emphasis on non-violence.

The Buddha admired some of the tribal republics of his day. At one time, he said that the Vajjian republic would flourish if the people continued to:

- i) 'hold regular and frequent assemblies'.
- ii) 'meet in harmony, break up in harmony, and carry out business in harmony'.
- iii) 'not authorise what has not been authorised, but proceed according to what has been authorised by their ancient tradition'.
- iv) 'honour, respect, revere and salute the elders among them, and consider them worth listening to'.
- v) 'not forcibly abduct others' wives and daughters and compel them to live with them'.
- vi) 'honour, respect, revere and salute the Vajjian shrines at home and abroad, not withdrawing the proper support made and given before'.
- vii) 'make proper provision for the safety of *Arahats*, so that such *Arahats* may come in future to live there, and those already there may dwell in comfort' (*D.* II.74–5).

One can see these as the principles of respecting collective decision-making, concord, tradition, elders, women, religion, and holy men and women. The importance of these social principles was such that he saw them, or adapted versions of them, as ensuring the flourishing of the monastic *Saṅgha*. Nevertheless, the Buddha could see that the days of the tribal republics were numbered, as they were gradually being swallowed up by new, expanding kingdoms. Indeed, he saw the falling away from

the above principles as the thing that would allow them to be overwhelmed by these kingdoms.

The Buddha also had views on kingship: the role of a king was to serve his people by ensuring order and prosperity for them. In the *Aggañña Sutta* (*D.* II.80–98), the Buddha describes the origins of human society as part of a process of moral decline from relatively ideal conditions at the start of a cycle of world-evolution (Fenn, 1996: 111–17). Here, the first king is said to have been chosen by his people – as the most handsome, pleasant and capable – to punish wrong-doers, in return for a share of the people’s rice (*D.* III.92). This can be seen as an early version of what Western political philosophers call the ‘social-contract’ theory of kingship. The sixth century writer Candrakīti argues against the Hindu idea of divine kingship thus:

The first king was created by his own action and the people, not by the Almighty One. A king is the same as a common person in lineage and in nature.³⁸

The Buddha’s advice on how best to run society was often couched in images of ideal legendary rulers of the past known as *Cakkavatti* (Pali; Skt *Cakravartin*), or ‘Wheel-turning’ kings, whose righteous, compassionate rule, in accordance with *Dhamma*, is said to have caused a divine wheel to appear in the sky. Though not yet a Buddha, such a type of person is seen as a political equivalent of a Buddha: at birth, his body has the same ‘thirty-two characteristics of a great man’ as one who will become a Buddha (*D.* III.142–79), and at death, his corpse and that of a Buddha should be treated in the same way (*D.* II.141). In the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta* (‘The Lion’s Roar on the *Cakkavatti*’, *D.* III.58–79),³⁹ the duties of such a ruler are said to be passed on from father to son. They are that he should revere *Dhamma* (here meaning something like moral norms and compassionate justice) and rule only in accordance with it. He should look after all his people, including monks and brahmins, and also animals and birds. He should prevent crime and give to those in need. Finally, he should advise good monks and brahmins if they come to ask his advice on what are wholesome or unwholesome actions (*D.* III.61). Such rulers were seen as successively having become world emperors, not by force of arms, but by other peoples coming to appreciate their ideals, such as following the five precepts (*D.* III.63). Thus Gokhale says

³⁸ *Tīkā on Āryadeva’s Bodhisattva-yogācāra-catuhśātaka*, cited by Jamspal in *ASP* 55.

³⁹ See Saddhatissa, 1970: 154–7, 159–60. Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 135–72 gives a developed Theravāda view on *Cakkavattis*. See *ASP* 182–3 for the view of a text influential in Tibetan Buddhism.

that the key contribution of Buddhism to Indian political theory was ‘the acceptance of a higher morality as the guiding spirit behind the state’.⁴⁰

In the *Jātaka* stories, the *Bodhisattva* teaches the ten duties of a true king (*rāja-dhammas*): generosity, moral virtue, self-sacrifice, honesty and integrity, gentleness, self-control, non-anger, non-injury, forbearance and non-opposition/uprightness.⁴¹ Elsewhere, the god Serī says that in the past he had been a generous king who gave to monks and brahmins, paupers and cripples, wayfarers and beggars, using half his revenue from outlying provinces for this (*S.* 1.57–9). In the *Mahā-vastu* (*Mvs.* 1.274–7), a text of the Lokottaravādin early school, advice to a king includes: do not fall under the power of anger; be impartial in arbitrating disputes; do not be indulgent in sensual pleasures; admit large bodies of immigrants; favour the poor and protect the rich; cultivate ties of friendship with neighbouring kings; act justly; and be circumspect, and diligent in the care of the treasury and granary.

It is said that when kings act unrighteously (*adhammika*), this bad example spreads through the various groups of their people. Hence the sun and moon, and then the stars, ‘go wrong in their course’; hence ‘days and nights, months and fortnights, seasons and years are out of joint; the winds blow wrong, out of season. Thus the gods are annoyed [commentary: particularly tree-gods, who lose their homes]. This being so, the sky-god does not bestow sufficient rain.’ Thus crops are poor and the humans who live on them are weak and short-lived (*A.* 11.74–6). That is, a king is seen to have a responsibility to maintain, through his actions and influence, the moral fabric of society and nature (cf. Payutto, 1993: 63–8). Stanley Tambiah refers to this as the ‘multiplier-effect’ of kingship on the conduct of the rest of society (1976: 50), from which he infers that it is acceptable to unseat an unworthy king. In one *Jātaka* story (*J.* 111.502–14), a king who is a thief is overthrown. A bad king has the responsibility to reform himself through reflecting on fear of notoriety and of bad karmic results, and should guard against becoming wicked by periodically consulting wise monks and brahmins as to what is virtuous and unvirtuous, and on the duties of rulers (*ASP.* 196).

In Buddhist history, the Indian emperor Asoka (c. 268–239 BCE) is particularly revered as a great example of a Buddhist ruler who sought to live up to the *Cakkavatti* ideal, though he never actually claimed to be

⁴⁰ Gokhale, 1966: 22. See Tambiah 1976: 9–53 on early Buddhist ideas on kingship, as contrasted with Hindu ones, with pp. 39–53 on the *Cakkavatti* ideal. On the latter, see also Obeyesekere and Reynolds, 1972, which also deals with ideas of kingship and social order in Sri Lanka.

⁴¹ E.g. *J.* 111.274, *J.* v.378, and see Eppsteiner, 1988: 103–9, 107–8.

one himself.⁴² The Magadhan empire, which he inherited, was the largest India was to see until its conquest by the British, and included most of modern India except the far south. An important source of knowledge on Asoka is the many edicts which he had published by having them carved on rocks and stone pillars.⁴³ In the Sixth Rock Edict, he expressed his aspiration thus:

No task is more important to me than promoting the well-being of all the people. Such work as I accomplish contributes to discharging the debt I owe to all living creatures to make them happy in this world and to help them attain heaven in the next. (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 38)

Asoka inaugurated various public works: wells, rest-houses, and trees for both shade and fruit for travellers; and medical herbs and roots for humans and animals. Such measures were also fostered in Indian regions beyond his actual empire, by what must have been early 'foreign aid' measures (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 64–5). His concern for justice is seen in his setting up a 'Ministry of *Dhamma*', through which he sought to prevent wrongful imprisonment and punishment, to free prisoners when appropriate, and to aid prisoners' families if they were in need (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 58–63). He exhorted his people to live by moral norms, particularly non-violence, himself abandoning his forebears' custom of violent expansion of their realm. He also gave up hunting, gradually became vegetarian, and passed various animal welfare laws. Though he was personally a Buddhist, and ruled in accordance with Buddhist morality, he did not make Buddhism the state religion, and urged mutual religious tolerance and respect. He supported not only Buddhist monks and nuns, but also brahmin priests, Jain monks and nuns, and ascetics of other religious sects. His Twelfth Rock Edict says:

King Priyadarśi honors men of all faiths, members of religious orders and laymen alike, with gifts and various marks of esteem. Yet he does not value either gifts or honors as much as growth in the qualities essential to religion in men of all faiths.

This growth may take many forms, but its root is in guarding one's speech to avoid extolling one's own faith and disparaging the faith of others improperly or, when the occasion is appropriate, immoderately.

The faiths of others all deserve to be honored for one reason or another. By honoring them, one exalts one's own faith and at the same time performs a

⁴² He came to be seen as a *Cakkavatti*, though (Jamspal, in *ASP* 56, citing *Divyāvadāna*, Vaidya edition, 1959, p. 239). On Asoka, see: Ling, 1973: 151–74; Basham, 1982; Swearer, 1995: 64–6 and Kraft, 1992: 64–6. For the later Theravāda view of Asoka, see: Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 172–89. ⁴³ See Nikam and McKeon, 1959 and Dhammika, 1993.

service to the faith of others. By acting otherwise, one injures one's own faith and also does disservice to that of others. For if a man extols his own faith and disparages another because of devotion to his own and because he wants to glorify it, he seriously injures his own faith.

Therefore concord alone is commendable, for through concord men may learn and respect the conception of Dharma accepted by others.

King Priyadarśi desires men of all faiths to know each other's doctrines and to acquire sound doctrines. (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 51–2)

To varying extents, many Buddhist rulers have sought to follow Asoka's example, or to imitate and invoke the model of king as *Bodhisattva*, *Cakkavatti* and *Dhamma-king*, charged with revival, protection and promotion of Buddhism. Sometimes, though, they only went in for a 'self-serving proclamation' to this effect (Tambiah, 1976: 226). In Sri Lanka, the king came to be seen, from at least the tenth century, as the lay head of Buddhism, its protector, and as a *Bodhisattva*, with the idea that 'The king is a *bodhisattva* on whom the sangha bestows kingship in order that he may defend the bowl and robe' (Tambiah, 1976: 97). Kings of the Pagan (1084–1167) period in Burma came to see themselves as *Cakkavattis* and *Bodhisattvas* (Tambiah, 1976: 81). In Thailand too, in Sukhothai and Ayutthaya times (fourteenth to eighteenth centuries), and into the nineteenth century, kings were seen in these terms and sometimes identified themselves with Metteyya, who will be the next Buddha on earth (Tambiah, 1976: 96–7). They have also been expected to follow the above ten duties of a king and the twelve duties of the *Cakkavatti*.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, as elsewhere:

The heads of kings rolled frequently because succession rules were vague, rebellions endemic, the overall political scaffolding fragile, and the territorial limits expanding and contracting with the military fortunes of the ruler, his subordinate chiefs, and his rivals. (Tambiah, 1976: 482)

Where Buddhism has been the dominant religion:

Kingship as the crux of order in society provides the conditions and the context for the survival of the *sasana* (religion). They need each other: religion in being supported by an ordered and prosperous society is able to act as a 'field of merit [karmic fruitfulness]' in which merit making can be enacted and its fruits enjoyed, while the king as the foremost merit maker needs the sangha to make and realize his merit and fulfil his kingship. (Tambiah, 1976: 41)

The dominant model of society, especially in lands of Southern Buddhism, has thus been a triangular one with the king supporting and

⁴⁴ See *D.* III.61 with *D. A.* III.46, and Rājāvaramuni, 1990: 38–9.

being advised by the *Saṅgha*, the *Saṅgha* drawing members from and being supported by the people, and the people acquiescing in the rule of a king provided he was not too immoral (see Ling, 1973). In modern times, though, we see Buddhist ideas being drawn on to support socialism in Burma, capitalism in Thailand and Communism in China and Laos.

Over the ages, Buddhist rulers have periodically taken note of the advice of leading Buddhist monks. While monks are generally expected to keep aloof from overt political activity, this is not always the case. In modern times, in Tibet, monks and nuns have been active in demonstrations against the Chinese Communist colonization of the country. In Burma, monks have sometimes led the populace in demonstrations against the present corrupt military regime. In Sri Lanka, monks have publicly voiced their allegiance to particular political parties – though the laity often see this as inappropriate for them. In Thailand, monks have co-operated in government-inspired community development projects in poorer regions, partly as a foil to the appeal of Communism in such regions, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. In Japan, the *Sōka Gakkai* lay religious movement (see p. 146) developed a political wing in 1964, in line with Nichiren's ideal of the union of politics and religion. The political wing is known as the *Kōmei-tō*, or 'Clean Government' Party, and has become the third or fourth largest in the Japanese Parliament. While it severed formal links with the movement in 1970, it remains influenced by it, and attracts a similar membership (Metraux, 1996: 385–8).

'Human rights' and Buddhism

A consideration of politics leads on to reflection on the idea of 'human rights': inalienable, fundamental rights to be treated in certain ways (cf. pp. 36–7), usually cited in contexts in which a government or quasi-government is seen as abusing its citizens. What are the limits of a state's power over its citizens? A good place to start in a Buddhist consideration of this is with the *Aggañña Sutta's* simple social-contract model of kingship (see p. 114): this clearly gives a ruler no right to abuse the people he rules, for the very basis of his legitimacy is that he should benefit them.

To say that someone has a 'right' means that others have a 'duty' to treat a person in a particular way. If the 'right' is a circumscribed one based on contract and transactions, such as a right to have a loan repaid by someone who borrows from one, then the duty falls on the borrower.

Nevertheless, the state then has a duty to make the borrower carry out this duty if he or she fails to do so of his or her own accord, and there can be said to be an abstract 'right' that anyone who lends things should have them returned by the borrower (unless he or she abrogates this right). In such a case, explicit talk of a 'right' does not arise until the normal business of human relationships breaks down. This applies equally to 'human rights', but these rights are not seen as circumscribed but as based on the fact that one is a living human being. One is thus seen as having a 'right' to such things as life, liberty, and not to be tortured. The UN Declaration of Human Rights lists a variety of other rights which spell out the implications of these, and specifies subsidiary rights to such things as education and health care. Such 'universal rights' are, in effect, 'universal duties' incumbent on any person *not* to treat other humans in certain negative ways; and 'positive rights' to things like education are duties incumbent on governments to provide what they can for people, or ensure that others make it available.

It is true that Buddhism does not usually talk in terms of 'rights', which is a term that arose from the Western philosophical tradition. That does not mean, however, that Buddhists cannot agree with the substance of what is expressed in 'human rights' language. Buddhists are sometimes unhappy using the language of 'rights' as they may associate it with people 'demanding their rights' in an aggressive, self-centred way, and may question whether talk of 'inalienable rights' implies some unchanging, essential Self that 'has' these, which is out of accord with Buddhism's teaching on the nature of selfhood. Nevertheless, as rights imply duties, Buddhists are happier talking directly about the duties themselves: about 'universal duties', or, to use a phrase much used by the Dalai Lama, 'universal responsibilities' (see, for example, Piburn, 1990: 111–15), rather than 'universal rights'. Moreover, while aggressively *demanding* rights is not in tune with the spirit of Buddhism, being calmly firm and determined in upholding rights, particularly of other people, is so. On the matter of what 'has' the rights, the raising of the not-Self teaching is actually a red herring: for if a permanent Self were the 'owner' of rights, it would not have any use for them, as a truly permanent Self would be invulnerable and could never be harmed! Thus one can simply say that living, changing, vulnerable beings are, conventionally, the 'owners' of rights, with the locus of their value seen as their ability to suffer, their very vulnerability, and their potential for enlightenment, referred to in Mahāyāna Buddhism as the 'Buddha-nature', and in Theravāda Buddhism as the 'brightly shining mind' (see p. 35).

The five precepts imply a code of behaviour and responsibility for the right treatment of others, whether these be humans or animals. A basic principle of Buddhist ethics is that all beings are alike in disliking pain and in wanting to be happy, so that we should not inflict on another being what we would not like done to ourselves (see p. 33). We have a duty to others to respect their interests, and a duty to ourselves not to coarsen ourselves by abusing others.

Having said the above, one may ask whether, as Buddhists sometimes choose not to 'take' all five precepts (see pp. 82–3), one can still see the primary content of the precepts as universally binding, even on those, Buddhist or otherwise, who do not formally 'take' them. One can perhaps omit the one on drinking alcohol as a special case, as this is sometimes not seen as concerning what is 'reprehensible by nature', i.e. wrong in itself. Those who choose not to 'take' a particular precept do so because they see precepts as weighty vows. This does not mean that they do not regard their substance as morally binding; it is simply that they do not wish it to be the case that, if they act out of accord with a precept, they also break a weighty vow. As for non-Buddhists, one can say that the key emphases of the precepts encode moral teachings that are shared in all societies.

The duties so far referred to are duties owed to any sentient being, though Buddhism would agree that we owe more to other humans because of the great value and potential of those who have attained a 'precious human rebirth' (see p. 30). We also have a range of responsibilities and duties to our parents and children, secular and religious teachers and pupils, spouses, friends, employees and employers (see pp. 98–100). While these can be seen as universal duties, to *whom* they are owed depends on who is in these particular relationships to us. However, Buddhism teaches that it is unlikely that any being we meet has not been a close relative or friend in some past life (see p. 29), so beyond the people in this life to whom we have specific duties, such duties in the end are owed to all humans and animals!

'Human rights' can be 'negative' ones – to freedom *from* something, such as arbitrary arrest – or 'positive' ones, *to* something, such as an adequate education. The first kind of rights are negated by being *abused*, and the second by being *neglected*. One can certainly make a case for the first type of human rights being the primary ones, and Buddhism is strong in this area because of its emphasis on non-harming. When it comes to the rights to positive benefits, Buddhism's emphasis is somewhat less strong, seeing such things less as *entitlements* and more as something that

it is good for others to choose to provide. Nevertheless, its political ideals, as outlined above, and in chapter 5, clearly see governments as having key responsibilities to look after their people.

In October 1995, the Internet *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* held a two-week on-line conference on Buddhism and human rights.⁴⁵ At the end of this, the following statement, in which I had a hand, was produced:

Declaration of Interdependence

Preamble

Those who have the good fortune to have a 'rare and precious human rebirth', with all its potential for awareness, sensitivity, and freedom, have a duty not to abuse the rights of others to partake of the possibilities of moral and spiritual flourishing offered by human existence. Such flourishing is only possible when certain conditions relating to physical existence and social freedom are maintained. Human beings, furthermore, have an obligation to treat other forms of life with the respect commensurate with their natures.

To repress our basic sympathy by abusing other sentient beings, human or otherwise, cripples our own potential, and increases the amount of suffering in the world for both others and ourselves. The doctrine of Conditioned Arising shows that our lives are intertwined, and abusing others can only be done when we are blind to this fact. As vulnerable beings in a conditioned world, our mutual dependency indicates that whatever can be done to reduce suffering in the world should be done.

The Buddhist teaching that we lack an inherently existing Self (*anatta*) shows that suffering does not really 'belong' to anyone. It arises, in the life-stream of various sentient beings. To try and reduce it in 'my' stream at the expense of increasing it in another life-stream is folly, both because this will in fact bring more suffering back to me (karma), and because it depends on the deluded notion that 'I' am an inviolable entity that is not dependent and can treat others as if only *they* are limited and conditioned.

Whereas in its teachings Buddhism recognizes:

1. The interdependency of all form of life and the reciprocal obligations which arise from it, such as the duty to repay the kindness of those who in previous lives may have been our parents, relatives and friends;
2. The need for universal compassion for sentient beings who are all alike in that they dislike pain and wish for happiness;
3. The inalienable dignity which living creatures possess by virtue of their capacity to achieve enlightenment in this life or in the future,

The Conference affirms:

1. Every human being should be treated *humanely* both by other individuals and governments in keeping with the Buddhist commitment to non-violence (*ahimsā*) and respect for life.

⁴⁵ The papers used as the basis for discussion in this are published as Keown, Prebish and Husted, 1998. See also Keown, 1995b; Inada, 1995; and papers by Unno and Thurman in Rouner, 1988.

2. Every human being must be treated *equally* and without discrimination on grounds of race, nationality, religion, sex, color, age, mental ability, or political views.
3. Human beings have obligations to other sentient beings and to the environment that all depend on for life and flourishing, now and in the future. Accordingly, humans have an obligation to present and future generations to protect the environment they share with other sentient beings, and to avoid causing direct or indirect harm to other forms of sentient life.

CONCLUSION

Buddhist values are rooted in the project of overcoming greed/attachment, hatred and delusion, which are seen as the roots of unwholesome actions and the key causes of suffering. Greed is to be overcome by generosity and sharing, combined with restraint from theft and cheating, with subtler forms of attachment overcome by monastic training and meditative training. Hatred and anger are to be dealt with by restraint from behaviour harming others, cultivation of lovingkindness and compassion, and insight into the distorted vision that makes hatred possible. Delusion is to be overcome by avoiding intoxication, and cultivating the mental clarity that allows one to see things directly 'as they really are'. This project begins with moral virtue, but also entails the other aspects of the Buddhist path: meditative development and the cultivation of insight. It has implications for individual conduct as well as inter-personal relationships and social ethics.

CHAPTER 3

Mahāyāna emphases and adaptations

May the pain of every living creature be completely cleared away

Bodhi-caryāvatāra III.7

THE PATH OF THE *BODHISATTVA*

The Mahāyāna is focused on the *Bodhisattva* (Skt; Pali *Bodhisatta*), or Being-for-Enlightenment: one on the path to perfect Buddhahood, whose task is to help beings compassionately while maturing his or her own wisdom. In early Buddhism and still in the Theravāda school, a *Bodhisattva* was seen as a rare heroic figure who, by a longer, more compassion-orientated route than that leading to Arahatsip, sought to become eventually a full and perfect Buddha. Such a Buddha is one who brings benefit to countless beings by immense insight which rediscovers liberating truth when it had been lost after being taught by another Buddha many thousands of years previously. In the Mahāyāna, though, *many* are urged to take the long path of the *Bodhisattva*, which is spelt out in considerable detail. The Noble Eightfold Path of ‘disciples’ (Skt *śrāvakas*) of a perfect Buddha, directed at Arahatsip, was still respected, but was seen to be in need of supplementing by the *Bodhisattva*-path to perfect Buddhahood, now exalted into the state of a heavenly saviour-being. While wisdom was a key part of the Eightfold Path, and itself encompassed compassion (see pp. 37–8), the Mahāyāna developed a more philosophically sophisticated account of it, and made compassion an equal complementary virtue which was the motivation of the whole path. Mahāyāna texts sometimes criticize *śrāvakas* as concerned only with their own liberation: rather an unfair caricature of the discipline of the Noble Eightfold Path, which contains many other-regarding virtues. Nevertheless, even the Theravāda acknowledges that aiming at the deliverance of all beings is more perfectly virtuous than working for one’s own deliverance (*Vism.* 13). It simply feels, though, that while the Buddha’s teachings remain in the world, only a few need to take this path, for the benefit of future generations. The Mahāyāna emphasizes, though, that in the vast universe, there is always a need for more Buddhas.

Compassion and wisdom in the Mahāyāna

The spirit of Mahāyāna compassion (*karuṇā*), the root-motivation of the *Bodhisattva*, is well expressed in Śāntideva's *Bodhi-caryāvatāra*:

Thus by the virtue collected through all that I have done, may the pain of every living creature be completely cleared away.

May I be the doctor and the medicine and may I be the nurse for all sick beings in the world until everyone is healed.

May a rain of food and drink descend to clear away the pain of thirst and hunger, and during the aeon of famine may I myself change into food and drink.

May I be a protector for those without one, and a guide to all travellers on the way; may I be a bridge, a boat and a ship for all those who wish to cross (the water). (*Bca.* III.7–9, 18)

Thus the *Bodhisattva* is resolute in his efforts to save all, using his roots of good to save those that have no such roots (*Ss.* 258). Śāntideva also cites the *Ratnamegha* as saying that the *Bodhisattva* should reflect, when he opens a door, 'May I open for all beings the door of the good way to *Nīrvāṇa*'; when he sits down, 'May I make all beings sit in the seat of wisdom' (*Ss.* 307), etc.

The *Bodhisattva*'s compassion aids wisdom's undercutting of self-centredness, and his or her developing wisdom (Skt *prajñā*; Pali *paññā*) ensures that compassionate action is appropriate, effective, and not covertly self-seeking. The Mahāyāna view of wisdom builds on the idea of all things as being 'not-Self' or 'empty' of Self (see p. 36). It emphasizes not only that no permanent, substantial Self can be found to exist, but that the changing mental and physical processes – *dharma*s (Skt; Pali *dhamma*s) – that make up the world and persons are devoid of any inherent nature or separate essence. Like the early schools, the Mahāyāna says that a *dharma* could only arise because other *dharma*s which conditioned it arise: the principle of Conditioned Arising (see p. 33). It goes on to argue, though, that this means that the nature of any *dharma*, for example consciousness, is not something belonging to it as an essence, but is simply the result of the way certain conditions come together. Nothing exists absolutely, with an absolute nature; 'things' only arise in a mutually conditioning network of processes. A key feature of each process, and the network as a whole, is its 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*): its lack of inherent, substantial existence. This is also expressed by saying that all the *dharma*s lack any nature of their own except this shared quality of emptiness: the 'sameness' of all *dharma*s. Moreover, the mysterious

quality of emptiness is also equated with *Nirvāṇa*, for this is empty of the possibility of being adequately described in words, and empty of anything to do with the delusion of 'I am' (Harvey, 1990a: 95–104; Williams 1989: 37–76). The above means, for example, that a *Bodhisattva* can rub shoulders with wrong-doers, to 'reach' them and draw them towards the good, as he knows that their bad characteristics are not inherent realities.

Śāntideva persuasively draws on such ideas to argue that indifference to the suffering of 'others' is as absurd as indifference to one's 'own' suffering. In his *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, he argues that 'self' and 'other' are relative terms, like 'this bank' and 'the further bank' of a river: neither bank is, of itself, the 'further' bank. If one says that one should not protect another from pain, as it does not hurt oneself, then why does one seek to avert pain, or to bring positive benefit to, 'oneself' later in this life or in future lives? One will not be unchangingly *the same* being then, given that beings gradually change both within and between lives (Ss. 315). Body and mind consist of a changing series of states. We each, by habit, call these 'I', but why not use this notion as regards 'other' beings? Thus one should strive to prevent suffering in any being (Ss. 316). Why bring suffering on oneself by feeling compassion for others? But compassion does not bring pain; it makes possible joy based on awareness of others' being delivered from suffering. Karmic fruitfulness is rejoiced in, whoever generates it. Thus the *Bodhisattva* should constantly identify with others (Ss. 317).

In his *Bodhi-caryāvatāra*, Śāntideva adds the following arguments.¹ Realizing that all are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting pain (see pp. 33–4), one should protect others as one protects oneself, for suffering is just suffering, whoever it 'belongs' to: what is so special about me and 'my' suffering (*Bca.* VIII.90–6)?

Being no (inherent) owner of suffering, there can be no distinction at all between (that of myself and others). Thus I shall dispel it because it hurts; why am I so certain (that I should not eliminate the suffering of others)? (*Bca.* VIII.102)

He thus advocates that one who sees the equality of self and other should heroically practise 'the exchange of self for others' (*parātma-parivartanam*), the 'highest secret' which benefits both self and other.² In this practice, one looks on another, lowly, person as 'I' and on oneself as

¹ See Mitomo, 1991; Williams, 1998: 104–77 gives a critique.

² *Bca.* VII.16, VIII.120. See also Wayman, 1991: 59–61.

one would on someone else. Fully identifying with the other person and his or her outlook, one sees oneself through his or her eyes, perhaps as proud and uncaring. One focuses one's ambitions on that person, and whatever indifference one normally has to others is focused on oneself (*Bca.* VIII.140–54). Moreover:

Although others may do something wrong, I should transform it into a fault of my own; but should I do something even slightly wrong, I shall openly admit it to many people.

By further describing the renown of others, I shall make it outshine my own
(*Bca.* VIII.162–3)

However, there should be no self-congratulation if one benefits others by practising the exchange of self for others, just as this is inappropriate when one benefits oneself (*Bca.* VIII.116). In any case, any potential pride at the good a *Bodhisattva* does is tempered by the reflection that his or her karmic fruitfulness is as 'empty' as all else (*Vc.* sec. 8).

The arising of the thought of enlightenment

The *Bodhisattva*-path begins with the arising of the *bodhi-citta* or 'thought of enlightenment': the heart-felt aspiration to strive for Buddhahood, both for its own sake and for the sake of helping suffering beings. For this momentous event to occur, a person requires karmic fruitfulness and insight developed in the present and past lives, devotion, and reflections on the sufferings of beings and the need for Buddhas.

A series of meditations are used to arouse the *bodhi-citta* (Wayman, 1991: 45–57). First of all, the meditator cultivates an impartial attitude of equanimity towards all beings. He or she visualizes a friend, then an enemy, then a neutral person. He or she examines, in turn, the nature of his or her feelings towards these, and reflects that such feelings are not so much based on inherent characteristics of these people as on how he or she has settled into seeing them, because of what they are seen to have done for him or her. He or she then reflects that the uncertainties of life may upset his or her stereotypes, for a friend may turn away from him or her, or hold him or her back in spiritual progress; an enemy may become a friend if treated well; and a neutral could become a friend or an enemy. In this way, the meditator develops an unbiased evenmindedness towards all people, overcoming the partiality that might limit the range of his or her sympathies.

Next, the meditator develops lovingkindness by reflecting on the

kindness his or her mother has shown him or her during his or her life, and the sacrifices she has made on his or her behalf. Having thus aroused feelings of love and gratitude in his or her heart, wishing happiness for his or her mother, he or she then reflects that in the long round of rebirths, even neutral strangers and enemies have been his or her mothers in previous lives (see p. 35). He or she then applies such a reflection to beings in every direction, cultivating a heart-felt aspiration for their happiness, and wishing that they be free from delusion and suffering: the 'great lovingkindness' (*mahā-maitrī*). He or she then develops compassion by a similar series of reflections prefaced by visualization of the pitiful lot of a condemned criminal or animal about to be slaughtered, reflecting that his or her present mother and all past mothers have experienced many kinds of such suffering in the realms of rebirth. Thus arises the aspiration to lead all beings from such sufferings, the 'great compassion'. Finally, there is the development of empathetic joy, which rejoices at the present happiness of beings, particularly enemies. Additionally, there may be practice of the 'exchange of self for others'.

Such practices are seen as building an outlook in which it is natural for the *bodhi-citta* to arise. The initial arising of this 'thought of enlightenment', as a resolve, is known as the 'aspiration-thought' (*praṇiddhi-citta*); when it is put into practice, it is known as the 'implementation-thought' (*prasthāna-citta*) (*Bca.* I.15). Even the resolve alone, without implementation, is seen as generating much karmic fruitfulness and as wearing out much past bad karma. Even one such thought 'bears in itself the accumulation of boundless, countless good' (*Ss.* 11). The *bodhi-citta* is seen as the seed of all the qualities of Buddhahood: 'It is the supreme medicine that quells the world's disease' (*Bca.* III.30).

The *bodhi-citta* is first formally expressed by taking various *Bodhisattva* vows (*praṇidhānas*) in the presence of others who live by them, or with 'all Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas*' as witnesses. Some are general vows: to overcome innumerable defilements, to attain incomparable Buddhahood, and to save all beings; others may be to help beings in more specific ways. In some formulations, the vow includes the resolution to stay in *saṃsāra* till all are saved (*Ss.* 15). The vow to save all beings is made more credible and less overly ambitious by the notion that beings already have the *Tathāgata-garbha*, or Buddha-potential, within them (see Harvey, 1990a: 113–18), and non-egoistic by the notion that beings are not ultimately different from the *Bodhisattva*. Such vows are not taken lightly, however. They become a powerful autonomous force within the psyche and lead

to much bad karma if broken; for they are seen as solemn promises to beings to save them.

Developing the Bodhisattva perfections

The *Bodhisattva*-path is practised by accomplishing ten ‘perfections’ (*pāramitās*) in ten *Bodhisattva* ‘stages’ (*bhūmis*) over aeons of time. The stages pertain to the Noble (*Ārya*) *Bodhisattva*, who has had some direct insight into emptiness, though before attaining this level, an ordinary *Bodhisattva* practises the perfections as best he or she can. In the first stage, the Noble *Bodhisattva* concentrates on developing the perfection of generosity (*dāna*) to a high degree. This is done by giving away wealth, teachings, life, limb, and even spouse and family, for the benefit of others. The karmic fruitfulness from such acts is dedicated to the future Buddhahood of himself or herself and others. In Mahāyāna tradition, karmic fruitfulness is often transferred to ‘all sentient beings’,³ such ‘transference’ (*pariṇāmanā*) being possible as karmic fruitfulness is ‘empty’ and does not inherently ‘belong’ to any particular ‘being’. Humans should transfer it for the benefit of other humans, and beings in unfortunate rebirths. They should also transfer it to Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* with a view to increasing their perfections and virtues.⁴ In turn, though, heavenly *Bodhisattvas* and Buddhas are seen as transferring it to devotees who ask for such help in faith.

The best expression of the Mahāyānist urge to transfer the benefits of good action to others is chapter 10 of Śāntideva’s *Bodhi-caryāvatāra* (*Bca.* x). He aspires that, by the karmic fruitfulness generated by writing this work, various benefits should ensue for other beings: those plagued by physical and mental sufferings should be relieved by great joy (verse 2); those in hell should see many *Bodhisattvas* (verse 15), experience ‘fragrant lotus pools, beautiful with exquisite calls of wild ducks, geese and swans’ (verse 7), and be reborn in the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha (verse 4); animals should be free from the fear of being eaten by one another, and hungry ghosts be full of happiness (verse 16); moreover:

May the blind see forms, may the deaf hear sounds, and . . . may pregnant women give birth without any pain.

May the naked find clothing, the hungry find food . . .

May all beings . . . be endowed with faith, wisdom and kindness.

(verses 18–19, 27)

³ See e.g., Tatz, 1994: 24, equivalent to Chang, 1983: 428.

⁴ *Ss.* 205–6, citing the *Vajradhvaja-pariṇāmanā Sūtra*.

He goes on to aspire even that the bad karma of others should ripen in him (verse 56), which goes beyond the sharing of good karma with others. In his *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, Śāntideva also cites the *Vajra-dhvaṅga Sūtra* as saying that the *Bodhisattva* looks on those who have done bad actions and aspires:

do I take away in each several rebirths in hell . . . may all those creatures be born out of those places, all that burden of pain I take upon myself, I assume, I endure . . . I have the courage . . . to experience every abode of pain . . . I resolve to abide in each single state of misfortune through numberless future ages . . . And why so? Because it is better indeed that I alone be in pain, than that all those creatures fall into the place of misfortune . . . I must be charioteer, I must be guide, I must be torch-bearer, guide to safety. (*Ss.* 256–7)

In eighth-century Tibet, Yeshe Tsogyel (Ye-shes mTsho-rgyal) is said to have practised ‘the exchange of my karma for that of others’, in which she took on and worked with the bad karma of others, and rescued beings from hell. This was based on the *tong-len* practice of breathing out one’s positive qualities to others and breathing in their negative qualities and suffering (Willis, 1989: 18, 137).

In the second stage, the *Bodhisattva* concentrates on the perfection of moral virtue (*śīla*) till his or her conduct becomes spontaneously pure. He or she also urges others to avoid immorality, as it leads to unfortunate rebirths. In the third stage, he or she concentrates on the perfection of patience (*kṣānti*; see p. 105), aided by meditations on lovingkindness and compassion. In the fourth stage, the perfection of vigour or strength (*virya*) is developed, because of increasing aspiration and compassion. Mindful alertness is emphasized, and the stage is particularly appropriate for practising the discipline of a monk or nun. In the fifth stage, the focus is on the perfection of meditation (*dhyāna*). Meditative trances are mastered, but the heavenly rebirths that they can lead to are not accepted. The Four Noble Truths are comprehended and the exchange of self for others is practised (see pp. 125–6). Abilities in such fields as mathematics, medicine and poetry are cultivated, as ways to help others and teach the *Dharma* (Pali *Dhamma*).

In the sixth stage, the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*) is attained. *The Bodhisattva* gains full insight into the conditioned, not-Self, empty nature of everything, and thus reaches a level of development parallel to that of the *Arahat*. At death, he or she *could* leave the round of rebirths and enter *Nirvāṇa*, but his or her Mahāyāna ‘great compassion’ prevents him or her from doing so. By the perfection of wisdom, the five previously emphasized perfections become transcendent, attaining completeness and full perfection (*Asta.* 172). Their most difficult acts are

carried out totally free of self-consciousness or ulterior motive. For example, in giving, he or she does not perceive either 'giver', 'gift', 'recipient' or 'result'; for all dissolve in emptiness (Conze et al., 1954: 136-7). At the seventh stage, the *Bodhisattva* goes beyond being reborn according to karma, and becomes a heavenly saviour being. He or she brings to perfection his or her 'skilful means' (*upāya-kauśalya*), his or her ingenuity in helping beings, and so magically projects himself or herself into many worlds to teach and help beings in appropriate ways. At the eighth stage, he (or she?: see pp. 373-6) reaches a non-relapsing level, so that he is now certain to attain Buddhahood. His vows reach perfection, as they are carried out spontaneously. His knowledge enables him to appear anywhere in the universe at will, teaching beings while appearing just like them. He fully masters the transfer of karmic fruitfulness from his vast store, so that beings who pray to him receive it as a free spiritual uplift of grace. In the ninth stage, the *Bodhisattva* perfects his (or her?) power (*bala*), using his tremendous insight into beings' characters to guide and teach them in the most precisely appropriate ways.

In the tenth stage, the *Bodhisattva* has a resplendent body and is surrounded by a retinue of lesser *Bodhisattvas*, and has the perfection of knowledge (*jñāna*). Buddhas then come to consecrate him (or her?) as ready for perfect Buddhahood, the definitive *Nirvāṇa*, which he attains in the following *Tathāgata*-stage. As a Buddha, he exists as an omniscient being with a hugely long life-span, dwelling in a heavenly 'Pure Land' generated by the power of his perfections: a type of realm which is a paradise and also where the conditions for attaining enlightenment are ideal.

The notion of heavenly *Bodhisattvas* and Buddhas provided the Mahāyāna with many holy saviour beings as focuses of devotion. Among the advanced *Bodhisattvas*, Avalokiteśvara, embodiment of compassion, receives most devotion; Tibetans also greatly revere Tārā, the 'Saviouress'. Among heavenly Buddhas, the most important are Śākyamuni, who is said to have manifested himself on earth as the historical Buddha, and Amitābha, who has generated a particularly marvellous Pure Land in which those with great faith in him can be reborn.

THE ETHICS OF THE *BODHISATTVA*

In the Mahāyāna, the concept of ethics (*śīla*) became broadened so as to be seen no longer as simply one component of the path; in the widest sense it encompassed the whole of it. Ethics came to be seen, by such

texts as the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (Keown, 1992: 137–8) and the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*,⁵ as comprising:

- (1) the ethics of ‘restraint or vow (*saṃvara*)’, through both the precepts of lay morality (abstention from harming others) and the monastic code, both termed *prātimokṣa* (Pali *pāṭimokkha*: a term reserved in the Theravāda for monastic precepts);
- (2) the ethics of ‘collecting wholesome states’ (*kuśala-dharma-saṃgraha*), through the practice of the perfections;
- (3) the ethics of ‘working for the welfare of beings’ (*sattvārtha-kriyā*), through active help for them.

The first was seen as the foundation for the other two, but as needing them to supplement it. A *śrāvaka* was seen as only engaged in (1), for he or she supposedly ‘excels in being intent upon his own welfare and in disregarding the welfare of others. In undertaking the welfare of others he has meagre aims and few deeds; he dwells in little concern’ (Tatz, 1986: 69–70). *Bodhisattvas*, though, were seen as not just engaged in (1), disengaging from evil, but also practising the other two: engaging in good (Tatz, 1986: 87). The ethics of collecting wholesome factors concerns the development of various positive qualities and actions that are, in fact, mostly shared with the Eightfold Path, though the dedication of one’s karmic fruitfulness to future Buddhahood goes beyond this (Tatz, 1986: 48–9).

The ethics of benefiting sentient beings is ministering to the needs of others by: nursing those who are ill; advising on how to attain worldly and transcendent goals; gratitude for help received and returning it; protecting from wild animals, kings, robbers and the elements; comforting those stricken by calamities; giving to the destitute; attracting disciples by friendliness and then attracting material support for them; amenability to the (non-harmful) desires of others; applauding and pointing out others’ good qualities; compassionately humbling, punishing or banishing others in order to make them give up unwholesome ways and take to wholesome ones; using psychic powers to show the results of unwholesome actions in hells etc., and generally inspiring and teaching others (Tatz, 1986: 50). Practical help should include such things as guiding the blind, teaching sign language to the deaf and giving hospitality to weary travellers (Tatz, 1986: 54–5). In this way, the Mahāyāna brought about a ‘shift in the centre of gravity of Buddhist ethics’ (Keown, 1992: 142), with

⁵ Tatz, 1986: 15–17, 480. See also Guenther, 1959: 165–7.

a new emphasis on moral virtue ‘as a dynamic other-regarding quality, rather than primarily concerned with personal development and self-control’ (Keown, 1992: 131).

The Bodhisattva precepts

In gradually developing a new, compassion-inspired, vision of the Buddhist path, Mahāyāna leaders came to supplement and reassess aspects of the previous Buddhist code of moral precepts. An important statement, here, is the chapter on ethics (*śīla*) of the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* (see Tatz, 1986) of Asaṅga (third or fourth century CE).⁶ This outlines a set of training-precepts for *Bodhisattvas* which avoided: (1) deeds ‘analogous to monastic defeats’ and (2) ‘misdeeds’. The first are seen as most serious as they conflict with the *Bodhisattva* vow, i.e. entail ‘defeat’ as a *Bodhisattva*, at least temporarily. Misdeeds relate to failure to develop wholesome qualities, and failure to accomplish the welfare of beings (Tatz, 1986: 22). Asaṅga specifies four actions likened to monastic grounds for defeat for a *Bodhisattva*:

- i) ‘With a longing for gain and respect, to praise himself and deprecate another’.
- ii) ‘While the goods exist in his possession, to cold-heartedly fail to donate material things,⁷ because he has a nature of attachment to them, to those who are suffering and indigent, who have no protector and no recourse, who have approached in a properly suppliant manner; and, out of stinginess in doctrine, not to teach doctrine to those who have approached in a proper manner eager for doctrine’.
- iii) ‘The bodhisattva develops such involvement in anger that he cannot resolve it with the mere utterance of harsh words, but overwhelmed with anger he strikes, hurts, damages sentient beings with hand, clump of earth or club; while focusing on just that aggravated angry attitude he does not heed, he does not accept even another’s apology; he will not let loose that attitude.’
- iv) ‘To repudiate the bodhisattva collection [of teachings] and, on his own or echoing someone else, to devote himself to counterfeits of the good doctrine, and then to enjoy, to show, and to establish those counterfeits of the good doctrine’. (Tatz, 1986: 64)

The great Tibetan reformer Tsong-kha-pa (1357–1410) cites Samudramegha’s view that these four parallel the four grounds for defeat in monastic vows (see p. 94): that i) is parallel to sexual intercourse,

⁶ For a good discussion of this and other aspects of Mahāyāna ethics, see Keown, 1992: 129–64.

⁷ Tsong-kha-pa explains that one should not, however, give if one is asked for unsuitable, harmful things such as weapons or poison (Tatz, 1986: 159).

for in both cases, disgrace is brought on oneself and another, that ii) is parallel to theft, that iii) is parallel to killing a human and that iv) is parallel to boasting of having attained spiritual states that one has not attained (Tatz, 1986: 162). Nevertheless, while an act entailing monastic defeat need only be deliberately committed once for such defeat to ensue (according to non-Mahāyāna schools), defeat as a *Bodhisattva* only comes from doing one of the above repeatedly and without regret – or abandoning the ‘thought of enlightenment’. One is then a counterfeit *Bodhisattva*, but can become a real one again by retaking the *Bodhisattva* vows (Tatz, 1986: 65).

Asaṅga lists forty-one ‘misdeeds’.⁸ Of these, some do not have a particularly Mahāyāna emphasis, such as failing to express devotion to the three refuges each day, or failing to accept a properly offered apology. Others do, such as neglecting the welfare of people who are violent and immoral, not accepting offerings with which others can be helped, not using caustic or severe means if this would benefit someone, and not helping those in need by, for example, being a travelling companion. Some concern the wrong attitudes to non-Mahāyāna Buddhists: it is a fault to hold that a *Bodhisattva* should not learn from their teachings and practices, but also wrong to neglect Mahāyāna texts for theirs.

Asaṅga also outlines factors which moderate the fault in such actions. As summarized by Tatz, these are that:

Misdeeds may be defiled or undefiled, depending upon their motivation; in addition, circumstances may render them innocuous. Mitigating circumstances consist of motivation by laziness, indolence, carelessness, and absent-mindedness (as opposed to defiling enmity, resentment, envy, conceit, lack of faith, and disrespect); exculpatory circumstances are not having taken the vow, distraught thinking, and unanticipated suffering (*Ts.* 39b). There is no fault in any deed done out of desire-attachment, because this is allied with compassion and is therefore the very duty of the bodhisattva (*Ts.* 84a–b). (Tatz, 1986: 22)

The *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* code was the locus classicus for instruction of new *Bodhisattvas* until the eighth century, when it was partly superseded by the system of Śāntideva. He, in his *Śikṣā-samuccaya* (*Ss.* 61–70), outlines eighteen ‘root’ transgressions (*mūla-patti*), which draw heavily on a list in the *Ākāśa-garbha Sūtra* (for which, see Tatz, 1986: 316–32). These include: putting people off the Mahāyāna by teaching emptiness to them before they can respond to it without fear, telling people that they are incapable of the *Bodhisattva*-path, teaching that this path will prevent

⁸ Tatz, 1986: 66–83; Keown, 1992: 142–5.

bad karma from ripening and that moral precepts are unnecessary for a *Bodhisattva*, and praising oneself for belonging to the Mahāyāna while depreciating non-Mahāyānists out of envy for respect people pay to them.

SKILFUL MEANS AND OVERRIDING THE PRECEPTS

However much the Mahāyāna added to the precepts outlined in the earlier traditions, it also added a greater flexibility as regards some of these. In this, a key concept emphasized by the Mahāyāna is that of *upāya kausalya*: means (*upāya*) which are skilful or wholesome (Pali *kusala*). The application of this idea of 'skilful means' (sometimes just referred to as *upāya*) is various (see Pye, 1978). It can refer to the first five of the six *Bodhisattva* perfections, so that the *Bodhisattva*-path consists of *upāya* and wisdom (Keown, 1992: 134). In developing these perfections:

The bodhisattva through skilful means dwells simultaneously in the states of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra . . . in solitude and amongst the bustling crowd . . . in meditation and amidst a circle of women. (*ASP* 134–5)

In another sense, the Buddha is said to use skilful means in adapting his teachings to the level of his audience's understanding. Thus he is said to teach the Four Noble Truths and the goal of Arahātship to those of 'lower dispositions', *śrāvakas* belonging to the 'Hīnayāna', or 'Lesser Vehicle', but the *Bodhisattva*-path to perfect Buddhahood to those of 'higher dispositions', who practise the 'Mahāyāna', or 'Great Vehicle'. Heavenly Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* are also said to use skilful means in the way that they manifest themselves on earth (in the flesh, or in visions) in ways which are ideally adapted to the needs of those who seek their help or teaching. A final application of the concept is in the ethical sphere, referring to the idea that Buddhist ethical precepts may sometimes be broken if this is an unavoidable part of a compassionately motivated act to help someone.⁹ Thus the Mahāyāna has a greater tendency than the Theravāda to adapt the precepts flexibly to circumstances, though such an approach is not completely absent in the Theravāda. Thus, in recent years, when the monastery of the Thai meditation master Ajahn Chah was overrun by a swarm of red ants, causing misery to all, he finally allowed the army in to spray insecticides. When the other monks questioned him on the acceptability of this, he simply said

⁹ See Keown, 1992: 150–63. Keown compares this approach to that of 'situation ethics' in the West (1992: 185–91).

‘I take full responsibility – don’t you worry about it!’, i.e. he was willing to suffer the karmic results of an act which allowed normal monastic life to resume.¹⁰

In the Mahāyāna, Śāntideva’s *Śikṣā-samuccaya* cites the *Candra-pradīpa Sūtra* to the effect that, where the motive is to help people, there is no fault in an action (*Ss.* 163). The *Akṣayamati Sūtra* is also cited as saying ‘At the time for giving one can overlook the practice of morality and so forth. But for all that he must not be lax’ (*Ss.* 12). Mahāyāna texts differ on the degree of permissiveness allowed to *Bodhisattvas*. The *Bodhisattva-piṭāka Sūtra*, dating from around the second century CE, allows no scope for breaking the precepts (Pagel, 1995: 180). The *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* vi.3 allows minor offences to be committed (Keown, 1992: 146) if the act helps others and is irreproachable, which the commentary explains as not arousing attachment, hatred or delusion in oneself or others (Keown, 1992: 147).

Compassionate killing

Some texts justify killing a human being, on the grounds of compassion in dire circumstances. A key text here is the *Upāya-kauśalya Sūtra*.¹¹ This says that taking life etc. is unrepensible ‘when it develops from a virtuous thought’ (Tatz, 1986: 323). A key passage in the text tells of the Buddha in a past life as a *Bodhisattva* sea captain named Great Compassion, who was transporting 500 merchants.¹² One night deities inform him in a dream that one of the passengers is a robber intent on killing all the rest and stealing their goods. He realizes that the robber will suffer in hell for aeons from such a deed, as the merchants are all *Bodhisattvas*. He ponders deep and long on how to prevent this, but realizes that if he informs the merchants of the plot, they will kill the robber – they cannot have been well established on the *Bodhisattva*-path – and themselves go to hell. If he does nothing, many will die. He is thus left with one option, the least of three evils: himself killing the robber. Even though he would himself be reborn in hell for ‘a hundred thousand aeons’ because of this, he is willing to endure this to prevent others suffering. Accordingly, ‘with great compassion and skill in means’, he

¹⁰ Ajahn Sumedho, ‘Facing Death’, *Raft – The Journal of the Buddhist Hospice Trust*, no. 2 (1989/90).

¹¹ Translated from Tibetan (*Upāya-kauśalya-nāma Mahāyāna Sūtra*) by Tatz, 1994, and from Chinese (*Jiānōttava-bodhisattva-paripṛcchā*) by Chang, 1983: 427–68 (Taishō 345). Tatz claims that the Indian original dates from the first century BCE (1994: 1).

¹² Tatz, 1994: 73–6; Chang, 1983: 456–8; see Welch, 1972: 284–6; cf. Williams, 1989: 145.

then kills the robber, who is reborn in a heaven. A similar story is also found in the *Mahā-Upāya-kauśalya Sūtra*,¹³ where the *Bodhisattva* feels compelled to kill the scout for 500 bandits, even though he is an old friend, to prevent a murderous attack on 500 merchants.

In the first story, while the captain was willing to be reborn in hell for his deed, the text simply says that this actually meant that the round of rebirths was, for him, 'curtailed' by 'a hundred thousand aeons': the time he was willing to spend in hell as a result of the deed. Nevertheless, the text goes on to say that the Buddha's treading on a thorn is 'the residue of the fruition of that deed' (Tatz, 1994: 76; Chang, 1983: 458). While, as a Buddha, he knew of this in advance and could have avoided the thorn, he lets it happen to show to others the effects of karma. The implication seems to be, then, that the act had various bad karmic consequences, though not as bad as if it had not been done with such a compassionate motivation (cf. pp. 19–21, 25–6). If the captain had not acknowledged that the deed could lead to many rebirths in hell, and not been *willing* to suffer accordingly, compassion (and wisdom) would have been lacking, and he *would* have suffered long in hell. That is, hell is only avoided here by willingly risking it in helping others. McFarlane comments, in such a context, that

if the *bodhisattva* were to perform such actions from self-interested motives, or even from disinterested motives, but with an attitude that his actions were justified and would produce much merit, then they would not count as skilful means and would result in woeful consequences. (1995: 4)

Even so, according to John Dunne, most contemporary Tibetans assert that the *Bodhisattva* in the above story 'was reborn in hell because he took a life, but did not remain there long because the attitude behind the act was based on compassion'.¹⁴

Desperate situations call for those who are heroically compassionate to grasp the nettle of taking the lesser evil, but only if they acknowledge that an evil is being done and they are prepared to take the karmic consequences, because of their compassion. The *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* says that if a *Bodhisattva* sees a robber about to commit many acts of immediate retribution, such as killing – for the sake of a few material goods – many hundreds of *śrāvakas* and *Bodhisattvas*, he thinks:

¹³ Chinese: *Ta fang-pien fo-pao-en ching* (Taishō 156, vii, 161b–162a), cited in Demiéville, 1957: 379 and thence in Welch, 1972: 282.

¹⁴ John Dunne, 'Precept Keeping' posting to 'Buddha-L' Internet discussion forum, 26 July 1995, and 'Killing Hitler' posting, 21 March 1996.

‘If I take the life of this sentient being, I myself may be reborn as one of the creatures of hell. Better that I be reborn a creature of hell than that this living being, having committed a deed of immediate retribution, should go straight to hell.’ With such an attitude, the bodhisattva ascertains that the thought is virtuous or indeterminate¹⁵ and then, feeling constrained,¹⁶ with only a thought of mercy for the consequence, he takes the life of that living being. There is no fault, but a spread of much merit. (Tatz, 1986: 70–1)

Demiéville’s translation from the Chinese (1957: 379) and McFarlane’s translation from the Sanskrit (1994: 194) add that the act is accompanied by horror.

There are also *Sūtras* which condone war. The *Ārya-bodhisattva-gocaropāya-viśaya-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa Sūtra* offers various forms of advice to a king, including on when war is necessary, and the best strategies and tactics in it (109a ff.). It is emphasized, though, that his motive should be love and compassion in seeking to protect his subjects.¹⁷ Moreover, in Tibet, at the highest level of tantric practice, acts of violence or killing are sometimes permissible to destroy a person or evil spirit that is causing great harm to many or to Buddhism, but *only* under very restricted conditions:

- a) there is no peaceful way left which could work,
- b) the act is performed by purely spiritual powers,
- c) there is no other motivation except the great compassion,
- d) the act of violence should have the desired effect,
- e) the person should be able to place the person killed onto the path of liberation by the act.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the Mahāyāna contains less guarded justifications of killing, several of which are contained in the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* (composed around the fourth century CE in India or Central Asia). In one passage, the Buddha says that in a previous life he was a king who found that several brahmins were slandering Mahāyāna teachings. To save them from the bad karma entailed in this (!), and to protect Buddhism, ‘I had them put to death on the spot. Men of devout faith, as a result of

¹⁵ Tsong-kha-pa sees this as applying to the *Bodhisattva*’s own mind, not that of the victim, as he sees this as senseless (Tatz, 1986: 215). Nevertheless, one Sanskrit manuscript seems to support the latter interpretation (Tatz, 1986: 297, n. 403), as does Demiéville’s translation of the Chinese (1957: 379).

¹⁶ Tsong-kha-pa sees this as meaning that there is no alternative to acting in such a way (Tatz, 1986: 215).

¹⁷ Information supplied by John Dunne, ‘Buddha-L’ Internet forum, posting on ‘Just War’, 21 March 1996.

¹⁸ Yuthok, 1995: 54. On apparent acceptance of killing etc. in tantric texts, see Broido, 1988.

that action, I never thereafter fell into hell.¹⁹ In any case, says the *Sūtra*, they were each an *icchāntika* – one incapable of salvation – so there was no evil in killing them to protect the *Dharma*.²⁰ Such a person is otherwise described as ‘perfect in his obstacles to present and future good’,²¹ being a monastic or lay person who: ‘slanders the true *Dharma*’ repeatedly and without any signs of remorse; or enacts a monastic offence entailing defeat; or does one of the five deadly actions, such as killing a parent, without contrition. He is a companion to Māra, the embodiment of evil.²² Thus:

Sentient beings possess the five good roots such as faith, but the *icchāntika* has eternally severed those roots. Thus, while it is a fault to kill an ant, it is not a fault to kill an *icchāntika*.²³

Fortunately this rather disreputable idea of the *icchāntika* is absent in later versions of the *Sūtra*, which says that *all* beings are capable of attaining Buddhahood: all have the Buddha-nature, and ‘are not cut off and do not perish before they attain supreme enlightenment’.²⁴

Williams sees the permission to kill those who slander the *Dharma* as the kind of passage which might be used to justify killing those who opposed one’s own sect of Buddhism (1989: 158–9), as happened in medieval Japan. McFarlane comments, ‘the arguments are hardly convincing in terms of Mahāyāna or more general Buddhist principles’ (1986: 101), and such attempts to justify Buddhist involvement in violence have been rare (McFarlane, 1986: 102).

In another passage of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, it is said that the true follower of the Mahāyāna should ignore the moral precepts, if the need to protect monks (who uphold them) from attack makes this necessary.²⁵ Nevertheless, the passage goes on to say that they should never use the weapons that they carry to take life.²⁶

¹⁹ Taishō 12, 434c; quoted in Yampolsky, 1990: 32.

²⁰ Taishō 374, xvi, 459a–460b, as cited in Yampolsky, 1990: 32, Demiéville, 1957: 378 and Welch, 1972: 281. ²¹ Taishō 12, 562b. My thanks to my research student Victor He for this.

²² Taishō 12, 425a–b, 419a and 421c–422a, as cited in Yampolsky, 1990: 31–2, 124. Buddhists see a Māra as a type of deity who has developed a perverse desire to keep beings in the round of rebirths, with all its suffering and repeated death. A Māra is an evil tempter deity, seen to dwell in the highest of the sense-desire-realm heavens (see p. 14), an embodiment of both desire and death. ²³ Taishō 12, 562b. My thanks to my research student Victor He for this.

²⁴ Taishō 12, 573c. See Williams, 1989: 98; Yampolsky, 1990: 120–1.

²⁵ Taishō 374, III, 383b–384a, as cited in Demiéville, 1957: 378–9, in turn cited by Welch, 1972: 281 and Williams, 1989: 161.

²⁶ Taishō 12, 383b–384b, as cited in Yampolsky, 1990: 33–5, and see Niwano, 1977: 27.

Compassionate stealing, non-celibacy, and lying

In regard to the second precept, the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* says that the *Bodhisattva* overthrows kings or officials who are oppressive, violent and pitiless; he steals back the property of thieves who have stolen from shrines or the *Saṅgha*; he removes from power wasteful or corrupt custodians of *Saṅgha* or shrine property. All of this is faultless taking of what has not been freely given, i.e. going against the moral precept regarding stealing, for the benefit of those who would otherwise have continued to harm others, and those they would have harmed (Tatz, 1986: 71; McFarlane, 1990: 410). McFarlane comments that this suggests that:

when confronted with a systematically unjust and oppressive regime, a *bodhisattva* is justified in taking direct and possibly violent action in overthrowing that regime. If of course the *bodhisattva* had it in his power to overthrow that regime nonviolently, perhaps through the disclosure of damaging confidential information, then that would of course be preferable. (1995: 6–7)

Asaṅga has the following things to say in relation to the third precept. A lay *Bodhisattva* has sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman who strongly desires sex with him, so as to help her avoid enmity (because of his refusal) and come under a wholesome influence (Tatz, 1986: 71). In this there is no fault but much karmic fruitfulness. The commentators Śāntarakṣita and Bodhibhadra say that there is ‘virtually’ no fault in this, for even if the agent looks on the act in the right way, it is still close to an unwholesome act (Tatz, 1986: 298–9, n. 416). Tsong-kha-pa’s commentary says that it is wrong to say that if she is single, it is not a case of sexual misconduct anyway. The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* also sees sexuality as a possible means through which a female lay *Bodhisattva* might help divest people of ignorance: ‘Of set purpose, they become a courtesan to draw men, and alluring them by the hook of lust, establish them in the Buddha’s wisdom’ (cited at *Ss.* 291).

Regarding the fourth precept, Asaṅga says that a *Bodhisattva* will lie so as to protect others from death or mutilation, though he will not lie in order to save his *own* life. He will slander an unwholesome adviser of a person, and use harsh, severe words to move someone from unwholesome to wholesome action. He indulges in dance, song, tales and idle chatter to bring others under his influence, and then lead them in a wholesome direction (Tatz, 1986: 72).

The above thus allows a *Bodhisattva* to commit the three unwholesome

actions of body and four of speech if this is done with compassionate intent. It does not allow the three unwholesome acts of mind, though: covetousness, ill-will and false view.

Who may perform such acts, and are they obligatory?

Is the 'skilful' breaking of precepts acceptable for *all* types of *Bodhisattvas*? The *Upāya-kausalya Sūtra* certainly acknowledges the potential danger of its doctrine of skilful means, as it says that it should be kept secret from non-Mahāyānists (Tatz, 1994: 87; Chang, 1983: 464). Jinaputra holds that only lay *Bodhisattvas* may kill etc., not monastic ones (Tatz, 1986: 327). By contrast, Tsong-kha-pa holds that while a monk may kill, steal and lie on compassionate grounds, without 'defeat' as a monk, he may not have sex on such grounds, as this would lay aside the basis of his training as a monk, with no real benefit to others (Tatz, 1986: 212–13). While the Sanskrit, and old Tibetan translation, of the *Śikṣā-samuccaya* says that murdering etc. out of compassion is only for *Bodhisattvas* who have not yet reached the Noble stages (S. 165), Tsong-kha-pa seems to favour a newer Tibetan translation in which *only* those in the Noble stages may do such acts. For him, 'this situation is an exclusive province of the capable, and fraught with very imminent peril'. Thus one should not seek to act beyond the level of one's spiritual maturity, or the karmic results will be bad (Tatz, 1986: 213–14). The flexibility that the doctrine of skilful means gave the Mahāyāna, then, is guarded from becoming licence by its association with compassion and warnings about the karmic dangers of abusing it.

If such acts are allowable to an advanced *Bodhisattva*, are they seen as actually being obligatory? The *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* itself, and some of its old commentaries, does not say that it is a misdeed to omit such an act if it is needed, but the new commentary does see it as such (Tatz, 1986: 211–12). This also became the predominant view in Tibet, though Tsong-kha-pa did not list compassionate killing as an obligation (Tatz, 1986: 244). In Chinese tradition, while three translations of the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* omit the passage allowing such acts, Hsüan Tsang's translation sees it as a misdeed not to do them compassionately when needed (Tatz, 1986: 296, n. 396).

SPECIFIC STRANDS OF MAHĀYĀNA THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

Neither Theravāda nor Mahāyāna is a monolithic tradition, but there is rather more diversity within the latter than the former.

Tantra

In India, from the sixth century CE, texts developed, known as *Tantras*, which sought to accelerate progress on the *Bodhisattva*-path. They thus formed the basis of the Vajrayāna, the ‘Diamond’ or ‘Thunderbolt’ spiritual vehicle, also known as the Mantrayāna, or vehicle of *mantras*, or sacred words of power. This approach mainly focuses on the evocation and visualization of holy beings so as to stimulate the growth of corresponding potencies already latent in the practitioner’s own mind. In this, an important principle is that unwholesome mental states, such as anger, are seen as distortions of the mind’s underlying intrinsic purity. They are thus to be transmuted into positive energies – symbolized by the holy beings – rather than suppressed (Misra, 1984: 153). Such an approach – which is seen to need careful guidance from a *Guru* (Tibetan *bLama*, pronounced Lama) – is seen as able, for the very dedicated practitioner, to lead to Buddhahood in one life.

The adept Saraha (ninth century?), one of the eighty-four Indian tantric *Mahā-siddhas*, or ‘Great Accomplished Ones’, says in his *Dohā-kośa* (Conze et al., 1954: 224–39) that a man may develop perfect knowledge without being a monk, while married and enjoying sense-pleasures. After he realized that further spiritual progress was not possible for him if he did not find a female partner, he said:

I have taken the sworn vows of a monk and I wander about with a wife: there I do not see any distinction. Some may have doubts and say, ‘Here is an impurity!’ but they do not know. (Ray, 1980: 235)

He rigorously emphasizes the importance of spiritual practice, under a *Guru*, though.

One strand of Tantrism included taboo- and convention-breaking practices to overcome attachments and aid insight into seeing everything as the *Dharma*-body, or inner nature of all Buddhas. The *Hevajra Tantra* asserts that the world is bound by lust, and may also be released by lust. This refers to the practice of sexual yoga, in which the power of lust is harnessed, and transmuted into a power for liberation, by means of visualizing various processes within the body. At a time when Buddhist influence had led to widespread vegetarianism, and a resurgence in Hinduism had strengthened ideas of purity of caste, such rites might be carried out after eating meat and drinking wine (against Buddhist ethics), in a cemetery at night, the sexual partner being a low-caste woman visualized as a deity (see Ray, 1980: 237). The importance of the

body, which the *Tantras* stress, goes back to the Buddha saying that *Nirvāṇa* is in ‘this fathom-length carcass’ (*S.* 1.62), while cemeteries were often seen as good places in which to meditate on the nature of the body and death. The bizarre-sounding tantric rites were certainly an innovation, though! It is worth noting, however, that the famous tantric adept Tilopa, while he accepted a woman running a very successful liquor shop as his disciple, made her close it down as a condition of his acceptance (Ray, 1980: 229–30).

While Vajrayāna Buddhism became the dominant form in Northern Buddhism, the above-mentioned tantric approaches are only used to a certain extent. Among Tibet’s four main schools of Buddhism, the one most open to practices such as sexual yoga is the Nyingma (rNying-ma), which is the oldest school there. Some of its non-monastic followers – and also monks who disrobe, perhaps temporarily – do sometimes practise sexual yoga with a partner. However, as Barber says:

The use of meat, alcohol, and sexual yoga is highly regulated. A tantric yogi cannot simply drink and engage in sexual intercourse at will; these are permitted only after years of training. Only those who have a proper mental attitude can incorporate these teachings. (1991: 86)

The Gelug (dGe-lugs), the dominant Buddhist school in Tibet, founded by Tsong-kha-pa, holds that tantric practices should only be carried out on a sound basis of monastic practice and Mahāyāna ethics (Tatz, 1986: 97, 111, 30–1), and ‘sexual yoga’ is only done as a visualization, not physically.²⁷

In addition to following Śrāvakayāna precepts and *Bodhisattva* vows, tantric practitioners observe various *samayās*, or tantric vows. These are seen as indispensable to the success of tantric practices, and powerful enough to lead to Buddhahood within sixteen lifetimes even without the practices. To break the vows leads to a low rebirth. The majority of the vows are identical with or extensions of Śrāvakayāna or *Bodhisattva* vows. Others involve such matters as not revealing secrets, not deriding women, and making offerings to one’s *Guru* (Barber, 1991: 85–90).

Pure Land Buddhism

In Eastern Buddhism, one strand of the Mahāyāna, the ‘Pure Land’ tradition (Chinese Ch’ing-t’u), focused its attention on devotion to Amitābha Buddha (see p. 130) as the main or even only practice (de Bary,

²⁷ Barber, 1991: 90. For a useful discussion of tantric sexual symbolism and yoga, see Jackson, 1992.

1972: 197–207, 314–44). In Japan, there is the Jōdo, ‘Pure Land’, school and the Jōdo-shin, the ‘True Pure Land’ school. These were founded, respectively, by the followers of Hōnen (1133–1212) and his pupil Shinran (1173–1263). Both regarded the traditional Mahāyāna path of gradual spiritual development as too difficult, and so turned to Amitābha (Japanese Amida) to save them.

For Hōnen, devotion was the central religious act, but one should also cultivate one’s own virtue. For Shinran, one should have faith in Amida to do all that is necessary for one’s salvation, and not pretend that one can contribute to this oneself: one should totally rely on Amida as saving ‘other-power’, not on ‘self-power’. He felt that humans were helpless sinners, full of passion and depravity, ignorant of what is truly good or evil, so attempts to cultivate virtue or wisdom deliberately would lead to pride and lack of faith in Amida. Hōnen taught that as even wicked people could be reborn in Sukhāvātī, Amida’s Pure Land, good ones certainly could be. Shinran taught that as even good people could be reborn there, ‘wicked’ ones stood an even better chance: an idea paralleling the Christian concept of the ‘salvation of sinners’. Salvation comes from gratefully accepting Amida’s saving grace, not by any good works. Even a person’s faith comes from grace, for the all-pervading power of Amida can be found within one, prompting the Buddha-nature to overcome arrogance and sin.

Some Jōdo-shin followers came to regard moral conduct as irrelevant to those saved by Amida. Against this view, the school’s ‘second founder’, Rennyo (1415–99), argued that sincere faith implied a pure heart, with a moral life expressing gratitude to Amida for salvation. For Jōdo-shin Buddhists, then, ethics is not part of a path towards liberation, as in most other Buddhist schools, but a consequence of belief that one is *already* saved.

Zen

In a different way, another strand of Eastern Buddhism, Zen (Japanese; Chinese Ch’an) came to modify the classical Buddhist view of ethical action as part of a path of gradual spiritual cultivation. Particularly in the Japanese Sōtō Zen school, founded by Dōgen (1200–53), neither moral virtue nor meditation was seen as a way to *attain* Buddhahood. Rather, they were seen as ways of progressively manifesting one’s existing Buddha-nature (Fox, 1971; Ives, 1992: 54). Thus Dōgen held that ‘The Buddha-seed grows in accordance with not taking life’ (Aitken,

1984: 24). While Zen's approach of 'self-power' contrasts with Pure Land's 'other-power' approach, Dōgen and Shinran share the view that ethical action is a consequence of liberation – whether through one's inner Buddha-nature or Amida Buddha – not part of a way to attain it.

For Dōgen, selfless compassion is what is naturally expressed when one acts in a spontaneous way – from one's underlying Buddha-nature – free from reflection and desire, which come from self-centredness. A disciplined life enables this inner goodness to be expressed in actions (Kasulis, 1981: 97–9), and developing wisdom ensures that good actions become the only natural thing to do (Brear, 1974: 436–7). Thus Dōgen said:

To study the Buddha-way is to study the self.

To study the self is to forget the self.

To forget the self is to be enlightened by the ten thousand dharmas.

(Aitken, 1984: 152)

In a more homely way, the American Zen teacher Aitken Roshi says: 'The one who beats his kids and gets drunk has no confidence in his Buddha-nature, we may say' (Aitken, 1984: 102). Aitken quotes Yamada Kōun Roshi as saying 'The purpose of Zen is the perfection of character' (Aitken, 1984: 155), in the sense of bringing out a perfection that normally lies hidden within. In doing this, while Zen has, to varying extents, emphasized traditional Buddhist ethical precepts, as well as Confucian norms on correct social relationships and 'human-heartedness', it has put more stress on 'fundamental ways of being as opposed to principles of good and evil' (Ives, 1992: 3, 37–8).

Zen emphasizes three aspects to the moral precepts, such as that against killing. Firstly, there is the literal aspect, which relates to the Śrāvakayāna cast of mind: simply do not deliberately kill any being. Secondly, there is the compassionate, Mahāyāna aspect: positively nurture beings (cf. pp. 130–2). Thirdly, there is the 'essential' or Buddha-nature aspect: this world of emptiness is no different from *Nirvāṇa*, which contains nothing to do with death; so, ultimately, there is no-one killed and no act of killing. All three aspects must be borne in mind (Aitken, 1984: 16–17). Zen often talks of overcoming all 'dualism', whether of 'like and dislike', 'good and evil' or 'right and wrong'. By this, it seeks to point to a level of awakening in which such distinctions are transcended, and a person spontaneously acts in a way which would otherwise be called 'good' (cf. pp. 43–6). Talk of 'transcending' good and evil is based on the idea that there is no *absolute* or *inherent* good or evil, but that good and evil are relative to each other, and that one must beware of strong

attachments or rejections – towards oneself or others – based on these ideas (Ives, 1992: 47–8).

The Zen emphasis on one's Buddha-nature or 'innate awakening' meant that it is sometimes said that 'passions are awakening'. This occasionally led to antinomianism, or at least quietism (Faure, 1991: 56, 59, 67, 129), though this was generally resisted (62–5, 128). On a related point, Zen came to emphasize 'formless repentance', which aims to realize the emptiness of transgressions and delusion, rather than focus on actual 'phenomenal' transgressions. This is found in the 'Platform' *Sūtra*, composed in China, and lent itself, in some quarters, to laxity (Faure, 1991: 237–8). Such laxity was not supported by Dōgen, who encouraged earnest resolve and expression of repentance before the Buddhas for past misdeeds.

Nichiren Buddhism

Another important strand of Japanese Buddhism is the Nichiren group of schools, founded by the fiery reformist Nichiren (1222–82) (de Bary, 1972: 345–54). He emphasized devotion to the saving truth of the Lotus *Sūtra*, a key Mahāyāna text which sees the Buddha as a long-enlightened heavenly figure who manifests himself on earth to teach in compassionately skilful ways. For Nichiren, chanting 'Na-mu myō-hō ren-ge-kyō', 'Honour to the Lotus *Sūtra* of the True *Dharma*', and contemplating a wooden plaque or scroll on which this invocation was written (the *Gohonzon*) was the key practice. It would activate the Buddha-nature and lead to the moral uplift of the individual and society and to the attainment of Buddhahood.

As with the Pure Land schools, Nichiren felt that history had reached the 'period of the Latter-day *Dharma*', when moral and spiritual decline meant that formal moral precepts were too difficult to keep. While the Pure Land schools advocated an 'other-power' way as the one appropriate to this period, Nichiren advocated the 'self-power' one of active devotion to the Lotus *Sūtra*. He saw the words 'Myō-hō ren-ge-kyō' as embodying the actions and virtues of the 'eternal' Buddha Śākyamuni, and as the seed of Buddhahood. Reverencing them was equivalent to keeping the precepts, and aligned one with the will of the Buddha, so as to bring peace and righteousness to oneself and society (Otani, 1991).

In twentieth-century Japan, after the Second World War, a number of so-called 'New Religions' have flourished or arisen. They are lay-led movements with roots in Buddhism, Shintō, or even Christianity. Their

followers are mostly urban members of the upper-lower classes, who feel economically and socially frustrated, dislike the anonymity of the sprawling cities, and feel the need for a modernized spiritual tradition to guide them in a confusing secularized world. The 'New Religions' promise that religious practice will lead to health, wealth, personal fulfilment and success. The major Buddhist ones give members both a sense of belonging and a sense of personal importance. They are organized into small discussion groups, where personal and social problems are discussed in the light of religious faith, but the groups are also part of a well-organized and successful movement.

One of the most successful originated as the lay arm of the Nichiren Shōshū school.²⁸ This is probably because of Nichiren's emphasis on reforming society, which appealed in the post-war period. The Lotus *Sūtra* also holds out the promise of earthly happiness to those who revere it, and gives prominence to the lay *Bodhisattva*. The Sōka Gakkai ('Value-Creating Society') sees the teachings of Nichiren and the Lotus *Sūtra* as representing absolute truth, but regards values as having to be positively created, drawing on faith in the Lotus *Sūtra*. Basic values include respect for the dignity of all life, and karma. Chanting is regarded as a way to overcome obstacles in life, such as poverty, domestic disharmony, and ill health, and as a means to giving up drinking and smoking and to attaining happiness. It is seen as bringing out a person's Buddha-nature, in the form of enhanced compassion, courage, wisdom and vital life force, so as to generate a 'human revolution'. At first, chanting is for personal goals, but it then moves on towards helping solve national or world problems, such as an end to all war (Causton, 1988).

The movement has been very successful in winning converts overseas. For many, one of its attractions is its lack of any formal moral precepts or commandments. Nevertheless, as people practise, behaviour tends to start to align itself with many traditional Buddhist norms (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 17, 29–30, 57). Another part of its appeal is the claim that practising it can 'expiate all negative karma', for 'the shackles of one's karma are progressively weakened until they are finally severed completely' (Causton, 1988: 231, 182).

MAHĀYĀNA REASSESSMENT OF MONASTICISM

In the Mahāyāna, monasticism is still seen as an important aid to spiritual development, but increasing weight has come to be given to the role of

²⁸ Though formal links with it were severed in 1991 (Wilson and Dobbelaere, 1994: 232–45).

the lay Buddhist. It was emphasized that the specifically monastic precepts were simply a means to the end of purifying the mind, and should not be made into ends in themselves, as some monks were perhaps making them (Tatz, 1986: 13). As the *Bodhisattva* aimed to remain in the round of rebirths for a huge length of time, to aid others, he or she did not need to overcome the defilement of attachment as quickly as a follower of the early schools, a *śrāvaka*, sought to, using monastic practice as an aid. Thus the lay *Bodhisattva* had an important role alongside the monastic one, and the lay–monastic division became blurred to some extent.

In Northern Buddhism, a Lama (Tibetan *bLama*; Skt *Guru*) is generally a monk (*gelong*) or nun of long standing or special charisma, but a lay person accomplished in meditation or advanced rituals may also be such a revered teacher, particularly in the Nyingma (rNying-ma) school. Moreover, many ‘monks’ only follow the precepts for novices throughout their life, though they also follow a number of *Bodhisattva* precepts (Tatz, 1986: 21).

In China, monks have followed both the full monastic precepts and a supplementary ‘Mahāyāna’ code consisting of the ‘three pure precepts’ (see p. 82), and a set of *Bodhisattva*-precepts outlined in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (De Groot, 1893; Dharma Realm, 1981). These consist of the ‘ten great precepts’ (see p. 82) and forty-eight minor ones, which positively require such things as vegetarianism, preaching, caring for the sick and exhorting others to give up immoral behaviour.

In Japan, the lay–monastic distinction gradually diminished in importance. Saichō (767–822), founder of the Tendai school, set aside the traditional monastic code as too difficult to keep in an age of moral and spiritual decline, so long after the Buddha. He retained only the supplementary code, which does not seem formally to require total celibacy. Nevertheless, Dōgen (1200–53), founder of Sōtō Zen, stressed a simple but rigorous life-style. He emphasized the ‘three pure’ and ‘ten great’ precepts, but also developed a meticulously detailed code for *unsui*, or trainee monks. This outlines how juniors should behave respectfully in the presence of seniors, how trainees should behave when relaxing or eating, and even how they should clean their teeth. In practice, these rules precluded any sexual activity. Yet Shinran (1173–1263), founder of the intensely devotional Jōdo-shin school, came to see celibacy as part of a futile attempt to save oneself, rather than depending on the saving power of Amida Buddha. Having dreamt that the *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara told him to marry, he regarded monasticism as unnecessary for salvation, and marriage as a realistic admission of human weakness. He thus initiated a kind of married hereditary clergy, and

advocated the family as the centre of religious life. This precedent of a married priesthood was one that monks of other schools sometimes followed.

From this period, Japanese Buddhism also came to develop a more this-worldly orientation, which generally saw ultimate reality as pervading everyday activities, to be known by those with true faith (Pure Land and Nichiren schools) or strong awareness (Zen). The role of the monk or nun thus became less central, with less charisma, and Buddhism became more lay-orientated, with devotion mainly focused before a home altar, rather than at a temple.

Japanese Buddhists have much respect for Vimalakīrti, a lay *Bodhisattva* whose teachings are given in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*:

Though he is but a simple layman, yet observing the pure monastic discipline;
 Though living at home, yet never desirous of anything;
 Though possessing a wife and children, always exercising pure virtues;
 Though surrounded by his family, holding aloof from worldly pleasures . . .
 Though frequenting the gambling house, yet leading gamblers into the right path . . .
 Manifesting to all the error of passions when in the house of debauchery;
 persuading all to seek higher things when at the shop of the wine dealer
 . . .²⁹

Nevertheless, it is surely true that ‘not every layperson can visit prostitutes or indulge in gambling and drinking, as did Vimalakīrti, without becoming attached’! (Barber, 1991: 85).

After the Meiji restoration of 1868, the Japanese government decreed that monks of all schools could marry; since then, so many monks have married that genuine (celibate) monks are now mostly young men in training. The nuns remain celibate. Monastic training is now seen as a preparation for the role of the priest, who performs rituals such as funerals for the laity, and often hands on his temple to a son, though the ‘New Religions’ have little need for priests or monks.

CONCLUSION

The Mahāyāna has its roots in the values broadly shared by all forms of Buddhism, but its greater emphasis on compassion has meant that it has accepted that this may, in certain circumstances, override the constraints of normal Buddhist morality. Here one sees a rough parallel to the way

²⁹ Tsunoda, de Bary and Keene, 1964: 99.

in which Christianity puts 'love' as a central value which might override constraints expressed in the precepts of Jewish law, though this covers both ritual and ethical matters, unlike Buddhist precepts. As in certain minority developments in Christianity, one also sees an antinomian attitude occasionally developing, though it never escapes criticism. Even when, as in the Japanese Jōdo-shin and Nichiren schools, the idea of formally undertaking precepts is abrogated, the ideals of behaviour remain broadly in accordance with them. Accordingly, Japanese Buddhists sometimes like to say that Mahāyānists are concerned to act from the 'spirit' rather than by the 'letter' of the precepts. In Tantra, one sometimes has practices whose form seems in tension with aspects of sexual morality, but which are intended as ways to confront and transmute the power of lust. The lay–monastic distinction, whilst still important in Tibet and China, comes to be downgraded in Japan, while in Tibet it is modified by the elevation in status of certain non-celibate practitioners.

CHAPTER 4

Attitude to and treatment of the natural world

May all beings be happy and secure. *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta*, Khp. 8

HUMANITY'S PLACE IN NATURE

Buddhism does not see humans as a special creation by 'God', or as having been given either 'dominion' or 'stewardship' over animals etc. Like all other sentient beings, they wander in the limited, conditioned realm of *saṃsāra*, the round of rebirths. Nevertheless, a human rebirth is seen as a very rare and fortunate one – a 'precious human rebirth' (see p. 30) – as it is the only one where the key work for enlightenment can be accomplished. Accordingly, in the Buddhist account of the types of rebirth – gods, humans, animals, ghosts and hell-beings – humans are listed in one group, while all other animals (i.e. land animals, birds, fish, worms, insects: *M.* III.167–9) are listed in another. That is, while all sentient beings are 'in the same boat' – *saṃsāra* – humans are in a specific compartment of this. This is because they have a greater freedom and capacity for understanding than animals (and a greater motivation for spiritual progress than gods). Most moral and spiritual progress, or its opposite, is made at the human level. This is not to say that animals are all seen as amoral automatons. Buddhist *Jātaka* stories often attribute noble actions to such animals as monkeys and elephants, and there is also a reference to some animals keeping the five precepts (*Vin.* II.162). Nevertheless, animals clearly have much less of a capacity for choice than humans, and if they are virtuous, for example less greedy, or generous, this is more an expression of their existing character, or a response to an encouraging human example, than any deliberate desire for moral development (Story: 1976). Moreover, it is clear that there is a gradation among animals as regards their relative degree of freedom, or capacity for virtue (*AKB.* IV.97b–c). Insects would seem to have little, if any, of either.

The relatively special place of humans in the Buddhist cosmos means that they can be seen as at a 'higher level' of existence than animals. This, however, is not seen as a justification for domineering and exploiting animals. Humans are 'superior' primarily in terms of their capac-

ities for moral action and spiritual development. The natural expression of such 'superiority' is not an exploitative attitude, but one of kindness to lesser beings, an ideal of *noblesse oblige* (Hall, 1902: 229–47). This is backed up by the reflection that one's present fortunate position as a human is only a temporary state of affairs, dependent on past good karma. One cannot isolate oneself from the plight of animals, as one has oneself experienced it (*S.* II.186), just as animals have had past rebirths as humans. Moreover, in the ancient round of rebirths, every being one comes across, down to an insect, will at *some* time have been a close relative or friend, and have been very good to one (*S.* II.189–90). Bearing this in mind, one should return the kindness in the present.

The Western concept of 'nature' is one which places humans and their artifices over and against the 'natural' world of animals, plants and the physical environment. In the present century, industrialization etc. has led to many environmental problems, and thus to reflection on how humans should act and live so as to be in a less destructive and self-undermining relationship with 'nature'. As the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh says, though:

We classify other animals and living beings as nature, acting as if we ourselves are not part of it. Then we pose the question 'How should we deal with Nature?' We should deal with nature the way we should deal with ourselves! We should not harm ourselves; we should not harm nature . . . Human beings and nature are inseparable. (Eppsteiner, 1988: 41)

Rather than divide the world into the realms of the 'human' and 'nature', the classical Buddhist perspective has seen a more appropriate division as that between sentient beings, of which humans are only one type, and the non-sentient environment, the 'receptacle-world' (*bhājanaloka*), in Sarvāstivādin terminology (*AKB.* III.45). In this division, plants would generally come on the non-sentient side of the line, but there is some ambiguity here, and differences of view (see pp. 174–7). The key quality, then, is sentience, the ability to experience and to suffer, and the related ability, in this or a future life, to transcend suffering by attaining enlightenment. A good image of this notion of the community of sentient beings is a genre of painting popular in Japan, showing humans, gods, and a variety of animals mourning at the death of the Buddha (Suzuki, 1959: 377–80).

Another Western dichotomy is, indeed, between the 'supernatural' – the realm of God, or gods, and angels etc. – and the natural world, with man partaking of something of both. Within the Buddhist perspective,

the gods are themselves sentient beings subject to the natural law of karma. Their actions do not subvert natural laws, though they may go against the *normal* course of things. In the same way, meditation-based psychic powers, such as walking on water, are not seen as supernatural or miraculous, but as law-governed natural manifestations of certain potencies latent in the human mind. Except for *Nirvāṇa*, everything in the universe is subject to Conditioned Arising, the natural process of law-governed arising-according-to-conditions. In this sense, there is nothing 'supernatural', except perhaps *Nirvāṇa*. The gods, then, and also humans, are part of the play of natural processes that is *samāsāra*.

Gods are seen as existing at various levels, with some being seen as (normally) invisible beings sharing the earth with humans. Buddhist texts refer to certain gods living in large trees (*Vin.* iv.34–5) and even in healing herbs (*S.* iv.302; *M.* i.306): thus one should not anger such a being by damaging or destroying his or her home (Hall, 1902: 248–71). Other gods dwell on the land. Thus a Thai custom, upheld even in the busy modern city of Bangkok, is to build a small 'spirit house' next to a building erected on a previously open plot of land. This is to house any gods displaced from the land: to be considerate to them and thus not rouse their anger. Similarly, in Ladakh, a ceremony at the first planting of the year seeks to pacify the spirits of the earth and water, as well as worms and fish, all of which might be disturbed by agricultural activity (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 43).

As part of Conditioned Arising, humans are seen as having an effect on their environment not only through the purely physical aspects of their actions, but also through the moral/immoral qualities of these. That is, karmic effects sometimes catch up with people via their environment. It is thus said that, if a king and his people act unrighteously, this has a bad effect on the environment and its gods, leading to little rain, poor crops and weak, short-lived people (*A.* ii.74–6; see p. 115). Right actions have the opposite effect. The Buddha is also seen to have had a positive effect on his environment: when he lay down between two *sāl* trees to die and pass into final *Nirvāṇa*, these are said to have burst into a mass of unseasonal blossom, which fell on him in homage (*D.* ii.137–8). Likewise, in the Mahāyāna 'Sūtra of the Buddha Teaching the Seven Daughters', it is said that, after the Buddha taught, 'One-hundred year old trees bore fruit and flowers . . . the blind could see . . . Hundreds of birds and beasts were harmonious in their cries' (Paul, 1979: 24).

The environment is thus held to respond to the state of human morality; it is not a neutral stage on which humans merely strut, or a sterile

container unaffected by human actions. This clearly has ecological ramifications: humans cannot ignore the effect of their actions on their environment. This message is also strongly implied by the *Aggañña Sutta*,¹ which gives an account of the initial stages of the development of sentient life on earth. This occurs when previously divine beings fall from their prior state and, through consuming a savoury crust floating on the oceans, develop physical bodies, and later sexual differentiation. At first their environment is bountiful, but it becomes less so the more they greedily take from it. They feed off sweet-tasting fungus, and then creepers, but these in turn disappear as the beings differentiate in appearance and the more beautiful ones become conceited and arrogant. Then they feed off quick-growing rice, gathering it each day as they need it. But through laziness, they start to gather a week's supply at a time, so that it then ceases to grow quickly, which necessitates cultivation. Consequently, the land is divided up into fields, so that property is invented, followed by theft. Here, then, is a vision of sentient beings and their environment co-evolving (or co-devolving). The beings are affected by what they take from their environment, and the environment becomes less refined and fruitful as the beings morally decline.

All this takes place according to the principle of Conditioned Arising (see pp. 33 and 124–5), in which nothing exists on its own, as each thing depends on others to condition its arising and existence. In Eastern Buddhism, the inter-relationship of all things (and thus of humans and their environment) is particularly strongly emphasized. In the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* is an image, the 'Jewel Net of Indra', explained by Fa-tsang (643–712), a master of the Hua-yen school, as follows. In this infinite net, a jewel is placed at each knot, so that each jewel reflects every other one, including their reflections of every jewel, and so on to infinity (Cook, 1989: 214). This is seen as a simile for reality as a web of interdependence, in which each thing is 'interpenetrated' by every other. Each item is made possible by, and reflects, every other, for they all condition it in one way or another. Nothing can exist by itself, but makes its own contribution to the whole. Thus the *Sūtra* says, 'Every living being and every minute thing is significant, since even the tiniest thing contains the whole mystery.' Likewise, the Ch'an monk Sêng-chao (384–414) said, 'Heaven and earth and I are of the same root, the ten-thousand things and I are of one substance' (Suzuki, 1959: 353). Cook sees this perspective as one of 'cosmic ecology' (1989: 214).

¹ D. III.84–93; cf. Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 11–13.

In the lands of Eastern Buddhism, the traditional ideal has been one of harmony with nature. This has been particularly emphasized by the Ch'an/Zen school, in such actions as blending meditation huts into the landscape, not wasting any food in monasteries, landscape painting, landscape gardening, and nature poetry (Suzuki, 1959: ch. 11). In paintings, human beings are just one part of a natural scene, not the focus, with nature as simply a background, as often seen in Western art (Cook, 1989: 217–18). Great attention is paid to seemingly insignificant aspects of nature, for insight into them can give an intuitive appreciation of the indescribable and mysterious 'suchness' which runs through the whole fabric of existence. Such insight requires a mind in which ego-centred thought has been stilled and disciplined, but in which a natural spontaneity wells up from deep within. The seventeen-syllable *haiku* poem form is a favourite medium for the expression of such intuitions (Suzuki, 1959: ch. 7). Of the following examples, the first three are by Bashō (1643–94), one is by Kikaku (1660–1707) and one is by Jōsō (1661–1704):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (1) An old pond, ah!
A frog jumps in:
The water's sound! | (2) On a dry branch
A raven is perched:
This autumnal eve. |
| (3) Lice, fleas –
The horse pissing
By my pillow. | (4) A little frog
Riding on a banana leaf,
Trembling. |
| (5) Under the water,
On the rock resting,
The fallen leaves. | |

Such an attunement to natural phenomena is also evident in a number of the poems attributed to the early *Arahats* in the *Thera-gāthā* (*Thag.*), a Theravāda text. A number are attributed to Mahā-Kassapa (verses 1062–70), an ascetic character claimed by the Ch'an/Zen school as the first teacher in their line. He speaks of his appreciation of the delightful rocks, 'cool with water, having pure streams, covered with Indagopaka insects' (verse 1063), resounding with elephants and peacocks, 'covered with flax flowers as the sky is covered with clouds' (verse 1068):

With clear water and wide crags, haunted by monkeys and deer, covered with oozing moss, those rocks delight me. (verse 1070)

Sāriputta affirms, 'Forests are delightful, where (ordinary) people find no delight. Those rid of desire will delight there; they are not seekers after sensual pleasures' (verse 992). That is, the enlightened appreciate nature

in a non-attached, non-sensual way. Indeed, Mahā-Moggallāna speaks of his living at the root of a tree in the forest, contemplating the foulness of the body (verses 1146–52). He is also without fear of natural phenomena: while lightning flashes around the mountain, ‘gone to the cleft in the mountain the son of the incomparable venerable one meditates’ (verses 1167). Likewise Bhūta speaks of contentedly meditating in a cave at night, while outside the thunder rumbles, the rain falls and fanged animals roar (verse 524). In a more tranquil vein, Rāmaṇeyyaka says, ‘Amidst the sound of chirping and the cries of birds, this mind of mine does not waver, for devotion to solitude is mine’ (verse 49). Non-attached delight is, again, expressed by Tālapuṭa, who meditatively admires the beautiful necks, crests, tail feathers and variegated wing feathers of birds (verses 1135–6). Moreover, after rain, ‘when the grove is in full flower, like a cloud, I shall lie among the mountains like a tree’ (verse 1137). That is, he will be rooted and ‘earthed’ through strong mindfulness, while in full mastery of his formerly wayward mind. For such early wilderness-meditators, the environment could itself be a teacher, especially of constant change and impermanence. As Vimala says, ‘The earth is sprinkled, the wind blows, the lightning flashes in the sky. My thoughts are quietened, my mind is well concentrated’ (verse 50). The environment could also be an example – for instance a mountain as an image of unshakeability (verse 1000). Thus Mahānāma says that he is ‘found wanting by the mountain with its many shrubs and trees’ (verse 115). All in all, the mountain and forest environment loved by such early saints is one in which a person can develop such qualities as non-attached joy, fearlessness, energy, and full enlightenment. As Kāḷudāyin boldly affirms, ‘While the wind blows cool and sweet smelling, I shall split ignorance asunder, as I sit on this mountain top’ (verse 544).

Such appreciation of the forest is also found in Mahāyāna texts. Thus the poet Śāntideva praises the forest as a delightful place conducive to not clinging to anything as ‘mine’ (*Bca.* viii.25, 27). In his *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, he cites the *Ugradatta-paripṛcchā* as saying that the forest-dweller should seek to be like the plants and trees, which are without a sense of self or possession (*Ss.* 193). He also says that if a *Bodhisattva* has to be away from the forest for a while, to teach or learn from others, he should retain a ‘cave-and-forest mind’ (*Ss.* 194).

While communal monastic life has always been important in Buddhism, time alone in the forests and mountains has also been so. It is an opportunity for developing certain qualities away from the support – and hindrances – posed by other humans. For all their positive potential,

humans can also have many negative traits. Thus the Buddha agrees when a disciple says that humans are a deceitful ‘tangle’, while animals are a (relatively) ‘open clearing’ (*M.* 1.340–1). Consequently, a time in the company of animals and nature may be an aid to spiritual development. The Buddha’s own association with and appreciation of such surroundings can be seen from the location of key events during his life. He was born under one tree, was enlightened under another, gave his first sermon in an animal park, and died between two trees. Nevertheless, he spent much of his time in and around towns and cities, teaching people. If he had been one who grasped at the beauties of nature, he would have kept clear of these.

Given all that has been said so far, it is clear that the Buddhist ideal for humanity’s relationship with animals, plants and the landscape is one of harmonious co-operation. Buddhism emphasizes a disciplining and overcoming of the negativities within the conditioned nature of the human heart. Such an approach goes hand-in-hand with a friendly attitude to the environment. This can be seen in D. T. Suzuki’s talk of making a ‘good friend’ of a climbed mountain, rather than of ‘conquering’ it (Suzuki, 1959: 334).

NON-HARMING OF ANIMALS

As an example of the pan-Indian value of *ahimsā*, or ‘non-injury’ (Tähtinen, 1976; Chapple, 1993), the first of the five precepts is to abstain from ‘onslaught on living beings (literally breathers)’ (see pp. 67–9). Its place as the most important precept is reflected in the fact that Sri Lankan villagers often sum up what Buddhism requires of them as ‘not to kill animals’ (Southwold, 1983: 66). While it is difficult to follow this fully, clearly a Buddhist should strive to minimize intentional injury to living beings. The law of karma backs up compassion as a motive for following the precept: it means that one *cannot* intentionally harm beings without this bringing harm to oneself at some time. Thus when the Buddha found some children molesting a snake with sticks, he said, ‘Whoever, seeking his own happiness, harms with the rod pleasure-loving beings gets no happiness hereafter’ (*Dhp.* 131).

The Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa explains that it is worse to kill a human than an animal, or a larger or more substantial animal than a smaller or less substantial one (see p. 52). Among animals, it is worse to kill an elephant, which is both large and noble, and bad to kill a cow, which gives much to humans through its milk. In the monastic

code of discipline, it is an offence requiring expiation if an animal is intentionally killed (*Vin.* iv.124–5). This is a lesser offence than killing a human, which requires permanent expulsion from the order, but an offence nevertheless. An offence requiring expiation is also committed if a monk uses water while knowing that it contains breathing creatures that will be killed by his action (*Vin.* iv.125); to avoid this, a water-strainer is part of the traditional kit of a monk (*Vin.* ii.118). Again, it is an offence to sprinkle water on the ground if it is known that there are living creatures there that will be harmed by this (*Vin.* iv.48–9).

Animal sacrifice

An obvious abuse of animals during the Buddha's day was the killing of them as part of elaborate Brahmanical sacrificial rituals. The Buddha, along with leaders of other non-Brahmanical renunciant groups, was very critical of this, both because of the cruelty involved and because it did not bring about the objectives the brahmins hoped for. Rejecting the brahmins' view of it as a wholesome action leading to a happy rebirth, he saw it as having the opposite qualities (*A.* ii.42). Such criticisms led to a great decrease in the use of animals in this way. The Buddha praised brahmins of old for not sacrificing animals – probably historically correct – and, in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (*D.* i.127–49), describes a sacrifice which he had himself conducted for a king in a past life. In this, no animals were killed, no trees were felled to act as sacrificial posts, workmen were not forced to help, and the only offerings were items such as butter and honey (*D.* i.141). Such a description was clearly meant as a contrast to the current mode of sacrificing! The emperor Asoka in fact banned animal sacrifices, at least in his capital city (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 55).

Meat eating

Of course, the main reason why animals are killed is to provide food. Buddhist texts, and the actions of Buddhist leaders, have sought to discourage this. The *Mahā-rāja-kaṇṣka-lekha*, addressed to a hunting emperor, says:

why do you commit such dreadful acts upon deer? Your eyes are similar to the eyes of a young deer. When the deer are startled, they look about with revolving eyeballs. Should you not therefore have compassion for these (deer)? (cited by Jampal, *ASP* 71–2)

The *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, a Mahāyāna text, states that the *Bodhisattva*'s great generosity should not include giving away nets for catching animals, or a piece of land on which animals might be hunted or killed.² A popular *Jātaka* story (*J.* I.145–53) tells of a king who drove two herds of deer into an enclosed park, so as to hunt them more easily. Nevertheless, when the king or his cook came to take a deer, many were still hurt and frightened in the chase. The herds' two leaders thus negotiated with the king and all agreed that there should be no chase. Each day, the single deer to be killed would be chosen by lot, and would go quietly. One day, it fell to the turn of a pregnant doe, so she appealed to the leader of her herd to postpone her turn until she had given birth. As he refused, she appealed to the leader of the other herd, known as the Banyan deer, who was the Buddha in a previous life. As he could not assign any other deer to take her place, he volunteered himself. When the king came and found him ready to die, he was astonished, for he had granted immunity to the two herd-leaders. On being told what had happened, he was so impressed by the deer's noble compassion that he spared the lives of both him and the doe. In response to the Banyan deer's requests, he then went on to spare all the other deer in the park, all deer outside the park, all four-footed beings, all birds and all fish. The deer then wandered free.

Such sparing of the lives of animals is therefore a respected ideal, known as the 'gift of fearlessness' (*abhaya-dāna*). The emperor Asoka made fifty-six official 'no slaughter' days per year, approximately four per lunar month, when no fish could be captured or sold, and animals might not be killed even in game reserves (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 56). He gave up hunting trips – hunting being the favourite sport of Indian rulers – and went on pilgrimages instead. He banned the killing of a wide variety of non-food animals, birds and fish, and drastically reduced, then eliminated, the slaughter of animals to feed the large royal household (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 55–6). In Sri Lanka, a number of Buddhist kings prohibited the slaughter of animals, either wholly or in certain circumstances. In China, the emperor Wu in 511 CE prohibited the use of fishing-nets, and exhorted his subjects to avoid killing beings, especially on the days dedicated to ancestor-worship. In Japan, the emperor Temmu in 675 CE restricted the use of some types of hunting devices and eating the meat of cows, horses, dogs and monkeys (Chapple, 1992: 57).

² 48b–49a; see Dayal, 1932: 175.

Meat eating in early and Theravāda Buddhism

It is often seen as surprising that vegetarianism (Prasad, 1979; Ruegg, 1980) is not more widespread among Buddhists than it is, given Buddhist teachings. In fact, the Buddha's emphasis was on the avoidance of killing. So it is worse to swat a fly – an immediate act of killing – than to eat the carcass of an already dead animal. Only in certain Mahāyāna texts is vegetarianism advocated. The position in early Buddhism, and in Theravāda lands, is as follows.

In the Buddha's day, vegetarianism was practised by Jains, though Jains see the vegetables eaten by them as containing a life-principle or soul (*jīva*). On one occasion, Jains accused the Buddha of knowingly eating an animal that had been specifically killed for him. The donor denied this, and the Buddha explained that a monk may eat meat provided it is 'pure in three respects': if the monk has not seen, heard or suspected that the animal has been killed specifically for him (*Vin.* 1.237–8). The commentary (on *Vin.* III.172) explains that, if a monk has suspicions, because of his having seen or heard of the donors hunting, fishing, or slaughtering an animal recently, he should ask about the meat and can only eat it if the being was not killed in order to feed him (*Vin. A.* 604–6; Bapat and Hirakawa, 1970: 395–6). Elsewhere, the Buddha explains that a monk receives food as a gift from a donor, and his lovingkindness for donors and other creatures is not compromised by such eating, if it is 'blameless' by being 'pure in three respects' (*M.* 1.386–71). He goes on to emphasize, though, that a donor generates much bad karma by killing a being so as to give alms to himself or a monk, through: (1) giving the order to fetch the animal, (2) its pain and distress as it is dragged with a rope around its neck, (3) giving the order to kill the animal, (4) its pain and distress while being killed, (5) the offering of the meat to a monk if it is of a type not allowable for a monk. Here, it can be noted, the evil of the act resides both in the actual actions of the killer and in the suffering of the killed.

Non-allowable food for monks, perhaps offered at times of scarcity, are: the flesh of elephants or horses, as people regarded these animals as royal emblems; dog-flesh and snake-flesh, as people saw them as disgusting; the flesh of lions, tigers, panthers, bears and hyenas, as such animals would smell the eaters and attack them (*Vin.* 1.219–20). These prohibitions were both to preserve people's faith in the *Saṅgha*, which was good for both the monks and lay people, and to protect monks from danger, a prudential, not moral, reason.

It is clear from the above that the Buddha would have frequently eaten

'blameless' meat given as alms. Thus the debate (for example Kapleau, 1981) over whether his last meal, literally 'pig-mild' (*sūkara-maddava*; *D.* II.127), was pork, or truffles dug up by pigs, is rather beside the point. It is notable that the Buddha actually resisted an attempt to make vegetarianism compulsory for monks (*Vin.* II.171–2). This was proposed by his cousin, the monk Devadatta, who is portrayed as having been proud and jealous of the Buddha's influence. In order to foment a schism, he proposed to the Buddha that all monks should both be vegetarian and follow a number of previously optional ascetic practices, such as living at the root of a tree. The Buddha refused, reaffirming that the practices were optional and meat was acceptable if it was 'pure in three respects'. Devadatta then attempted to lead his own order, under these rules, seeking to gain support from those who 'esteem austerity'. Elsewhere, such a purely external way of assessing someone's spiritual worth is seen as unreliable (*A.* II.71). Prior to his enlightenment, in his ascetic phase, Gotama had himself tried the teachings of those who taught 'purity through food', i.e. living off small amounts of only one type of food, be it jujube, beans, sesame or rice. Such externally orientated practices only made him thin and weak, though (*M.* I.80–1). The link between vegetarianism and extreme asceticism is also found in another passage, where it is included among the practices of self-tormenting ascetics, along with such things as nakedness, eating once a week, never sitting down, and pulling out hair (*M.* I.342–3). Such ascetic acts are not seen to 'purify' a person (*Sn.* 249), and meat is not what is to be seen as 'tainted fare' – breaking the precepts is 'tainted fare' (*Sn.* 242).

It is notable, above, that the Buddha did not even regard vegetarianism as an optional ascetic practice for monks. If they were given flesh-food, and it was 'pure' as described above, to refuse it would deprive the donor of the karmic fruitfulness engendered by giving alms-food. Moreover, it would encourage the monks to pick and choose what food they would eat. Food should be looked on only as a source of sustenance, without preferences. To believe that being a vegetarian is itself spiritually purifying would seem to be an example of the spiritual fetter of 'attachment to virtues and vows'. It is certainly the case that a feeling of moral superiority is a common danger among vegetarians: though it can be avoided! Likewise, vegetarians can in time become disgusted with meat, which can be seen as a form of negative attachment. In any case, as the above suggests, there are many worse actions than eating meat.

The preceding discussion is concerned with what is acceptable for a monk or nun, who must, with few exceptions, eat what is given to him

or her. The considerations for a lay Buddhist are similar, but not identical. A lay person has more control over his or her food supply; ingredients must be directly obtained or bought. Lay people, within the limits of their means, make many preference-directed choices over what they eat. So for a lay person to avoid flesh-food (except, perhaps, when a guest) is not to refuse what someone has graciously offered, and not, as such, more 'picking and choosing' than is normal for a lay person. A lay vegetarian must, though, be wary of feelings of judgemental moral superiority, and negative attachment to meat. The latter is best dealt with by not refusing meat if one is someone's guest. While it is in some ways more feasible, then, for a lay person to be a vegetarian than a monk, one feature of Buddhism weighs against this leading to vegetarianism being more common among the laity. Normally, higher standards of behaviour are expected of a monk than of a lay person. If even monks are not expected to be vegetarian, a lay person might well think, 'why should I?'

In Theravāda countries, vegetarianism is universally admired but little practised.³ There is a minority witness of vegetarians, however – such as the one-time governor of Bangkok – and most people have an uneasy conscience when they *think* about meat eating. Most lay people eat meat, though some abstain on observance days, or during periods of meditation. In Thailand, a few monks let it be known that they would prefer vegetarian food (Bunnag, 1973: 69–70). In Burma, Mahāsi Sayadaw recommends vegetarianism as the safest way for monks to ensure that their food is 'pure in three respects' (Mahasi, 1981: 45–7), and some nuns are vegetarian in periods of more ascetic practice (Kawanami, 1990: 27). In Sri Lanka, most nuns are vegetarian (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 140), many 'Protestant Buddhists' (see p. 112) have recommended vegetarianism, as does the Sarvōdaya Śramadāna movement (see pp. 225–34) (Bond, 1988: 280), and some see meat eating as hindering success in meditation (Bond, 1988: 200–4).

In general, it is seen as preferable to eat the meat of an animal which is less intelligent, and/or smaller (cf. p. 52), than the opposite. Thus it is worst of all to eat beef (in Burma prior to British colonization, it was a crime to kill a cow, as it was in the period 1960–2). It is seen as less bad to eat pork, then goat-meat or chicken, and less bad again to eat eggs. Nevertheless, eggs are always regarded as having been fertilized, so to boil or crack an egg is seen as killing a living being (Terweil, 1979: 188).

³ Gombrich, 1971a: 260–2; King, 1964: 281–4; WFBR, 1983.

This means that, in Sri Lanka at least, no eggs are used in Buddhist monasteries, and pre-cracked 'Buddhist eggs' are sold to the middle-class pious Buddhists. It is seen as least bad to eat fish, an unintelligent form of life that needs little effort to kill. Fish is by far the most common form of flesh eaten, as is reflected in a saying on the abundance of food in Thailand, 'There are fish in the water, there is rice in the fields.' Nevertheless, the Buddhist ideal rules out even killing fish. This is expressed in one *Jātaka* story, where the Buddha in a past life is said to have been a crane who only ate fish when he found them already dead (*J.* 1.206–8).

It is clearly the case, though, that any lay Buddhist should not kill an animal for food, or tell someone else to do so. Either action clearly breaks the first precept. The question arises, though, whether buying meat from a butcher is participating in wrong action by encouraging it. One passage (*A.* 11.253) says that a person will be reborn in hell if he kills and encourages others to do so. 'Encouraging' alone is not specified as having this effect, but in any case, such encouraging would normally be seen to be of a direct form, for example 'why don't you go hunting?', or *ordering* a carcass from a butcher (Mahasi, 1981: 46). Clearly, to ask a butcher to kill an animal for one is to break the first precept. In the West, most food animals are killed in large abattoirs, and 'butchers' only sell the meat. Buddhist countries lack such large-scale slaughter-houses (they would be seen as hells on earth), and so obtaining meat is more likely to have the attendant danger of direct involvement in an animal's death. This probably helps to reduce the extent of meat eating.

To make one's living as a butcher, hunter or fisherman clearly comes under the category of 'wrong livelihood' (*A.* 11.208), to be avoided by all sincere Buddhists. Certainly one finds that, in Buddhist societies, butchers (slaughterers and meat salesmen) are usually non-Buddhists, often Muslims (Spiro, 1971: 45). By making a living by or from killing, they are seen as depraved people, and are often treated as outcasts. Buddhist fishermen are more common, though they have a low status in society on account of their livelihood. In Sri Lanka, the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress recommended, in 1985, that the government should not support commercial fishing through having a Ministry of Fisheries (Bond, 1988: 118). Yet, as fish are seen as a lower form of life than land animals, it is seen as less bad to kill them. The excuse is sometimes made that they are not *killed*, but just die when taken out of the water. This is evidently a case of trying to distance oneself from what is recognized as

an unwholesome action. In South-east Asia, people often catch their own fish, which clearly breaks the first precept; but if a living is not made from this, it is not seen as 'wrong livelihood'.

Meat eating in Mahāyāna Buddhism

In the Mahāyāna tradition, Śāntideva had an aspiration that all should avoid meat (Ss. 33), and cited the *Bodhisattva-Prāṭimokṣa* as saying that flesh-food should not be given to a monk, but if it was, he should eat it (Ss. 143). Some texts give arguments for vegetarianism, such advocacy clearly having been facilitated by the climate of opinion that the Buddhist emphasis had helped to create. Jain criticism of meat eating by Buddhists may have also played its part, but the Mahāyāna emphasis on compassion seems to have been a key factor. Thus the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* says that eating meat 'extinguishes the seed of great compassion' (Kapleau, 1981: 34), and has the Buddha explicitly saying, 'I order the various disciples from today that they cannot any more partake of meat.' Ruegg (1980) notes that vegetarianism was first emphasized in texts, such as this, which focused on the idea of the *Tathāgata-garbha*, or Buddha-potential, in all beings. This concept is also found in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, in which a late section has a series of arguments against meat eating,⁴ and has the Buddha *denying* the scriptural idea of it being 'blameless' to eat meat that is 'pure in three respects'. Such a direct contradiction of an earlier scriptural idea is unusual in Mahāyāna texts; non-acceptable ideas are generally subverted, reinterpreted, or seen purely as a 'skilful means'. The arguments of the *Sūtra* can be summarized as follows:

1 All beings, in some past rebirth, have been one's close relative, such as one's mother, or friend. One should look on all beings as if they were one's only child, i.e. with lovingkindness, and not eat them.

2 The smell of a meat eater frightens beings and gives a meat eater a bad reputation.

3 Eating meat by Buddhists means that the *Dharma* will be spoken ill of, and the *Bodhisattvas* will lose their hearers.

4 Meat stinks.

5 Meat eating prevents progress in meditation, and leads to arrogance, as do onions, garlic and alcohol (here the influence of Hindu yoga ideas seem apparent).

⁴ Suzuki, 1932: 211–23; 1930: 368–71.

6 The meat eater sleeps uneasily, with bad dreams (cf. that lovingkindness is said to lead to good sleep); he or she is anxious, with bad digestion and bad health. It is karmically fruitful for a *Bodhisattva* to eat grains, beans, honey, oil, ghee, molasses and sugar etc., and also healthy to do so.

7 Meat eating leads to a bad rebirth as a carnivorous animal, or a low-caste human; vegetarianism leads to a good rebirth.

8 If no meat is eaten, no-one will destroy life, as there will be no market for the bodies.

Here, various types of argument are used: an appeal to love, and to the duty of returning past kindnesses (1); prudence (2); the need to protect the *Dharma* (3); disgust (4); spiritual pragmatism (5); mental and physical health (6); karmic effect (6 and 7); and good indirect consequences of abstinence (8). The *Sūtra* concludes that it is karmically fruitful to avoid flesh-food, that the arguments defending meat eating are spurious, and that the Buddha never ate meat.

By the early fifth century CE, in the Buddhist heart-lands of North-east India, nearly all classes but the lowest came to be vegetarian (Legge, 1886: 43). This influenced Hinduism so that, today, members of the higher castes are often vegetarian. Outside India, it is in Eastern Buddhism that Buddhist arguments for vegetarianism have had a notable effect. The emperor Wu, in 511, included a ban on meat eating among other animal-protecting legislation. This helped lead to the long-term reduction of meat eating by Chinese Buddhists, and the virtual end of meat eating in Chinese monasteries and temples (Welch, 1967: 112–13). Such a requirement for vegetarianism by monks and nuns is enshrined in the supplementary monastic code of Eastern Buddhism known as the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* (Dharma Realm, 1981; De Groot, 1893). Among pious lay people, vegetarianism has been common, being seen as an implication of either the first precept or the *Bodhisattva* vows (Welch, 1967: 365). Vegetarian feasts have been common at festivals, and when the Communist government came to laicize forcibly many monks, quite a proportion turned to running vegetarian restaurants. For Chinese Buddhists, to see Theravāda monks eating meat often comes as a shock, as it is seen as very unmonkly behaviour!

Chinese attitudes have also broadly prevailed in Korea and Japan. It is claimed that Japan was ‘essentially a vegetarian country’ until the middle of the nineteenth century (Kapleau, 1981: 34). Certainly, beef was not eaten. Since the opening of Japan to the West, in 1868, though,

Western meat-eating habits have gradually come to have a considerable influence. The monasteries, especially Zen ones, remain formally vegetarian, though it has been observed that trainee monks do eat meat when away from the monastery (Kapleau, 1981: 27).

In Northern Buddhism, while the tradition is Mahāyāna, the harsh, cold climate, yielding little plant protein, has meant that most people, except for some Lamas, eat meat (Bell, 1928: 217–34). Those Lamas who eat meat, though, may perform a ceremony to help the dead animal gain a good rebirth. A common livelihood is as a nomadic herdsman up on the high pastures of Tibet or on the steppes of Mongolia, so livestock play an important part in the economy of these regions. Nevertheless, people often abstain from meat on observance days – when, in pre-Communist Tibet, slaughtering was banned – and butchers are despised. The most direct method of killing an animal – with a knife – is generally avoided, suffocation being the preferred method. While Theravādins prefer to eat small creatures, the Tibetans reason that it is better to kill a few large animals (cattle, sheep and goats) than many small ones (Ekvall, 1964: 75). The fact that this fits in with the abundance of fish in Theravāda lands and cattle etc. in Tibet is surely no accident! The widespread avoidance of fish and fowl is also related to the practice of disposing of human remains by compassionately making them available to birds and fish. Tibetans are noted for their kindness to animals, and even have scruples about eating honey, for this is seen as entailing theft from bees, a view also found in Sri Lanka (Schmithausen, 1991b: 43). A similar restraint is seen in a story about the Tibetan hermit-saint Milarepa (Mi-la-ras-pa; 1040–1123). When given some meat by hunters passing his isolated cave, he used this very sparingly to supplement his existing diet of nettles. Once maggots started eating the meat, though, he stopped doing so: not out of disgust, but because he felt that clearing out the maggots and eating the meat would be stealing it from them (Evans-Wentz, 1951: 199)!

In the West, vegetarianism among Buddhists is more common than in many parts of Buddhist Asia. This is due to Western expectations of what ‘non-harming’ Buddhists should do, a general increase in vegetarianism in the West, along with ease of obtaining good vegetarian food, and the influence of the Eastern Buddhist model, particularly via America. In Britain, when food is offered to Western monks trained in the Thai tradition, Thais often give dishes containing some flesh, but Westerners give vegetarian ones. This is gradually having the effect of the Thais offering more vegetarian ones.

Animal husbandry

The emperor Asoka prohibited the castration or branding of animals on various holy days, as well as completely banning the killing of young goats, lambs or pigs, or of their mothers while still in milk for them (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 56–7). In China, the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* code says that one should not sell domestic animals, or keep cats, badgers and silk worms (cf. *Uss.* 76, 82). In Theravāda countries, the ‘wrong livelihood’ of ‘trade in flesh’ is generally seen to include keeping livestock for slaughter. In rural Sri Lanka, people keep chickens and pigs for slaughter, though they may evasively refer to their goats as ‘pets’ (Gombrich, 1971a: 261). In Burma, there has been little domestication of animals, except as beasts of burden. The keeping of pigs and chickens has existed on a small scale, but government attempts to increase it have not been very successful (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 345), and it is rare to find a Buddhist cattle-farmer (Spiro, 1971: 45). In Thailand, around a third of people in a typical village might keep pigs and chickens, on a small scale, and there has been a modest rise in numbers of animals (for example a rise from 3.15 million pigs to 5 million between 1950 and 1970), though many people are reluctant to respond to government encouragement to keep cattle. Of those who do keep animals for slaughter, some see it as an evil occupation, but say ‘I have to make a living.’ Older people, who are generally more religious, are least likely to be involved in animal husbandry, even of chickens (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 355).

In the cold climate of Tibet, herding animals is a common form of livelihood, but killing them is seen as a necessary evil. It is avoided by older, more pious members of herding families, and it is preferred that an animal has a natural death, for example falling off a cliff (though this is sometimes deliberately engineered).

In Japan, a common practice is for those who live from killing animals to conduct memorial rites (*kuyō*) for them: for cows by farmers, fish by fishermen, game by hunters. These are performed as a kind of thanks, and perhaps apology, and to ease the animals on their way to a better rebirth. Such rites, though, are even performed for intimate inanimate objects such as an old pair of spectacles, and are now also carried out for pets (Hoshino and Takeda, 1987: 310).

Pest control

The elimination of pests clearly presents an ethical problem for Buddhists: Vasubandhu says that it is deluded to say that poisonous pests

should be killed (*AKB*. iv.68d), and Asoka's edicts include a ban on the killing of vermin (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 56). Where possible, there is often a preference for removing pests to a safe distance and then releasing them.⁵ This is done with rats, mice, insects and even snakes, except the most vicious and deadly ones.⁶ Nevertheless, Ingersoll (1966: 203–4) cites the opinion of a pious Thai villager, in 1960, when he heard that the government were killing some of the many stray dogs, some rabid, in Bangkok: it would be better not to kill them, and they would only bite one if it was one's karma. Likewise, Burmese villagers have been generally unwilling to assist in DDT spraying to kill malaria-spreading mosquitoes (Spiro, 1971: 45). Behaviour towards pests does vary, though. In Thailand, mosquitoes are readily killed, and insecticides are used if they can be afforded (Terweil, 1979: 191). Thais will generally kill rodents and vermin which infest gardens and paddy fields (Bunnag, 1973: 143), though Tibetans do not harm the bold rats and mice that they share their homes and monasteries with (Ekvall, 1964: 76). In Sri Lanka, insecticides are used, though with some remorse and sadness; most people – even monks – (Gombrich, 1971a: 262) will kill harmful insects, but will put up with considerable annoyance from others, and step aside to avoid treading on them (Southwold, 1983: 67–8). Richard Gombrich reports that Sri Lankan villagers, in killing small creatures such as insects, 'do not display the compunction or squeamishness sometimes found in the urban middle class' (1971a: 262). Beyond this, though, uneasiness sets in. Likewise, Barend Terweil reports that for Thai villagers, the killing of animals larger than insects 'is often accompanied with a marked decomposure' (1979: 191), though Jane Bunnag says that most in central Thailand 'appeared to feel no compunction' in killing a pig to feed their family (1973: 143).

If Buddhists do decide to kill pests, they may seek to do so in round-about ways. For example, when a caretaker military government took over Burma in the late 1950s, it wanted to decrease the large stray-dog population in the capital, Rangoon. So as not to be too offensive to Buddhist sensibilities, only *some* of the meat put down to poison the dogs actually contained poison. This meant that it could be argued (?) that the dogs chose the poisoned pieces (and that when they did so, it was due to their past bad karma) (cf. King, 1964: 281). Similarly, in a valley of Kashmir bordering Tibet, Buddhists feel that they have to kill predatory wolves, but seek to do so in a way which obscures personal responsibility

⁵ King, 1964: 280; Ekvall, 1964: 76.

⁶ Spiro, 1971: 46, 449; Hall, 1902: 234–6; Southwold, 1983: 67.

(p. 54). In Tibet, bugs found in clothing will only be removed, not killed, though garments may be hung out on very cold nights, so that the bugs die without being directly 'killed'. Such an act is still seen to generate bad karmic results, though (Ekvall, 1964: 76). From Burma comes the example of people's ground-nut crops being ravaged by a horde of rats (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 345–6). The villagers consulted the monks, the more 'liberal' of whom said that killing the rats was an evil but was unavoidable; moreover, some of the money from the saved crop could be used for religious donations, so as to generate karmic fruitfulness and, it was hoped, counteract the evil. Most of the farmers agreed with this line of reasoning. Another possible attitude in this matter is to say that, if pests must be killed, it should be done in a spirit of lovingkindness, or, if this is seen as self-contradictory, at least lack of cruelty. In line with this, perhaps, is the Japanese practice of conducting memorial rites for dead vermin (Suzuki, 1959: 379); a company which exterminates white ants has even built a memorial tower to them at a Buddhist site (Hoshino and Takeda, 1987: 310). Sometimes a monk may seek to get round the detailed monastic rules against any participation in killing by indirectly suggesting to a lay person that he or she should kill a pest. Gombrich even gives the example of a monk *telling* a young temple servant to kill a cockroach when clearing out a cupboard; but the pious boy merely swept it outside (1971a: 262).

Animal experimentation

The Buddhist ideal of non-injury to animal life clearly has implications for the use of animals in product testing, and in medical research and training. The modern world 'uses' animals for these purposes in large numbers. From a Buddhist perspective, this might be seen as analogous to the animal sacrifices of ancient Brahmanism. In one case, the animals were sacrificed in the name of religion, in the other in the name of 'science' and 'knowledge'. In both cases, the *motive* is, in part at least, to bring benefit to human beings. In the West, the public mood has swung increasingly against the abuse of animals in cosmetics testing. There is also some degree of disquiet concerning the use of animals in school biology classes, where much or all of the knowledge gained could be obtained from video-tapes, slides and models. The use of animals in medical research at least has strong Utilitarian arguments in its favour. Buddhist ethics, though, is not generally based on the principle that the ends justify the means (except in certain versions of Mahāyāna 'skilful

means' theory). From the traditional Buddhist perspective, it is more certain that killing an animal is wrong than that generating better drugs etc. from experiments on it is good (cf. King, 1964: 281). If the early Buddhist attitude to meat eating is applied in this area, though, it will be acceptable for a Buddhist to take drugs which others have developed using animal research. The Mahāyāna ethic would give an ambivalent answer: the precedent of vegetarianism would suggest opposition to drug-testing in that way; the principal of skilful means (see pp. 134–8) might suggest that it was acceptable, where really necessary. However, the precedents of skilful means cases only give possible legitimation for killing someone about to do a heinous act: not for killing innocent beings supposedly to help other beings. Nevertheless, the Western Zen monk Saidō Kennaway regretfully accepts that many developments in modern drugs and surgery have depended on animal dissections and experimentation. He goes on to say:

From a Buddhist point of view, anyone prepared to do this has to know and accept the karma of his actions. This would entail trying to do as little harm as possible, using alternative methods if available, killing only if absolutely necessary, treating the being with tender respect and making sure the knowledge is put to good use. (Shasta Abbey, 1980: 23)

Of course, much testing is not necessary, but arises from an atmosphere of commercial secrecy and rivalry. It might also be pointed out that many modern ills arise as the result of chosen life-styles, for example from smoking, drinking and diet. One might ask if animals should pay the price of alleviating the products of human folly (Story, 1976: 369–71). But, from a Buddhist perspective, that does not rule out compassionate help for those who thus suffer. In any case, most Buddhists would see any angry and violent means of opposition to animal experimentation, by groups such as the (UK) Animal Liberation Front, as unwholesome. Action more in line with traditional Buddhist behaviour would be to liberate animals by *buying* them from establishments that would otherwise experiment on them. Jainism and Buddhism face a similar dilemma. In India, where Jains are very active and influential in the pharmaceutical industry, animals are used for drug testing if really necessary, but are then 'rehabilitated' by recuperation facilities maintained by the laboratories; if possible, they are then released back into the wild (Chapple, 1992: 59).

As regards debate on this issue in modern Buddhist countries, information is sparse. In Thailand, graduate nurses connected to Mahidol

University, which has a 'Center for Animal Experimentation', now have bioethics courses which include a discussion of animal rights (Lindbeck, 1984: 25). Japan also uses laboratory animals, and the tension with Buddhist norms is dealt with by many companies and research facilities performing annual memorial rites to honour the animals they 'use'.⁷ Among Western Buddhists, there is the Buddhist Animal Rights Group, in Britain, and the Buddhists Concerned for Animals group in America (WFBR, 1984: 73–9). The latter focuses on animal experimentation, as well as factory farming and trapping.

POSITIVE REGARD, AND HELP, FOR ANIMALS

As all sentient beings like happiness and dislike pain, however much their specific desires and sensitivities vary, the *Karaṇīya-metta Sutta* speaks of radiating lovingkindness to all types of beings (see pp. 104–5). The eleventh-century *Bodhisattv-āvadāna-kalpalatā* says 'I cannot endure the pain even of an ant' (Dayal, 1932: 199–200), and one *Jātaka* story concerns a bull who would pull one hundred carts, to win his owner a bet, only when the latter stopped using a harsh tone to get him going (*J.* 1.191–3). Thus 'hard words gall even animals'.

In the nineteenth century, Fielding Hall remarked that animals were very well treated in Burma as compared to those in India. Even ownerless dogs were well fed and also very tame. He describes the Burman's attitude to animals as that of 'the gentle toleration of a father to very little children who are stupid and troublesome often, but are very lovable' (1902: 239). Yet while Buddhists are encouraged to be kind to animals, sentimentality is not encouraged, for this goes against the ideal of non-attachment. In principle, this means that lovingkindness should no less be shown to alien, 'uncuddly' creatures such as lobsters than to dogs or cats.

Both humans and animals respond better to those who they feel are friendly, so that lovingkindness is seen to protect a person. Accordingly, the Buddha is said to have halted the charge of the rampaging elephant Nāḷāgiri by suffusing it with lovingkindness, so that it ground to a halt and bowed its head to him (*Vin.* 11.194–6). On another occasion, he taught that the reason a monk was bitten by a snake and had died was that he had failed to radiate lovingkindness to the snakes and other wild animals (*A.* 11.72–3). Even today, monks meditating in the forests of

⁷ Hoshino and Takeda, 1987: 310; LaFleur, 1992: 145.

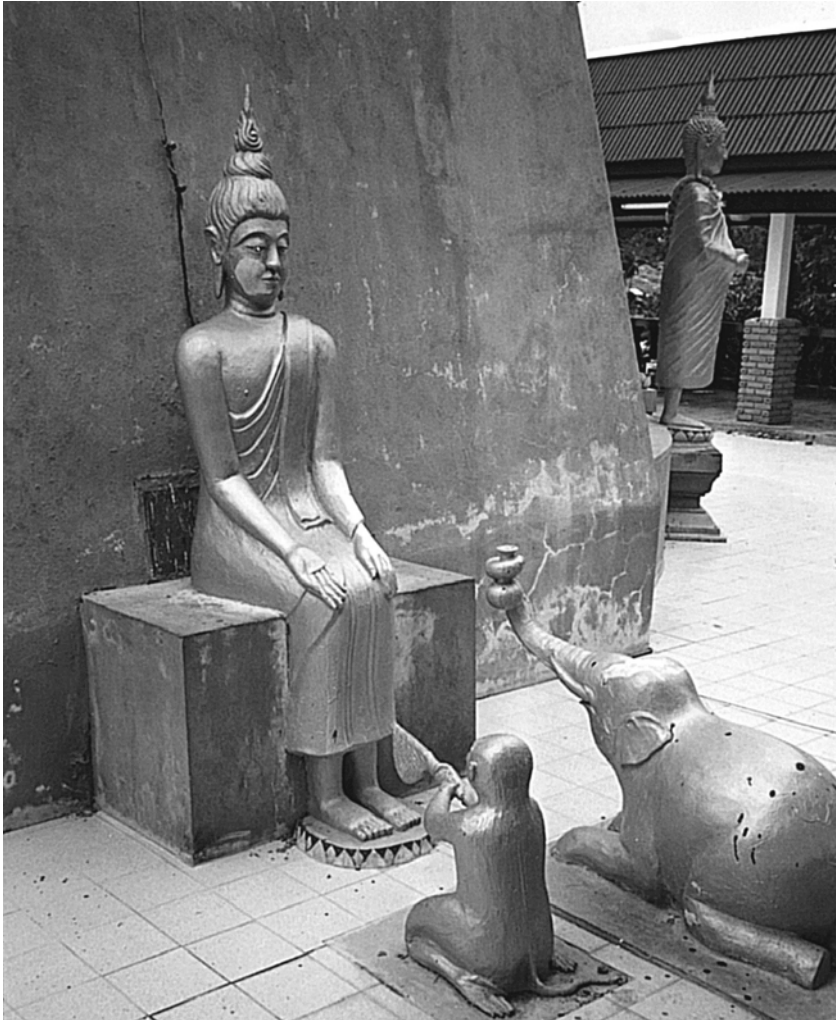


Plate 4. The Buddha with a devoted monkey and elephant before him, at a temple in Ko Samui, Thailand.

Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka radiate this quality to the forest animals, including prowling hungry tigers, as a protection. There are many stories of this working (Tambiah, 1984: 86–7, 88–90).

Animals are seen as responding in a positive way to those who have a kindly presence. Once, the Buddha retired to the forest to be away from some quarrelsome monks. There, an elephant and a monkey were his

companions, bringing him offerings.⁸ In the ‘Three Worlds According to King Ruang’, a fourteenth-century Thai work, it is said that, through the emperor Asoka’s goodness, pigeons and parrots brought him high-quality rice, wild rats nibbled it so as to produce white rice, bees came to make honey for him, bears brought his cooks firewood, and beautiful birds came to display and sing for him (Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 175)!

In the Theravādin monastic code, monks are allowed to release trapped animals or fish, if this is from compassion rather than a desire to steal (*Vin.* iii.62–3). In a more positive vein, a *Jātaka* story tells of the *Bodhisattva* as a hermit who, during a drought, ensured that wild animals got water (*J.* i.449–51). In doing this, he was so busy that he had no time to get himself food, so that the animals gathered it for him, in thanks. In the *Jātaka-māla*, it is said that, as a boy, Gotama saved a goose which his cousin Devadatta had shot with an arrow, and went on to nurse it back to health (Chapple, 1992: 53). One famous story, from the Mahāyāna *Suvarṇa-prabhāsottama Sūtra*,⁹ says that the Buddha, in a past life, even gave his body to a starving tigress that was too weak to sustain herself and her cubs, thus bringing his generosity to full perfection. In Eastern Buddhism, the *Bodhisattva* code known as the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* says: ‘One should be willing to forsake one’s entire body, one’s flesh, hands and feet as an offering to starving tigers, wolves, lions, and hungry ghosts.’¹⁰ Altruism towards animals can also be at a very simple level: thus it is said that it is karmically fruitful even to throw dishwater into a pool or cesspit for insects and other creatures to feed on (*A.* i.161). The Mahāyāna philosopher Nāgārjuna also advised a king to offer food to hungry ghosts, dogs, birds and ants before and after eating, and even to have men put food at the openings of ant-hills (*RPR.* 249–50).

The Zen monk Ryōkwan (1758–1831) acted lovingly even to the lice with which he was afflicted. On early warm winter’s days, he would carefully remove them from his underwear to warm in the sun, and then pop them back (Suzuki, 1959: 372)! An even more altruistic act is attributed to the great Indian scholar-monk Aśaṅga (fourth or fifth century CE). For twelve years he meditated in a cave with a view to gaining a vision of the *Bodhisattva* Maitreya, the embodiment of lovingkindness. One day, frustrated at his lack of success, he saw a poor dog afflicted with a maggot-filled sore. He wished to help the dog, but not harm the

⁸ *Vin.* i.352–3; *Dhp.* A. 1.58–60.

⁹ *Svb.* 202–40; Conze, 1959: 24–6; see also the *Jātaka-māla* (Khoroché, 1989: ch. 1).

¹⁰ Dharma Realm, 1981, 150; cited by Chapple, 1992: 53.

maggots. To pull them from the sore would harm them, so, with great compassion, he coaxed them out onto his warm tongue, and then was about to give them a small portion of his own flesh to feed on. At this point, the dog and maggots disappeared, and Maitreya stood where they had been: Maitreya's testing of him had elicited great love, and thus the long-awaited vision (Thurman, 1981: 22–4).

Among the charitable deeds of the emperor Asoka was the planting of medicinal herbs, and the development of wayside wells and shade-trees, for both humans and animals (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 64). This accords with one of the duties of compassionate *Cakkavatti*: protecting animals and birds (*D.* III.61). One also finds 'retirement homes' for cows in Burma. Buddhist veterinary care would not naturally include the killing of an ill or injured animal, for this would still be a breach of the first precept, and is seen as not unlike killing a sick human. Buddhist compassion would urge the caring for the animal, but not 'putting it to sleep' (Schmithausen, 1991b: 46).

Buddhism also regards the liberating of animals from death as a karmically fruitful act, and in Eastern Buddhism, the *Brahmajāla Sūtra* code requires this. In Chinese Buddhism, particularly at the time of certain festivals or holy days, crabs are returned to the sea, birds are released to the sky, and chickens are saved from slaughter (Welch, 1967: 378–82). Livestock are sometimes released into the care of large monasteries, perhaps with contributions for their upkeep. Such monasteries may also have a pool for fish rescued from fishmongers. Unfortunately, they are not always properly fed. Liberating beings may be an act of worship to Kuan-yin, the *Bodhisattva* embodiment of compassion, or to generate karmic fruitfulness to ward off a natural disaster. Thus Hong Kong Buddhists, during a very bad drought in 1963, released sparrows, turtles, monkeys, deer, tortoises, shellfish, crabs, snakes and eels. Such liberated beings have the three refuges recited on their behalf, to help them towards better future rebirths.

In Burma, people feed the protected turtles and fish at monasteries, and it is seen as good to rescue fish from pools that are drying out, and to transfer them to a river. The freeing of domesticated animals is seen to be very karmically fruitful, and is done collectively in a special ceremony, to protect the community (Spiro, 1971: 271–2). In 1962, the government closed slaughter-houses for three days and released 602 animals, when astrologers predicted a world calamity. Fielding Hall also tells how he went without a meal of chicken when someone bought the bird destined for the pot from his cook, paying over the odds (1902: 231). In Sri

Lanka, the monks of isolated communities occasionally organize a boycott of a butcher's shop, so as to save lives (Gombrich, 1971a: 260). The forest monks also look after orphaned animals such as squirrels or bear cubs (Carrithers, 1983: 291). In Thailand, a person might leave some money in their will for the dogs living in a monastery compound (Bunnag, 1973: 119), and retired draught animals are sometimes allowed to live out their days in peace (Terweil, 1979: 192). At certain festivals, people also buy birds from traders, so as to do the good deed of releasing them. An unfortunate side-effect of this custom, though, is that birds are deliberately captured for this purpose! Turtles released in monastery canals are also sometimes over-crowded and not properly fed (Burns, 1977: 25–37).

PLANTS, TREES AND FORESTS

From the beginning of Buddhism, the forest has represented the ideal place for meditation for monks (see pp. 154–5), as seen in the refrain, 'These are the roots of trees, these are empty places. Meditate, monks . . .' (see, for example, *M.* 1.118). Indeed, Theravāda monks specializing in meditation are known as 'forest monks', whether or not they actually reside in the forest (Carrithers, 1983; Tambiah, 1984). For lay people, forests may not be so inviting, but there is karmic fruitfulness in planting groves and fruit-trees for human use (*S.* 1.33). Devotion to the Buddha may also be shown by watering of, and making offerings before, the type of tree under which Gotama attained Buddhahood (*ficus religiosa*), known as *Bodhi*-trees.¹¹

The Buddhist ideal of non-harming is one that extends to all sentient beings. What, though, of plants?¹² The Jains certainly thought that plants, and even minerals, contained life-principles or souls (*jīvas*) and were part of the round of rebirths. Buddhist texts, though, do not say that it is possible to be reborn as a plant,¹³ or for a plant to be reborn, and later texts explicitly deny this (*AKB.* iv.36a–b). Nevertheless, the Buddha is described as having avoided harm to seed and plant life (*D.* 1.5), and there are monastic rules against harming trees and plants. It is

¹¹ Harvey, 1990b; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 384–410.

¹² For a detailed discussion on plants and sentience in early Buddhism, see Schmithausen, 1991a.

¹³ An exception is the 'Tale of *Saṅgharakṣita*', cited in the *Sikṣā-samuccaya* (*Ss.* 58–9) as referring to bad monks reborn as 'trees, leaves, flowers and fruit'. As this also has the nonsensical idea of such monks being reborn as non-organic things such as walls or mortars, though, it is of little significance.

an offence requiring expiation (by acknowledgement) for a monk to fell a tree or to ask someone else to do so (*Vin.* iv.34–5). Here, the occasion for making the rule is that a god who had lived in a felled tree complained to the Buddha. In addition, lay people complained that Buddhist monks, in felling trees, were ‘harming life that is one-facultied’ (*ekindriya jīva*): i.e. only possessing the sense of touch (*Vin. A.* 575), an idea found in Jainism. The Buddha thus bans the destruction of ‘vegetable growths’ by monks. One might speculate that the ‘one-facultied life’ could refer to the many small insects living on trees and plants. However, the explanation of the above rule only refers to various kinds of plants and trees, not to the insects that live on them. Indeed, the rule against monks wandering during the rainy season was made to avoid people’s accusations that Buddhist monks were ‘injuring life that is one-facultied and bringing many small creatures (literally: breathers) to destruction’ by trampling growing crops and grasses (*Vin.* i.137; my italic). Nor could ‘one-facultied life’ refer to the tree deity in the above passage: as the god is seen as conversing with the Buddha, he could hardly be seen as lacking all senses except touch. In another passage on tree-felling, after a reference to people’s concern over ‘one-facultied life’, the Buddha criticizes a monk who has cut down a large tree used as a shrine, saying ‘For, foolish man, people are percipient of a life-principle in a tree’¹⁴ (*Vin.* iii.156). There is also a rule against monks digging the ground or asking someone to do so (*Vin.* iv.32–3). Here, there is again reference to concern over ‘one-facultied life’, and then to people who ‘are percipient of life-principle(s) in the ground’. In both cases, the motive of the rule seems to be to avoid offending popular sensibilities. The belief in ‘one-facultied life’ is not endorsed by the Buddha, but it is not actually criticized either. After a careful examination of the evidence on this in early Buddhist texts, Lambert Schmithausen holds that plants were seen as a ‘border-line case’ as regards sentient life, and there was no real interest in resolving the matter as a theoretical issue (1991a: 69). The *Abhidhamma*, though, lacks reference to ‘one-facultied life’ in its very detailed analysis of phenomena. In practice, however, plants were still included within the ambit of non-violence for monks (Schmithausen, 1991b: 6–7).

The relationship of a tree-deity to ‘his’ or ‘her’ tree is generally seen

¹⁴ ‘Jīva-saññino hi moghapurisa manussā rukkhasmim.’ I. B. Horner, in *Book of the Discipline*, vol. 1, p. 267, translates ‘For, foolish man, in a tree are people having consciousness as living beings.’ While this is a possible translation, it is highly unlikely that any living being(s) within a tree would be seen as *manussā*: people or humans. It is much more likely that this refers back to the ‘people’ (*manussā*) who had expressed concern over ‘one-facultied life’.

as a close one. In some texts, while a deity may be harmed in the process of felling his or her tree, he or she may move on to another one (*Vin.* iv.34). In one *Jātaka* story, though, such a deity is referred to as being ‘reborn’ (*nibbata*) in his tree, and the tree is referred to both as the deity’s ‘mortal body’ (*sarīra*) and as his ‘mansion’ (*vimāna*). In this case, the god’s life will last only as long as his mansion does (*J.* iv.153–6).

There are no rules against lay people felling trees (*Miln.* 266), but it is seen as an act of treachery to a friend to cut off the branch of a tree under whose shade one has rested (*J.* v.240; *Pv.* ii.9, verse 3). Nevertheless, it is seen as bad form for a tree-deity to prevent his or her tree from bountifully fruiting, if this is simply because one ungrateful individual has cut a branch off it after enjoying its fruit (*A.* iii.369–70). In this case, it is said that the god Sakka will summon the tree-deity to instruct the deity to ‘keep tree-*dhamma*’: to allow people to take from the tree’s roots, bark, leaves and fruit without getting upset. If the monastic ideal is one of complete non-violence to trees, then, the lay ideal is one of co-operative harmony with them and their deities.

In a similar way, the monastic prohibition on digging the ground has some effect on lay practice, too. In Tibet, people are careful in digging the ground for fear of hurting worms etc. Likewise, in Southern Buddhist lands, some abstain from farming on observance days, to avoid injury to worms and insects. The image of the very pious lay person certainly reflects the monastic ideal. One early text (*M.* ii.51–2) speaks of the behaviour of a lay ‘Non-returner’ saint, who was the supporter of a former Buddha:

Ghaṭikāra the potter, sire, is one who has laid aside jewels and wrought gold . . . does not dig the earth with a spade or with his own hands; willingly he makes a vessel from the soil of a bank that is crumbling or scratched out by rats and dogs.

Clearly, this is an ideal for an abstemious few, but it is an ideal nevertheless!

In China and Japan, there was much debate on the nature of plants and trees.¹⁵ Mahāyāna teachings promised the enlightenment of ‘all sentient beings’. Did this mean that plants, trees and the land were excluded from enlightenment, and devoid of the Buddha-nature, the enlightenment-potential? In China, Chi-t’sang (549–623), of the San-lun school, held that non-sentient beings such as plants and trees had the Buddha-nature, but as they lacked a mind, they could not actualize this potential

¹⁵ LaFleur: 1973–4; Shaw: 1985.

by experiencing Buddhahood. The T'ien-t'ai monk Chan-jan (711–82), on the other hand, argued that as the Buddha-nature is the immutable mind at the base of all phenomena, even soil and dust, nothing could be excluded from Buddhahood. Certainly all could progress towards it by appropriate action, even if this were through the minute movements present in soil. In Japan, the indigenous reverence for nature fuelled the continuing debate. Ryōgen (912–85), of the Tendai school, held that plants were sentient and that their growth was a process of quiet, steady training towards enlightenment, which came when they bore fruit. Their stillness was that of a being in meditation. Shōshin (1189–1204), on the other hand, denied that plants and trees were sentient. He pointed out, moreover, that no *Sūtra* or treatise said that they could attain enlightenment. Kūkai (774–835), the founder of the tantric Shingon school, however, saw all phenomena, sentient or non-sentient, as manifestations of the body and mind of Mahā-vairocana Buddha, and thus not devoid of mind, the prerequisite for Buddhahood. Dōgen (1200–53), founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan, went even further. He saw the whole phenomenal world as not *manifesting* or *containing* the Buddha-nature, the ultimate, but as *being* it. While such Mahāyāna texts as the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* had denied that walls and stones had the Buddha-nature, he asserted they, like all else, *were* it. The whole changing flux of empty phenomena was nothing but the Buddha-nature, within which it was not possible to designate anything as 'non-sentient'. For him, 'There is a world of living beings in a blade of grass', as in water, air, fire, earth or a staff (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 12). Each aspect of nature has an intrinsic value as part of ultimate reality, and to let go of oneself in full awareness of the sound of the rain or the cry of a monkey is to fathom this in a moment of non-dual awareness. As he put it:

The ocean speaks and mountains have tongues – that is the everyday speech of the Buddha . . . If you can speak and hear such words, you will be one who truly comprehends the entire universe. (Nishiyama and Stevens, 1975: 104–5)

For Dōgen as for the nature-poet Saigyō (1118–90), being in tune with nature was salvific.

CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

The emperor Asoka prohibited the burning of forests without reason (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 56), and the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, popular in China, said that one should not set fire to hills, woodland or fields.

Nevertheless, conservation of species and habitat is not something that Buddhist cultures, in pre-modern times, have had to give much attention to, as Buddhist values have meant that the environment has not been over-exploited. Kabilsingh (1988) points out that on the small, crowded island of Sri Lanka, wildlife has not been virtually eliminated, as in many other regions of the world, this being largely due to religious sensibilities. Places such as the ancient Buddhist capitals of Anurādhapura and Polonnaruwa have acted as wildlife sanctuaries. Hunting is rare – being done by some poor people in remote areas (Gombrich, 1971a: 261) – as it is in Burma, where only non-Buddhists seem to do it (Spiro, 1971: 45). In pre-Communist Tibet, ‘herds of wild blue sheep, yak, deer and flocks of migrating birds would travel with Tibetan nomads’ (Kabilsingh, 1988: 19). Hunting of animals for meat occurred, but there were many extensive nature-reserves in central Tibet, especially round the capital or any monastery or sacred site (Ekvall, 1964: 76).

The situation in a number of Buddhist countries, though, is changing, because of the influence of Western values, whether in the form of consumerism, or Communist state capitalism. In Tibet, Chinese exploitation of the country’s natural resources has led to much of its wildlife being killed and its forests felled. In Thailand’s *laissez-faire* capitalist economy, consumerism and rapid economic change are also having a deleterious effect on the environment. In 1945, 70 per cent of the country was still forested; by 1989 it was around 15 per cent, on account of logging and the spread of agri-business, such as growing tapioca or tobacco, or prawn farms where there were once mangrove swamps. Government sanctioning of deforestation has also set a bad example for villagers, who have taken wood from remaining areas for fire-wood, charcoal, and to clear for cultivation. In the 1970s, many birds were killed by eating fish poisoned by DDT, and jungle fowl were being hunted out of existence. Even with tough penalties, there was much poaching in the forests. Every year, 50,000 birds, belonging to 40 species, were harvested from forests for food, and 375,000 birds of 350 species – including some protected ones – were used for non-food purposes (MacAndrews and Sien, 1979: 108). The 1960 Wildlife Act imposed a fine of up to \$500, or one year in prison, for killing a member of a protected species, but the fine had to be doubled in 1972 as wildlife was still decreasing, partly through poor enforcement (p. 33).

Bhikkhu Bodhi, an American Theravāda monk, affirms that at the root of the world-wide ‘ecocrisis’ – in the form of pollution, resource depletion, erosion, deforestation – is the presumption ‘that the means to

human well-being lies in increased production and consumption' (Sandell, 1987: vi), that is, in the ideal of unlimited material 'progress'. He refers to:

a number of assumptions specific to Western industrial society: that happiness and well-being lie in the satisfaction of our material needs and sensual desires; that the basic orientation of man to nature is one of conflict and struggle aimed at subjugation; that nature must be conquered and made subservient to the satisfaction of our desires. (p. vii)

Bodhi thus sees a need for the practical implications of the Buddhist perspective to be articulated in a new way to the leaders of Buddhist lands currently under the sway of the Western model of development. As Klas Sandell expresses it, the Buddhist ideal is co-operation with nature, not domination – or passive submission to it (1987: 36). Seeking to *overcome* external nature is likely to be an expression of human greed and attachment. Helena Norberg-Hodge (1991), who studied the traditional Buddhist life of Ladakh, an Indian region bordering Tibet, points out that life was 'based on co-evolution between human beings and the earth' (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 43), but that, since the opening up of the area in 1974, the development of a cash economy and an influx of tourists have subverted this balance. To help the Ladakhis reach an appropriate accommodation with the modern world, she has aided the setting up of the Ladakh Ecological Development Group (1983), to introduce environmentally friendly technology such as greenhouses, solar ovens and hydraulic rams (p. 53). While material progress brings undoubted benefits, it needs to be tempered by the Buddhist reflections that 'contentment is the greatest wealth' (*Dhp.* 204) and that craving is the root of suffering. As Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese social activist resident in France, says, 'We must be determined to oppose the type of modern life filled with pressures and anxieties that so many people now live. The only way out is to consume less' (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 108). A Buddhist movement which follows such a perspective is the Sarvōdaya Śramadāna movement of Sri Lanka. Founded in 1958, this aims to improve the lives of rural people by awakening them to their own powers and abilities, over against unsympathetic urban modernizers. They aim at appropriate development, based on an economics of sufficiency, free from 'pollution' by materialist values. Accordingly, they concentrate on ten 'basic needs', including a clean, safe and beautiful environment, and activities include cleaning canals and building roads, wind-pumps and biogas generators (Macy, 1983; Batchelor and Brown,

1992: 78–86). Their camps also include environmental and reforestation schemes (Ariyaratne, 1995: 9).

Even in rapidly modernizing Thailand, wild animals and fish in the region of monasteries are often left unharmed, so that the areas have been small nature-reserves. Accordingly, Wat Phailom, near Bangkok, has the last remaining breeding-ground in Thailand for the open-billed stork, thousands of which live there in winter and autumn (Kabilsingh, 1988: 17–18). Since 1966, a programme for training monks to help in community development has included advice on the preservation of nature. Moreover, sophisticated urban dwellers have come to appreciate the isolated forest monasteries of certain meditation masters such as Ajahn Chah, in the north-east. Their visits to such places, to develop more inner peace and wisdom, undoubtedly help to build an appreciation for the forest. An active conservation movement has now developed in Thailand, involving members of the royal family, pop singers, government officials, monks, and many ordinary people, with the Wildlife Fund Thailand sponsoring Buddhism and nature conservation projects, especially to highlight Buddhist teachings which relate to nature and conservation. Relevant material includes instructions to monks to recycle old robes (*Vin.* II.291) and not to pollute water or green grass with urine or excrement (*Vin.* IV.205–6), and the ideal of having a quiet environment (*A.* v.15). The Thai-Tibetan ‘Buddhist Perception of Nature Project’ has distributed 3,000 books of Buddhist stories and teachings related to the environment. It will be followed by 50,000 more, to be sent to all Thai monasteries and teachers in training colleges. Audio-visual and television programmes are also planned. Similar literature is being distributed among Tibetans in India, and the project aims to expand to Korea and Japan. Its founder and co-ordinator, Nancy Nash, based in Hong Kong, says that previously, Buddhists have passively protected nature, but now they need to be more overtly active in doing so (Sandell, 1987: 73–5). Nash was herself inspired by the Dalai Lama’s emphasis on ‘universal responsibility’. In his 1989 Nobel Peace Prize lecture, the exiled Dalai Lama expressed his aspiration that, in future, the Tibetan plateau would become a ‘Zone of Non-violence’ which

would be transformed into the world’s largest natural park or biosphere. Strict laws would be enforced to protect wildlife and plant life; the exploitation of natural resources would be carefully regulated so as not to damage relevant ecosystems; and a policy of sustainable development would be adopted in populated areas. (Piburn, 1990: 24; Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 112–13)

In Thailand, a major concern has been with the effects of deforestation, which has led to land erosion, hotter, shorter rainy seasons, and flooding when the rains come. In 1978, the government banned the export of much unprocessed wood, and started a reforestation project, though this has favoured quick-growing eucalyptus monoculture plantations. In 1989, the country was the first in the world to ban logging completely, stimulated by a public outcry after 350 people were killed by flooding and mud-slides, due to illegal logging. The measure was taken against the powerful vested interests of the logging industry, which then moved its activities to neighbouring forest-rich Buddhist lands such as Burma, Laos and Cambodia. The government also allows the import of timber from Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Particular problems exist in northern Thailand, where various opium-growing hill-tribes have practised slash-and-burn agriculture, leading to forest loss and disruption of streams to the lowlands. Since the 1970s, Phra Ajahn Pongsak Tejadhammo, a forest monk, watched a tobacco company destroying much of the local lowland forest, then the locals finishing it off, then in-coming Hmong hill-tribes starting to destroy the higher, watershed forest with their slash-and-burn methods. His concern at this led him, since the early 1980s, to organize the villagers of the Mae Soy valley, near Chiang Mai, to protect the forests and help in reforestation of their now eroding land and its watersheds. The aim is to aid river-flow and irrigation and so benefit villagers' livelihood through sustainable food production. Ajahn Pongsak teaches the villagers that they depend on the forest for water, and thus food, so it is their moral duty to protect and foster it with gratitude. It should be looked on as like a second parent, with the forest animals being like the villagers' brothers and sisters. He emphasizes that a harmony with nature is the basis of true Buddhist morality, and that the healthy functioning of the forest is the key to the natural balance, which includes and benefits humankind. The forest ensures 'a healthy harmony in people's lives both physically and mentally' (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 92). He strongly links Buddhism to respect for nature:

Dharma, the Buddhist word for truth and the teachings, is also the word for nature. This is because they are the same. Nature is the manifestation of truth and of the teachings. When we destroy nature we destroy truth and the teachings. (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 99)

Ajahn Pongsak emphasizes that the villagers must have land to support themselves, or they will continue to destroy the forest. He urges villagers

to self-help and co-operative effort, not relying on government subsidies etc. for aiding their environment. The work is based on collective decision-making, and donation of labour (as in the Sarvōdaya Śramadāna movement of Sri Lanka). By 1985, the movement involved 274 villages, had replanted half a square kilometre of forest, and was planning to replant eight square kilometres. Since then, many villagers have been involved in running a tree-nursery, terracing eroded hillsides, planting thousands of seedlings and building reservoirs and canals. By 1992, over 1,000 villages participated, with 97,000 people involved (Swearer, 1995: 128). Areas of forest land have also been fenced off for protection – which led to an attempt to prosecute Ajahn Pongsak for encroaching on government-‘protected’ forest! The government allows the Hmong to live on the watershed, growing subsidized cabbages instead of – it is hoped – opium. Ajahn Pongsak, though, opposes this as a too easy form of ‘compassion’. He prefers bringing them down to the lowlands – where opium cannot grow – and giving them land. This will also prevent the insecticides they use from polluting water-courses.

In 1990, the UN Environmental Programme’s ‘Global 500 Roll of Honour’ included Ajahn Pongsak – along with the Thai Prime Minister and a Thai villager who turned his land into a sanctuary for birds (Tangwisuttiji, 1990). Scores of monks in other areas are now following the example of Ajahn Pongsak, and a number of monasteries are actively acquiring land for reforestation. Ajahn Pongsak’s activism has included participating in protests against allowing mining in forest areas. He is the founding head of Monks for Preservation and Development of Lives and Environment, formed in 1990. This has met at ecologically threatened sites, such as a proposed dam site in the south which would flood a large tract of ancient rain-forest. Monks participated by living in this forest, on a rota basis, to prevent this. In 1991, Phra Kru Udom Patakorn even ordained trees in the last remaining patch of ancient forest in his part of the north-east, to prevent them from being felled for a eucalyptus plantation. Unfortunately Ajahn Pongsak disrobed in 1993 because he was charged with a monastic offence entailing expulsion, but he has continued his work as an eight-precept lay person (Swearer, 1995: 128).

Thai activists have also made some contact with the Japan Tropical Forest Action Network. Japan, which has a weak, but growing, environmental movement, imports 45 per cent of the world’s tropical timber, which it uses mainly as disposable plywood shuttering for concrete buildings. It protects its own forests, though, and it has a good record on pollution control, energy conservation and recycling.

In 1986, an inter-faith conference on the environment was called at Assisi, Italy. There, the (Tibetan) Buddhist representative affirmed, for example, that Buddhists should strive to protect habitats and ensure that endangered species do not become extinct (Harris, 1991: 101). In a rather sceptical tone, Ian Harris questions how deep-rooted environmentalism is in Buddhism, suggesting that it is largely in response to fashionable concerns coming from the West. Its recent rise as a self-conscious concern among Buddhists, though, can be seen as largely due to an awareness of the destructive impact of modernization – which was first experienced in the West. Harris cites *D.* iii.74–5, which describes a future golden age, where humans, after a moral decline into a period of great conflict, learn to be highly moral again, and the world is prosperous. Then, ‘cities and towns are so close to one another that a cock can comfortably fly from one to the next. In this perfect world, only urban and suburban environments are left. The jungle has been fully conquered’ (Harris, 1991: 108). Harris sees this as a vision in which civilization is compatible with the ‘total destruction of the wilderness’. And yet, in the period of conflict, people are said to have retired to the jungle and mountains to avoid killing or being killed. The implication is, perhaps, that in a highly moral society, there is no actual *need* of wilderness, not that it should be ‘conquered’;¹⁶ and in any case, an urban environment may still have nature interspersed in it in semi-wild parks etc.

It is certainly appropriate, though, to question whether Buddhism has any particularly strong reasons for protecting *species*. The Buddhist concern has always been for the suffering of any sentient being, of whatever species. In an aeons-old world of change and impermanence, it is to be expected that species will become extinct (though this is happening more rapidly than usual at present). Nevertheless, each dying species consists of suffering individuals, and Buddhist concern should certainly focus on these. Buddhist principles might not strongly support saving ‘the’ whale, but they support saving whales! Where saving (members of) one endangered species involves killing members of another species, however, Buddhism will not be supportive. Moreover, classical Buddhist ethics would not, without being extended, see killing the last rhinoceros as *worse* than killing one when they were plentiful, or killing a cow, say. To kill a rhinoceros deliberately *so as* to try to end the species could be seen as worse, however, both because it would be a very destructive act

¹⁶ Harris develops his views in Harris, 1994a, 1994b, 1995a, 1995b and 1997, while Schmithausen, 1991b and 1997 takes a somewhat more positive view on Buddhist support for environmental concerns.

and because it would offend many people. A world without a particular species is still the conditioned world of suffering beings. If the human species became extinct, then an opportunity to be born as a being capable of enlightenment would be lost – at least in this part of the universe. While the same could not be said of any other species, the higher animals at least are seen as capable of some virtue, so their loss would also hinder the spiritual progress of beings. Accordingly, for some animals, to kill one when one knows that this will push its species closer to extinction, even if this is not one's intention, can indeed be seen as a worse act than if the species were not an endangered one.

One endangered species is the tiger, partly threatened by the traditional Chinese belief that eating parts of a tiger sustains virility. Thus tigers are still imported from the dwindling numbers of India and Bangladesh into Taiwan – supposedly as 'pets'. In 1986, it was reported that Buddhist leaders there planned to buy twelve such tigers to save them from being eaten at the Chinese new year. Other endangered species are various types of whales, which the Japanese are active in hunting 'scientifically' in spite of a world moratorium. Japanese whale-hunting can be seen as the product of several factors. The fact that Japan is an island has meant that the sea has been looked to as a great food-provider. The traditional preference for sea-foods was probably also strengthened by Buddhist concerns over meat eating, for fish are seen as a low form of life. Philip Kapleau reports one whaler as saying 'If whales were like pigs or cows, making lots of noise before they die, I could never shoot them. Whales die without making a noise. They're like fish' (1981: 47) (in fact, whales in distress do make a noise: but those above water cannot hear them). With more powerful boats, and an increasing secularism, there has been much whale killing. In the post-war period, this was initially encouraged by the American occupying force, so as to help feed the starving population of Japan. Today, though, whale-meat is not much eaten, and the carcasses are largely used for pet food and industrial products. To an average Japanese, killing a whale is no worse than killing a cow, though of course a pious Buddhist would not want to do either. Given the Buddhist concern for 'all sentient beings', Japanese whaling, and the Japanese emphasis on memorial rites, it is perhaps not surprising that Buddhist monks sometimes carry out memorial rites for the whales killed by whalers (Hoshino and Takeda, 1987: 310). Kapleau reports one such in 1979, put on by a Zen temple, and with government officials and executives of a large whaling company in the congregation (1981: 46–50). Unfortunately, the service did not seem to contain any dis-

couragement of whaling, but was more like a way to salve people's consciences.

Beyond Asia, Buddhists have been active in environmental matters. In France, the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh has set up the international Tiep Hien (Inter-being) order of meditators and social/peace activists. Among the precepts of the order is, 'Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature' (Eppsteiner, 1988: 151). Nhat Hanh teaches his followers to use verses which remind them of their inter-relationship with the world, and their duties towards it. For example, when turning on a tap or drinking water, they should reflect:

Water flows over these hands
May I use them skilfully
to preserve the planet. (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 106)

As Thich Nhat Hanh says, 'We, ourselves, are made of non-self elements, the sun, the plants, the bacteria and the atmosphere' (Badiner, 1990: 177). In a similar vein, Stephen Batchelor says,

We feel ourselves to be separate selves in a separate world full of separate things. We feel separate from each other, separate from the environment that sustains us and separate from the things we use and enjoy. We fail to recognize them for what they are: part of us as we are of them. (Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 32)

The image of Indra's net (p. 153) is frequently alluded to by Buddhist modernists, both Western and Asian, who seek to infuse ecological activism with a Buddhist motivation based on a vision of the deep inter-relationship of all things.¹⁷ The implicit logic, here, is that we should respect the other beings and environment that we depend on, and be aware that our negative actions towards the rest of nature go on to affect us. Those who abuse nature, in blindness to this, should be respected as human beings, but not aided.

CONCLUSION

For Buddhism, humans are a part of the community of sentient beings in a conditioned world where suffering is endemic. Humans are not seen as set over non-human nature as 'stewards', but as neighbours to other, less intelligent, sentient beings. The spiritual potential of humans means that they are to be more valued than members of other species, but that very potential is expressed and enhanced by compassionate regard for

¹⁷ See e.g., Badiner, 1990: 61; Batchelor and Brown, 1992: 11, 35; Macy, 1991; Sandell, 1987.

any being. To kill or harm another being deliberately is to ignore the fragility and aspiration for happiness that one has in common with it. When it comes to indirectly causing harm to sentient beings, Buddhism's emphasis on an ethic of intention means that such actions are not necessarily blameworthy. Yet its positive emphasis on compassion means that the removal of causes of harm to beings *is* praiseworthy.

CHAPTER 5

Economic ethics

Hunger is the greatest illness . . . Contentment is the greatest wealth.

Dhammapada 203–4

Economic ethics covers a wide range of issues: types of work or business practices, the approach to work in general and entrepreneurship in particular, the use to which income is put, attitudes to wealth, the distribution of wealth, critiques of politico-economic systems such as capitalism and Communism, and the offering of alternatives to these in both theory and practice. In a Buddhist context, it also entails a consideration of such issues in relation to lay citizens, governments, and the *Saṅgha*.

LAY ECONOMIC ETHICS

In his teachings, the Buddha included advice to the laity on how best to generate and use their income, the various aspects of which are well encapsulated at *S.* iv.331–7 (and *A.* v.176–82):

1 As to how wealth is *made*, it is praiseworthy to do so in a moral way (in accordance with *Dhamma*), without violence, and blameworthy to do the opposite.

2 As to *using* the product of one's work, it is praiseworthy to use it:

- (a) to give ease and pleasure to oneself;
- (b) to share it with others, and to use it for generous, karmically fruitful action.

Correspondingly, it is blameworthy to be miserly with oneself or mean with others.

3 Even if wealth is made in a moral way, and used to benefit oneself and others, one is still blameworthy if one's *attitude* to one's wealth is greed and longing, with no contentment or heed for spiritual development.

These points form a useful framework for the first part of this chapter.

Right livelihood

The 'right livelihood' factor of the Eightfold Path entails that one's means of livelihood should not be dishonest or otherwise cause suffering

to other living beings. 'Wrong livelihood' is trade in: weapons (being an arms salesman), living beings (keeping animals for slaughter),¹ meat (being a slaughterer, meat salesman, hunter or fisherman), alcoholic drink, or poison (*A.* III.208). Such trades, especially being a slaughterer or hunter, are socially despised in Buddhist societies, and are said to lead to a bad rebirth. Wrong livelihood is also seen as any mode of livelihood that is based on trickery or greed (*M.* III.75), that is, which entails breaking the second precept: stealing, directly or by deception. To be able to see how to increase one's wealth is fine, but to be blind to moral considerations, so as to do so 'with tricks, fraud and lies: worldly, purse-proud', is to be 'one-eyed' (*A.* I.129–30). While the early texts only give a short list of types of 'wrong livelihood', in the modern context, a Buddhist might add others to the list (Whitmyer, 1994). For example: doing experiments on animals; developing pesticides; working in the arms industry; and perhaps even working in advertising, to the extent that this is seen as encouraging greed, hatred and delusion, or perverting the truth (Saddhatissa, 1971: 52). The Western Zen teacher Aitken Roshi says that the precept against false speech implies that one should not work in a normal advertising agency, or swallow advertising lies either, thus showing complicity with lying (1984: 52).

The *Maṅgala Sutta* holds that a great blessing is 'work which is free from upset (*anākulā*)' (*Sn.* 262), which of course can often arise from conflict amongst employees or between employees and employer. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* says that a person should look after servants and employees 'by arranging their work according to their strengths, by supplying them with food and wages, by looking after them when they are ill, by sharing delicacies with them and by letting them off work at the right time' (*D.* III.191). In response, they should be diligent and honest, and uphold their employer's reputation. The *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta*, an early Mahāyāna text, says that a righteous ruler should censure those

who do not properly share with their wife, children, servants, maids or workers; or who make the livelihood of others difficult through overworking them or asking them to perform degrading work,

as this is 'wrong livelihood' (*ASP.* 198). While a form of slavery was countenanced by the emperor Asoka in India, in his Rock Edict XI he emphasized that slaves and servants should be treated well (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 45). In modern times, slavery remained legal in Thailand

¹ The Thai monk Ven. Payutto sees this as also including controlling prostitutes (1993: 61).

prior to 1872 (Tambiah, 1976: 191–2), but it had never entailed the kind of degradation found in the Western slave trade.

Moral and spiritual qualities aiding worldly success

The early texts see success in ethical livelihoods as a boon, and see a person's moral and spiritual qualities as contributing to such success, rather than in any way hindering it. Such success-enhancing qualities include (cf. Rājāvaramuni, 1990: 39–40):

- (1) faith in the Buddha, keeping the moral precepts, a generous, open-handed attitude, and understanding the bad effects of the five hindrances (desire for sense-pleasures, ill-will, laziness, agitation and vacillation) (*A.* 11.66–7);
- (2) a moral life, free from laziness (*D.* 11.85);
- (3) vigilance (*appamāda*) (*S.* 1.86);
- (4) 'dwelling in a suitable place, association with good people, perfect application of self, and previous karmically fruitful acts' (*A.* 11.32; cf. *Sn.* 259–60).

In modern South-east Asia, for example, success in this life is seen to depend on karmic fruitfulness from previous lives as well as current application and knowledge (Spiro, 1966: 1165; Nash, 1965: 162). A passage at *A.* 11.281–5 asserts that happiness and success in this life come from:

- (a) the 'attainment of energy': that is, being skilful and industrious in one's work, whatever it is, and with an enquiring mind. A similar passage at *A.* 11.67 talks of 'that same noble disciple, with wealth acquired by energetic striving, amassed by strength of arm, won by sweat, in accordance with *Dhamma* (what is right and proper), and gained in accordance with *Dhamma*';
- (b) the 'attainment of watchfulness': taking care with one's possessions so that they are not lost by the action of kings, robbers, fire, water or ill-disposed heirs;
- (c) *association with good, virtuous people*: so as to emulate their qualities of faith, virtue, charity and wisdom;
- (d) *leading a 'balanced life'*: not being unduly elated by successes or depressed by failures. A person should also avoid both outgoings exceeding income and the pointless hoarding of wealth. Loss of wealth by looseness with women, drunkenness, gambling and friendship with evil people should be avoided.

In a similar way, the *Sigālovāda Sutta* talks of six ways of dissipating one's wealth:

Addiction to strong drink and sloth-producing drugs . . . haunting the street at unfitting times, attending fairs, being addicted to gambling, keeping bad company, and habitual idleness. (*D.* III.182)

Details of the disadvantages of each of these are then given (pp. 182–3). For example, the drunk wastes his money and he quarrels; one who wanders the streets at night leaves himself and his family unprotected; one who frequents fairs is preoccupied with finding entertainments; the gambler loses his money, makes enemies, and is not trusted; one who keeps bad company is led astray; the lazy person puts off his work, thinking: ‘It’s too cold’ or ‘it’s too hot’; ‘it’s too early’ or ‘it’s too late’; ‘I’m too hungry’ or ‘I’m too full’! In such ways, a person wastes what he has already earned and fails to generate new earnings. The *Sigālovāda Sutta* also counsels caution in the use of wealth, saying that a quarter should be used for one’s own ease and convenience, half for one’s business or occupation, and a quarter should be saved, against adverse times (*D.* III.188). Accordingly, as being in debt is seen as stressful (*A.* III.350), being free of debt is a source of happiness (*A.* II.69–70).

Appropriate uses of income

In accordance with the above ideal of ‘balance’ in one’s life, both a miser and one who squanders his wealth are seen as hard to satisfy (*A.* I.87). The miser is seen as one who brings cheer to neither himself nor others, but just guards his wealth, saying ‘Mine!’ (*J.* III.299–302). *S.* I.89–91 describes a millionaire who died intestate, after a life of eating coarse food and wearing coarse clothing; his wealth benefited no-one, and would then be taken by kings or robbers, destroyed by fire or water, or go to heirs for whom he had no affection. Elsewhere, the wealth of a rich miser is described as ‘like a pool haunted by demons, where no man may slake his thirst’ (*J.* I.353–4). Wealth is only of benefit if put to use, and however much one holds onto it, one will be parted from it at death. Paradoxically, the only way to benefit from one’s wealth after death is by generously giving it away before one dies: for ‘what is given is well saved’, because of the karmic fruits this brings (*S.* I.31–2). As the Mahāyāna philosopher Nāgājuna says:

Through using wealth there is happiness here and now,
 Through giving there is happiness in the future,
 From wasting it without using it or giving it away,
 There is only misery. How could there be happiness? (*RPR.* 315)

A. II.67–8² discusses the appropriate use of wealth, saying that one should seize the opportunity it offers, and should:

- (a) bring happiness to oneself, one's family, friends, comrades, servants and employees;
- (b) protect one's wealth against loss;
- (c) give offerings to relations, guests, dead relatives and gods;
- (d) give gifts to virtuous renunciants and brahmins: the best type of giving, leading to a heavenly rebirth.

Accordingly, in modern central Thailand, Jane Bunnag observed that many relationships are of a patron–client form (1973: 13) and that 'It is . . . incumbent upon a wealthy individual to support numerous clients, and other dependants, some of whom may be poor relations' (1973: 11).

Generosity is encouraged by such texts as:

Monks, if people knew, as I know, the fruits of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it if there was someone else to share it with. (*It.* 18)

One text says that, when people once realized the karmic fruitfulness of even a small gift, giving became widespread to 'renunciant and brahmin, to tramp, wayfarer and destitute; they provided drinking water in their courtyards, they placed seats in their gateways' (*Vz.* 1). Public works, such as the sinking of wells and the planting of medicinal plants, are also encouraged in Buddhist texts (*S.* 1.33), with the Chinese monk Puan Yinsu (1115–69) affirming that 'building bridges is a Buddha act that brings peace to men and causes heaven to rejoice' (Faure, 1991: 128). Tales of great givers of the Buddha's day, such as Anāthapiṇḍika, 'Feeder of the Poor', or the lady Visākhā, are also popular. The Mahāyāna *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra*, which has been and remains very influential on Chinese lay Buddhism (Chappell, 1995: 2), says that a lay disciple should always stop to look after a sick stranger on the road and find a place for him to stay (*Uss.* 83). As part of the virtue of *dāna*, lay *Bodhisattvas* should engage in such social welfare activities as:

learning medicine, building hospitals, road repair, building guest houses, digging wells, planting fruit trees, building bridges, maintaining canals, protecting animals, massaging tired travellers, making shade with umbrellas, providing people with ear picks, consoling the grieving, etc. (Chappell, 1995: 8)

² Cf. A. III.45–6; S. 1.89–91; A. III.76–8; Saddhatissa, 1970: 143.

Helping others should not be done as a way to get a reward, though, for this is not giving, but trade (p. 10).

Buddhist giving and its socio-economic impact

Buddhists can show a considerable concern with generating karmic fruitfulness (or ‘making merit’) by generous deeds etc. In Theravāda countries such as Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka, considerable time, money and effort, individually and communally, are spent on activities aimed at this, such as alms-giving, the sponsoring of ordination and *Kathina*³ ceremonies, and building a monastery or *Stūpa* (monumental shrine) (Lester, 1973: 139). For example, David Pfanner and Jasper Ingersoll estimated that in 1960, in rural lower Burma, an average of 4–6 per cent of net disposable family cash income (which averaged 1,000 Kyat, or \$200 per year, then) went on such activities (1962: 348), though Melford Spiro – who may have included a broader range of activities in his estimates – found the figure for rural upper Burma in 1961 to be around 30 per cent (1971: 459). For example, parents might save for years for the ordination ceremony of their son, and spend 200–5,000 Kyat on this (Spiro, 1971: 456).⁴ Thus:

The accumulation of wealth as an end in itself is not admired in rural Burma, but the accumulation of wealth for the purposes of merit-making is highly valued. (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 345)

It is no exaggeration to say that the economy of rural Burma is geared to the overriding goal of the accumulation of wealth as a means of acquiring merit. (Spiro, 1971: 459)

Manning Nash points out that in 1960s rural Burma, the rich spent more on religious activities both in absolute and in relative terms: 14 per cent of disposable income per year compared to 4 per cent for the moderately well off and 2 per cent for the poor (1965: 160). This indicates that people in Burma tend to spend what they can on such activities, after their basic needs are met. A common Burmese view is that, though the *intention*, not the amount given, is what matters, a person is wealthy because of past good karma, and also has more opportunity to make more good karma for the future (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 345). In Thailand, however,

³ The donation of robes and other requisites after the ending of the annual rainy-season monastic retreat: see Swearer, 1995: 22–5.

⁴ Pfanner and Ingersoll, for lower Burma, says that the average cost was \$75, or 375 Kyat (1962: 348).

poorer people spend a larger proportion of their income than the wealthy (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 357). This is because Thailand's economy is more developed,⁵ so that the well off tend to use surplus funds for consumer goods or investment (Bunnag, 1973: 127–8, 164–5). The less well off see their position as partly due to past karma, and so seek to help themselves by generating more good karma by giving.

While Mya Maung (1964) has claimed that the poor post-war economic performance of Burma has been due to its high expenditure on religious activities, rather than on investment, Trevor Ling argues that the devastation of the country in the Second World War and the British legacy of rural indebtedness and rice mono-culture have been important factors (1979: 107–11) – and, since 1962, we can add, so have the effects of an oppressive Marxist government. While there may be some truth in the observations that, in a country which is not short of food, people's willingness to spend on religious activities may have had some effect on the economy,

it is doubtful whether the Burmese economy which might have resulted if the money had been so channelled [into investment] would have been preferable to the majority of Burmese Buddhists. (Ling, 1979: 113)

Pfanner and Ingersoll point out that, as well as feeling that they benefit in the future by such acts, people, both individually and communally, get much immediate satisfaction and enjoyment from them (1962: 348). Robert Lester expresses it thus:

The ideal is that the monk and the layman give to each other, and that their giving promotes *both* physical *and* spiritual well-being, *both* here *and* hereafter. (1973: 156)

Thus such activities are seen as a kind of investment in happiness. In any case, money channelled to the *Saṅgha*, in being used for goods for the monastery, may still help stimulate the economy (Pfanner & Ingersoll, 1962: 357–8). The *Saṅgha* is not an unproductive drain on the economy, as some have suggested, but a focus of cultural continuity and stability, supporter of an ethically sound society. Thus:

It is not that Buddhists believe that it is more important to make pious donations than to seek economic development. Rather, they believe that such donations are the most effective way to advance social concerns. (Sizemore and Swearer, 1990: 16)

⁵ By 1989, it was growing at 9.0 per cent per annum, the fastest growth in the world: the *Guardian* newspaper, 24 November 1989; though in the late 1990s, it took a dive, along with that of a number of other Asian countries.

Thai monks now commonly try to steer the laity's desire to give towards community development projects, such as building a school, small bridge, or hospital. Moreover, in South-east Asia generally, activities directed at generating karmic fruitfulness may be community-wide events, so as to involve the feeding of perhaps thousands of lay guests (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 348), and 'provide people with an opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen the social ties that exist between them' (Bunnag, 1973: 178).

So much for the economic and social impact of religious giving, but what of the question of whether it diverts income from helping those who are less well off? Jane Bunnag reports that, in Thailand, while karmic fruitfulness is regarded as a by-product of fulfilling social obligations such as support for kin or clients, generating it is the main motive for giving in a religious context (1973: 178). Such giving is seen as more karmically fruitful (see pp. 21–3), and this has generally meant that Buddhists are more willing to support monks or monastery-related welfare activities than to support the poor directly. This tendency is resisted, though, in the Mahāyāna *Upāsaka-sīla Sūtra*, which says that a lay *Bodhisattva* should give to the poor before 'fields of blessings' such as the *Saṅgha*, parents or teachers (*Uss.* 41; cf. 93). Giving to the former is from pity, is to eliminate the causes of suffering and to increase blessings and virtues. Giving to the latter is to repay kindness, to increase the causes of happiness, and to increase wisdom and forsake afflictions (*Uss.* 62).

In Theravāda lands, though, religious giving has a redistributive effect in various ways. Food donated to monks 'generally benefits not only the monks, but also a number of people who come to seek shelter in the monasteries', and monasteries became 'places where the destitute, orphans, and students live, obtain sufficient food, and receive moral and educational training from the monks' (Rājavarāṇi, 1990: 38). In Thailand, the *wat* or monastery

provides a place of retirement for elderly men and a home for *dek wat* [boys who assist around a monastery] from poor families, as well as a hostel for country boys studying in town. Moreover, at a few monasteries, laymen who are without home and kin, or those who are chronically sick, have taken up permanent residence in the public pavilion or *sala*, and any [male] householder passing through a strange town can rest for the night in one of the local *wats*. (Bunnag, 1973: 126–7)

Moreover, as more wealthy villagers in Theravāda South-east Asia are expected to help sponsor the religious activities of the poorer ones, such

as an ordination, income disparities have traditionally not built up (Pfanner and Ingersoll, 1962: 348). For Thailand, Bunnag also points to an apparent 'religious division of labour' whereby most monks come from the ranks of the less well off (1973: 48) – and after a period as monks, may return to lay life with a better education and thus improved employment prospects (1973: 127) – and the better off show their interest in religion by donation to the *Saṅgha*. Moreover, at the time of the annual *Kathina* ceremonies, processions, sometimes including monk-donors, often go from urban centres to rural ones to present donations to monasteries that are less well endowed than the urban ones, which has a redistributive effect (Tambiah, 1976: 456–7).

The Buddhist attitude to wealth

For Buddhism, wealth is not evil: the important thing is how it is made and used. Yet even if wealth is made in a moral way, and used to benefit oneself and others, one should not have a greedy attitude to it:

Riches ruin the foolish, but not those in the quest of the Beyond; through craving for riches, the foolish one ruins himself as (if he were ruining) others. (*Dhp.* 355)

The virtues of contentment and fewness-of-wishes are praised, and it is said that 'contentment is the greatest wealth' (*Dhp.* 204). The highest ideal of contentment, for an ascetically inclined lay person, is perhaps expressed in the story of Ghaṭikāra (*M.* 11.45–54), said to have lived at the time of the past Buddha Kassapa. As he wished to continue supporting his ageing and blind parents, he did not become a monk, but lived as a potter who let people take his wares for free, and did not use money. Nevertheless, his open-hearted generosity inspired a king to give him a supply of food (*M.* 11.54), and his 'customers' to bring him useful materials (*M. A.* 11.284–5).

Whether one's wealth increases or declines, the ideal is to remain calm, and to be free of regret, provided one has attained the wealth in a moral and non-greedy way. Thus, in the Mahāyāna, the lay *Bodhisattva* fully engages in the world, but in a non-attached way. Thus the *Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti* is described as 'Though profiting by all the professions, yet far above being absorbed in them'.⁶

Generally speaking, Buddhism encourages the adoption of a 'middle way' between the extremes of:

⁶ From the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, as quoted by Tsunoda et al., 1964: 1.101.

- (a) poverty, where people have insufficient means for a becoming life: 'For householders in this world, poverty is suffering' (*A.* III.350), 'Woeful in the world is poverty and debt' (*A.* III.352), and
- (b) a materialistic seeking of riches for their own sake.

Relevant to the first extreme is the following story.⁷ The Buddha once walked about thirty miles specially to teach a poor peasant, who he had seen was ripe for insight. A group of well-off citizens gather to hear the Buddha teach, but he delays until the peasant arrives. When he does so, he is tired and hungry, having come directly from seeking a lost ox. Seeing that the man is in no fit state to be able to understand his sermon, the Buddha asks that he be fed with surplus alms-food. When he is fed and rested, the Buddha then teaches, and the man attains stream-entry (see p. 39) as a result. The Buddha then gives a verse which begins 'Hunger is the greatest illness' (*Dhp.* 203).

As explained below (pp. 197–8), poverty is seen as encouraging theft, general immorality and social unrest. Moreover, in a situation of poverty and conflict, it is more difficult to lead a moral and spiritual life. Circumstances which facilitate spiritual striving are that a person is young and healthy, there is no food shortage, people are friendly to one another, and the *Saṅgha* is harmonious (*A.* III.65–6).

At the second extreme, Buddhism sees material welfare as not an end in itself, but only a means to human happiness, and a support for a life of moral and spiritual development. To be ever on the look-out for 'more' is to base one's life on craving and, since one is without contentment, makes happiness impossible, for one will never be satisfied. Thus traditional Buddhist values are in tension with the values of an acquisitive, consumerist society. Bruce Morgan reports that in rapidly modernizing Thailand, though there is a general support for economic development in the *Saṅgha*, there is equally a concern

about the kind of restless, endless generation of wants and desires in a dynamic economy, never satisfied and always ascending. It is not the particular standard of living that is in question, but the style, rate and effects of continual changes in standards. (1973: 72)

It can be seen that societies at many different levels of wealth would be acceptable to Buddhism, but not a continuous striving for more for its own sake.

Russell Sizemore and Donald Swearer hold that Theravāda Buddhism, at least, 'offers a "middle way", or sees the acquisition and

⁷ *Dhp.* *A.* III.262–3; Payutto, 1994: 88–9.

renunciation of wealth in a dialectical relationship'.⁸ For monks, this means that while the more worthy attract more donations from the laity, their worthiness helps them to remain non-attached to it (Sizemore and Swearer, 1990: 3). For lay people:

Wealth always provides both an opportunity for a new expression and cultivation of non-attachment *and* a temptation towards the kind of anti-dhammic self-indulgence that leads to increased entrapment in the web of worldly existence. (Reynolds, 1990: 69)

To be non-attached is to possess and use material things but not to be possessed or used by them. (Sizemore and Swearer, 1990: 2)

For monks as for the laity, 'it is not the amount so much as the way the wealth is possessed and used that is subject to moral scrutiny' (Sizemore and Swearer, 1990: 17).

Economic ethics for rulers

The *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta*⁹ describes a line of mythical universal emperors (*Cakkavattis*) of the past (see p. 114). Each is seen as having been a compassionate ruler, who counsels his son on how to rule, like him, according to *Dhamma*, in the sense of justice or righteousness. In one case, the son does all that his father advises, *except* giving to the needy. As a result of this failing, poverty arises for the first time for ages. Consequently, stealing arises. When a thief is caught and is brought before the emperor, he explains that he stole as he was poor: so the emperor gives him some goods with which to support himself and his family, carry on a business, and make gifts to renunciants and brahmins. When others hear of this, though, stealing only increases. The emperor therefore makes an example of the next thief by executing him. This then leads to thieves arming themselves and killing those whom they rob, so that there are no witnesses (*D.* III.64–8). The Buddha sums this up as follows:

Thus, from the not giving of property to the needy, poverty became rife, from the growth of poverty, the taking of what was not given increased, from the increase of theft, the use of weapons increased, from the increased use of weapons, the taking of life increased – and from the taking of life, people's life-span decreased, their beauty decreased. (*D.* III.68)

Thus, a ruler who allows poverty to develop is sowing the seeds of crime and social conflict. Systemic poverty threatens law and order and

⁸ 1990: 1; cf. Reynolds, 1990: 63–4, 68.

⁹ *D.* III.58–77; see Fenn, 1996: 100–8 for a discussion of this.

thus inhibits both social cohesion and personal morality (Fenn, 1996: 107).

A related message is given in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta*, at *D.* 1.134–6. Here, the Buddha tells of a rich and powerful king of the past who wanted to offer a lavish sacrifice to secure his future welfare, in accordance with the practices of pre-Buddhist Brahmanical religion. He therefore asks his brahmin adviser, the Buddha in a past life, how to go about this. In reply, the brahmin points out that the kingdom is being ravaged by thieves and brigands. This situation will not be solved by executions, imprisonments or other repressive measures, for those who survive such measures will continue to cause problems (as often happens in anti-guerrilla measures today). He then gives an alternative plan to ‘completely eliminate the plague’, which involves granting grain and fodder to those who cultivate crops and keep cattle; granting capital to traders; and giving proper living wages to those in government service:

Then those people, being intent on their own occupations, will not harm the kingdom. Your Majesty’s revenues will be great, the land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves, and the people, with joy in their hearts, will play with their children and dwell in open houses. (*D.* 1.136)

The king then carries out this advice and, in line with further counsel, conducts a great sacrifice, but one in which only such things as butter and oil are offered, not the lives of animals, no trees are cut down, and no one is forced to help (*D.* 1.141). While Gombrich (1988: 83) comments that this passage was meant mainly as a critique of Brahmanical sacrifice, and that he knows of no Indian king who did such things as grant capital to businessmen, the spirit of the passage still expresses a Buddhist ideal – and one which has often been cited by a number of twentieth-century Buddhists.

A key message of both the above texts is that if a ruler allows poverty to develop, this will lead to social strife, so that it is his responsibility to avoid this by looking after the poor, and even investing in various sectors of the economy. In the *Mahā-sudassana Sutta*, it is said that the Buddha, in a past life, had been a righteous king in a glorious city who established a beautiful lotus pond around which the needy were given food, drink, transport, shelter, money, and even marriage partners (*D.* 11.180). In the *Mahā-vastu*, a non-Theravādin early text, the duties of a king are said to include admitting a large body of immigrants and favouring the poor as well as protecting the rich (1.276). The Mahāyāna philosopher Nāgārjuna, in his *Rāja-parikathā-ratnamālā* (*RPR.*), advised King Udayi

that he should support doctors, set up hostels and rest-houses, supply water at arid road-sides, and

- Cause the blind, the sick, the lowly,
The protectorless, the wretched
And the crippled equally to attain
Food and drink without interruption. (verse 320)
Always care compassionately for
The sick, the unprotected, those stricken
With suffering, the lowly and the poor
And take special care to nourish them. (verse 243)
Provide extensive care
For the persecuted, the victims (of disasters),
The stricken and diseased,
And for worldly beings in conquered areas. (verse 251)
Provide stricken farmers
With seeds and sustenance,
Eliminate high taxes
By reducing their rate. (verse 252)
Eliminate thieves and robbers
In your own and others' countries.
Please set prices fairly and keep
Profits level (when things are scarce). (verse 254)

Robert Thurman sees such advice as outlining 'a welfare state . . . a rule of compassionate socialism' (1985: 128).

In an early Mahāyāna *Sūtra* known as the *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta* (*ASP*), or 'Noble Discourse of the Truth Teller', which was a favourite handbook of many teachers in Tibet (*ASP* 2), it is said that:

a righteous ruler, after attaining a realization of the impermanence of himself and his possessions . . . would use those possessions without being attached to them, while ruling over his domain. This is called the heedfulness of a ruler. (*ASP* 187)

Stockpiles of food should be seen as neither belonging to the king, as they are produced by the people's work, nor, any longer, as belonging to the people, as the king has been 'entrusted as their sole overseer' (*ASP* 201). Thus the *Mahā-vastu* advises that a king's duties include being circumspect, and diligent in the care of the treasury and granary (*Mus.* 1.277). The *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta* continues:

As a ruler, he must not use inappropriate possessions or even appropriate possessions at an improper or even at a proper time if that would be harmful to the poor. Were crop failure or famine to occur to (afflict) the people, he should give them protection. He should also protect them from harm and ill caused by

robbers and thieves, armies from other states, and from each other. He should benefit all. He should give property to the poor and lawfully chastise the wicked. This is called the compassion of the ruler. Therefore, heedfulness and compassion are very important for the ruler. (*ASP* 188)

The poor should be exempt from taxes if their poverty is due to factors outside their control, such as natural calamity, theft, or pest depredation. Those made poor by wasting their money on such things as gambling or prostitutes, however, should have to pay their taxes but have them partly repaid by the king, which perhaps implies that this rebate will be conditional on their mending their ways (*ASP* 202). Those who refuse to pay taxes are not exactly *stealing*, but are doing ‘an acutely nonvirtuous act brought about by miserliness’ (*ASP* 201). A ruler who forces those who refuse to pay taxes to do so is not stealing, but more like collecting his wages for performing his duties (*ASP* 201–2).

In his *Traibhūmi-kathā*, ‘The Three Worlds According to King Ruang’, the fourteenth-century Thai prince Phya Lithai has a mythical *Cakkavatti* advise other kings to collect only a tenth of the harvest in taxes, though they should collect nothing if the people do not have enough rice, and should not collect more taxes than their predecessors, so as not to set a bad precedent for succeeding kings (Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 151). Sufficient food should be supplied to those recruited to do service for the ruler, or in the army, and

if you assign them to do any kind of work, assign only an appropriate amount – do not use them too much so that they are pushed beyond what they are willing to do. If there are any people who are elderly, do not use them – let them do as they will. (p. 151)

Moreover, the kings should lend capital, at no interest, to subjects in need of it for trading (p. 151–2).

The *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta* says that a righteous ruler shall increase his treasury merely by receiving gifts, whereas an unrighteous ruler, striving to gain wealth through cunning and all manner of deception, will not be able to increase his treasury. (*ASP* 211)

The moral actions of a righteous ruler mean that his country will also have timely rains, a good harvest, no harm to crops by hail or pests, and fewer harmful wild animals, and that malicious enemies will disappear through the ripening of their own karma.¹⁰

Buddhist kings have varied considerably in the extent to which they

¹⁰ *ASP* 211; cf. Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 153 and *A.* II.74–6, pp. 115 and 152 above.

have lived up to the above-mentioned high ideals, but Buddhists often look to the Indian emperor Asoka as an exemplar of them (see pp. 115–17). In Sri Lanka, people also look back to medieval kings as presiding over a period of agricultural abundance based on extensive irrigation works, religious flourishing and charity. In the *Cūlavamsa* chronicle of Sri Lanka (Geiger, 1929), it is said of King Upatissa I (362–409) that ‘For cripples, women in travail, for the blind and sick he erected great nursing shelters and alms-halls’ (ch. 37, verses 182–3). Of King Mahinda II (772–92), it is said: ‘The poor who were ashamed to beg he supported in secret, and there were none on the Island who were not supported by him according to their deserts’ (ch. 48, verse 146). Mahinda IV (956–72 or 1026–42) is said to have

built an alms hall . . . and gave to beggars alms and couches. In all the hospitals he distributed medicine and beds, and he had food given regularly to criminals in prison. To apes, the wild boar, the gazelles and to dogs he, a fount of pity, had rice and cakes distributed as much as they would. In the four vihāras [monasteries] the king had raw rice laid down in heaps with the injunction that the poor should take of it as much as they wanted. (ch. 54, verses 30–3)

The justice of economic distribution

The obligation of rulers to seek to prevent poverty among their people raises the topic of the Buddhist attitude to the issue of ‘justice’ in the apportioning of wealth in a society. Russell Sizemore and Donald Swearer make the point that in Buddhism, there is more concern with the mode of acquisition and use of wealth than on the question of the justice of its distribution (1990: 2). For them, in Buddhism, moral virtue is seen to lead to wealth, and wealth is seen to be the result, and proof, of previous generosity (pp. 3–4). Nevertheless, to help the poor is seen as generating good karma, and the receipt of such help will also be karmically deserved:

when the doctrine of kammatic [i.e. based on karma] retribution is understood as an exceptionless moral explanation and justification for the present distribution of wealth and poverty in society, it undercuts moral criticism of the distribution per se. Consequently, Buddhists concerned with how to make their present society more just appeal not to a distribution of wealth corresponding more adequately to moral desert, but to the principles of non-attachment and virtues such as compassion and generosity. (p. 12)¹¹

¹¹ Cf. Ornatowski, 1996: 202 and Ash, 1994.

Thus ‘*dāna* and not some concept of structural justice is the central concept in Buddhist social and political philosophy’ (p. 13) and ‘There are norms for redistributing wealth and visions of the well-ordered society which serve as moral strictures about the use of wealth’ (p. 19).

While the above is in the main true to how many Buddhists think, it includes some unwarranted assumptions, at least as regards how faithful such readings are to the texts of Buddhism. While these certainly hold that moral virtue, especially generosity, leads to wealth as a karmic result, and stinginess leads to being poor (see pp. 15–16), it is not said anywhere that these are the *only* causes of wealth or poverty. Indeed, the fact that it is said that karmic causes are only *one* among a variety of possible causes of illnesses (see p. 23) suggests that such a view would *not* be warranted in the texts. Thus while a person’s wealth and poverty *may* be due to past karma, this is only one possibility. Thus it is not right to assume that all poverty and wealth are karmically deserved. To assume that karma is an ‘exceptionless moral explanation’ is, indeed, to come close to karmic fatalism, which is not true to the original Buddhist vision. Thus, while appeals to generosity, non-attachment and compassion certainly *are* key persuaders for Buddhists in working for a more just society, this need not be at odds with an appeal to justice *per se*. Mavis Fenn has pointed out that, in the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta* referred to above, there is no reference to poverty being karmically deserved,¹² and that a king reacting to poverty with sporadic personal giving is seen as ineffective: he must act more systematically and effectively by preventing poverty from becoming systemic (Fenn, 1996: 107). Moreover, this and the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* express ‘views that correspond to simple notions of social justice – everyone should have sufficient resources to care for themselves and others, and to make religious life possible – and the notion that these values should be incorporated into the political system’ (Fenn, 1996: 108).

Nevertheless, ideas of distributive justice may be muted by the idea that at least some poverty and some wealth are the results of karma. The notion of karmically deserved riches is seen in the fourteenth-century Thai work ‘The Three Worlds According to King Ruang’, where it is said that, at the time of the Buddha, the rich man Jotika could not have his riches forcibly removed by the jealous king Ajātasattu, as his riches were due to his great karmic fruitfulness of the past (Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 197–9). Moreover, at least in Theravāda lands, those

¹² 1996: 102, 121, and see Fenn, 1991.

who seek to persuade others of the legitimacy of their wealth do so by reference to some or all of: (a) the idea that it is due to their past karmically fruitful actions, (b) the idea that it was morally made, (c) the idea that it is not the result of self-indulgent craving, by demonstrating present generosity (Reynolds, 1990: 73). In fact, a rich person is seen as having a greater opportunity to do karmically fruitful actions by giving liberally to the *Saṅgha* and the community. As Phra Rājavaramuni says:

A wealthy man can do much more either for the better or for the worse of the social good than a poor man . . . acquiring wealth is acceptable if, at the same time, it promotes the well-being of a community or society. (1990: 45)

Rājavaramuni holds that as long as wealth is used for the well-being of all members of society, 'it does not matter to whom it belongs, whether the individual, community or society' (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 53). Thus, while Buddhism has no central drive towards economic equality *per se*, (a) the well-off have an obligation to be generous to other members of the community; and (b) rulers have an obligation to seek to avoid poverty among their people. While the *Saṅgha's* relationship to the state has been typically one of 'cooperation and an amelioratory approach to social change, along with support for the status quo distribution of wealth' (Ornatowski, 1996: 213), monasteries have themselves traditionally had a redistributive effect, as seen above (pp. 194–5). Today, Rājavaramuni suggests that it is desirable 'to improve or modify this tradition to suit the current circumstances' (Rājavaramuni, 1990: 38).

THE MONASTIC ECONOMY

The original ideal of the *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī* was that of a person with a minimum of possessions living a simple life-style, supported by lay donations rather than by any gainful occupation (*D.* 1.12). The formal list of a monk's personal 'requisites', treated as his property, is as follows: an upper-, lower- and over-robe, a belt, a bowl, a razor, a needle, a water-strainer, a staff and a tooth-pick. In practice, any monk also has such articles as sandals, a towel, extra work robes, a shoulder bag, an umbrella, books, writing materials, a clock and a picture of his teacher. Such a way of life is held up as one which offers great opportunity for spiritual growth, free of the restrictions of lay life (*M.* 1.179). It is pointed out, for example, that while the sense-pleasures offered by lay life are enjoyable, to earn them, a lay person has to work hard, being affected by the

extremes of weather while doing so (for example in agriculture), perhaps being affected by sadness at failure, and being bothered by worry over losing wealth, and quarrels arising from its possession (*M.* 1.85–7). The blessings of a renunciant's life are said to include blamelessly and contentedly eating that which others freely give and wandering without attachment or cares, with no possessions to lose by fire, war or theft (*J.* iv.252–3). Overall, it is suggested, sense-pleasures have more disadvantages than advantages in terms of human happiness. The values of celibacy and possessionlessness associated with renunciation are an implicit critique of the limitations within the normal social order (Fenn, 1996: 108), and emphasize the simple basic needs for a becoming human existence (Fenn, 1996: 100).

Yet monastic simplicity attracts lay donations. The virtue of a monk is seen to make him a more worthy recipient of these, and indeed the Buddha once praised the monk Sivali as chief of those who receive offerings (*A.* 1.24). In Southern and Northern Buddhism, therefore, there is a structural tension between the ascetic tendencies of the *Saṅgha* and the laity's desire to do actions which are more abundant in their karmic fruitfulness, by giving to more abstemious and ascetic monks. In Thailand, for example, a town monk with a good reputation may be given a refrigerator or even the use of a car. If he lives up to his reputation, though, he will use these with detachment (he cannot drive himself), and let other monks benefit from them. Bangkok monks may accumulate many gifts by doing rituals for the laity, or because of their activity as successful astrologers, preachers or meditation teachers. Yet these gifts of robes, cigarettes, incense, candles, biscuits or cash are often shared with disciples in the monastery and used to support the education of young monks, novices and temple boys, as well as in gifts to less well-endowed rural monasteries in a monk's home region (Tambiah, 1976: 459):

the prevailing ethic of *noblesse oblige* ensures the equitable distribution of these material goods; the more favoured a *bhikkhu* is in terms of presentation received, the more generous he is obliged to be; the lack of privacy both within the *wat* and with regard to the laity acts as a strong sanction against any monk's misuse of his personal property . . . Thus the dilemma posed by the fact that the more revered the *bhikkhu* the more he is showered with worldly goods by the householder is to some extent resolved, in that he must maintain an attitude of indifference towards material possessions and wherever possible should give them away. (Bunnag, 1973: 68; cf. p. 33)

Jane Bunnag describes a certain abbot as a respected example of such an ideal who used his money to help build a school, and supported a

number of novices and temple boys with food, clothes and school equipment (1973: 72).

Monasteries themselves, generally through lay workers, have sometimes been economically active through donations, for example of land. The twentieth century, though, has seen a considerable reduction in Buddhist monastic land-ownership, as a result of confiscations by Communist governments or of land-reforms. In Theravāda lands, monastic landlordism only developed to a notable extent in Sri Lanka, where the Buddhist chronicles record many occasions when kings gave lavish gifts to accomplished monks, whether scholars or ascetics (Kemper, 1990: 155–6). Thus, between the ninth and twelfth centuries, large temples owned vast estates, which included plantations, complex irrigation schemes, the villages that depended on them, and rights over some of the labour of the villagers. There were periodic kingly reforms relating to monastic possessions, but these were not triggered by monastic wealth *per se*, which was seen as acceptable, but by lack of moral discipline or by concentration of the wealth in too few hands (Kemper, 1990: 153–61).

In China also, by the middle of the T'ang period (618–907), Buddhist monasteries were among the major land holders, through donations from members of the imperial family, the nobility and the rich (Ch'en, 1973: 126–7), by foreclosing on land mortgaged by peasants who had needed to raise income but were unable to pay off the loan, and by buying land (Ch'en, 1973: 130–1). However, in times of economic need, the state came to confiscate such land periodically (Ornatowski, 1996: 217).

Some ancient monastic codes (but not the Theravāda one) allowed surplus donations to be loaned out and interest charged, if the profit was used to promote Buddhist activities, and Buddhist monasteries may have been the first institutions in India to make such loans (Ch'en, 1973: 158–9). In China, by the T'ang period, monasteries became important agents in the economy (Ch'en, 1973: 151–73). They ran large markets, lent out seedlings and grain and a certain amount of money, and ran water-powered flour mills and oil presses. As part of the income was reinvested in such activities, this represented a form of capitalism (Ch'en, 1973: 177–8), called by Gregory Ornatowski 'communal capitalism' (1996: 219). Other income was used for repairs to monasteries, help for the destitute and hungry, and offerings to the Buddha (Ch'en, 1973: 163). Monasteries also operated hostels for monks and other travellers; no charges would be made in the case of large monasteries (Ch'en, 1973: 171–7).

Japanese monasteries also became involved in such commercial activities and trade, and in pre-Communist Tibet, monasteries were key economic institutions at the centre of a web of trading and donation relationships. Individual monks invested in such things as herds and seed-grain, but most capital was received and administered by one of a monastery's superintendents, monastic or lay. These were responsible for getting a good return from land worked by leaseholders or peasants attached to the monastery, from grazing, forest and water rights, from monastery herds, trade with China and India, bartering with herdsmen, and loans and investments.

BUDDHISM AND CAPITALISM: WEBER'S 'PROTESTANT ETHIC'
 THESIS

In his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904, in German; 1930, in English), the sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) developed an influential thesis that claimed that Protestant Christianity, in its Calvinist form, was a key source of values and orientations consonant with the 'spirit of capitalism'. This then led, in certain historical circumstances in Europe from the sixteenth to the mid eighteenth century, to entrepreneurial, capitalist activity, the key to the modern era. For Weber, the origin of this was the emergence, in the sixteenth century, particularly among Puritans and Calvinists, of 'reinvestment' capitalism, where profits were continually reinvested in profitable enterprises, which went beyond prior unsystematic 'adventure' capitalism. Nevertheless, in time, the economic success which this brought undermined the very ascetic virtues that had helped lead to it (Ling, 1980b: 577).

Looking at the less economically developed Asia of his day, Weber sought to show, in his *The Religion of India* (1916, in German; 1958, in English) and *The Religion of China* (1917, in German; 1951, in English), that this was because Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism all lacked one of the two key ingredients of the 'Protestant ethic', these being:

- (1) a 'this-worldly' or 'inner-worldly' asceticism, which emphasized disciplined, purposive, rational action in the world, with an ascetic attitude towards the fruits of such work, so that enjoyment of them could be postponed and profit reinvested, so setting off a positive economic cycle;
- (2) the idea of work as having a religious significance, as a religious 'calling' akin to that of the Catholic monk.

Weber saw Buddhism as having an other-worldly monky ideal which devalued the world and its drives, and a restriction of rational purposive activity to meditation (1963: 267), with advice to the laity too vague to be the basis of a rational economic ethic of self-discipline (1958: 199, 217–18, 222). Weber acknowledged the social welfare emphasis of the emperor Asoka's Buddhism, but oddly saw this as an historical accident not in keeping with the original spirit of Buddhism (1963: 268; 1958: 226–8). He acknowledged that, for the laity, economic activity was stimulated by the need to have a surplus to use in generating good karma, but said that this did not support capitalist reinvestment.

Weber has been criticized for focusing on the orthodox ancient forms of Buddhism and other Asian religions, as known by scholars of his day, and trying to deduce twentieth-century behavioural consequences from these. Today, scholars are also more aware of the complexities of these religions, and, moreover, there have been reform movements in them since Weber's time. Padmasiri De Silva argues against Weber that it is wrong to see Buddhism as having no positive role in changing society, for while it has its other-worldly aspects, it also has a genuine social ethic (1976: 6–7). It is only misinterpretation that makes the karma doctrine fatalistic (p. 7), and 'egolessness' does not undercut 'a healthy drive for personality integration, social reform or even nation building', and should reduce selfishness and avarice, thus aiding co-operation (p. 8). Buddhist principles are also critical of superstition, though Buddhist practice has sometimes come to include it (p. 8). De Silva thus criticizes the Weberian claim that Theravāda Buddhism has no basis for a social ethic, seeing this claim as arising from overlooking the continuity and relationship between the Buddhism of the laity, directed (mainly) at a good rebirth and life in society, and the Buddhism of (ideally) world-renouncing monks.¹³

Buddhism certainly contains an ethic of diligent work for lay people, as seen above, though, as Trevor Ling says, unlike the Puritan, 'the Burmese Buddhist views worldly pleasure as a boon to be enjoyed' (1979: 113). Thus it seems appropriate for Hans Dieter Evans to say 'Buddhism does not hinder the emergence of modern capitalist values, though it does not suggest them.'¹⁴ In reflecting on Weber's thesis in relation to Indian Buddhism and Hinduism, Stanley Tambiah looks to Gandhi and

¹³ De Silva, 1976: 10–17. Spiro, 1971, is a noted exponent of such a dichotomy between 'Kammatic' and 'Nibbanic' Buddhism.

¹⁴ *Modernization in South-East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 161, quoted in De Silva, 1976: 20.

the 1950s Burmese Buddhist socialism of Prime Minister U Nu, claiming that Indian values are not conducive to the capitalist spirit but to 'inner-worldly asceticism and the spirit of socialism' (1973: 16). Looking at Burma, he says that Weber was right, but in a way that he had not anticipated, for in Burma 'Buddhist ideas appear to stimulate and to legitimate a kind of socialist welfare politics that subordinates economic activity of the capitalist kind' (1973: 18). Ling agrees that Buddhist values 'do not find a natural expression in a capitalist economy' (1979: 111).

In Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka, commercial roles such as those of businessmen, traders, entrepreneurs and moneylenders have traditionally had a low social status, especially in rural areas, through their association with acquisitiveness and greed. In the traditional hierarchy of honour and status,¹⁵ farmers were more respected, as they provided the necessities of life. Above them came professionals such as magistrates, civil servants, teachers and military officers, because they served the public good, and especially the king and nobility, for the same reason and because their position was seen as due to past good karma. The highest respect was given to monks and pious, generous laity. This has meant that it has been the Chinese minority who have been very active in finance and industry in Thailand, along with Thai women (Kirsch, 1975: 173–6), who cannot be fully ordained nuns (see pp. 395–8), and are under-represented in the professions. Thai men have traditionally been attracted to high-honour public-service roles, leaving women to be active in more 'worldly' economic roles. Nevertheless, the Thai *Saṅgha* has been starting to describe economic roles in more positive terms, as contributing to the public good, and male Thai resistance to commercial and business activity has been lessening (Morgan, 1973: 74–5).

In Tibet, there was traditionally a small middle-class trading community, which mainly exported wool (Bell, 1928: 109), yet most people in this partly pastoral society engaged in trade and bartering from time to time, and, as seen above, large monasteries traded to help support themselves (Bell, 1928: 125–6).

The fact that traders have been looked on with suspicion in a number of peasant societies where Buddhism has become established is worth reflecting on. To what extent do such suspicions originate as much from the nature of peasant societies as from Buddhism? In early Indian Buddhism, merchants were in fact among those particularly attracted to Buddhism, for its open nature in which religious outcomes were the

¹⁵ For Thailand: Kirsch, 1975: 190–1 and Morgan, 1973: 74. For Burma: Maung, 1964: 760. For Sri Lanka: Ling, 1980b: 584.

result of personal efforts, as with economic outcomes in their own sphere (Gombrich, 1988: 80–1). Indeed, a greatly respected supporter of the Buddha was Anāthapiṇḍika, a *setthi* (Pali; Skt *śreṣṭhī*) or rich merchant-patron. The virtues of diligence and prudence in work which the Buddha recommended would have appealed to merchants. Commentaries on the fifth precept criticize not only intoxicants but also any irresponsible or wasteful expenditures:

The tenor is unmistakably bourgeois, and it is hard to resist the hypothesis that this attitude is closely correlated with the affinity that seems to have existed between early Buddhism and the merchant class. (Reynolds, 1990: 71)

Moreover, a passage in the *Jātakas* (J. 1.120–2) seems to support entrepreneurial energy directed to investment and reinvestment. It tells of a poor man who sells a dead mouse to a tavern, for its cat, and then goes on to become rich by a series of astute investments whenever he sees opportunities for supplying goods or services. Thus it is said, ‘By means of accumulation of small money, the wise man establishes himself even as by a skilful application, small particles are fanned to a fire.’ Again, at A. 1.116–17, it is said that a rich man will invest in the business of a shopkeeper if he sees that he is both dependable and astute at making a profit, these being qualities for which there are spiritual parallels.

Gregory Ornatowski holds that the implications of key Buddhist concepts for economic ethics is ‘ambiguous and depends to a large extent upon the interpretation of them within the particular sociocultural and historical situation’ (1996: 201):

Buddhist economic ethics for the laity were not inherently antagonistic to the development of capitalism, but in fact supported a primitive capitalism among the merchant classes in early Buddhist India, and medieval China and Japan, seen in both ‘merchant-type lay ethics’ and direct economic activities by Buddhist monasteries themselves, which led to innovations in business practices and implicit support for commercial tendencies in society as a whole. (Ornatowski, 1996: 202)

In modern Thailand, Charles Keyes (1990) has traced a change from traditional suspicion of traders among the Thai-Lao people of the north-east. Since the 1950s, their way of life has changed from subsistence farming, with general equality of wealth, to one more orientated to the national and international market, and periods of work in Bangkok, leading to greater discrepancies of wealth. The north-east has traditionally been the poorest region of the country, and in a context where the government is pushing economic development for the whole country, the region has got wealthier, but not as fast as other regions (p. 181). When in

Bangkok, north-easterners have realized that, as members of a disadvantaged group, they cannot aspire to the status of an official, but can to that of a merchant, after the example of the once poor Chinese whom they see (p. 188). In changing social and economic circumstances, as previous certainties have declined (pp. 171–2), some north-easterners have thus developed ‘something of a Buddhist work ethic’ (p. 185) akin to Weberian ‘inner-worldly asceticism’ (p. 188). This is in the form of a ‘this-worldly non-attachment’ (p. 187), drawing on the strong valuation in the north-east given to non-attachment and the ability ‘to forgo gratification in order to overcome one’s base desires’ (p. 186). North-easterners see themselves as stronger in detachment than other Thais, partly because they are used to dealing with tough economic circumstances (p. 189). A high proportion of north-eastern men also spend some time as monks, while women learn non-attachment in separation from children when these marry, are ordained or die, and in the rite of ‘lying by the fire’ for several days after they have given birth to ‘dry out the womb’: a form of ascetic mortification due to the heat and avoidance of solid food at this time (p. 187). Moreover, popular in the north-east is the “‘dhammic group” (*mū tham*)’ movement of those who seek access to the uplifting power of *Dhamma* so as to be ‘ordained in the dhamma’. Members emphasize careful observance of the five precepts, including the one on alcohol (pp. 179–80), as well as thriftiness and industriousness, and de-emphasize actions leading to immediate pleasures (p. 187). Thus in most north-east villages now, some Thai-Lao families run rice-mills, transport firms and shops (1990: 173). Those running these seek to better themselves, though they acknowledge that improved worldly happiness is impermanent (1990: 186). The attitude of others to such successful entrepreneurs is ambivalent. They might greatly admire them for diligence and shrewdness, but some might suspect them of being obsessed with wealth. Yet such a charge can be countered by reference to the fact that they use their wealth, in part at least, in generous activities which are seen to be karmically fruitful (p. 183). Likewise in Sri Lanka, those in lowlands villages that have come to be involved in commerce remain suspected by some but also earn respect when their new wealth is used for acts of piety (Ling, 1980b: 584).

The case of Japan

Given the twentieth-century success of Japanese capitalism, it is appropriate to look at the background of this with the Weberian thesis in

mind. During the Tokugawa period (1600–1867), Japan was very inward-looking and somewhat xenophobic, after suffering bad experiences at the hands of interfering European colonial powers. This was a time of peace after almost 400 years of civil strife. Buddhism was formally supported by the rulers, though Neo-Confucianism was the state ideology. Shōguns, or military rulers, ran society, aided by the *samurai* warrior-knight class. Society was a closely regulated, centralized state, which was felt to be needed so as to enhance national unity and strength. During this time, cities were growing in size, and commerce was developing in the new, unified, national market. Tokugawa society remained feudal in its structure, however, with an emphasis on a properly ordered social hierarchy, and respect for elders and superiors. Confucianism emphasized diligently working in one's station in life, for the benefit of the group, including descendants, dead ancestors, parents, and one's feudal lord (Duus, 1976: 171–2), and society was divided into four different, mainly hereditary, classes (Duus, 1976: 11). In decreasing order of status, these were:

- (1) *samurai*: traditionally warrior-knights, but now more like civil servants in many respects. Their role was to lead, and they were seen as the group most dedicated to the good of society. The other three groups consisted of commoners:
- (2) peasants: their role was to produce food, the primary necessity of life;
- (3) artisans: their role was to produce various secondary necessities such as utensils;
- (4) merchants: their role was to exchange things. Neither Confucianism nor Buddhism had a high regard for trading, as it was non-productive (Confucianism), and was seen to encourage greed (Buddhism).

In time, though, there developed something like a Weberian 'this-worldly asceticism' in the form of an abstemious attitude which was not aimed simply at other-worldly goals, but at success in this life, in the form of the good opinion of others, and material rewards (Duus, 1976: 172). Enjoyment was good, but not at the expense of diligence and frugality, thus the slogan 'Work much, earn much, spend little' (Duus, 1976: 171). Confucianism both encouraged production and discouraged consumption (Bellah, 1957: 109). Also from Confucianism came an emphasis on serving the group, accentuated by the *samurai* ethic of loyalty and selfless service to a person's feudal lord, and to the state. From Buddhism came an emphasis on selfless detachment, here in an active, engaged mode, as seen in the actions of Sōtō Zen monks, who were close to the people, and helped with such matters as building bridges, irrigation and draining

swamps (Ives, 1992: 63). Winston King (1981) has written on the work ethic espoused by Suzuki Shōsan (1579–1655), a *samurai* who became a Sōtō Zen monk in his forties, but who was also influenced by Taoism, Confucianism and Shintō. He held that one's ordinary everyday work, whatever this may be, could be a method of practice leading to Buddhahood, if done with the proper attitude and with Buddhist teachings borne in mind. Thus, not unlike the Puritans, he sought to raise ordinary occupations to the level of spiritual practice:

Farm work itself is Buddha-action. Only when your purposes are evil is it mean and shameful. When your faith-mind is strong and secure, (your work) is the work of a Bodhisattva . . . For you to have been born a farmer is to have received from Heaven¹⁶ an official appointment to be one who nurtures the world . . . Perform your work as a public service to the Righteous Way of Heaven . . . Producing the five cereal grains, worship the Buddha and the kami [Shintō gods]. Making the great vow to sustain the life of all men and to give alms even to insects and other such creatures, recite 'Nama-Amida-Butsu, Nama-Amida-Butsu' with every stroke of the hoe. Concentrate on every single stroke of the sickle with no other thoughts. (1981: 213)

This combines allusion to Confucian ideals and Shintō gods with Pure Land devotion to Amida Buddha (see pp. 142–3) and a Zen emphasis on single-mindedly giving oneself over to the task in hand, as a kind of moving meditation. Such an approach, of seeing one's task as supporting the community, and devoutly immersing oneself in it, was seen to help wear down self-centredness, and so conduce to enlightenment. The world was a fragile, changing place that one should not be attached to, but looking on it thus aided selfless action within it, for the benefit of all (King, 1981: 218). Working thus would ensure a rich crop yield, and the protection of 'Heaven' and the Shintō gods. Moreover, merchants should work hard, so as to convey needed goods to people, and also make a profit, provided that this was not done unfairly or greedily (p. 213).

The Jōdo Shin Pure Land school, while condemning dishonest or excessive profit, saw the work of artisans and merchants as providing the needs of others, so that:

By profiting others they receive the right to profit themselves . . . The spirit of profiting others is the Bodhisattva spirit . . . Thus Bodhisattva deeds are just the deeds of merchants and artisans. In general the secret of merchants' and artisans' business lies in obtaining confidence through Bodhisattva deeds. (quoted in Bellah, 1957: 120)

¹⁶ A Confucian term, meaning the natural-moral order of the universe.

Jōdo Shin tracts influential on merchants included the maxims:

Cheerfully do not neglect diligent activity morning and evening.

Work hard at the family occupation.

Be temperate in unprofitable luxury.

Do not gamble.

Rather than take a lot, take a little. (quoted in Bellah, 1957: 119)

Such diligent work would both help the mind remain concentrated and show gratitude to Amida Buddha. The merchants of Ōmi province were much influenced by such Jōdo Shin ideas, and were well known for their diligence, hard work, simplicity of life-style, and dislike of waste (Bellah, 1957: 120–1). By such means, they often became wealthy. Thus Tokugawa Buddhist teachings encouraged in people, including merchants, great dedication and a strong will to succeed.

Towards the end of the Tokugawa period, however, there was a turning away from Buddhism and Confucianism as ‘foreign’ religions, and an emphasis on Shintō as the true ‘national’ religion. The year 1853 also saw the humiliation of Japan by being rudely awakened from its inward-looking period by American gun-boats, which came to open up Japan to American trade. This helped lead to the end of the Tokugawa regime. The re-establishment of the emperor system ushered in the Meiji period (1868–1912), when Japan opened its doors to the outside world and started to modernize rapidly, learning from the West, which it saw as a rival and threat.

There was a drive towards industrialization, directed by the state. This aimed at developing a ‘rich country, strong army’ so that Japan could stand its own ground against foreign powers, and redress what it saw as unequal trading arrangements.¹⁷ Legal restrictions on the involvement of *samurai* in trade were lifted, and being deprived of their place in the previous feudal regime, *samurai* put their considerable energy into commerce and innovation. Nevertheless, Hiroshi Mannari (1996: 2–3) has shown that the percentage of business leaders from *non-samurai* backgrounds was actually 77 in 1880, and 63 in both 1920 and 1960. Thus the end of the feudal system also released *non-samurai* energy, too.

Loyalty to a person’s feudal lord was transferred to loyalty to the state, focused on the emperor, its symbol (Saniel, 1965: 128). There was a wave of Shintō-inspired nationalism, with Shintō underpinning the idea of the divinity of the emperor, and Confucianism being drawn on to stress loyalty to him as father of the nation. In his *Tokugawa Religion: The Values*

¹⁷ Davis, 1989: 308; Saniel, 1965: 133.

of *Pre-industrial Japan*, Robert Bellah develops a Weber-inspired analysis of how Tokugawa this-worldly asceticism and Meiji institutional changes led to the development of capitalism in a way which was analogous to its development in Protestant Europe. While European capitalism was *laissez-faire*, though, Japanese capitalism was state-directed, with loyalty to the emperor producing an overall rationality¹⁸ to economic action which Weber had seen as necessary for successful capitalist development.

Capital was generated by the state through taxation, and while the people could not see the benefits for some time, the value of loyalty to superiors, ultimately the emperor, enabled them to work hard for the state, and future benefit, without rebelling (Saniel, 1965: 136). In time, because of a financial crisis in 1881, the state sold off some of its enterprises to influential families, so that capitalism spread further (Saniel, 1965: 139–41). Large and small private enterprises were largely run according to a family-based ethic, which encouraged loyalty to the firm, both from actual family members and those brought into the firm.

A central Japanese value, based on both Confucianism and Buddhism, is the idea of the ‘return of benefits’ (*hō-on*) (Davis, 1989: 307–8). As soon as a person enters the world, he or she is seen as having received ‘benefits’ (*on*) from *kami*, the Buddha, parents, ancestors, the country and the emperor. Later he or she receives them from village, patrons, employers and neighbours. In response to these benefits of life, nourishment, protection and guidance, the individual should respond with gratitude, love and loyalty. Confucianism saw this as a relationship between superiors and inferiors, and the individual was conditioned to obedience to superiors, from whom he or she was seen to have received various benefits. This is still at the heart of the Japanese work ethic, though Bunnag describes a somewhat similar attitude – apart from the emphasis on obedience – in Thailand, where many relationships are of a patron–client form, often based on age difference, and

the senior member is expected to provide counsel and moral guidance, as well as material assistance when the need arises; whilst the junior partner should in turn pay heed to his advice, and give more tangible evidence of his deference by acting as a general factotum for his superior. (Bunnag, 1973: 13)

Winston Davis (1989) argues that Buddhism largely contributed to Japanese modernization and development by not getting in the way: a

¹⁸ Though Bellah later (1963) came to see emperor-loyalty as also containing non-rational elements which hindered economic development and full modernization and democratization, by helping to prevent a deep reorientation of social structures and values in Japan.

process of 'passive enablement' and accommodation. The Meiji restoration brought much criticism of Buddhism, for example for being other-worldly, as well as its disestablishment and some persecution. In this context, Buddhists often sought to emphasize Buddhism's usefulness to the state, through its moral exhortations, good works, and bringing of divine protection, though there were also reformers who were interested in modernization in itself, apart from its nationalistic focus in Japan. Buddhism's emphasis on social harmony helped oil the wheels of rapid social change. Its values of frugality and work as an expression of religious devotion were also useful. Not unlike Suzuki Shōsan before him, Ashari Saichi (1851–1933) said 'My work . . . is "Nama Amida Butsu"' (Davis, 1989: 309). Buddhists supported loyalty to the emperor, and justified such things as the war against Russia. While sympathy was expressed for the plight of workers, not much positive action was taken to help them, and poverty was often put down to bad karma. In some ways, Buddhists acted like an economically active minority such as the Jews or Mormons.

Thus, as seen above, Buddhism contains elements supportive of diligent and frugal work patterns which, under certain conditions, can respond positively to social pressure for entrepreneurial activity, if not acting to initiate such a pressure, thus overcoming Buddhism's tendency to suspect merchants and entrepreneurs of greed. Buddhism contains, though, an important emphasis on social welfare, wrongly downplayed by Weber, and holds that capitalist activity is to be justified by its benefit to the community, rather than on the grounds of purely personal benefit. This can be seen in monastic commercial activities in T'ang China, in recent developments in Thailand, and the general emphasis that wealth is acceptable if accompanied by generosity and non-attachment.

'BUDDHIST ECONOMICS'

Nevertheless, a number of Buddhist writers, primarily Theravādins, have sought to articulate a 'Buddhist economics' that is different from the capitalist or Marxist-influenced economics that have been the dominant influence on most Asian governments in the post-war era. A stimulus to many of these efforts was a short article on 'Buddhist Economics' by the Catholic writer E. F. Schumacher, an advocate of intermediate technology and critic of Western development models who had been an economic adviser in 1950s Burma. The article originally appeared in 1966, but was reproduced in his *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as*

if *People Mattered* (1973). He points out that ‘modernisation’, in practice, often leads to ‘a collapse of the rural economy, a rising tide of unemployment in town and country, and a growth of a city proletariat without nourishment for either body or soul’ (1973: 56). Accordingly, he laments that the Burmese and others had simply adopted development plans from the West, without pausing ‘to think that a Buddhist way of life would call for Buddhist economics’ (p. 48). He argues that for the right path of development, what is needed is ‘the Middle Way between materialist heedlessness and traditionalist immobility’ (p. 56), and seeks to develop such a vision by articulating an economics which he sees as implicit in Burmese Buddhist life (p. 48).

In Theravāda Thailand and Sri Lanka, the majority of monks and lay people support a somewhat conservative form of Buddhism that works with the status quo and government development efforts. Nevertheless, there are those who lament the loss of a ‘Buddhistically defined moral community’ through the onslaught of modernization, Westernization and secularization (Swearer, 1996: 196). Donald Swearer sees these as:

- a) neo-traditionalists: fundamentalist-like movements which advocate a return to an ‘idealized personal piety that either ignores or misunderstands the nature of systematic economic, social, and cultural problems and tensions’.
- b) liberal reformists who engage with the problems of the modern world and seek to use creative interpretations of traditional beliefs and practices to help solve these. (1996: 196)

In Thailand, the former include Santi Asok, a rather strident sectarian movement that offers a moralistic critique of many aspects of Thai society (Swearer, 1995: 136–9), and Dhammakāya, a very successful movement that has support among political and military leaders, using the media to spread itself, and that emphasizes meditation and moral renewal (Swearer, 1995: 114–15). The reformers include those who have sought to develop and articulate ideas of ‘Buddhist economics’.

In Sri Lanka, Dr H. N. S. Karunatilake, then Director of Economic Research at the Central Bank, in his *This Confused Society* (1976), has sought ‘to develop an economic system suitable to the modern world based on the discourses made by the Buddha’ (Karunatilake, 1976: iii), though he offers what is in places a rather idealistic vision. He sees Buddhist economic principles as having been exemplified in the reign of the Indian emperor Asoka (pp. 29, 73) and the large-scale irrigation works of past Sinhalese civilizations (p. 74). ‘A Buddhist economic system has its foundations in the development of a co-operative and harmonious effort in group living. Selfishness and acquisitive pursuits have to be

eliminated by developing man himself' (p. 29). Also in Sri Lanka, the psychologist and philosopher Padmasiri De Silva, in his *Value Orientations and Nation Building* (1976) booklet and *The Search for Buddhist Economics* (1975) pamphlet, has outlined what he sees as the contribution of Buddhism to social progress in various fields.

In Thailand Ven. P. A. Payutto,¹⁹ a leading monk-scholar, has developed a vision of Buddhist economics in his *Buddhist Economics: A Middle Way for the Market Place* (1994). In this, he criticizes the tendency of modern economics to examine economic transactions in isolation from ethical considerations of the nature of what is sold, and the social and environmental impact of the transactions. He emphasizes the economic impact of unethical behaviour, such as a reluctance to invest where there is social disorder, customer dissatisfaction if shoddy goods are sold, and medical costs and poor health amongst workers if adulterated foodstuffs are sold, as sometimes happens in Thailand (Payutto, 1994: 24).

Also in Thailand, a monk who has offered innovative modernist interpretations of central Theravāda teachings, including those concerning society and economics, was the leading monk-intellectual and meditation master Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu (1906–93). Though his forest monastery was far from the centres of power, he has been influential on many college-educated people in Thailand, including judges, teachers, educators and doctors, and on the democratic student movement of the 1970s (Santikaro, 1996: 180–2). Buddhādāsa was forthright in his criticism of the 'immorality and selfishness of many modern social structures' (Santikaro, 1996: 147), and compared the wealth of Bangkok unfavourably with the generosity of people in the countryside (Swearer, 1989: 175). While emphasizing the spiritual core of Buddhism, he felt that there was no separation between this and social concerns (Santikaro, 1996: 155), for to solve social problems, we must get at the moral defilements that are their basic cause (Swearer, 1989: 170). Thus he saw such things as hunger, illiteracy and illness as simply symptoms of a lack of true religion and moral principles in society (Swearer, 1989: 171).

Buddhādāsa felt that all religions, including Buddhism, are fundamentally socialistic, in that their founders aimed at the good of society as a whole. He thus opposed the individualism, linked to capitalism and associated 'liberal democracy', that he saw as eating away at Thai society (Swearer, 1989: 172). While opposing both capitalism and Communism, he came to espouse a kind of religious socialism that he called 'Dhammic

¹⁹ Also known by the monastic title Phra Dhammapitaka, and formerly Phra Debvedi and Phra Rājavaramuni (see list of references under this name) (Swearer, 1995: 139).

Socialism' as the solution to society's problems – in line with Tambiah's analysis above (pp. 207–8). For Buddhadhāsa, apart from 'worldly' forms of socialism in the shape of Marxism and Communism, which could be violent and malignant, there is true socialism. He saw this as being rooted in *Dhamma*, the interdependent nature of things (Swearer, 1989: 195). It draws on the fact that humans are social creatures who depend on and should help others, not acting from individualism (Santikaro, 1996: 166–69; Swearer, 1989: 173). It entails 'not taking more than one's fair share – using only what is necessary so that the rest is available for others' use', as in Buddhist teachings on contentment (Swearer, 1989: 172). It is living according to nature, taking only what we really need (Swearer, 1989: 173). Such a socialism he felt to be nothing new, but as always having been at the heart of Buddhism, which 'has an excellent and special socialist system' (Santikaro, 1996: 165–6), for he saw the administration of the *Saigha* as always having been socialistic and the emperor Asoka and Thai kings of the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods (the fourteenth to the eighteenth century) as having been genuinely 'socialist' rulers (Swearer, 1989: 192). Thus, unlike Communism and capitalism, true socialism was not foreign to the Thai Buddhist spirit. He held that:

if we hold fast to Buddhism we shall have a socialist disposition in our very being. We shall see our fellow human beings as friends in suffering . . . and, hence, we cannot abandon them. (Swearer, 1989: 195)

Moreover, he saw the concept of the *Bodhisattva* as a 'socialist' one (Swearer, 1989: 197). In the *Aggañña Sutta* (see pp. 114, 153) he saw an account of a natural socialism declining because of the start of hoarding of naturally abundant food: 'our problems began when someone got the idea of stockpiling grains and other food, causing shortages for others' (Swearer, 1989: 174). This then necessitated the election of the first king, who ruled according to 'socialist' principles (Swearer, 1989: 187–8).

Both Payutto and Buddhadhāsa have influenced another key Thai liberal reformer, the lay intellectual Sulak Sivaraksa (Swearer, 1996: 215), who has also been influenced by the Vietnamese peace activist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (Swearer, 1996, 225). Sivaraksa has been described as 'a writer and publisher, lecturer, peripatetic international conferee, peace and human rights activist, founder of NGOs [non-governmental organizations], Buddhist social critic, and intellectual moralist' (Swearer, 1996: 200). He has developed an incisive critique of Thailand's rush to

American-influenced capitalist-based modernization and the materialism that it is bringing. For him, 'Modern development encourages competition and success whereas Buddhism encourages collaboration and contentedness' (Sivaraksa, 1986: 182). While he accepts that modernization in Thailand has some potentially good aspects, in practice he feels that it has mainly brought luxury to the few and poverty to the many, especially farmers and urban workers (1986: xv). Rising debt has meant that large numbers of peasants have migrated to Bangkok, where

Rampant unemployment forces many to resort to crime. Young girls work as servants, factory workers, or are forced into prostitution. Children work illegally in small shops under the harshest conditions. Some are even sold abroad. Men do heavy labor for pathetically low wages. (Sivaraksa, 1992: 32–3)

Modernization has also brought pollution, urban ugliness and slums, and cultural disintegration (1986: 20, 57–8). Sivaraksa has thus worked to preserve and perpetuate traditional Thai culture – though he prefers to use the older term, Siamese – but also for necessary changes in society to enhance social justice (1986: xxiii). Like Sri Lankan writers and activists such as Karunatilake and Ariyaratne (see pp. 225–34), he looks back to the emperor Asoka, the early *Saṅgha*, and certain pious, benevolent kings of the past as inspiring models for a truly Buddhist society (Swearer, 1996: 213).

The purpose of economics and a critique of consumerism

Writers in the 'Buddhist economics' mould frequently emphasize the distinctive goal of the Buddhist approach to economics:

Buddhist economics must be very different from the economics of modern materialism, since the Buddhist sees the essence of civilisation not in a multiplication of human wants but in the purification of human character . . . formed primarily by a man's work. (Schumacher, 1973: 50)

Economic Development must be placed against the wider background of the need to develop a well-rounded personality and a happy human being. (De Silva, 1975: 5)

Ven. Payutto holds that consumption should be seen only as 'a means to an end, which is the development of human potential' (1994: 43) or 'well-being within the individual, within society and within the environment' (1994: 35). He thus distinguishes between 'right consumption' and 'wrong consumption': the former is using goods and services 'to satisfy the desire for true well-being', and the latter is using them 'to satisfy the

desire for pleasing sensations or ego-gratification' (1994: 41), limited only by one's ability to afford what one wants (1994: 43). Karunatilake holds that 'The present economic order is based on the thesis that permanent and limitless economic expansion is possible and desirable' (1976: 29), though for man 'no standard of living satisfies him' (p. 79). This produces a reckless use of non-renewable resources that is unfair to future generations (p. 63), and is based on recognizing craving as a fundamental axiom of economics (pp. 18, 28).

Sivaraksa thus criticizes Thailand for falling for 'the religion of consumerism', the 'dominant ethic in the world today' (1992: 3), for:

The religion of consumerism emphasizes greed, hatred and delusion. It teaches people to look down on their own indigenous, self-reliant culture in the name of progress and modernization. We need to live simply in order to subvert the forces of consumerism and materialism. (1992: 114)

There is nothing intrinsically wrong in having expectations rise, but it is harmful when people who were formerly happy are given to believe that they cannot do without a particular good. (1992: 30)

These writers thus question the very basis of a life aimed at continually increasing consumption. Sivaraksa says that as people work harder for things they do not need, they become more restless, rushing and never relaxing (1986: 44). More particularly, Schumacher says that while modern economics 'tries to maximise consumption by the optimal pattern of productive effort', Buddhist economics 'tries to maximise human satisfactions by the optimal pattern of consumption' (1973: 53). He notes that the Burma that he knew had few labour-saving devices compared to the USA, yet also had much less pressure and strain of living (p. 53). Thus, looking at the approach which emphasizes consumption,

A Buddhist economist would consider this approach excessively irrational: since consumption is merely a means to human well-being, the aim should be to obtain the maximum of well-being with the minimum of consumption. (Schumacher, 1973: 52)

Buddhist economics is the systematic study of how to attain given ends with the minimum means. (p. 53)

Likewise, De Silva holds that:

all planning for national development must go beyond pure 'maximal production' to 'optimal human development'. (1976: 36-7)

Peter Timmerman (1995), a Buddhist and director of the Institute for Environmental Studies, University of Toronto, challengingly claims that

modern consumerist society is in fact 'the least materialistic culture in history' as it does not promote a careful valuing of objects, but attempts simply to use them to satisfy dreams of sexual potency, power, or image, and then discard them. In this, the 'desperate need to produce (and to consume) is driven by a kind of panic and mistrust, because it is an attempt to fill a yawning gap in existence with an endless stream of glittering objects'. A mindful approach, however, values the 'rich particularity' of things. Schumacher thus holds, on the basis of his observation of Burmese practice, that the ideal for clothing, for example, would be to use durable material, without toilsome complicated tailoring, but draping the uncut cloth round the body, and leaving time and effort free for artistic creativity in its embroidery (1973: 52).

The Thai writer Suwanna Satha-Anand, who is influenced by Buddhādāsa, holds that in Western economics,

desires are the given. It is not within the realm of economics to 'control or question' desires. It is the essence of economics to *satisfy* desires. In contrast, Buddhism seeks to *bridle* desires as a way to happiness,

for reducing one's desires makes it easier to achieve satisfaction (1995: 7). Here, Ven. Payutto usefully distinguishes craving (*taṇhā*), which is directed at attaining pleasure, from purpose (*chanda*), which aims at well-being, based on wisdom. When driven by the first, economic behaviour is unskilful, while if the latter guides it, it will be skilful (1994: 34–5). He sees modern economics as based on the assumption that people's aim is to seek happiness through the satisfaction of craving, which means that the goal is always over the horizon, as craving can never attain lasting satisfaction.

A common theme is a criticism of taking a country's Gross National Product and per capita income as the key measures of economic success. For one thing, these measures overlook the question of how goods or income are distributed (Karunatilake, 1976: 45) – 80 per cent of an increase may go to 10 per cent of the population (Sivaraksa, 1986: 59). For another, they include in their calculations unnecessary goods (Karunatilake, 1976: 40), harmful products such as armaments, alcohol, dangerous drugs and chemicals, and animal products (p. 84). As Helena Norberg-Hodge, a champion of traditional Ladakhi culture, emphasizes, a focus on GNP also registers, as positive, economic transactions which are wasteful and disruptive of traditional patterns of self-sufficiency (1991: 147). Sivaraksa holds that emphasizing quantitative measures of development focuses attention on economic factors, such as increased production, and political ones, with economists' emphasis on increased

goods fostering greed, and politicians' emphasis on power fostering ill-will. Economists and politicians work together and measure results in terms of quantity, thus fostering ignorance (Sivaraksa, 1986: 57).

Critiques of capitalist and Marxist development models

Many of the writers discussed above agree in criticizing aspects of both capitalism and Communism or Marxism, while at the same time appreciating some of their elements. Karunatilake sees both capitalist and Marxist development planning as:

concerned with the purely material aspects of life, the ownership of wealth, the redistribution of wealth and what goods and services individuals should be entitled to. (1976: 23)

They thus ignore the inner development of humans as an important factor in the growth of society, so that crime and moral decline accompany economic growth (p. ii). For Buddhādāsa, both 'capitalism and communism – especially in their recent historical forms – were the same in that they are fundamentally selfish', both being only concerned with one class in society rather than society as a whole (Santikaro, 1996: 167). For him, 'Dhammic socialism' was the Middle Way which avoided the faults of both (Santikaro, 1996: 178; Swearer, 1989: 193).

To take capitalism first, this is seen by 'Buddhist economists' as having certain good points:

- (1) as capitalist systems are usually democratic, they allow free choice in many matters, and thus allow freedom of religion and opportunities for self-development (Karunatilake, 1976: 22–3);
- (2) they are open to Buddhist values of 'individual initiative, the obtaining of wealth by just means and the sensible spending of it for a comfortable living, for charity and helping others' (De Silva, 1976: 20), and give workers more motivation, and the avoidance of inefficient centrally directed state run industries (Karunatilake, 1976: 107–8).

On the negative side:

- (1) according to a moderate view, capitalism has a tendency to 'feed on the acquisitive drives of man, his greed' (De Silva, 1976: 21); less moderately, Sivaraksa says that it is always motivated by selfishness, and so cannot be ameliorated by adding aspects of socialism to it (1986: 64). Indeed, Buddhādāsa saw it as inherently immoral (Santikaro, 1996: 166), and not even properly democratic, as it is not based on the good of all in society (Santikaro, 1996: 177);

- (2) its economics does not differentiate between wants and needs (Karunatilake, 1976: 60) and assumes that human wants are endless (p. 8), with only scarcity being a legitimate constraint on their satisfaction;
- (3) thus poor people's needs are overlooked while other people's wants – which may be artificially stimulated (Karunatilake, 1976: 57) – are temporarily satisfied (p. 60);
- (4) it emphasizes profits, not public welfare, and emphasizes keeping wages of workers low (Sivaraksa, 1986: 60). Unless unions are strong, government officials fairly honest and efficient, and consumers' organizations on their toes, capitalists will take advantage of people (pp. 62–3);
- (5) it undermines its lauded 'freedom of choice' through manipulative advertising (Sivaraksa, 1986: 63);
- (6) just as much as Communism, it exploits and weakens religion (Sivaraksa, 1986: 126): 'Capitalism kills religion slowly with a neat trick without letting the religious leaders realize what is happening, while communism tries to uproot religions as if they were drugs' (Sivaraksa, 1986: 133); 'Buddhism is being killed by capitalism – slowly, to be sure' (Sivaraksa, 1986: 199).

The good points of Communism and Marxism are that:

- (1) they tend to focus on essential goods and equality (Karunatilake, 1976: 24; Buddhādāsa in Swearer, 1989: 174) and so emphasize sharing (De Silva, 1976: 21);
- (2) they rightly condemn acquisitiveness and exploitation of employees (De Silva, 1976: 20);
- (3) in certain aspects of Marx's writings, there is a valuable humanism (De Silva, 1976: 18–29), such that a more tolerant form of Marxism could work with Buddhism: 'Marxism's courage, vision and struggle may combine with the gentleness, vitality, joy, and peaceful non-violence of Buddhism' (Sivaraksa, 1986: 208).

On the negative side:

- (1) they use coercive or violent means (Karunatilake, 1976: 24; De Silva, 1976: 26);
- (2) they have a tendency to breed hatred and conflict, or to use dishonest means (De Silva, 1976: 21), believing that the end justifies the means (De Silva, 1976: 29). For Buddhādāsa, they are simply the 'revenge of the worker' (Santikaro, 1996: 167);
- (3) they spend too much on arms production or procurement (Karunatilake, 1976: 23);

- (4) they do not allow people freedom (Sivaraksa, 1986: 53), or allow people to ‘realize their full humanity’ (Sivaraksa, 1986: 54);
- (5) they are intolerant of religion;
- (6) they are overwhelmingly materialistic (Buddhadāsa in Santikaro, 1996: 167), have a materialist philosophy, and wrongly assert economic determinism (De Silva, 1976: 28), believing that a change in economic and social structures guarantees psychological change (De Silva, 1976: 28);
- (7) they give workers little motivation, and generate inefficient centrally directed state-run industries (Karunatilake, 1976: 107–8).

Overall, capitalism is seen as prone to the fault of greed, but as avoiding direct hate-based coerciveness, while Communism is seen as prone to the fault of hatred and coerciveness, while upholding a sharing ideal. Both are different from the Buddhist ‘Middle Way’, and both undermine religion, capitalism by insidious, slow corrosion, and Communism by direct repression.

Most of the writers discussed above offer a prescription for a positively ‘Buddhist economics’, but space does not permit a full discussion of these. Their main emphases, though, are implicit in their critiques of existing economic models. Recurring themes are: simplicity and a focus on essential needs; the avoidance of poverty; appropriate technology to avoid high unemployment; the use of renewable resources; avoiding harmful activities such as arms manufacture; national self-sufficiency where possible; the use of co-operatives; the importance of rural areas as a focus for traditional values; and the need to revitalize the rural economy. Buddhadāsa’s particular vision seems to be of a society emphasizing co-operation and generosity, and both individual and communal energetic activity for the good of the community. By implication, its tax system would aim at reducing income disparities. Its government should be led by genuinely virtuous people, but could be overthrown if it became dictatorial. Yet, it would retain its legitimacy, based on *Dhamma*, even if it was unpopular in firmly opposing the expression of people’s defilements (Swearer, 1989: 172–3, 185, 193; Santikaro, 1996: 174–7). Sivaraksa sees the *Saṅgha* in its original form and in present forms not tainted by association with power elites as the ‘ideal for human society’ (Sivaraksa, 1991: 160), a ‘prototype’ for a ‘wide-ranging counter-civilization’ which allows a reversal of ‘the process of degeneration described in Buddhist creation myths’.²⁰ He also advocates a kind of

²⁰ Sivaraksa, 1991: 161; here, he alludes to the *Aggañña Sutta*, on which see p. 153.

'world federalism' entailing such things as: a world parliament as an adjunct to the UN General Assembly; institutions that can tax and regulate transnational companies; economic justice between the North and the South; a taming of the global arms trade; a global disarmament administration; a permanent, strengthened international peacekeeping force, and a strengthened international judiciary (Sivaraksa, 1992: 113–15).

BUDDHISM AND ECONOMICS IN THE MODERN WORLD

In the modern world, there have been various attempts to bring a Buddhist frame of reference to bear on an actual economy and development process of a country. In lands of Southern Buddhism, this has been directed by the government in 1950s Burma,²¹ in Sri Lanka a successful example of a lay-led non-governmental development movement also involves monks, and in Thailand, government development efforts came to be complemented by and added to by those involving monks.²² In lands of Northern and Eastern Buddhism not dominated by Communism, Buddhism mostly affects economics in a less proactive way, whether as a key ingredient of simple, traditional ways of life in certain Northern Buddhist cultures (Norberg-Hodge, 1991), or as elements in the far-from-simple dynamic economies of East Asia. In the West, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (see p. 103) has sought to develop its own alternative economy through a string of 'right livelihood' businesses (Subhuti, 1994: 219–64). Of the above, we will discuss examples from Sri Lanka and Japan.

The Sarvōdaya Śramadāna movement in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka underwent a colonial period under the British, and one of the elements that helped lead up to independence in 1948 was a resurgence in Buddhism. The economy remains primarily agricultural, and three quarters of the population of 17.7 million (1995) live in rural areas, the 1995 per capita GNP being \$500 per annum.²³ The government has remained democratic, and government development efforts have been largely directed at the rural sector, though a 'free-trade zone' set up in 1978 has led to the garment industry becoming the country's largest

²¹ King, 1964: 241–50, 264–7; Sarkisyanz, 1978; Maung, 1970.

²² Suksamran, 1977; Piker, 1973; Swearer, 1973; Swearer, 1995, 118–23; Gosling, 1985; Sivaraksa, 1992: 48–50. ²³ *Small World: The Magazine of Intermediate Technology*, issue 19 (1995), 8.

foreign-exchange earner, employing 350,000 people by 1997.²⁴ Good progress has been made in health care and a free education system, with the life expectancy being 68 for men and 72 for women.²⁵

In many ways Sri Lanka affords a model for other Third World countries, for the peasantry have been able to attain higher levels of well-being thanks to government endeavours. (Swan, 1983: 127)

Since independence, and especially since the Buddha Jayanti celebration in 1956,²⁶ the Sinhalese have felt that the restoration of Buddhism, and simpler ways of living, would bring prosperity, as is seen to have existed in their pre-colonial past (Bond, 1988: 106–7):

the contours of the utopian past, in which the political authority actively intervened and ‘planned’ for the elimination of poverty and to create general prosperity, is widely shared by prominent Buddhist monk-scholars today. (Tambiah, 1992: 108)

Accordingly, a common yearning is for an egalitarian, non-competitive, village-centred welfare-state (Tambiah, 1992: 106). Politicians have thus often preferred to build grandiose irrigation works, as in ancient times, rather than factories, which are linked to alien Western scientific materialism (Bond, 1988: 121). Some factories prefer to use intermediate technology, such as the Durable Car Company, which makes hand-crafted spare parts for the Morris Minor, a 1960s-style car still common in Sri Lanka²⁷ and whose owners oppose the ‘planned obsolescence’ mentality of car makers. Yet the impact of modern economics and urbanization have nevertheless been felt, with high unemployment among educated youth, and a communications gap opening up between the rural majority and the urban, English-educated elite.

In a study of thirty-seven monks, a cross-section of those in the university town of Peradeniya in 1983–4, Nathan Katz found that 90 per cent saw Buddhism as incompatible with capitalism but as compatible with democratic socialism, though half felt that Buddhism and Marxism were incompatible. On the free-market policies of the then government, Half felt the free market was contrary to traditional values, while only a fifth gave it support. A good deal of concern was expressed about the rising national debt associated with free-market policies, while others were concerned about the consumerism and greed such policies seemed to invite. (Katz, 1988: 144)

²⁴ The *Guardian* newspaper, 7 November 1997.

²⁵ *Small World: The Magazine of Intermediate Technology*, issue 19 (1995), 8.

²⁶ Which was seen as 2,500 years after the Buddha’s death, and a time for a revival in Buddhism.

²⁷ B. Datta, ‘The Buddhist, the Businessman’, *People and the Planet*, World Wide Fund for Nature magazine, 4 (1) (1995), 28–9.

Three-quarters agreed with 'Tourism has only a corrupting influence on our society' (Katz, 1988: 146).

Nearly three-quarters (Katz, 1988: 144) approved (with 5 per cent disapproving) of an important movement known as Sarvōdaya Śramadāna, or 'Sharing of Energy for the Awakening of All', movement,²⁸ which is also approved of by De Silva and Sivaraksa. This self-help grass-roots rural development movement seeks to foster the economic and cultural development of depressed villages by drawing on and re-emphasizing traditional spiritual and social values, and getting everyone involved in identifying, and actively working to address, needs that a village has, for example a metalled road, or a new school. It also encourages villagers to develop their own marketing co-operatives for their own products, so as to be less dependent on middle men.²⁹

The movement is led by A. T. Ariyaratne, who in 1958, when a science teacher at a prestigious high school, began it by taking pupils to live and work in a remote and poor village (Macy, 1983: 13, 24). From this, hundreds of schools came to organize weekend work-camps, and the movement took off, being active, by 1973, in 4,000 of Sri Lanka's 25,000 villages (p. 25), and in 8,000 by the end of the 1980s (Bond, 1995: 5). In 1980-1, for example, it ran 3,400 work-camps (Macy, 1983: 52), and by the mid 1990s had, since its inception, recruited more than 800,000 volunteers and touched the lives of over 4 million people (Swearer, 1995: 117). It is the largest of Sri Lanka's non-governmental organizations, and has been described by Ken Jones as 'arguably the largest and most comprehensive example of socially engaged Buddhism in the world today' (1989: 25). It builds roads, wells and wind-pumps, cleans canals, operates programmes for pre-school education, vaccination, and nutrition, runs marketing co-operatives, communal kitchens, village shops and orphanages, and works with released prisoners (Macy, 1983: 21). Ariyaratne sees Sarvōdaya as working to help underprivileged people 'to assert their value as human beings and help them to share the material and non-material resources in society on an equal basis with others' (1995: 11).

The movement's method is as follows (Macy, 1983: 26-7). A village invites a Sarvōdaya worker to visit it, where he or she consults with the local head monk and other leaders so as to organize a 'family gathering' of the village, usually at a temple. There, the idea of 'village awakening' is introduced, and it is suggested that the villagers organize a *śramadāna*,

²⁸ See Macy, 1983; Bond, 1988: 241-98; Bond, 1996: 121-46; Moore, 1981; Goulet, 1981; Kantowski, 1980; Ariyaratne, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1995.

²⁹ See Swearer, 1995: 120-3 for co-operatives that monks have led villagers to develop in Thailand.

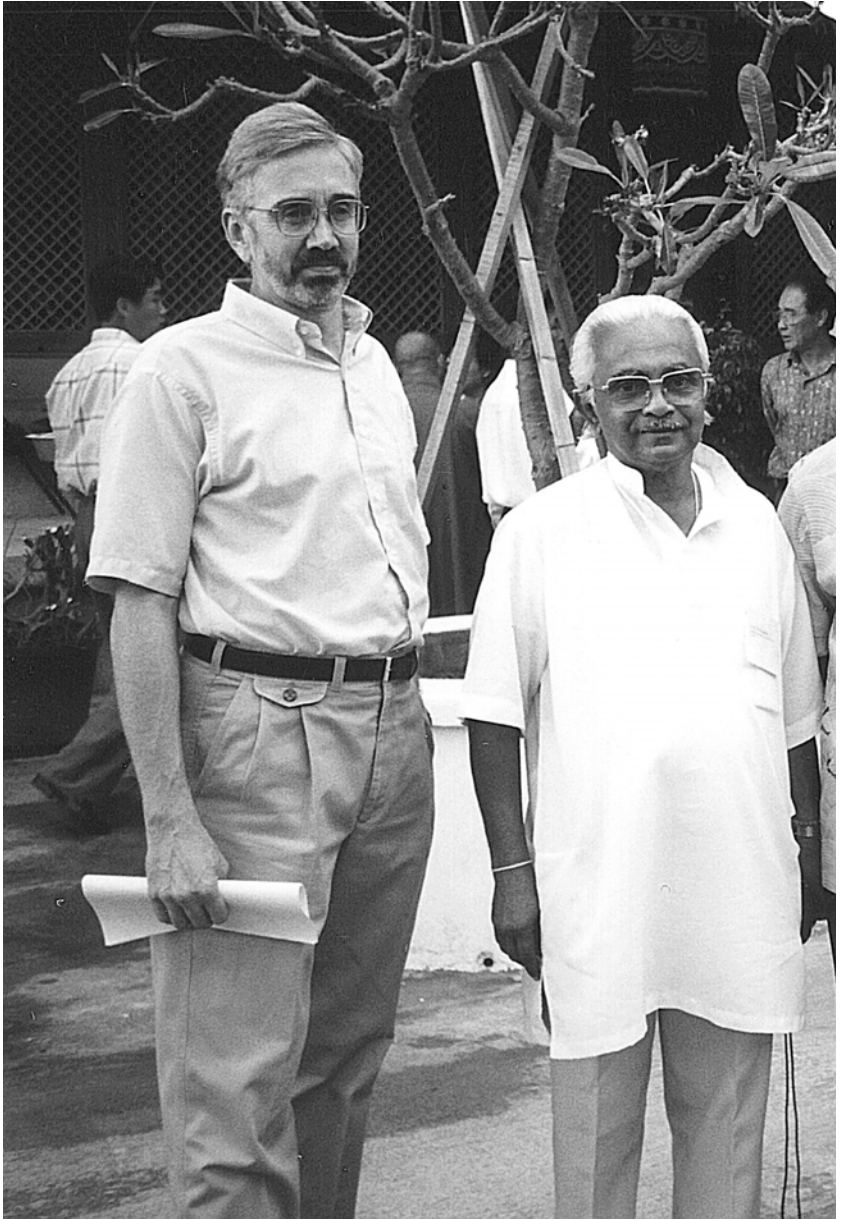


Plate 5. A. T. Ariyaratne, founder of the Sarvōdaya Śramadāna movement, with Professor George Bond, who researches the movement, on his right.

an 'energy sharing' work-camp to work on a project that the villagers have identified as one which will genuinely improve the village. The goal should be a realistic one, such as building a metalled road, so as to bring a sense of empowerment when it is achieved, and it is emphasized that a period of one or two months is needed to plan the project effectively. A successful work-camp gives villagers the experience of a new co-operative and dynamic way of living, working alongside each other and Sarvodaya volunteers. The local monks, or Hindu priests, are usually actively involved, there are communal meals and three 'family gatherings' a day, at which there is discussion or talks, songs and dances (Macy, 1983: 53). As *sharing* is seen as the spirit of Buddhist *dāna* at work, there is a particular emphasis (Macy, 1983: 55–61) on the sharing:

- (1) *of labour*, to help break down barriers, with all participating: men, women, young, old, people of different castes; and villagers and visiting government officials. This also brings a sense of involvement and having a stake in the project, which will encourage future maintenance of it;
- (2) *of food*, drawing on contributions from all, unless they are too poor;
- (3) *of ideas*, with all sections of the community being encouraged to speak up at meetings;
- (4) *of language*, so that people use kindly speech, free of any pejorative forms of address, and all are addressed by family forms of address, such as 'mother' or 'younger brother'. Such mutual respect means that women feel well regarded and safe (see p. 405 and Macy, 1983: 80–3).

After a *śramadāna*, groups may be formed for youths, mothers, children, farmers or elders, and these go on to organize their own projects, such as a pre-school or marketing co-operative. This process helps a new local leadership to emerge, to counterbalance the influence of large landowners, moneylenders, merchants, and representatives of political parties.

The aims of the movement are:

- (1) to take a *holistic*, integrated approach, pursuing a Middle Way between tradition and change to benefit the individual, society and the environment, blending material and spiritual improvement (Macy, 1983: 46), with the transformation of the individual and of his or her society mutually supporting each other (Bond, 1988: 263). Thus Ariyaratne says 'to change society we must purify ourselves, and the purification process we need is brought about by working in society' (quoted in Bond, 1988: 274). Thus 'Work in the world purifies individuals while it creates a better world, which in turn provides greater support for awakening' (Bond, 1988: 264);

- (2) to *build a new person* by bringing about an awakening and empowerment at both an individual and communal level (Macy, 1983: 32), using right livelihood to develop character and enhance the life of the community (Macy, 1983: 46). One of the movement's slogans is 'We build the road and the road builds us' (Macy, 1983: 52), with a District Co-ordinator saying 'The road we build may wash away, but the attitudes we build do not' (Macy, 1983: 54);
- (3) to be a *grass-roots* movement, with decision-making coming from below by village people articulating their own experience and needs, and unfolding development values implicit in their existing value system (Macy, 1983: 20, 24);
- (4) on the basis of (3), to emphasize ten *basic needs for full human welfare and fulfilment*: safe water, a balanced diet, housing, clothing and fuel; health care; communications and education; a clean, safe and beautiful environment; and a satisfying cultural and spiritual life (Macy, 1983: 27; Bond, 1988: 267). Ariyaratne sees these needs as 'an index to measure the spirituo-cultural quality of life', a corollary to Western development planners' Physical Quality of Life Index (quoted in Bond, 1988: 282);
- (5) to aim for an *economics of sufficiency*, with modest consumption, self-reliance, and the conserving of resources and the environment (Macy, 1983: 41–2). Thus the goal is a 'no-poverty, no-affluence society. This is the middle path advocated by the Buddha. Such a society need not destroy nature, value systems, or cultures' (Ariyaratne, 1995: 16). The aim is not economic growth, which can only ever be a means, but a right livelihood which stresses 'harmony and the quality of life rather than ambition and working for profit only' as in the standard Western model of development (Bond, 1988: 267).

Sarvōdaya criticizes both capitalism and socialism for focusing only on economic activity, with the former having the fault of encouraging acquisitiveness, and the latter as being too top-down rather than grass-roots in its approach (Macy, 1983: 13–14, 45–6). Ariyaratne holds that:

In a free-market open economy the religious and spiritual heritage of our societies have become brushed away, leaving room for competitive and possessive instincts of individuals to flourish. (1995: 9)

From this, he holds, come problems such as 'Alcoholism, drug addiction, crimes, child prostitution' (p. 9). He also approves of the 1994 UN Human Development Report in its claim that 'a new development par-

adigm is needed that puts people at the centre of development, regards economic growth as a means and not an end', and goes on to argue that decentralization is the way forward, with communications technology being used for communities to network and bypass the centres of power (1995: 12–13).

Ariyaratne looks back to ancient times in Sri Lanka when kings were inspired by Buddhism to help the people through building large irrigation works, the so-called 'temple and tank' tradition, and sees the movement as resocializing Buddhism (Macy, 1983: 17–18, 43–5). He wishes to recover the best of rural values which became overshadowed in the colonial period, when a subsistence economy based on co-operation and sharing was supplanted by an urban-centred one in which individualism and competition became more dominant (Macy, 1983: 22). Rural society and its values are seen as having come under increasing pressure in the post-independence era, with government-led rural development actions mainly benefiting landlords, rural entrepreneurs, and middle-men (pp. 22–3). Ariyaratne also holds that machines and 'machine-like men' have exterminated traditional arts and crafts (Bond, 1996: 131). Moreover, the colonial period is seen as having undermined the social roles of the monks (Bond, 1988: 250), a view previously championed by the noted monk Walpola Rāhula.

Inspiration for the movement comes partly from Quaker work-camps, and the Gandhian Sarvōdaya movement found in India (Macy, 1983: 29). Gandhian influences can be seen in the movement's emphasis on selfless service for humanity, its goal of a new non-violent social order, its emphasis on an 'economics of sufficiency' and its focus on the village as the core of this new order (Bond, 1996: 122–3). Gandhi's this-worldly asceticism, i.e. non-attached activity focused on transforming this world, present society, is also seen in the movement (Bond, 1988: 262, 275). While Sarvōdaya is clearly part of Buddhist revivalism, its leaders prefer not to call it a 'Buddhist' movement (Bond, 1988: 255–61). While based on Buddhist ethical principles, it emphasizes that these are not uniquely Buddhist, that it draws on other inspirations too, and that the movement also works with members of other religions. Yet it uses Buddhist symbols and is perceived by Buddhists as a Buddhist movement. George Bond sees it as not just a development movement, but a 'carefully planned attempt to apply the Buddhist ideals to the modern world to solve the problems of meaning and modernization' (Bond, 1988: 261).

Sarvōdaya appeals to early Buddhist texts and sees itself as recovering the social ethic of early Buddhism, so as to emphasize that Buddhism

is more than its other-worldly, spiritual teachings (Bond, 1988: 242–3, 248–9). It looks to the spirit and intention of *Suttas* such as³⁰

- (1) the *Kūṭadanta* (see p. 198), on poverty as a cause of social unrest;
- (2) the *Sigālovāda* (see pp. 97–100), on duties to others;
- (3) the *Mahā-maṅgala* (*Sn.* 258–69) on thirty-eight actions and qualities which are a blessing in the world, such as self-application, self-discipline, support of relatives, contentment and patience;
- (4) the *Parābhava* (*Sn.* 91–115), on actions that lead to failure in life, such as bad company, laziness, not looking after aged parents, not sharing wealth, haughtiness, gambling, adultery, and craving for power.

A favourite story in Sarvōdaya circles is that of Magha, told in the *Dhammapada* commentary (*Dhp. A.* 1.264–72). This tells how Sakka, chief of the thirty-three gods of a key heaven, attained his state on account of good deeds in a past life as Magha, a man of unstinting generosity and patience. Living in a village where people were rough and unpleasant, he determined to bring happiness to it. He therefore set to cleaning the village and then making the road smooth and even. When others saw him at work, thirty-two men gradually joined him, as he said that he was ‘treading the path that leads to heaven’. The village head-man became jealous of his influence and told the king that he and his companions were thieves. When there was an attempt to have them trampled to death by an elephant, though, this failed as Magha and his companions radiated lovingkindness to it as well as to the head-man and the king. They then went on to build a beautiful rest-house at a cross-roads in the village, with women coming to be actively involved in the project, and all went on to be reborn in the heaven of the thirty-three.

The movement emphasizes that changes at the level of the individual, village, nation and world are interlinked; in 1981 it founded the Sarvōdaya Śramadāna International, concerned with both Third World development and ‘maldevelopment’ in industrial societies (Jones, 1989: 251). Sarvōdaya sees its mission as to

create a new global social order based on the values of Truth, Non-violence and Self-sacrifice and governed by the ideals of participatory democracy. The decentralisation of power and resources, upholding of basic duties and rights, satisfaction of basic human needs, protection and nurturance of a healthy environment, non-violent conflict resolution and tolerance of religious and linguistic differences will be given pride of place in such an order. The economic principle would be one of a sustainable (no-poverty no-affluence) society based on the sharing of resources and their prudent and mindful use. (Bond, 1995: 4)

³⁰ Bond, 1988: 249, 252–3.

Frank Reynolds sees Sarvōdaya Śramadāna as a reformist movement aiming at structural changes in society in the direction of greater equality, a liberal stance different from that of some conservatives who support more limited movements in the direction of greater equality (1990: 75). George Bond describes Sarvōdaya as a form of 'engaged Buddhism' (1996: 134) or a 'Buddhist social liberation movement' (1996: 121) in which the world is affirmed 'by arguing that the path to individual liberation ran through social liberation' (1996: 122). Joanna Macy sees it as a Buddhist form of 'social gospel' and a parallel to Christian 'liberation theology' (1983: 87). It expresses Buddhist teachings in a strongly social way: it is emphasized that greed, hatred and delusion can be organized at a social level, and the Four Noble Truths analysis is applied to society, with a stagnant, conflict-fraught village in place of *dukkha*, and a co-operative, harmonious village in place of *Nibbāna* (Macy, 1983: 34-7). Nevertheless, Ariyaratne acknowledges that the ramifications of the Noble Truths are not restricted to this social reading of them (Bond, 1988: 273); it is simply that Sarvōdaya focuses on mundane aspects of 'awakening' (Bond, 1988: 270-1).

Ariyaratne rejects forms of Sri Lankan Buddhism that have primarily other-worldly goals, such as many lay people's focusing on generating karmic fruitfulness for a future rebirth (Bond, 1988: 255). He emphasizes that karma is only one factor that influences people's lives, so that they should do all they can to take charge of their lives in the present (Bond, 1988: 272). He has re-orientated the traditional value of *dāna*, or giving, from primarily being support for the *Saṅgha* to being *śrama-dāna*: the gift or sharing of one's time, labour and energy, for the benefit of all. He criticizes both monastic activity aloof from society and that which is focused only on rituals which generate karmic fruitfulness for the laity (Bond, 1988: 255). Rather, people should get 'full use' of their temples in terms of drawing on their potential for social transformation (Bond, 1988: 282). The movement thus often cites a passage where the Buddha admonishes the first sixty *Arahat* monks to go in all directions:

Walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the manyfolk, for the happiness of the manyfolk, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of gods and humans . . . teach *Dhamma* which is lovely in its beginning, lovely in the middle, lovely in its culmination. (*Vin.* I.21; *D.* II.48)

In a similar way, Ariyaratne sometimes compares the Sarvōdaya approach to that of the *Bodhisattva*, who works in the world to aid the

awakening of the many (Bond, 1988: 274). The movement is lay-led, but involves over 1,000 monks as workers at village level and beyond (Macy, 1983: 64). It sees itself as helping to 'restore' the wider social responsibilities of monks, lost in the colonial period, and to help broaden their understanding of the social implications of Buddhism.

Richard Gombrich, an English Buddhistologist, and Gananath Obeyesekere, a Sri Lankan anthropologist, are quite critical of the movement. They hold that it reduces the demanding other-worldly path to one of this-worldly activity (1988: 246). Yet Sarvōdaya activity exists alongside an increase in 'demanding' meditative activity in Sri Lanka by both monks and laity, and Sarvōdaya has stimulated other types of demanding activity in many people who were unlikely to engage in meditation. Gombrich and Obeyesekere also regard Sarvōdaya's vision of pre-colonial village life as 'sentimental and idealized' and thus inaccurate (1988: 244). Given that most of its leaders are from the urban middle classes (pp. 246–7), its 'vision of village life and the past of Sri Lankan civilization is a projection of the bourgeoisie, a fantasy that has no social reality' (p. 250) in the form of bourgeois values that the movement seeks to spread to the villages (pp. 246–7). They also hold that many of the English-language writings on Sarvōdaya are by 'good-hearted but naive Western intellectuals who see the movement in terms of their own utopian fantasies of a benevolent social order' (p. 243). They recognize Sarvōdaya's achievements in inculcating 'a sense of Buddhist work for the welfare of others', but hold that 'the rest of the Sarvōdaya program is both naive and unrealistic, with little hope of success once the massive support from aid donors is withdrawn' (p. 245). For them, Ariyaratne's 'disembodied village has little recognition of social conflict, of the vice and folly that constitute part of our humanity' (p. 251). Yet while Ariyaratne's vision is certainly idealistic, he clearly recognizes the vices of village life and seeks to rectify these by drawing on neglected strengths that he, rightly or wrongly, sees as implicit in Sri Lankan village life. If not, his movement would be doing nothing positive, but just resisting aspects of modernization. His glowing picture of certain ancient Sinhalese civilizations certainly contains exaggerations, and is thus best treated as an inspiring vision, yet this certainly seems to be producing good results. The movement appears to have enough pragmatism to adapt to the reduction in donor support, but let us hope that this does not lead to inappropriate compromises that dull its driving vigour.

Buddhist elements in the modern Japanese economy

Since the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, it has turned its back on the project of military power which fascinated it in the first half of the twentieth century. After a difficult period of reconstruction, it has experienced a lasting economic boom. While traditional forms of Buddhism and Shintō have still been influential in the countryside, in the cities they have often lost out to secularism, though they have adapted to it in certain respects through marketing their ritual services to people. They have also lost out, in the cities, to many 'New Religions', often Buddhist-based. These address modern urban anxieties about belonging, and the quest for material security. They have dropped many traditional religious trappings, use modern means of communication etc., and are lay-led movements. The most successful has been the Sōka Gakkai, or 'Value-Creating Society', a form of Nichiren Buddhism which had a following, in 1992, of 8–10 million in Japan (population 120 million) and 1.26 million overseas converts in around 120 countries (Metraux, 1996: 365, 372).

The Sōka Gakkai (see pp. 146 and 273–4) sponsors an education system including two high schools and the respected Sōka University, two art museums, several publishing companies and a mass-circulation newspaper. It has also amassed much money and property, and has been criticized for some of its financial dealings (Metraux, 1996: 365). It runs Citizens' Livelihood Discussion Centres, which give free legal counseling and act as a channel to government for grievances on such matters as housing, social security, education and pollution. Sōka Gakkai has also sponsored a labour union and student movement which seek to synthesize capitalist and socialist values.

While the Japanese are noted for their hard work, verging on being workaholics, in 1984, the Prime Minister said that there was some concern that the Japanese worked *too* hard and left insufficient time for relaxation and spiritual matters, for 'the country's store of spiritual affluence is all important'.³¹ In 1985, the Labour Minister sought to encourage workers to take more of their paid leave entitlement – in 1983, only 8.8 days of an annual 14.8 days' entitlement were taken on average³² – so as to 'regain their human character'.³³ By 1994, it was

³¹ The *Guardian* newspaper, 4 October 1984.

³² In addition to twelve national holidays a year.

³³ The *Guardian* newspaper, 26 February 1985.

noted that the number of public holidays in Japan had increased to be among the largest in 'developed' countries. In 1984, the Prime Minister had floated the idea of developing a 'Net National Satisfaction Index' to monitor the happiness of Japanese citizens according to how they feel, their health, unemployment, possessions etc.³⁴ In fact, in a 1990 survey of the quality of life in the major cities of the world, Japanese cities came out among the top ones, though homes are of poorer quality and less spacious than in many Western nations.³⁵

In the Japanese economy, employees who work in the large companies (about a third of the total work-force) are cared for very well. The companies try to give a job for life, to look after the social and physical welfare and education of their employees. In return, dedication to the firm is expected. Such an approach has its roots in Confucian family-centred ideals, Buddhist ideals about looking after employees (see pp. 100 and 188), and Japanese group-centred ethics, which springs from the needs of rice-growing agriculture. Canon,³⁶ the office equipment and camera manufacturer, provides extensive welfare benefits for workers, and nearly £3.5 million a year is spent on training centres and courses for them. The expression of its management philosophy has spiritual overtones: a booklet for workers says:

At Canon we are devoted to constantly to contribute [*sic*]to the betterment of society, manufacturing only the highest quality products . . . at Canon we are devoted to building an ideal company to enjoy everlasting prosperity . . . we shall co-operate to deepen mutual trust and understanding with harmonious spirit . . . our motto shall be health and happiness for personal development.³⁷

While the reference to 'everlasting prosperity' sounds out of tune with the Buddhist emphasis on impermanence, the somewhat pious hopes expressed here do contain echoes of Buddhist ideals. The head of TDK declares that the inspiration for his successful company is Buddhism:

Making a profit is important, of course, but it is not the ultimate goal. Character building is much more important. At TDK we attach great importance to discovering the meaning of work. As far as valuing relationships goes, it seems to me, Japan is second to none. And at the bottom of this lies Buddhism.³⁸

Of course the Japanese capitalist 'economic miracle' has been emulated by so-called 'Asian Tiger' economies of South Korea, Taiwan and

³⁴ The *Guardian* newspaper, 4 October 1984.

³⁵ The *Guardian* newspaper, 17 January 1985.

³⁶ Which used to be called Kwannon, the Japanese name of the *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara.

³⁷ The *Guardian* newspaper, 13 December 1984.

³⁸ *Japan Times*, 7 December 1981, 8, as quoted in Davis, 1989: 304.

Singapore, which all share a Confucian/Buddhist value-mix, as well as by that of Thailand, which has an economically active Chinese minority. As in Japan, South Korean economic growth has been led by the government and channelled through large firms. People have worked very hard, with few welfare handouts but with support from family and from employers, if large enough. The average growth in GNP from 1962 to 1984 was 8.5 per cent.³⁹ Thailand has also had a similar rate of growth. Yet in autumn 1997, the growth bubble of many 'Asian Tigers' collapsed, starting with Thailand. The South Korean currency (the won) fell 50 per cent against the dollar in December 1997, so that the International Monetary Fund was called in to assist the country. An editorial in the *Guardian* newspaper (13 December 1997) stated:

The Wall Street Journal sees the whole sorry episode as an obituary to the long-termist 'communitarian capitalism' of Asia which put employees and customers ahead of shareholders and a total justification for the short-termism practised in Britain and the United States.

Whether this is the right analysis remains to be seen. High rates of borrowing seem to be a crucial factor, and a period of retrenchment is likely to be followed then by more moderate growth.

CONCLUSION

This chapter clearly shows that it is wrong to regard Buddhism as uninterested in economic issues, for the Buddha gave guidance to lay people on their economic activity. Moreover, the support of monasticism by both lay people and monastics themselves has been, and generally remains, an important part of economics in Buddhist lands. In both respects, Buddhism's emphasis is on a moral framework for economic activity, and the importance of generosity, especially in support of monastics, who help set the moral tone of society. In the modern world, Asian Buddhist lands have been affected by the twin politico-economic ideologies of Communism and capitalism. Given Communist regimes' harsh treatment of Buddhism, and their use of violence, it is not surprising that Buddhists are aware of Communism's weaknesses. While elements of the capitalist spirit are not foreign to Buddhism, its consumerist form is, and Buddhists are more at ease with capitalism when it contributes to the public good rather than just to private gain. Both Communism and full-blooded capitalism have challenged Buddhist cultures and values, thus

³⁹ The *Guardian* newspaper, 9 April 1986.

stimulating thought on 'Buddhist economics' as an alternative to these, especially in Theravāda lands. This has led to a variety of prescriptions which are broadly favourable to a co-operative communitarian-cum-socialist model with use of 'appropriate technology' and care for the poor. While these prescriptions can sometimes be overly idealistic or insufficiently developed, there have also been attempts to put aspects of such an approach into practice. From a Buddhist perspective, given the conditioned nature of the world and people, it is not surprising that these have all faced some difficulties, as do all human actions.

Among Buddhist lands, excluding Communist ones in which Buddhism has had minimal opportunities to affect modern society, Theravāda lands are spread around the mid-point of the spectrum running from traditional, low-income societies to high-tech rich ones, while Mahāyāna ones are, in the case of Northern Buddhism, for example Bhutan, generally at the former end or, in the case of Eastern Buddhism, generally at the latter end. At either end of the spectrum, Buddhists have not been at the forefront of those embracing modernity and its economics, but elements of Buddhism have been important in resisting or moderating its unethical aspects, or in helping to spread its genuine benefits. They have also contributed to an approach to work which values it as an arena for character building, rather than simply as a way of gaining an income.

CHAPTER 6

War and peace

Enmities never cease by enmity in this world; only by non-enmity do they cease.
This is an ancient law. *Dhammapada* 5

Buddhism is generally seen as associated with non-violence and peace. These are certainly both strongly represented in its value system. This does not mean, though, that Buddhists have always been peaceful: Buddhist countries have had their fair share of war and conflict, for most of the reasons that wars have occurred elsewhere. Yet it is difficult to find any plausible ‘Buddhist’ rationales for violence, and Buddhism has some particularly rich resources for use in dissolving conflict. Overall, it can be observed that Buddhism has had a general humanizing effect throughout much of Asia. It has tempered the excesses of rulers and martial people, helped large empires (for example China) to exist without much internal conflict, and rarely, if at all, incited wars against non-Buddhists. Moreover, in the midst of wars, Buddhist monasteries have often been havens of peace.

BUDDHIST ANALYSES OF THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT

For Buddhism, the roots of all unwholesome actions – greed, hatred and delusion – are seen as at the root of human conflicts (Nyanaponika, 1978: 50). When gripped by any of them, a person may think ‘I have power and I want power’, so as to persecute others (*A.* 1.201–2). Conflict often arises from attachment to material things: pleasures, property, territory, wealth, economic dominance, or political superiority. At *M.* 1.86–7, the Buddha says that sense-pleasures lead on to desire for more sense-pleasures, which leads on to conflict between all kinds of people, including rulers, and thus quarrelling and war. As the Mahāyāna poet Śāntideva put it in his *Śikṣā-samuccaya*, citing the *Anantamukha-nirhāra-dhāraṇī*, ‘Wherever conflict arises among living creatures, the sense of possession is the cause’ (*Ss.* 20). Apart from actual greed, material deprivation is seen as a key source of conflict, as seen in the last chapter (pp. 197–8).

The Buddha also often referred to the negative effect of attachment

to speculative or fixed views, dogmatic opinions, and even correct views if not personally *known* to be true (*Sn.* 766–975; Premasiri, 1972). Surveying the intellectual scene of his day, he referred to ‘the wrangling of views, the jungle of views’. Grasping at views can be seen to have led to religious and ideological wars (offensive or defensive), crusades, bloody revolutions, and gas chambers. Indeed, millions of deaths were caused, in the twentieth century, by those attached to particular ideologies which ‘justified’ their actions: Hitler, Stalin, the Khmer Rouge, and terrorists of various kinds.

Hatred, perhaps fuelled by propaganda at times of conflict, may spring from attachment to certain goods or issues. Though people want to live in peace, they fail to do so: they think increasingly round and round an issue until thought focuses on a particular matter, leading on to desire, and thus to dividing people into ‘liked’ and ‘disliked’, and on to greed, avarice, and thus hatred (*D.* II.276–7). Fear, close to hatred, may also motivate evil actions, whether or not it is justified (*D.* III.182).

Distorted perceptions which fuel conflict are clear forms of delusion. The deepest delusion, according to Buddhism, is the ‘I am’ conceit: the feeling/attitude/gut-reaction that one has a permanent, substantial Self or ‘I’ that must be protected at all costs. As part of the process of building up their self-image, people invest much of their identity in ‘my country’, ‘my community’, ‘my religion’, or even ‘my gender’. When this ‘entity’ is seen as being threatened or offended, people then feel that they themselves are threatened or have been offended. So relationship with a group, which in one sense helps take a person out of ego-centric preoccupation, then becomes the basis for a group-wide ‘ego’ that can itself be ‘offended’. Yet just as a person contains no fixed essence as ‘Self’, surely such conventional groupings as ‘a country’ or ‘a community’ lack any permanent essence which needs defending at all costs: note how political maps of the world change over time as boundaries move and political entities rise and fall. As regards the Buddhist community, the Buddha did not encourage his followers to feel anger at insults to it. If anyone disparaged the Buddha, the *Dhamma* or *Saṅgha*, disciples should not be angry, and if anyone praised these, they should not be elated. In either case, this would be a hindrance to clarity of mind. Rather, they should calmly assess and acknowledge the degree of truth, if any, in what was said (*D.* I.3).

The bad influence of other members of one’s community – whether of rulers or friends – is seen as another factor which may lead to conflict.

Thus at *A.* II.74, it is said that when a king acts in an unvirtuous (*adhammikā*) way, this influences his ministers to do likewise, and this influence then spreads to brahmins and householders, and on to townsfolk and villagers. That is, rot at the top can easily spread downwards through the whole of society. A flatterer can also influence one into taking, or confirm one in, bad actions (*D.* III.185–6).

SOLUTIONS TO CONFLICT

Economic means

The notion that poverty is a root-cause of crime and moral decline, as seen in chapter 5, correlates with the idea that economic measures to avoid poverty can help to prevent crime, as described in the *Kūṭadanta Sutta* (see p. 198). To the extent that economic grievances are factors in a conflict, then, this implies that addressing them can help resolve it.

Negotiation and emphasizing the mutual harm of war

The Buddha is once said to have prevented a war between the Sākiyas – members of the republic from which he himself came – and the Koliyas.¹ Both used the waters of a dammed river that ran between their territories, and when the water-level fell, the labourers of both peoples wanted the water for their own crops. They thus fell to quarrelling and insulting each other, and when those in power heard of these insults, they prepared for war. By his meditative powers, the Buddha is said to have perceived this, then flown to the area to hover above the river. Seeing him, his kinsmen threw down their arms and bowed to him, but when people were asked what the conflict was about, at first no-one knew, until at last the labourers said that it was over water. The Buddha then got the warrior-nobles to see that they were about to sacrifice something of great value – the lives of warrior-nobles – for something of very little value – water. They therefore desisted.

Over the centuries, Buddhist monks have often been used by kings to help negotiate an end to a war. Mahāyāna texts explicitly suggest that Buddhists should also try to see to it that warring parties are more ready to settle their differences. Thus the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* says, on the *Bodhisattva*:

¹ *Dhp.* A. III.254–6; *J.* v.412–14.

In times of war he teaches
 Kindliness and pity
 To convert living beings
 So that they can live in peace.
 When enemies line up for battle
 He gives equal strength to both.
 With his authority and power, he forces
 Them to be reconciled and live in harmony.²

A non-violent moral stance

In a *Jātaka* story (*J.* II.400–3; cf. *J.* I.261–8), the *Bodhisattva* is said to have been a king told of the approach of an invading army. In response, he says ‘I want no kingdom that must be kept by doing harm’, that is, by having soldiers defend his kingdom. His wishes are followed, and when the capital is surrounded by the invaders, he orders the city’s gates to be opened. The invaders enter, and the king is deposed and imprisoned. In his cell, he develops great compassion for the invading king (who will karmically suffer for his unjust action), which leads to this king experiencing a burning sensation in his body. This then prompts him to come to see that he had done wrong by imprisoning a virtuous king. Consequently, he releases him and leaves the kingdom in peace. Here, the message is that the king’s non-violent stance managed to save the lives of many people – on both sides. In line with this approach are such verses as:

Conquer anger by love, conquer evil by good, conquer the stingy by giving,
 conquer the liar by truth. (*Dhp.* 223)

Though he should conquer a thousand thousand men in the battlefield, yet he,
 indeed, is the nobler victor who should conquer himself. (*Dhp.* 103)

At *J.* II.3–4, the content of the first of these is said to have been the policy of the Buddha in a previous life as a King Brahmadata of Benares, in contrast to a king who only repaid good with good and evil with evil.

Of course, such an approach does not always save lives, and indeed it is said that the Sākiya people (see above) came to be annihilated when they did not defend themselves against aggressors. Again, in the eleventh century, when invading Muslim Turks smashed Buddhist monasteries and universities, it appears that the monks offered no resistance. Yet the non-violent response can save. A few years ago, an English Buddhist

² Luk, 1972: 89. A slightly different translation is given by Nhat Hanh, 1975: 95.

monk and his lay companion were attacked by brigands in India. The lay companion fought back and got beaten up. The monk prepared for death, by chanting, and was left alone . . . At *M.* iii.268–9 the account is given of the fearless monk Puṇṇa, who told the Buddha that he was going to live and teach among the people of Sunāparanta. When the Buddha pointed out that they were fierce people, who would revile him, he simply said that he would then look at them as good people if they did not actually strike him with their hands. If they did do this, though, he would look at them as good for not hitting him with clods of earth. If they did this, he would look at them as good if they did not strike him with sticks, and so on for striking with a knife but not killing him. Finally, he said that if they killed him, this would simply bring the body, with its disgusting features, to an end. It is then said that he went on to gain many disciples among the people of Sunāparanta! In Indian history, while Buddhists were sometimes persecuted by Hindu kings, there is no record of persecution of others by Buddhists. On the other hand, neither does history seem to record any Buddhist king who did not seek to repel invaders by force! While an individual may risk his or her life by not meeting force with force, perhaps it takes a very spiritually gifted ruler to do this successfully on behalf of his or her country!

Reflections to undermine hatred and develop patience

Among the central values of Buddhism are those known as the ‘divine abidings’: lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy and equanimity (see pp. 103–9). Allied to these is the virtue of patience or forbearance (Pali *khanti*, Skt *kṣānti*), as exemplified in the *Khanti-vādi-Jātaka* (see pp. 105–7). All such values are directly relevant to defusing conflicts, and their practice will make these less likely to occur in the first place.

As part of the method of developing lovingkindness, the Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa gives various reflections, in his *Visuddhimagga*, for undermining hatred or anger (*Vism.* 298–306). These can be seen as valuable in many contexts as methods of removing the power of these destructive emotions, and thus undermining the psychological roots of conflict. By contrast with the Christian emphasis on not holding ill-will *against* someone, the Buddhist, particularly Theravāda, emphasis is on not holding it *within* oneself, because of its harmful effects. Several of Buddhaghosa’s reflections are in the spirit of: ‘Whatever harm a foe may do to a foe, or a hater to a hater, an ill-directed mind can do one far-greater harm’ (*Dhp.* 42). An example is:

Suppose another, to annoy, provokes you with some odious act, why suffer anger to spring up, and do as he would have you do? If you get angry, then maybe you make *him* suffer, maybe not; though with the hurt that anger brings, *you* certainly are punished now. (*Vism.* 300)

That is, when someone attacks or abuses one, truly lasting harm only arises when one reacts with anger or violence. An enemy wishes such things as that one is ugly, in pain, without good fortune, poor, without fame, without friends, and not destined for a heavenly rebirth. Yet allowing oneself to be prey to anger brings these very things (*A.* iv.94). Getting angry with others is compared to picking up a burning stick to hit someone with, or throwing dust against the wind: one only suffers oneself, through immediate unpleasant feelings, and future karmic results. While the other person presents the occasion for this, such an action is one's own, and directly harms one. Anger is conditioned by an attack of an assailant, but it is not determined by it. There must always be some co-operating reaction: something that one can come to have increasing control over, by developing more self-control and undermining the attachment to 'I' and 'mine'. Of course, this is no excuse for abusing others on the grounds that *they* should use self-control to avoid any annoyance on their part. Most people are not developed enough to avoid some annoyance, so abuse will generally be a direct encouragement for it, as well as being unwholesome for the perpetrator.

In a more concrete way, Buddhaghosa suggests that if another is harming one because of one's *own* anger, the wise thing to do is to put the anger down. Or, again, if one's presence is fuelling another's anger, it is best to get out of the way for a while, so that tempers may cool. He also recommends one to focus only on the good qualities that an offending person now has, or reflect that all beings must have been a close relative or friend in one of their, and one's own, innumerable past rebirths: so that one should now recollect their kindness (*S.* ii.189–90; cf. *Ss.* 21). As past human rebirths might have been in a variety of ethnic groups or cultures, such a reflection seems particularly relevant to situations of ethnic strife between two peoples who view each other as alien 'others'.

Buddhaghosa also suggests that one should reflect on impermanence, and acknowledge that the mind-states of a person who has harmed one are likely to be different now from when he or she did the harmful act (of course, this applies even more to the actions of a past generation of a country or group that was once seen as an enemy). Again, one can even

see an annoying person in terms of a collection of physical elements and mental processes: which particular ‘part’ of them is one annoyed with?? One may also reflect on the inspiring example of the Buddha in past lives, when he showed great patience at provocation, or reflect on the eleven kinds of good results of the mind-deliverance by lovingkindness (A. v.342), such as good sleep, without disturbing dreams, the good regard of others, a serene face and an easily concentrated mind. If all else fails, it is useful to give a gift to, or receive one from, a person to whom one is hostile.

In his *Bodhi-caryāvatāra*, the Mahāyāna writer Śāntideva has much to say on patience, which is close to lovingkindness in spirit. In a striking and thought-provoking way, he says:

Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy about something if it cannot be remedied? (*Bca.* vi.10)

Moreover:

So when seeing an enemy or even a friend committing an improper action, by thinking that such things arise from conditions, I shall remain in a happy frame of mind. (*Bca.* vi.33)

Anger at a fool for harming others is like anger at a fire for burning things (*Bca.* vi.39). If someone strikes one with a stick on account of his hatred, it makes more sense to be angry with his inciting hatred than with him (*Bca.* vi.41). If someone harms one, just look at it as the karmic results of similar harm one has done to others (*Bca.* vi.42). Moreover, one can only be harmed by others because one’s grasping has led to one’s being reborn:

Both his weapon and my body are the causes of my suffering. Since he gave rise to the weapon and I to the body, with whom should I be angry? (*Bca.* vi.43)

An angry response to those who attack one is self-defeating, for by their actions, they are reborn in hell, but by patiently enduring them, one gets beyond one’s past evil that karmically led to this suffering (*Bca.* vi.47–8).

Moreover:

If I am unable to endure even the mere sufferings of the present, then why do I not restrain myself from being angry, which will be the source of hellish misery? (*Bca.* vi.73)

In fact, an enemy should be looked on as like a beneficial treasure, for he gives one a good opportunity for practising patience, and should be venerated accordingly (*Bca.* vi.107–11). Having thus practised patience in

the face of provocation, one should share the spiritual fruits of this patience with those who attack one (*Bca.* VI.108).

Forbearance and forgiveness

In accordance with the spirit of the above, certain scriptural passages recommend the strength and transformative potency of forbearance and forgiveness. One passage concerns a conflict between the gods (*devas*) and the power-hungry titans (*asuras*) (*S.* 1.220–2). Vepacitti, the defeated titan leader, is once brought before Sakka, leader of the gods, and curses him. When Sakka is not angry, his charioteer asks whether he forbears from fear or weakness, but Sakka replies: neither, I simply do not wish to bandy words with a fool. Further, he explains that the words of a fool are best stopped by responding to his anger and verbal onslaught by oneself remaining calm, not by harsh measures. This will not lead to one's opponent thinking he can take advantage of one's 'weakness', for forbearing patience (*khanti*) is a sign of real strength, unlike the deceptive 'strength' of a fool:

Worse of the two is he who, when reviled, reviles again. He who does not, when reviled, revile again, wins a twofold victory. He seeks the welfare of both himself and the other, who, having known the anger of another, mindfully maintains his peace. (*S.* 1.222; *Vism.* 324)

At *S.* 1.162, the same verses are used when a brahmin insults and abuses the Buddha because a relative has become a Buddhist monk. In response, the Buddha asks him what he does when he prepares food and drinks for visiting relatives, but they decline what he offers: who does the food and drink then belong to? When he replies 'those things are for ourselves', the Buddha then says that 'That with which you revile, abuse and insult we who do none of these things, *that* we do not accept. So now, brahmin, it remains with you.' He then goes on to say that he will not 'dine' with him by responding with anger to his angry words, and then gives the above verses.

At *Vin.* 1.342–9 (cf. Niwano, 1977: 18–24), the Buddha tells the following story to two parties of monks quarrelling over the interpretation of a point of monastic discipline. King Brahmadata of Kāsi conquers a weaker kingdom and later executes its former king and queen. Just before he dies, the former king says to his son, Dīghāvu, who remains unknown to Brahmadata, 'enmities are not allayed by enmity: enmities, dear Dīghāvu, are allayed by non-enmity' (*Vin.* 1.344–5). Dīghāvu never-

theless goes away to plot his revenge. By learning to sing, he attracts the attention of King Brahmadata, enters his employ, and goes on to win a position of trust. He gets an opportunity to kill the king when the latter falls asleep on his lap when they are out hunting. Three times he draws his sword to kill the king, but three times he desists, on remembering his father's last words to him. The king then awakens, alarmed by a bad dream, and Dīghāvu reveals his identity. The king asks him to spare his life, but Dīghāvu simply asks that the king spare *his* life. They thus agree to spare each other. Dīghāvu then says:

my parents were killed by a king, but if I were to deprive the king of life, those who desired the king's welfare would deprive me of life and those who desired my welfare would deprive these of life; thus enmity would not be settled by enmity. (*Vin.* 1.348)

Brahmadatta then grants him back his kingdom, and gives him his daughter's hand in marriage. The Buddha then teaches the quarrelling monks in verses (*Vin.* 1.349), some of which are also found at *Dhp.* 3–6:

'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me', the enmity of those who harbour such thoughts is not appeased.

'He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me', the enmity of those who do not harbour such thoughts is appeased.

Enmities never cease by enmity in this world; only by non-enmity (i.e. loving-kindness) do they cease. This is an ancient law.

And others do not know that we come to an end here; but those who know, thereby their quarrels are allayed.

All traditions of Buddhism value acknowledgement of a fault – just to oneself, or to others also – and the resolve not to repeat it (see pp. 26–8). The Mahāyāna also includes an emphasis on explicitly apologizing. In the chapter on ethics (*śīla*) of his *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, Asaṅga states that a *Bodhisattva* should apologize for any offence he or she has caused, and should accept the properly offered apology of another (Tatz, 1986: 74, 75). In Japan, apology is much used as a way of restoring relationships, and those who apologize and confess are treated more lightly in court (LaFleur, 1992: 147).

In the Theravādin *Vinaya*, there are provisions for a formal act of *paṭisāraṇiya*: 'reconciliation', or literally 'returning to' a wrong so as to undo it. This is to be done by a monk who has scoffed at a lay person, refused or complained at his or her alms, or spoken in dispraise of the Buddha, *Dhamma* or *Saṅgha* to him or her, or caused dissension among lay supporters (*Vin.* 11.17–20). In such cases, the monk should be

reproved, made to remember his offence and be accused of the offence, and then the *Saṅgha* should agree for him to go to the lay person to ask his or her forgiveness. If he feels unable to ask forgiveness, the *Saṅgha* should arrange for a competent monk to accompany him to ask on his behalf. He should try to seek forgiveness by a variety of methods if need be, in turn using the following form of words:

‘Forgive me, householder, I am at peace towards you’ . . . ‘Forgive this monk, householder, he is at peace towards you’ . . . ‘Forgive this monk, householder, for I am at peace towards you’ . . . ‘Forgive this monk, householder, (I ask it) in the name of the *Saṅgha*.’ (*Vin.* 11.20)

If none of this succeeds in eliciting forgiveness, the offending monk should be made to sit on his haunches, salute the lay person with joined palms, and acknowledge his offence. Nevertheless, it should be said that, from a Theravāda perspective, if apologizing becomes compulsive for a person, it might be seen as a subtle form of self-advertising, drawing attention to ‘me and my faults’.

Defusing a situation

Within the Buddhist monastic community, harmony is much valued, and systems were developed to deal with differences within it, such as disputes over matters of monastic discipline. At *M.* 11.247–50,³ the Buddha explains that there are seven ways to settle a dispute: reaching a consensus by drawing out the implications of agreed principles; majority voting if this fails;⁴ overlooking monastic offences which the guilty party cannot remember committing; overlooking apparent offences committed when a person was out of his mind; setting aside an offence which has been acknowledged with the promise not to repeat it; censure of a monk who only acknowledges a serious offence under cross-questioning, after having denied it; and lastly ‘covering over with grass’. This final method is to be used if the two parties have taken to open quarrelling. A wise monk should be selected from each side, and each of these should acknowledge the faults of himself and his own party in acting in such an unseemly way. This can draw a veil over such lesser offences, though not any serious ones. The commentary sees this as like covering

³ Cf. *Vin.* 11.93–104 and Nhat Hanh, 1987: 74–9, citing ‘*Mokh.* 10 and Sseu Fen Lin (r. 1428)’.

⁴ Consensus is the preferred method, but otherwise majority voting may be used. This should not be done over a trifling matter, though, or if it is known or thought that ‘those who profess non-*Dhamma*’ are in the majority or the (local) *Saṅgha* will be split on the matter (*Vin.* 11.84–5).

over excrement with dry grass, so that someone can walk over it without becoming soiled. Nhat Hanh refers to another version of this method, called 'covering mud with straw', from a different source. Two respected senior monks are chosen, and one speaks on behalf of each of two monks. They each say something to de-escalate the feelings of those involved, by helping monk A understand monk B:

Then the other high monk says something to protect the other monk, saying it in a way that the first monk feels better. By doing so, they dissipate the hard feelings in the hearts of the two monks and help them accept the verdict proposed by the community. (Nhat Hanh, 1987: 77)

Such procedures, of course, would work best within a community of like-minded people, who share agreed objectives. Nevertheless, some features might be applicable to other kinds of conflict. The avoidance of 'divisive speech', part of 'right speech' (see pp. 38 and 76), is also relevant to defusing or avoiding conflict. One who practises this is

one who reunites those who are divided, a promoter of friendships, who enjoys concord, rejoices in concord, delights in concord, a speaker of words that promote concord. (*M.* 1.288)

NON-VIOLENT REFLECTIONS ON A VIOLENT WORLD

Among Buddhist teachings and principles relevant to the use of violence are the following:

- (1) the first precept (see pp. 67 and 69), i.e. the commitment to avoid intentional harm or killing of any sentient being, whether directly or by the agency of another person;
- (2) the emphasis on lovingkindness and compassion;
- (3) the ideal of 'right livelihood', a factor of the Eightfold Path to *Nirvāna*, which precludes making a living in a way that causes suffering to others. Among the specifically listed forms of 'wrong livelihood' is living by 'trade in arms' (*A.* v.177).

Given these emphases, can war and similar forms of violence ever be justified? The Buddhist path aims at a state of complete non-violence, based on insight and inner strength rooted in a calm mind. Yet those who are not yet perfect, living in a world in which others may seek to gain their way by violence, still have to face the dilemma of whether to respond with defensive violence. Pacifism may be the ideal, but in practice Buddhists have often used violence in self-defence or defence of their country – not to speak of sometimes going in for aggressive violence, like any other

group of people. Ordinary Buddhists may feel that they are not yet capable of the totally non-violent response, particularly as they are still attached to various things which they feel may sometimes need violence to defend. Of course they could give these up, by becoming a monk or nun, but they may not feel ready for this level of commitment.

This said, there are a number of textual passages which reflect on war and punitive violence, seeking to subvert the ‘violence is sometimes necessary’ view of worldly common sense by a dialogue with the non-violent ideal. Here, the Buddha speaks as one who himself came from the warrior-noble (*khattiya*) class. In two short discourses at *S.* 1.82–3 and 83–5, the Buddha comments on two battles which arise when the evil King Ajātasattu attacks the land of his uncle, King Pasenadi, a follower of the Buddha who is said to be ‘a friend to whatever is good’. In the first, Pasenadi is defeated and retreats, and the Buddha reflects on his misery:

Victory breeds hatred; the defeated live in pain. Happily the peaceful live, giving up victory and defeat. (*S.* 1.83; *Dhp.* 201)

This clearly implies that conquest results in tragedy for the defeated, which may lead to hatred and the likelihood of a desire to overcome the conqueror. In the second battle, Pasenadi wins. Capturing Ajātasattu, he spares his life but confiscates all his weapons and army. Here the Buddha comments:

A person may plunder
 so long as it serves his ends,
 but when they plunder others,
 the plundered (then) plunder.
 So long as evil’s fruit is not matured,
 the fool thinks he has an opportunity,
 but when the evil matures, the fool suffers.
 The slayer gets a slayer (in his turn),
 the conqueror gets a conqueror,
 the abuser gets abuse,
 the wrathful gets one who annoys.
 Thus by the evolution of karma,
 he who plunders is plundered. (*S.* 1.85)

Without justifying defensive violence, this points out that the aggression often leads to defensive counter-violence, which can be seen as a karmic result for the aggressor. Such a response happens, whether or not it is justified. Thus aggression is discouraged. Yet Pasenadi, the generally peace-loving defender, is not free of censure. To spare the life of a

defeated enemy is surely good, but to leave him defenceless, without an army, is seen as storing up trouble. Khantipalo comments:

The uselessness of war as a way of solving conflicts is summed up in the last two lines . . . The Buddha saw how fruitless would be Pasenadi's action in confiscating the army of his troublesome nephew. The effect that it had was to harden Ajātasattu's resolve to conquer Kosala, which he did eventually do. In our times the huge reparations demanded of Germany after the First World war is another good example – our revenge is followed by their revenge as seen in Hitler and the Second World war. (Khantipalo, 1986: 14)

Kashi Upadhyaya comments that the passages portray the peace-loving defender as only moderately good, falling short of the ideal of complete non-violence (1971: 537). Elizabeth Harris, on the other hand, says that the passages show 'an acceptance of political realities' in which, the world being as it is, 'Pasenadi's role as defender of the nation against aggression is accepted as necessary and praiseworthy' (1994: 18). Perhaps the crux of the matter is whether one who 'gives up victory and defeat' can remain a king, or would need to be ordained as a monk to pursue purely spiritual concerns to practise this ideal. The passage does not specify. Harris is certainly wrong in saying that Pasenadi's actions are portrayed as 'praiseworthy'. If anything, he is simply portrayed as acting in a limited way according to his emotions and situation. Elsewhere, Pasenadi laments to the Buddha the preoccupations of his kingly role, which encourages such things as greed and conquest. The Buddha thus helps him to refocus his mind on wholesome actions by reminding him that, like everyone else, he will grow old and die (*S.* 1.101–2).

Nevertheless, the issue remains of whether it is possible for a sincere Buddhist king, rather than a somewhat compromised one such as Pasenadi, to rule without force. At *S.* 1.116–17, the Buddha wonders whether it is possible to be a ruler who 'reigns according to *Dhamma* [justice, virtue, righteousness], without killing or causing to kill, without conquering or causing to conquer, without grieving or causing to grieve'. Before answering his own question, however, the tempter-god Māra appears to him and encourages him to be such a king himself. Wondering why Māra should so encourage him, he sees that rulers are inevitably enmeshed in sense-desires, which causes suffering, so that a liberated person could not incline in that direction. This perhaps implies that, while it is not appropriate for a liberated person to be a king, non-violent rule is still a possibility for others – though the danger of corruption by attachment to sense-pleasures needs always to be kept in mind.

In fact, the Buddha says that he had been a non-violent *Cakkavatti* ruler in the past (*A.* iv.89–90; cf. *D.* i.88–9; *D.* iii.59):

a *Dhamma*-king, master of the four quarters, who had established security of his realm . . . And I had more than a thousand sons who were heroes, of heroic stature, conquerors of the hostile army. I dwelt on this sea-girt earth, having conquered it by *Dhamma* without stick or sword.

This is not because a *Cakkavatti* has no army. The *Cakkavatti Sihanāda Sutta* has such a ruler establishing his rule, after his *Cakkavatti* father retires as a monk, by going in each of the four directions with his army, with potential enemies willingly becoming his subjects and accepting his advice to follow the five ethical precepts (*D.* iii.62). Hence no violence is necessary. This is because he has first shown that he can rule according to *Dhamma* by protecting all sections of the population from crime and poverty, and consulting with religious people on what is wholesome and unwholesome (*D.* iii.61). Of course, dealing with crime implies some use of force, though not necessarily killing. Indeed, the *Aggañña Sutta* says that the first king in human society was chosen by the people so as to deal with wrong-doers: but only by his wrath, censure or banishment (*D.* iii.92).

Such, then, is the ideal of non-violent rule as expressed in the early Buddhist texts. Yet it seems to be acknowledged that this is an ideal that can be fully lived up to only by an exceptional person. Thus Harris, after an investigation of such texts, holds:

That lay people should never initiate violence where there is harmony or use it against the innocent is very clear. That they should not attempt to protect those under their care if the only way of doing so is to use defensive violence is not so clear . . . The person who feels violence is justified to protect the lives of others has indeed to take the consequences into account. He has to remember that he is risking grave [karmic] consequences for himself in that his action will inevitably bear fruit . . . Such a person needs to evaluate motives . . . Yet that person might still judge that the risks are worth facing to prevent a greater evil. (E. J. Harris, 1994: 47–8)

If violence is then used, it is something that Buddhism may *understand* but not actually *approve of*. This can be seen in texts which tell of clever forms of self-defence. In the *Dhammapada* commentary (*Dhp. A.* ii.217–22) there is a story of a woman who is about to be murdered by her husband, whose life she had earlier saved. When she outwits him and pushes him off a cliff, a god who observes this says that women can be as wise (*pañḍita*) as men (p. 221). As a god, rather than the Buddha or a monk says this, there is no direct approval of the violence involved in the act.

The Indian emperor Asoka (268–239 BCE) is widely revered by Buddhists as a great exemplar of Buddhist social ethics (see pp. 115–17), partly because of his emphasis on non-violence. While encouraging his people in this and other Buddhist moral norms, he himself abandoned his forebears' custom of violent expansion of the realm. Indeed, the Hindu *Manu-smṛiti* (7.169–70) holds that a king should make war when he thinks that all his subjects are contented and that he is most exalted in power, with the Hindu *Mahā-bhārata* holding that there is no evil in a king killing enemies.⁵ In the early part of his reign, prior to becoming a committed Buddhist, Asoka had conquered the Kalinga region, but his Kalinga Rock Edict⁶ expressed horror at the carnage that this had caused. He therefore resolved to abandon such conquests – even though he was the head of a very powerful empire. He retained his army, though, and in one edict warned troublesome border people that, while he preferred not to use force against them, if they harassed his realm he would, if necessary, do so. He retained the goal of spreading the influence of his empire, but sought to do so by sending out emissaries to bring about 'conquests by *Dhamma*', that is, to spread the influence of his way of ruling and thus form alliances. The most famous instance of this was his link with Sri Lanka, where his son, the monk Mahinda, transmitted Buddhism, in its Theravāda form.

The *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta Sūtra*, an early Mahāyāna text perhaps influenced by Asokan edicts, and in turn influential in Tibet, teaches that the righteous ruler should seek to avoid war by negotiation, placation or having strong alliances. If he has to fight to defend his country, he should seek to attain victory over the enemy only with the aim of protecting his people, also bearing in mind the need to protect all life, and having no concern for himself and his property. In this way, he may avoid the usual bad karmic results of killing (*ASP* 206–8). In war, he should not vent his anger by burning cities or villages, or destroying reservoirs, fruit-trees or harvests as these are 'sources of life commonly used by many sentient beings who have not produced any faults', including local deities and animals (*ASP* 197; cf. 70).

THE POSITION OF THE SOLDIER

While the 'wrong livelihood' of 'trade in arms' refers to the arms-salesman and not the soldier, it clearly has relevance to the latter. Buddhist

⁵ *Śānti-Parvam* 15.14, 15.54; Tähtinen, 1976: 91–2.

⁶ Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 27–30.

texts do not contain the idea, found in the Hindu *Bhagavad Gītā*, for example (II.37 and 32), that if one's role in society is that of a warrior-noble, then it is one's religious duty to go into battle, when called to, and that one who dies in battle goes straight to heaven (Upadhyaya, 1971: 513–37). The Buddha's attitude can be seen in one text where a professional soldier asks him whether a soldier who falls in battle is reborn in a special heaven. In response, the Buddha is silent, but when the man persists in his questioning, he explains that such a person is actually reborn in a hell or as an animal (*S.* IV.308–9). While the *Bhagavad Gītā* holds that a truly detached person can still, as a soldier, kill (V.10; III.30), the Pali Canon sees the truly detached person – a liberated person (*Arahat*) – as incapable of deliberately killing anything (*D.* III.133).

In the Theravādin monastic code, it is an offence for monks to go to see an army fighting, to stay with an army, or watch sham fights or army reviews (*Vin.* IV.104–7). Moreover, the *Suttas* say that monks should avoid talk of various 'low matters' including armies and battles (*D.* I.7, 178). The *Brahmajāla Sūtra*, a Mahāyāna code for lay and monastic followers which became influential in China, holds that those who take the *Bodhisattva* vows should not take any part in war. It forbids detention of anyone, or the storing of any kind of weapons, or taking part in any armed rebellion. They should not be spectators of battles, nor should they kill, make another kill, procure the means of killing, praise killing, approve of those who help in killing, or help through magical chants.⁷

Vasubandhu, giving the Sarvāstivāda view, is very clear that when an army kills, all the soldiers are as guilty as the ones who directly do the killing; for by sharing a common goal, they mutually incite one another. Even a person forced to become a soldier is guilty, unless he has previously resolved 'Even in order to save my life, I shall not kill a living being' (*AKB.* IV.72c–d). This is not saying, note, that the guilt of any individual is reduced by being shared; all share the same guilt as would pertain to a single individual who did the killing. Yet, given the Buddhist emphasis on intention and motive, it must be said that defensive violence is less bad than aggressive violence.

Even so, in Buddhist Thailand, army officers are well respected: though this is more for their role in helping run the country than for their military prowess. A two-year national military service is required of all men (Tambiah, 1976: 489). This even includes those who are Buddhist monks, the reason being that, as short-term ordination is common and

⁷ Demiéville, 1957: 353, citing De Groot, 1893: 46f.

easy, only long-term monks are exempt. Ex-monks are often employed as *anusasanachams* or ‘chaplains’ to instruct soldiers in religious and moral matters (Tambiah, 1976: 304).

Most lay Buddhists have been prepared to break the precept against killing in self-defence, and many have joined in the defence of the community in times of need. One might say, nevertheless, that any Buddhist faces a dilemma during a war. His response might be:

- (1) to avoid fighting, perhaps by becoming a monk, and to encourage peace, if possible (as Buddhist monks did during the Vietnam War);
- (2) to fight, but with the intention of saving his people, country or religion, rather than killing an enemy. During the Second World War, some British Buddhists remained pacifists, while others felt it their duty to fight against Hitler’s Germany.

To take course (2) cannot be seen as avoiding the evil of killing, but it is less bad than aggressive killing. A Buddhist soldier may also try to dilute the evil of his killing by the performance of counteractive good actions. If conscripted against his will, he may be more afraid of killing than being killed – for to kill will lead to bad karmic consequences. For members of a government, if they are Buddhist, the dilemma is more intense. Buddhist principles would encourage the avoidance of violence, or the minimization of it if it is used (King, 1964: 278). Yet this is not always so in practice. For example, the force which the Sri Lankan government has used against Tamil rebels has sometimes been very potent, and not too discriminating.

BUDDHIST ‘JUSTIFICATIONS’ OF, AND INVOLVEMENT IN, VIOLENCE

Sri Lanka

Within the Theravāda, no canonical text can be found justifying violence, yet some later writings are relevant to the issue. In Sri Lanka, once known as Ceylon, a number of chronicles focus on the actions of Buddhist kings and the fate of Buddhism from its arrival on the island in 250 BCE. The most important of these is the *Mahā-vaṃsa* (Geiger, 1980), composed by the monk Mahānāma in the fifth or sixth century CE. More than a quarter of it concerns the reign of King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi (Sinhala Duṭṭagāmuṇu; 101–77 BCE), glorifying him as the greatest of Sinhalese heroes (the Sinhalese being predominantly Buddhist, and the majority people of the island). Chapter xxv tells how he defeated Eḷāra, a non-Buddhist Tamil general who had invaded the island from South

India, and established an enclave in the north which had lasted forty-four years. While Eḷāra was not an unbenevolent ruler, and even offered some patronage to Buddhism, the *Mahā-vam̐sa* sees him as having been a threat to the health of Buddhism on the island. Duṭṭhagāmaṇi is said to have fought not for the ‘joy of sovereignty’, but for the protection of the Buddhist religion. His actions are therefore the nearest thing to a ‘holy war’ in Buddhist history, though even this can perhaps be seen as having been (delayed action) defensive.

The chronicle tells how, for protection, Duṭṭhagāmaṇi’s army was accompanied by monks and by Buddhist relics on spears. Monks were encouraged to disrobe and become soldiers, one becoming a general. After defeating the Tamils, the king was distressed at the many deaths he had caused – as Asoka had been after his defeat of Kālīṅga (p. 253) – but it is claimed (xxv.108–11) that enlightened monks (*Arahats*) reassured him that

That deed presents no obstacle on your path to heaven. You caused the death of just one and a half people, O king. One had taken the refuges [i.e. were Buddhist], the other the Five Precepts as well. The rest were wicked men of wrong view who died like (or: as considered as) beasts. You will in many ways illuminate the Buddha’s teaching, so stop worrying. (Gombrich, 1988: 141)

This – written many centuries after the events it purports to describe, at a time of renewed threat from South India – is a rather perverse reflection of the doctrine that it is less bad to kill an unvirtuous person than a virtuous one: for it is always worse to kill a human intentionally than an animal (see p. 52). In any case, the king was said to have sought to make amends for his actions by a life of good works of benefit to the community, before being reborn in a heaven.

Duṭṭhagāmaṇi may in fact have been the first to unify the island: even the *Mahāvam̐sa* says that not all who fought against him were Tamil, and that he had to fight thirty-two kings before reaching Eḷāra’s kingdom from the far south (Tambiah, 1992: 134). Thus the chronicle’s attempt to portray his actions as simply a defence of the Sinhalese nation and its Buddhism is over-played. The alignment of the Sinhalese to Buddhism and the Tamils to a threatening alien force was probably the product of a later period. There was racial and cultural mixing from an early time, and this only began to be undermined in the fifth century, when rulers of three powerful South Indian kingdoms succeeded in undermining the influence of Buddhism on Hindu society in South India, and threatened the political stability of the island’s Sinhalese kingdom, generating real fear for the plight of Buddhism (Manogaran, 1987: 22–3). There were notable

destructive invasions of the island by militantly (Śaiva) Hindu South Indian states in the fifth, ninth, tenth, eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

In twentieth-century Sri Lanka, an influential book arguing for the involvement of Buddhist monks in social and political matters was Walpola Rāhula's *Bhikkhuvage Urumaya* (1946; Rahula, 1974). In a colonial context, this talked of Sinhalese-Buddhist 'religio-nationalism' and 'religio-patriotism' (Tambiah, 1992: 27–8), and referred to Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's campaign against General Elāra as a 'crusade' to 'liberate the nation and the religion from the foreign yoke' which was arresting the 'progress of Buddhism' (Rahula, 1974: 20):

From this time the patriotism and the religion of the Sinhalese became inseparably linked. The religio-patriotism at that time assumed such overpowering proportions that both *bhikkhus* and laymen considered that even killing people in order to liberate the religion and the country was not a heinous crime. (p. 21)

On the *Mahā-vaṃsa*'s claim that supposed *Arahats* had said that most of the Tamils killed were not fully human,⁸ Rāhula says:

Nevertheless, it is diametrically opposed to the teaching of the Buddha. It is difficult for us today either to affirm or to deny whether *arahants* who lived in the second century BCE did ever make such a statement. But there is no doubt that Mahānāma Thera, the author of the *Mahā-vaṃsa*, who lived in the fifth century A.C., recorded this in the *Mahā-vaṃsa*. (Rahula, 1974: 22)

He holds that this shows that responsible monks of this time had accepted such an idea and that they 'considered it their sacred duty to engage themselves in the service of their country as much as in the service of their religion' (p. 22).

When Richard Gombrich interviewed Sinhalese monks in the 1960s, he found that

most (but not all) of them were reluctant entirely to accept the view propounded to Duṭṭhagāmaṇi, for they realized its incongruence with Buddhist ethics. The stereotypes are, however, too strong to be easily demolished, and least of all by historical fact. (Gombrich, 1988: 142)

When monks were asked about the ethics of Duṭṭhagāmaṇi's war, the answers varied slightly, but typical was the reply that his

killing of Tamils was sin [*pava*], but not great, because his main purpose (*paramārtha*) was not to kill men but to save Buddhism; he did not have full intention to kill. But to say that he will not pay for his sin . . . is wrong.⁹

⁸ On this issue, see also Obeyesekere, 1988.

⁹ Gombrich, 1971a: 257. I would prefer the translation 'evil' to that of 'sin', as 'sin' implies an action which offends a creator God. For further information on the use of the Duṭṭhagāmaṇi legend in the context of the current ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, see Bartholomeusz, 1999.

Only one monk said that the king was wrong in thinking that his ultimate purpose made his action right. It was wrong. Only two monks said that he did not 'sin'. One, a kindly but very unsophisticated monk, said that it had not been a 'sin' for the king to kill Tamils as they were of wrong view, since it was not wrong to kill in order to save religion. Another held that killing is not a 'sin' if it is done to defend Buddhism, as with *Duṭṭhagāmaṇi* (Gombrich, 1971a: 258).

Sri Lanka has often been in the news since 1983 – when there were bloody inter-ethnic riots – because of flare-ups in the conflict between the government and ruthless guerrillas fighting for an independent Tamil state in the north-east of the island (de Silva et al., 1988). The conflict is between the majority Sinhalese, who make up 74 per cent of the population, and the Tamils, who make up 18 per cent. It is mainly centred on the issues of language use, peasant resettlement areas, and regional devolution. The Sinhalese language has come to have a privileged status, and Tamil-speakers have felt that this has placed them at a disadvantage as regards education and government employment. Peasant resettlement schemes have involved the movement of Sinhalese people into once dry areas, which had been populated by the Sinhalese in earlier eras, upsetting the current population balance with the Tamils in such areas. Regional devolution for Tamil areas has been sought so as to overcome economic deprivation, though extremists have sought a completely separate state. The tensions arising from such issues have been heightened by rising population pressures and the poor economic performance of the country, though it has a good record on health and education.

The conflict also has a religious dimension. The Sinhalese are mainly Buddhists, and Buddhism is a major ingredient in their identity, because of the long history of the religion on the island, and the fact that the Sinhalese have done much to preserve and spread Theravāda Buddhism. The Tamils are mainly Hindu, but religion is not a part of their cultural identity which is emphasized. The Sinhalese Buddhists see themselves as an endangered minority protecting an ancient tradition. While they are a majority in their own country, a history of invasions by the much more numerous South Indian Tamils make them feel insecure. One leading monk, interviewed by Juergensmeyer in 1987, talked of the geographically 'tiny . . . fragile Sinhalese Buddhist Society . . . a tear drop, a grain of sand, in an enormous sea' (Juergensmeyer, 1990: 58). For a British Christian at least, an insight into this mind-set may be gained by imagining the following scenario. If an Ireland-sized Britain

(cf. Sri Lanka) and the Scandinavian peninsula (cf. South-east Asia) were islands of Christianity (cf. Buddhism) facing a Europe which had predominantly turned Muslim (cf. Hinduism in India), after having once been a stronghold of Christianity, then the presence of a Muslim enclave in South-east Britain might cause some concern, especially if there had been a history of invasions from Muslim Europe! If, moreover, Christianity in a Protestant form (cf. Theravāda Buddhism) *only* now existed in Britain and Scandinavia, this would increase the concern. There is also, of course, an analogy with the situation of Judaism in Israel, where there is, again, a perceived need for a religion to have a protected territory.

After independence from the British in 1948, Sinhalese Buddhists rightly sought to revive and strengthen their culture after the colonial period, and they have also sought to overcome the colonial legacy of the Tamils being a relatively privileged minority. Yet a side-effect of building their nationalism around a Buddhist identity rooted in perceptions of past Sinhalese Buddhist civilizations has been to exclude the mainly non-Buddhist Tamils from this ideal. Buddhist values have become distorted as 'Buddhism' has become increasingly identified, by sections of the population, with the Sinhalese people and the territory of the entire island.¹⁰ While the *Mahā-vamsa* has the Buddha predict that Buddhism would flourish in Sri Lanka, this has wrongly been taken by some to support a drive to restore all, and only, Buddhists to prominence (Bond, 1988: 9). This perspective has led to Buddhists exploiting their majority position and alienating Tamils, who are still perceived as a privileged minority. Sinhalese party politicians have 'played to the gallery' and made capital out of religion, producing a communalization of politics (Bond, 1988: 121–2). Often the party in opposition has objected when the party in power has made moves to address Tamil grievances. There are Buddhists who object to this, though: both the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress and the Young Men's Buddhist Association have passed resolutions for the government to revoke the party system (Bond, 1988: 118). The division of the *Saṅgha* along political lines has not helped either, though there is a swell of opinion against this.

But for extremists on both sides – including some Buddhist monks who have demonstrated against 'concessions to the Tamils' – moderates could have resolved the ethnic problem by taking into account the concerns of both sides and encouraging mutual forgiveness of past wrongs.

¹⁰ Cf. the rise of 'Hindutva', a kind of Hindu fundamentalism, in India.

In their drive to protect Buddhism, Sinhalese Buddhists need to pay more attention to the contents of what they are 'protecting', and less to the need for a strong political 'container' for it. A re-emphasis on the Buddhist values of non-violence and tolerance is needed, as is a more pluralistic model of Buddhist nationalism (Tambiah, 1992: 125). Tambiah points out that the heavy centralization of the state is a legacy of British rule that cannot be traced back to pre-colonial times (pp. 179–80). The pre-British kingdoms were based on a 'galactic model', with a centre in dynamic interplay with surrounding kingdoms and immigrant groups, not a fixed, exclusive nation-state (pp. 174–5). He feels that the idealizing of an ancient Sinhalese past has led to an overlooking of more recent medieval and pre-colonial times in which there was 'a multicultural and pluralistic civilization with a distinctively Buddhist stamp' (p. 149).

In the late 1990s, the government of Mrs Kumaratunga has been both talking to moderate Tamils and trying to defeat the Tamil Tigers militarily. In November 1997, she also put forward a plan to give the country a federal structure, with regions having substantial powers, including over police, land and revenue. While Sinhalese nationalists and some well-known monks object to this, it is to be hoped that people come to agree to this in a referendum, for the death toll over the years is at least 50,000, military expenditure takes up a quarter of government spending, and the economy has become stunted.

South-east Asia

In Thailand, during the 1970s, people felt very threatened by Communist insurgency and the threat of invasion after the fall of Vietnam (1975), Laos and Cambodia to Communist forces. Many saw this as a grave threat to the nation, Buddhism and the monarchy: the three pillars of Thai society. Thus during the Vietnam War, there were American air-force bases in Thailand which were used to bomb Communist areas and supply-lines in Vietnam and Cambodia. In this context, Kittivuddho, a popular but militantly anti-Communist monk (Suksamran, 1982: 132–57), said in a magazine interview on 29 June 1976 that killing Communists or leftists was not 'demeritorious' as

such killing is not the killing of persons (*khon*). Because whoever destroys the nation, religion and the monarchy is not a complete person, but mara (evil). Our intention must not be to kill people but to kill the Devil. It is the duty of all Thai. (quoted in Suksamran, 1982: 150; cf. Sivaraksa, 1986: 98)

Here, one sees an echo of the unfortunate *Mahā-vamsa* notion of humans who are not really humans. He went on to say that while he accepted that killing was against Buddhist teachings, such killing generated only little 'demerit', but much compensating 'merit', comparing this to killing a fish and then cooking it to give as alms to a monk. His interview caused a furore in the Thai press, in which he was accused of stupidly encouraging bloodshed (Suksamran, 1982: 150–1). The Supreme Patriarch rightly denounced his attempted 'justification' of killing, but appeals to *Saṅgha* authorities to discipline him for infringing the *Vinaya* produced a negative result (Keyes, 1978: 158–9). In fact, apart for one small exception, there are no *Vinaya* rules against a monk expressing any viewpoint.

Kittivuddho defended himself in a speech to monks in which he said that what he had meant in the interview was that killing Communism as an evil *ideology* was not 'demeritorious' (Suksamran, 1982: 153). In a speech to army officers, though, he made it clear that it was the job of monks to kill *Communism*, but their job to kill *Communists*. In his previous speech, he had made it clear that, in the face of a grave threat to 'nation, religion and monarchy', he would disrobe to kill their enemies (p. 154). In his speech to soldiers, he said that 'to kill some 5,000 people and ensure the happiness of 42 million Thais' was legitimate, so that to do such an act would be meritorious and not lead to hell (p. 155):

If we want to preserve our nation, religion, and monarchy, we sometimes have to sacrifice *sila* (rules of morality) for the survival of these institutions.

This he saw as sacrificing a lesser good for the sake of a greater good (p. 155). In a speech on a Buddhist festival day, he went on to say that, because of Communist violence against monks,

Let us determine to kill all communists and clean the slate in Thailand . . . Anyone who wants to gain merit must kill communists. The one who kills them will acquire great merit . . . If the Thai do not kill them, the communists will kill us. (quoted in Suksamran, 1982: 155)

There were those who agreed with him, leading to an army coup in October 1976 which brought an end to three years of democracy, and saw police and right-wing mobs mounting bloody attacks on alleged 'student-leftists and communists' occupying a university (Suksamran, 1982: 157). An unfortunate era in Thai politics.

In Burma, at the popular level, there have been millenarian ideas which looked forward to a future utopia brought in by a leader variously identified as a *Cakkavatti* king (see p. 114), a *Bodhisattva*, and Setkya-Min Buddha-Yaza, 'Lord of the Weapon and Buddha-Ruler', a future king

of occult powers who would overcome disorder and re-establish the rule of *Dhamma* in the world (Sarkisyanz, 1978: 90; Spiro, 1971: 172). In times of popular discontent, a charismatic person would be so identified, and lead peasant revolts against kings or the British conquerors, as happened in 1839, 1855, 1858 and 1860. Such ideas were also linked to guerrilla resistance to the British in 1886–9, a peasant revolt in 1922, and a peasant war of 1930–1 (Sarkisyanz, 1978: 90). Thus Buddhist ideals have been adapted at the popular level to sustain revolts. Yet Fielding Hall remarks that, during his time in Burma, though there were revolts, he never saw monks having anything to do with them (1902: 56–7).

In Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, various kingdoms have arisen and fallen, and there has been no shortage of conflicts between these (Ling, 1979: 135–47). In war, Buddhist temples might be destroyed, and famous Buddha images or relics taken as booty (Tambiah, 1976: 121). This was because they were seen as the source of auspicious magical power that would benefit whoever possessed them. In Burma, the eleventh century saw King Anawratā invading the southern Burmese kingdom of Thaton to get a copy of the Theravāda scriptures that Thaton refused to give, as Anawratā's kingdom was turning to the Theravāda. In 1767, Burmese forces also devastated Ayutthaya, then capital of Siam (now Thailand), destroying most of its Buddhist temples. When one reads of this devastation, one might wonder whether it is the case that, having overridden the prime Buddhist precept against killing, Buddhist soldiers may sometimes lose *all* inhibitions in war and become very violent. As a point of comparison with non-Buddhists, however, this would be unfair, as it would overlook, for example, the great violence of war in Christian Europe up to the sixteenth century or so.

The Buddhist emphasis on non-anger and harmony means that, in both Thai and Burmese society, face-to-face expressions of anger, hatred or hostility are frowned on and avoided at all costs. They are seen to show lack of self-control and equilibrium, thus:

The Siamese [Thais] are a people incapable of retaining one spark of animosity, and during my stay in Bangkok I do not remember a single instance of seeing two Siamese come to blows and seldom even to quarrel.¹¹

Hostility may be avoided by humour or avoiding a potential conflict situation, or expressed in indirect ways, such as gossip, 'slip-of-the-tongue' indirect insults, or occasionally magical means of aggression (Ling, 1979: 141–3). Western observers sometimes comment that, when a Thai

¹¹ F. A. Neale, *Residence in Siam* (London, 1852), p. 148, quoted in Bunnag, 1973: 1.

person is really pushed, and does get angry, this can lead to sudden violence of an unpredictable kind. The 'suddenness' of the anger is sometimes put down to the release of repressed aggression. However, this view may well be based on an inability to read a Thai's subtle signs of rising anger, which any Thai would be able to read: so there is not really a sudden 'explosion' of anger at all. The Burmese and Thais are no more repressed than the English, though repression is more common in Sri Lanka, where Martin Southwold sees it as perhaps contributing to the island's high murder rate (1983: 73–4). He notes that the rate tends to be highest in fishing communities, and wonders if this is because Buddhist fishermen feel less disinclined to break the first precept by killing a human when they are used to breaking it regularly by killing fish, so that they already feel that they are evil-doers.

China

As has been seen (pp. 135–40), Mahāyāna texts contain passages which allow killing in constrained circumstances provided it is motivated by compassion and carried out with 'skilful means'. To what extent were such justifications for violence reflected in the practice of the Buddhists of East Asia? In China, the monastic rule which meant that a monk who intentionally killed a human was permanently expelled from the *Saṅgha* was listed as the first, rather than as the third of such rules, to emphasize its importance (Demiéville, 1957: 348). Over the ages, Buddhists were often noted for 'shirking their military duties', and non-Buddhists complained at the fact that Buddhist monks were exempted from conscription (Demiéville, 1957: 355–6).

Nevertheless, one of the main reasons why the non-Chinese people in the north of China adopted Buddhism was to gain magical help in times of war (Demiéville, 1957: 355); though having engaged their interest, monks helped steer them towards more peaceful ways. Over the centuries, Chinese and Japanese military forces have used Buddhist symbols, banners, *mudras* and *mantras* to empower their actions and intimidate opponents. Vaiśravaṇa, one of the protector 'four great kings' of classical Buddhism, became, in T'ang China, the focus of tantric rites to assure victory in battle, to protect the *Dharma*, and in Japan was the patron deity of soldiers. Chinese and Japanese Buddhists also included non-Buddhist war-gods in their pantheon, such as the Shintō kami Hachimana, identified as a *Bodhisattva* (Demiéville, 1957: 376). Chinese kings occasionally gave a 'Buddhist' justification for violence. In 581,

after Wen-ti had established the Sui dynasty, he pronounced himself a *Cakkavatti* emperor, saying 'We regard the weapons of war as having become like incense and flowers' as offerings. He took the *Bodhisattva* vows, claimed that his battles had promoted Buddhism, and was a lavish patron of Buddhism (Welch, 1972: 297).

In China, there was sporadic involvement of Chinese monks with violence:

Without ever becoming in China an essential given of history, as they did in Japan, mutinies, insurrections or organised peasant revolts, fomented or inspired by the Buddhists, were not lacking in many eras. The eras seem to have coincided, as was also the case in Japan, with weaknesses of the centralised state. When the central power slackened its control, and religion was feudalised along with society, one sees monks born of the people constituting armed bands or putting themselves at the head of bands of peasants, all often having initiated ties with a rebellious nobility or with local functionaries wanting autonomy. (Demiéville, 1957: 357)

Japan

In Japan, Buddhists intervened in the life of the nation more openly than in China; indeed, there was a connection between Buddhism and the state from the time of the coming of Buddhism to the country, in 538 CE. In the tenth century, during the Heian era (794–1185), social order began to break down, and a strong central government was not re-established until the Tokugawa era (1603–1867). In the intervening period, a feudal society developed in which clan and regional loyalties were dominant, yet the project of attaining national unity urged the parties on to attain such dominance (King, 1993: 39). This was also a time when *sōhei*, or warrior-monks, were a recognized part of national life (Renondeau, 1957; Demiéville, 1957: 369). One factor in this was the fact that monasteries were centres of power and donated land at a time of social unrest, when political power was up for grabs. Another was the fact that Japanese Buddhists came to identify strongly with one or other school or sub-school, these becoming more like sects, so that sectarian differences were far more strongly drawn than in other Buddhist countries (Demiéville, 1957: 369–70).

In the Heian era, a demanding and oppressive aristocracy put high demands for taxes and labour on the population, which sought refuge in Buddhist monasteries, which were exempt from these. Many inhabitants of the monasteries were 'monks' in name only, and were used by the

monasteries to develop land donated to them. They also came to be used in armed defence of these lands against the state or the nobility, and then armed monks rebelled against their abbots, who were often of noble origin or connected to the court.¹² By 1100, all the great monasteries of the well-established, broad-based Tendai school had armies to protect their interests (King, 1993: 41). A key text of the Tendai school was the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, which contains several passages allowing violence 'in defence of the *Dharma*' (see pp. 137–8). At the same time as these developments, military barons of the provinces were launching revolts against the court (Demiéville, 1957: 370). Thus feudal conflicts and clan rivalries arose in which there was fighting between sects and the imperial court, between sects and feudal lords, and between sect and sect (Demiéville, 1957: 371).

During the troubled Kamakura period (1192–1333), central state power almost completely disappeared. Rule was by military Shōguns and the *bushi*, or warrior-knight, class. The latter helped Buddhism spread to the people, however, and thus put down deep roots. Zen's meditational and ethical self-discipline, and indifference to death, helped the *bushi* to resist two attempted Mongolian invasions in 1274 and 1281 (Suzuki, 1959: 64–79). Eisai (1141–1215), founder of Rinzaï Zen, gained the protection of a Shōgun at the capital Kamakura, and helped establish the long-lasting alliance between Rinzaï and the *bushi*. Rinzaï Zen monks began to teach some of the *bushi* knights how to be calm, self-disciplined fighters, with no fear of death. This can be seen as an example of 'skilful means', in the form of an adaptation of Buddhism to the way of life of a particular group of people. The *bushi* also appreciated Zen discipline, simplicity and directness.

The militant and nationalistic reformer Nichiren (1222–82), ex-Tendai founder of a new school (see pp. 145–6), unsuccessfully called for the government to suppress other Buddhist sects, which he regarded as undermining the Japanese nation, citing various passages from the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* in support of this. The school fell into conflict with the Pure Land Jōdo school, and especially its offshoot the Jōdo-shin school (see pp. 142–3).

The Ashikaga period (1333–1573) was one of almost constant turmoil, with simultaneous rule by two emperors followed by rule by rival warring

¹² The elite of the monasteries, known as *gakuryō* or *gakushō*, were monks proper, dedicated to study. Monastic troops were generally recruited from the other monks, known as *shuto*, as well as lay employees, known as *kokumin*. From the fourteenth century, the *shuto* outnumbered the *gakuryō* and were in turn outnumbered by the *kokumin* (Demiéville, 1957: 371–2).

Shōguns. The Jōdo-shin school became centred on fortified temples, with its armed followers, both priests and laity, acting to defend its single-minded 'true faith' in the saving power of Amida Buddha. They could be fanatical in battle, believing that they would be reborn in Amida's Pure Land if they were killed. In the sixteenth century, the school organized and led peasant uprisings and became the ruling power in one region of Japan (Demiéville, 1957: 373). This century also saw Nichiren Buddhists attacking the headquarters of the Jōdo-shin and the Tendai school.

The Tendai school continued to maintain troops, as did the Tantric Shingon school. In 1409, Tendai monks published the following, which they attributed to Ryōgen (912–85):

Without literate culture, there are no rites which show love for superiors; without arms, there is no virtue which impresses inferiors. The world is therefore only well ordered if literate culture and arms mutually complement each other. (Demiéville, 1957: 377)

They went on to say that as, in their day, the true *Dharma* had declined, people did not respect religion. It was thus necessary for *shuto*, troops drawn from the less able monks, to prevent disorder in monastic domains, and protect against 'heretical' sects, so as to maintain the facilities for study and meditation (Demiéville, 1957: 377). A biography of Ryōgen from around the same time has him urging Tendai monks to take up arms to protect their true version of the Mahāyāna against 'heresies' (Demiéville, 1957: 377–8).

However, during the Ashikaga period, Zen temples were havens of peace, culture, education and art, with Rinzai Zen having a particular influence. Zen monks did not take part in armed conflicts, though they did help train *bushi* warriors, and had the protection of them when needed (Faure, 1991: 231; King, 1993: 29–32). The Zen ideal of 'no-mind' (*mushin*), of spontaneous reaction free from discriminating thought, was influential on martial arts touched by Zen, such as swordsmanship and archery. The idea that even life and death are empty, essenceless phenomena (cf. p. 144) also helped develop lack of hesitation, and lack of fear of death, in battle. Suzuki quotes a medieval Japanese poem on *mushin* which includes the lines,

But striking is not to strike, nor is killing to kill.
 He who strikes and he who is struck –
 They are both no more than a dream that has no reality. (1959: 123)

A Chinese Ch'an text of the seventh century, the 'Treatise on Absolute Contemplation', indeed, explains that there is only evil in killing if the

person killed is not recognized as empty and dream-like. As long as one sees a 'person' or 'living being' standing out from emptiness, one should not kill even an ant. One who overcomes these perceptions can kill, though: in a way similar to natural events like a storm or collapsing cliff bringing death (Demiéville, 1957: 382). Yet to claim that one who truly knows emptiness can kill might well be seen as implausible: such people should also know that they themselves and their 'side' are empty too!

Bushi sometimes retired, in later years, to a more reflective life in a monastery, but while still active warriors, they would sometimes accept their bloody career as being entailed by being born into a warrior family on account of past karma. Such distorted 'karmic fatalism' was reinforced by the strong emphasis, in Japan, on loyalty to one's family and its traditions (King, 1993: 33).

Two powerful Shōguns eventually put an end to military monasteries, with the Tendai headquarters on Mount Hiei being destroyed and thousands of its inhabitants, not just monk-soldiers, killed (King, 1993: 53–4). This 'pacification' helped in the establishment of the Tokugawa era (1603–1867), when the country was unified under a military dictatorship. During this time, Japan closed its doors to all but a few traders from the outside world. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese had brought Christianity to Japan. Some rulers had favoured it as a foil to the power of Buddhist monasteries, and had propagated it with violence. Now, it was ruthlessly persecuted as being a possible conduit of foreign influence, and struggled on as the secret religion of a few. In 1614, Buddhism was made the established church and arm of the state.

Over the centuries, the aristocratic warrior-knights had come to be known as *samurai* – originally a term for lower-class professional soldiers – rather than *bushi* (King, 1993: 125). The warriors of earlier times had been touched by Zen to some extent, but the application of Zen theory and practice to guide martial activities, and the association of the warrior with spiritual values, is primarily a phenomenon of the Tokugawa era, when Japan was in fact much more peaceful, and *samurai* had more leisure. Thus what was earlier *bujutsu*, 'martial arts' concerned with battlefield effectiveness, became transformed into *budō*, 'martial ways', concerned with spiritual and moral cultivation (McFarlane, 1990: 403), an example being *kendō*, the 'way of the sword'. In such 'ways', Zen influence can be seen in the emphasis on meditative concentration, discipline and austerity, and direct non-verbal communication between master and disciple (Shōhei, 1987: 228).

In his teaching of Zen to people already committed by birth to being

samurai, Takuan Sōhō Zenji (1573–1645) sought to get them to think in Zen terms. On no-mind, he says in his *Fudōchi shinmyōroku*:

The mind of no-mind is the same as the . . . original mind; it is a mind free of solidification and settling and discrimination and conceptualisation and the like . . . If one is able to thoroughly practice this mind of no-mind, one will not stop on a single thing, and will not lose a single thing. (McFarlane, 1990: 407)

Such fluidity of response was, surely, of value, whether in normal life or in swordsmanship, whether in earnest or in training. Takuan was not averse to applying Zen principles to swordsmanship:

The uplifted sword has no will of its own, it is all of emptiness. It is like a flash of lightning. The man who is about to be struck down is also of emptiness, as is the one who wields the sword . . . Do not get your mind stopped with the sword you raise, forget about what you are doing, and strike the enemy. Do not keep your mind on the person before you. They are all of emptiness, but beware of your mind being caught in emptiness. (Aitken, 1984: 5)

Such ideas sound morally dangerous, but Takuan was adapting teachings to those who were already committed by birth to fighting, and he also emphasized the virtues of sympathy and human-heartedness. Whether killing or giving life, the accomplished man acts with complete concentration, and ‘without looking at right and wrong, he is able to see right and wrong’ (McFarlane, 1990, 411; 1994: 201). In time, Takuan’s writings came to have a formative influence on many Japanese martial arts, though Confucian ethics and Shingon ritual also had their influence alongside Zen (McFarlane, 1994: 189).

Zen became one of the influences on the warrior-ethic known as *Bushidō*, the ‘way (*dō*) of the warrior (*bushi*)’ (McFarlane, 1990: 403–4). This also drew on previous warrior values and Confucianism (Kammer, 1978), and emphasized such qualities as loyalty to one’s feudal lord, self-sacrifice, upholding the honour of one’s family name, strength, skill, fearlessness, self-control, equanimity in the face of death, and generosity of mind.¹³ In the Tokugawa era, the Confucian value of learning was also emphasized, though this in part exacerbated *samurai* tendencies to look down on other social classes. At its worst, this expressed itself in the cutting down of disrespectful commoners.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Confucian values of humanitarianism and *noblesse oblige* and Buddhist self-sacrifice also meant that the *samurai* became efficient administrators of the country, in a range of professions.

¹³ Maliszewski, 1987, 226; Ackroyd, 1987; King, 1993: 123–56.

¹⁴ The Japanese social system of the day was a stratified class system (see p. 211).

Then and now, serious martial arts training is generally imbued with values drawn from Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, and inculcates such qualities as 'humility, patience, cooperation, discipline, self-control, mental clarity and physical health' as well as facilitating 'the joy of play and non-competitive achievement' (McFarlane, 1990: 415). Stories of past heroes help convey such values, such as that of the swordsman Kami-idzumi Hidetsuna (d. 1577), who rescued a baby from an outlaw who held it hostage and was threatening to kill it. Hidetsuna disguised himself as a monk to gain the outlaw's confidence, then overcame him by *ju-jutsu* and turned him over to the inhabitants of the village for justice (McFarlane, 1994: 190, 200). Yet not all practitioners followed such values, and *Bushidō* contained several un-Buddhist elements, such as the obligation to seek revenge (King, 1993: 153–6) and a disregard for life.

From the eighteenth century a new form of Shintō began to be developed as the 'true religion' of the Japanese, different from the 'artificialities' of foreign Buddhism and Confucianism. In 1868, this culminated in a *coup d'état* which ended the Tokugawa Shōgunate, restored the emperor system, and brought in the Meiji era. Soon after, Japan opened its doors to Western influence and rapid modernization. On a wave of Shintō-inspired nationalism, Japan later fought wars with Korea, Russia and China and then, in the Second World War, America and Britain.

Buddhist schools, after being criticized and persecuted at the start of the Meiji era, came to support the government actively and contribute to the anti-Christian and anti-socialist climate of early twentieth-century Japan (Ives, 1992: 64, 67). Soyen Shaku, a Japanese abbot, reflecting in his sermons on the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), sought to come to understand and even come to terms with violence. Here, he 'incorporates exalted Mahāyāna teachings, Zen pragmatism, and Japanese nationalism into a fascinating but perplexing mix of ideas' (McFarlane, 1986: 102). He portrayed it as a war in which Japan was unselfishly engaged against 'evils hostile to civilization, peace and enlightenment', and hoped that when Japanese soldiers died, they would do so 'with ennobling thoughts of the Buddha' (quoted in Aitken, 1985: 146). Only a few, beyond the pale of institutional Buddhism, objected to the war (Davis, 1989: 327). Both Zen and Pure Land organizations financially supported Japan's war with China (Davis, 1989: 327), and certain Zen figures supported the growing militarism of the twenties and thirties by directing Zen practice as a preparation for combat. Harada

Sogaku (1870–1961) reportedly said that a soldier should always become ‘completely at one with’ his work, doing whatever he is ordered to do, whether march or shoot, this being ‘the clear expression of the highest Bodhi-wisdom, the unity of Zen and war’ (quoted in Ives, 1992: 65): an amazing distortion of Buddhist values (and see Victoria, 1997). We also see, in 1938, a hereditary Jōdo-shin leader as Minister of Overseas Affairs, and in the Sino-Japanese conflict, Buddhist sects officially participating, under the control of the Bureau of Religious Affairs, in the ‘spiritual mobilisation’ decreed in 1937 (Demiéville, 1957: 373–4). In the Second World War, most Buddhist schools agreed to support the nation in its efforts. Seemingly the one exception was the Sōka Gakkai, which refused to take part in this unified front.

The *Bushidō* code became dominated by a nationalistic form of Shintō in which a total suppression of self-interest and unquestioning loyalty to the emperor were enjoined. Such *blind* loyalty went beyond what was previously expected. In *Bushidō*, the Zen contempt for death was still present, and this was drawn on in the training of Kamikaze pilots in the closing phases of the Second World War, when the Japanese were getting desperate. Together with the idea that death was preferable to the dishonour of surrender, it played its part in the ill-treatment of prisoners of war, as well as in mass suicides of captured Japanese soldiers (Ackroyd, 1987: 583; King, 1993: 211–18).

Since the Second World War, Japan has had a constitution which forbids it to have its ‘defence forces’ fight overseas. During the Gulf War, for example, Japanese forces were only allowed to act in non-military support roles, even though Western governments put much pressure on Japan to take a more active role.

BUDDHIST ACTION FOR PEACE IN THE MODERN WORLD

In Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi is noted for her spirited opposition to the country’s oppressive Marxist-Nationalist military regime, which ignored her party’s resounding victory in the 1990 elections (Suu Kyi, 1995). In Thailand, Sulak Sivaraksa (see pp. 218–19) has founded many grass-roots non-governmental organizations for peace, human rights, community development and ecumenical dialogue, and objected to coups by the army (Sivaraksa, 1986; Swearer, 1996: 198). In Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh helped in efforts to oppose the 1964–75 war and to aid refugees. An exile in France since the 1970s, he is a prolific writer on Buddhism and peace, and a strong advocate of ‘Engaged Buddhism’ (see pp. 112–13

and 185; King 1996; Nhat Hanh, 1987). Another exile, the Dalai Lama, has become a world-wide symbol of Buddhist values. As head of Tibet's 'government in exile' in North India, he tirelessly works to win back Tibetans' control of their land from the Chinese, though he steadfastly opposes the use of any violence in doing so, and urges the need for universal compassion and responsibility in an increasing inter-dependent world (Cabezón, 1996). Buddhist activists for peace are also found in Japan, Sri Lanka and Cambodia.

Peace activities of Japanese Nichiren-based schools

In post-war Japan, a number of Buddhist schools have been active in the field of peace work. The ones which are most noted in this field belong to the Nichiren tradition (see pp. 145–6), whose followers account for around 30 per cent of Japanese Buddhists. On the face of it, one would not have expected this tradition to be so peace-orientated, given that its founder, Nichiren Daishōnin (1222–82), was militant in his attacks on other schools of Buddhism as 'ruiners of the country', even asking the government of his day to suppress them. Nevertheless, he had a vision of improving the social welfare of Japan, albeit through his own 'exclusively true' brand of Buddhism.

The Nipponzan Myōhōji is a small monastic Nichiren order dedicated to working for world peace, in opposition to the arms race and nuclear weapons. Its founder, Nichidatsu Fujii (1885–1985), strongly emphasized the precept against killing and was greatly impressed and influenced by Gandhi when he met him in India in 1933 (Fujii, 1980: 45–78, 127–9). For Fujii, 'There is no taking of life which is reasonable' (p. 237), and he saw Nichiren's idea that 'Killing one to let tens of thousands live is pardonable', as in killing a ferocious king, as a dangerous principle which could too easily be used by a killer in defence of himself. Thus for Fujii, 'It is of paramount importance to seek to let multitudes live without killing a single person. Never take the lives of others, either good or evil' (p. 238). During the Second World War, in 1944, he fasted for an early conclusion to the war and an enhancement of peace (p. 326).

The Nipponzan Myōhōji order has built over sixty 'Peace Pagodas' in Japan, including ones at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as two in India and one in Sri Lanka. In the late seventies, a few monks of the order arrived in the UK and became involved in marches of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In 1980, they opened the first consecrated Buddhist *Stūpa*/Pagoda in the West, at Milton Keynes (Fujii, 1980:



Plate 6. The opening of the 'Peace Pagoda' at Milton Keynes, England, built by the Japanese Nipponzan Myōhōji order.

284–91). Ones in Vienna (1983), Massachusetts (1985) and London (1985) followed, the last being an impressive 34-metre-high structure in Battersea Park, beside the Thames. As well as being active on anti-war and anti-nuclear demonstrations, they hold that the presence of Pagodas, and the spiritual power of the Buddhist relics they contain, act as beacons of peace in a strife-torn world.

In post-war Japan, many 'New Religions' have prospered or sprung up to address the religious needs of urban people. These are mostly lay-led, and a number have their roots in Nichiren Buddhism. One, the Sōka Gakkai, or 'Value-Creating Society', has been particularly successful (see p. 146). Starting as a society for educational reform in 1930, it became the lay wing of the once small Nichiren Shōshū sub-sect, though it became separated from this in 1991, as the monks of the sect found that the 'child' had become more powerful than the 'parent'. During the Second World War, the two leaders of the Sōka Gakkai were imprisoned, as they criticized the war effort and refused to toe the government line by uniting with other Nichiren sects as part of this. The leader who survived imprisonment, Jōsei Toda (1900–58), went on to say that the defeat of Japan and its plight after the war were due to its having propagated Shintō and ignored the 'true' faith of Nichiren (Metraux, 1996: 369–70, 377, 383).

In the post-war period, the Sōka Gakkai was led by Toda and then Daisaku Ikeda (1928–), who both spearheaded a conversion drive. The movement successfully addressed the needs of urban people in difficult and changing times, and grew rapidly, at first using rather aggressive conversion techniques. Since then, while still holding to the view that it has the exclusive hold on religious truth, so that it does not co-operate in *religious* matters with *any* other sect or religion, it has been open and co-operative on matters to do with the environment, peace, the arts and cultural exchange (Metraux, 1996: 392–3).

Ikeda has gone on many 'pilgrimages for peace' in which he makes proposals for disarmament or the lessening of tensions in hot-spots, or meets world religious or political leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev to discuss matters of cross-cultural importance (Metraux, 1996: 372, 380–1).¹⁵ The movement has arranged school exchanges with Chinese and Russian children to help break down barriers between peoples (Metraux, 1996: 377, 380), and emphasizes the idea of human rights. It keenly supports the United Nations and its High Commission for

¹⁵ See, e.g., Toynebee and Ikeda, 1989, and Ikeda, 1981.

Refugees, having raised large sums of money for the latter and also inspected refugee camps in Asia and Africa (Metraux, 1996: 379–80).

The Sōka Gakkai has been very active in peace education, as it seeks to help bring about world peace. Ikeda holds that:

modern military power must be regarded as very different from the self-defense forces with which man has been familiar throughout the ages. I see no grounds for justifying military power in the world today . . . I am convinced that examples of warfare conducted for the sake of veritable self-defense are rare. (Toynbee and Ikeda, 1989: 208)

Given the nature and expense of modern weapons,

self-defense by means of arms has reached its limits . . . it is time to return to first principles . . . Our new point of departure must be the right of survival of the people of the whole world, not of one nation alone. (p. 210)

Like the Dalai Lama, the Sōka Gakkai emphasizes that the world is an inter-dependent network that must learn to work in harmony (Metraux, 1996: 377–8). It sees nuclear weapons as an absolute evil, and seeks both to abolish them and to overcome the ‘diabolical’ side of human nature that would wish to use them. As the mainstream Japanese education system glosses over many of the horrors inflicted by Japanese forces in China and in the Second World War, the Sōka Gakkai has sought to redress the balance by publishing a substantial series of books recording graphic portraits of the war. Its aim is to promote anti-war sentiments and ensure that Japan does not repeat its mistakes of the past. It has also mounted photographic exhibitions on the horrors of war, especially nuclear war (Metraux, 1996: 379).

Another Nichiren-based new religious movement is the Risshō-kōseikai. Founded in 1938, this combines faith in the Lotus *Sūtra* and Śākyamuni Buddha, honouring of ancestors, and practice of ethical aspects of the Eightfold Path and *Bodhisattva* perfections. It is also active on the peace front, and is concerned about Japanese repentance over the Second World War, which has never been decisively and fully expressed by the Japanese government. In the 1970s, members of the Risshō-kōseikai Young Adults’ Group built a ‘Friendship Tower’ in the Philippines, in an effort to help make amends for the suffering the Japanese had caused there. When he was in Singapore in 1975, their leader Nikkyō Niwano happened to go past a memorial to civilians killed by the Japanese. ‘We stopped the car and from the depths of our hearts prayed in front of the tower’ (Niwano, 1977: 116). He has also expressed deep regret at the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and, when in China, for

the rapacious actions of Japanese troops there in the 1930s (Niwano, 1977: 120, 138).

Individual Japanese have also worked to express their repentance for Japanese actions in the war. Takashi Nagase, who was an interpreter with the Japanese Imperial Police, is one.¹⁶ Though he volunteered to fight in the war, and believed in absolute obedience to the emperor, the cruelty that he saw his colleagues inflicting on Allied prisoners building the Burma–Siam railway and the full death toll, of which he learnt after the war, produced a change of heart. Back in Japan, he suffered from heart problems associated with flash-backs to scenes of maltreatment, and came to vow ‘to judge myself and expiate the crimes we committed during the war – which must take all my life’. By 1963, he could return to the region of the bridge over the river Kwai, in Thailand, and by 1995 had returned there eighty-six times. Since 1976, he has organized annual reunions there of former prisoners and Japanese, laid out a garden of remembrance, and endowed scholarships for the descendants of some of the thousands of Asian slave labourers left in Thailand. In 1986, he built a Buddhist temple of peace ‘to comfort the dead’, and has been ordained there temporarily as a monk in the Thai Theravāda tradition. He has struck up friendships with ex-prisoners, one of whom describes him as ‘one of the most exceptional men I have ever met’.

Sarvōdaya Śramadāna as a force for defusing conflict in Sri Lanka

In his critique of Buddhist aspects of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka (p. 260), Stanley Tambiah refers to an ‘idealising’ of the past that focuses on (1) scriptural ideas of *Cakkavatti* kings as expressing the ideal of welfare-orientated rule (see pp. 114–18 and 197–8) and (2) chronicles seen as showing past Sinhalese Buddhist civilization as a co-operative ‘egalitarian’ rural society (1992: 60). Tambiah – a Sri Lankan Tamil who is a noted anthropologist of Buddhism in South-east Asia – looks with a jaundiced eye on attempts to draw on ancient ideals to shape modern society; for he sees them as too wedded to Sinhalese-only nationalism. This is not a necessary connection, though, and there are real positive elements in this vision, if they can be separated out from ethnic protectionism and triumphalism.

One movement which draws on many of these ideals, and is in fact a

¹⁶ John Ezard, ‘War and Remembrance’, the *Guardian* newspaper, 27 July 1995, and see Eric Lomax’s *The Railway Man* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1995).

force for social harmony in Sri Lanka, is the Sarvōdaya Śramadāna self-help rural development movement (see pp. 225–34). This is not a narrowly Buddhist organization, though, for it has been influenced by the ideals of Mahātmā Gandhi and Quakerism. In recognition of his work for peace, its founder and leader Ariyaratne has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and awarded the Niwano Peace Prize from the Risshō-kōsei kai.

A key aim of the movement is to break down barriers between people – whether based on caste,¹⁷ political party, wealth, age, gender, race or religion – by encouraging people to work side by side to improve local facilities. One particular emphasis is on getting women to speak up and be more active in shaping their world. By the end of the 1980s, the movement was the only organization that was able to be active in all parts of the country, as the government could not reach areas held by Tamil guerrillas (Bond, 1995: 5). Personnel from Sinhalese and Tamil areas have visited each other's areas, with Tamils visiting Buddhist temples and Sinhalese visiting Hindu ones (Burr, 1995: 14; Macy, 1983: 50). Tamils have held prominent leadership positions in Sarvōdaya, and Tamils who work with it see it as a Sri Lankan organization rather than a Sinhalese Buddhist one (Bond, 1996: 136). At Sarvōdaya work-camps, multi-religious services are held, with people of the minority religion of the area always being the first to perform their rituals (Macy, 1983: 50). Many Buddhist monks are involved in Ariyaratne's lay-led movement, but among other sections of the *Saṅgha* there are some who express hard-line views against any 'concessions' to the Tamils. There are also monks who work in Tamil-dominated areas, and who have sought to help anxious and fearful Tamils contact relatives arrested by the security forces (E. J. Harris, 1998: 111–13).

Ariyaratne's vision for Sri Lanka is of a decentralized network of communities in which people work together to bring out the good qualities of themselves and others. Like most Sinhalese, though, he would not like to see the break-up of Sri Lanka into two states. His ideal is that of a nation which accommodates internal diversity, basing such positive tolerance on ideals with deep roots in Buddhism. As his inspiration also comes from Mahātmā Gandhi, such ideals also have important roots in Hinduism.

During the 1983 riots, Ariyaratne immediately, but unsuccessfully,

¹⁷ While there is no religious support for caste in Buddhist teachings, a mild form of caste system exists in Sri Lanka.

asked the President to announce a curfew, and went on to set up refugee camps unilaterally (Burr, 1995: 14). After the riots, the movement organized a national conference, at which 2,000 religious and civil leaders explored ways to settle the conflict. The conference produced a Sarvōdaya-influenced 'People's Declaration for National Peace and Harmony', emphasizing that 'only by non-hatred does hatred cease' and the need for 'a friendly dialogue, based on the principles of truth and non-violence' (Bond, 1995: 6). A peace march was then proposed from the Sinhalese-dominated south to Jaffna, the stronghold of the Tamil Tiger guerrillas, but though thousands began this, it was called off on government advice (Bond, 1996: 137). Shorter peace marches followed over the next few years in the central hill-country. The movement also became a key conduit for relief supplies and funds, supplied by Western donors, to refugees (Bond, 1995: 6–7). In 1994, Ariyaratne visited Jaffna in an attempt to find a solution to the ethnic conflict (Bond, 1996: 137).

The Sarvōdaya strategic plan for 1995–8 saw the movement as having a role in 'National Re-integration', addressing problems of poverty and 'unachievable lifestyle expectations' which help feed the ethnic problems, and continuing to aid refugees and orphans. This is in line with its emphasis on basic human needs, both material and cultural, avoiding poverty and consumerism. One of its three priorities is to 'play a more assertive conflict-resolution and peace-making role' (Burr, 1995: 5). Ariyaratne emphasizes that the solution to the ethnic conflict lies in education and getting the common people of both communities to unite (Burr, 1995: 14). He emphasizes that the urge to win at others' expense leads not to a win-lose situation, but a lose-lose one (Burr, 1995: 15). In line with this, the movement has planned a series of workshops, based on experiential learning, and supported by the Asia Foundation, to train 600 Sarvōdaya monks to engage in conflict management and mediation in their villages (Burr, 1995: 6; cf. McConnell, 1995). Burr reports on the first of these, at which participants started by sharing their perceptions of various sorts of 'conflict', ranked them by gravity, and then reflected on the extent to which conflict can sometimes have positive results (pp. 7–9). There was then a discussion of Buddhist perspectives on the causes of conflict, which emphasized the role of greed, ignorance, clinging to views, and poverty. It was stressed that the solution to a conflict needed a careful mapping of it, a neutral description of it, and sympathy for the needs and interests of all parties. For this, effective, active listening was needed. One also needed to be assertive, rather than aggressive or passive (pp. 10–13).

Buddhist action to heal Cambodia

After devastating American bombing in the Vietnam War, Cambodia fell victim, in 1975, to the Maoist-inspired Communist rule of the Khmer Rouge. Their avowed aim was to create an egalitarian, self-reliant agrarian utopia, free of alien influences. In practice, this meant the dismantling of the existing civilization: city dwellers were marched out to become peasants in a rigidly collectivized setting; hospitals were emptied, with only folk-medicine allowed; religious practice was punishable by death; in many sectors, family life was abolished, and where it survived, children were given authority over adults. The Khmer Rouge systematically executed those who challenged them, and those not of 'pure peasant stock'. They singled out those from ethnic minorities, those with formal education, and monks and nuns, whom they regarded as 'parasites'. Thus arose the 'killing fields' in which 2–3 million people were killed by starvation, disease, overwork, torture and execution, leaving a legacy of famine, scattered families, despair and depression (Ghosananda, 1992: ix–xi). At the end of Khmer Rouge rule, almost all of the country's 3,600 Buddhist temples had been destroyed and only around 3,000 monks, out of 50,000, had survived; many nuns had also died (Ghosananda, 1992: 7–12).

Fortunately, Khmer Rouge attacks on Vietnamese border sites meant that the Vietnamese attacked Cambodia, and with the help of some Khmer Rouge dissidents, took control of the country in 1979. The 1980s saw continuing armed conflict between the Khmer Rouge, plus nationalist forces, and the Vietnamese-installed government. In 1989, the Vietnamese withdrew, on account of UN pressure, leaving a client government in place. In 1991, all factions signed a UN-brokered peace treaty, providing for a four-faction interim government, leading up to elections in 1993. While the UN treaty attempted to bring Khmer Rouge violence to an end by including them in the process of national reconciliation, they continued their military operations, particularly from near the Thai border in western Cambodia until their impetus ran out in 1998.

A key figure working for national healing and recovery is Mahā-Ghosānanda, an influential monk who has been compared to Mahātma Gandhi and who was nominated for the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize. Dith Pran, who was the subject of the film *The Killing Fields*, says of Ghosānanda:

Although his entire family was lost in the holocaust, he shows no bitterness. He is a symbol of Cambodian Buddhism, personifying the gentleness, forbearance, and peacefulness of the Buddha. (Ghosananda, 1992: x)

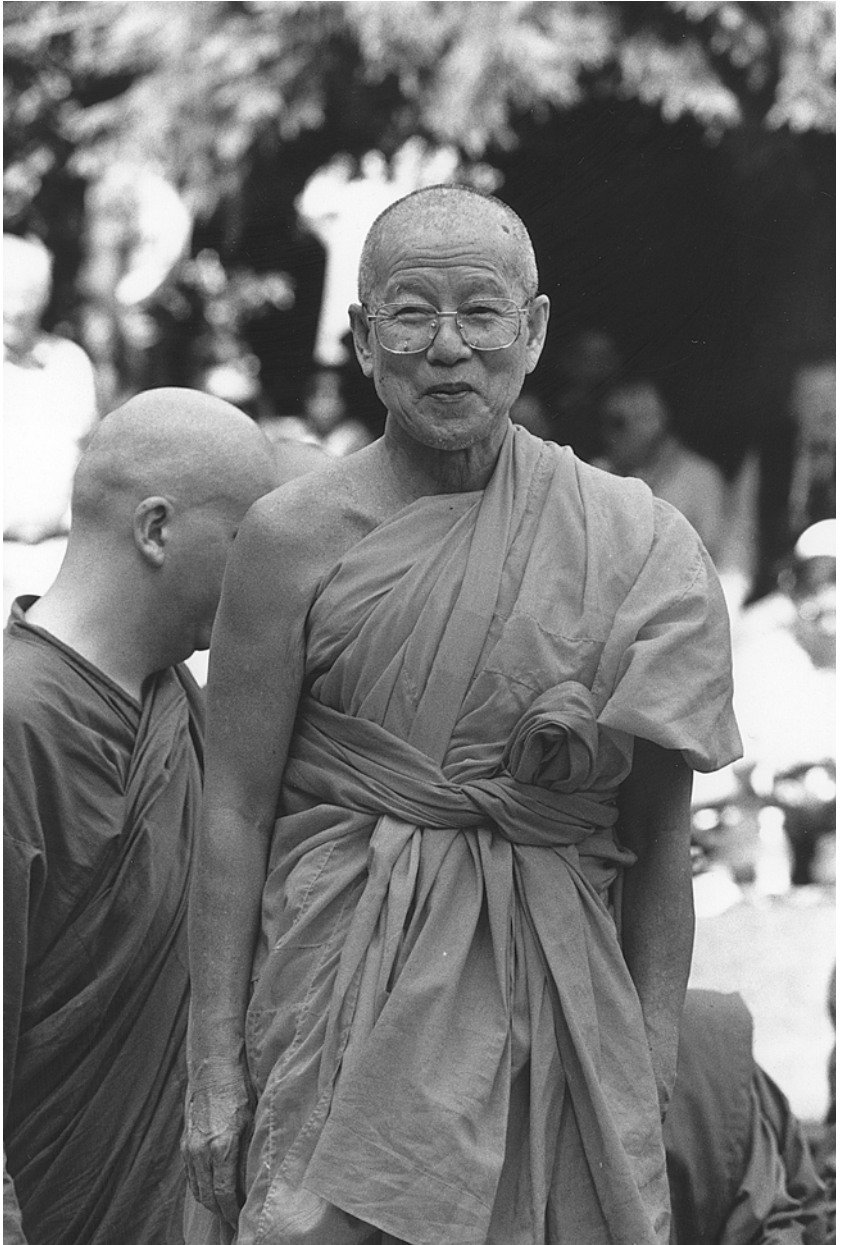


Plate 7. Cambodian monastic leader and peace activist Mahā-Ghosānanda.

Jack Kornfield says that, in the twenty years he has known him, he has represented to me the essence of sweet generosity and unstoppable courage of heart. Just to be in his presence, to experience his smile and his infectious lovingkindness that flows from him is healing to the spirit.¹⁸

Ghosānanda had been ordained as a novice monk after seeing the suffering of war as the Allies attacked the Japanese in Cambodia (Rojanaphruk, 1995: 69). He went on to study in Cambodia and India, and to learn meditation in Thailand (Ghosananda, 1992: 15–16). In India, he had worked with a relief team in the 1967 Bihar famine (Gosling, 1984: 62) and had learnt skills of peace and non-violence from Nichidatsu Fujii (see p. 271), who had himself been partly inspired by the Mahātma Gandhi (Ghosananda, 1992: 15).

In 1978, after the defeat of the Khmer Rouge, Ghosānanda went to Sa-Kaeo refugee camp in Thailand and gave out pamphlets on the Buddha's discourse on lovingkindness (Ghosananda, 1992: 18). He began to build a bamboo temple, and though the Khmer Rouge running the camp warned people not to co-operate at the cost of their lives, 20,000 attended the opening. Ghosānanda recited over and over (pp. vii–viii) to the people the *Dhammapada* verse:

Enmities never cease by enmity in this world; they only cease by non-enmity. This is an ancient law. (*Dhp.* 5)

He constantly reminded people that 'national peace can only begin with personal peace' (p. x). In line with this, he held regular weekly meetings for Buddhist, Muslim and Christian section leaders, urging them to work together for peace and reconciliation. In April and May 1980, around 120,000 refugees in this and another camp were involved in each of two days of meditation and prayers for peace. Most were Buddhists, but Christians and Muslims were also involved (Gosling, 1984: 59). A 'Prayer for Peace' which Ghosānanda has composed includes the words:

The suffering of Cambodia has been deep.
 From this suffering comes Great Compassion.
 Great Compassion makes a Peaceful Heart.
 A Peaceful Heart makes a Peaceful Person.
 A Peaceful Person makes a Peaceful Family.
 A Peaceful Family makes a Peaceful Community.
 A Peaceful Community makes a Peaceful Nation.

¹⁸ Ghosānanda, 1992: vii. These quotations are from the introduction to a book of Ghosānanda's teachings, and are not being quoted by Ghosānanda himself!

A Peaceful Nation makes a Peaceful World.

May all beings live in Happiness and Peace. (Ghosananda, 1992: 28)

Thai monks undergoing development training assisted in the building of temples in the camps and in the peace-days, and organized schools and adult education programmes (Gosling, 1984: 60). In 1980, however, the Thai military tried to push people from refugee camp Sa-Kaeo I back across the border to Cambodia, as they wanted to stop the camp being used as a support for the Khmer Rouge, and did not want it to become permanent. Knowing the hardship and dangers that a return to Cambodia would mean, Ghosānanda and others declared the camp a temple sanctuary. While this did not please the Thais, it meant that only 7,500, mostly Khmer Rouge, of the 35,000 residents, were persuaded to leave (Gosling, 1984: 67–8).

Ghosānanda has worked in and visited many Cambodian refugee camps and resettlement communities worldwide, establishing temples in each of them and helping camp leaders build spiritual, educational and cultural preservation programmes. In 1980, with Peter Pond, a Christian social activist, he formed the Inter-Religious Mission for Peace in Cambodia. They helped locate hundreds of surviving monks and nuns so that they could renew their vows and take leadership roles in Cambodian temples throughout the world. With lay support, Ghosānanda founded over thirty temples in the USA and Canada alone. He helped rebuild many more in Cambodia, and has been active in educating monks and nuns in skills of non-violence and the monitoring of human rights (Ghosananda, 1992: 20).

At the UN-sponsored peace-talks, he led a contingency of monks and urged compromise and non-violence (Ghosananda, 1992: 20). When people objected to having Khmer Rouge personnel in an interim government, he smiled and said:

We must have both wisdom and compassion. We must condemn the act, but we cannot hate the actor. With our love, we will do everything we can to assure peace for all. There is no other way. (p. 21)

Related comments of his are:

The unwholesome minded must be included [in our lovingkindness] because they are the ones who need loving kindness the most. (p. 68)

If I am good to someone, he or she will learn goodness and, in turn, will be good to others. If I am not good, he or she will harbor hatred and resentment and will, in turn, pass it on to others. If the world is not good, I have to make more effort to be good myself. (p. 54)

He cites the Gandhian non-violent ideal as aiming at

an end to antagonism, not the antagonists. This is important. The opponent has our respect. We implicitly trust his or her human nature and understand that ill-will is caused by ignorance. By appealing to the best in each other, both of us achieve the satisfaction of peace. Gandhi called this a 'bilateral victory'.¹⁹

He sees peace-making as a slow, but steady, step-by-step process. In this, 'Reconciliation does not mean that we surrender rights and conditions, but rather that we use love in all our negotiations', otherwise there is no way beyond the cycle of hatred and retaliation (p. 69). On unrealistic compassion without wisdom, he tells the story of a dragon-king who came to give up killing. On being attacked by children, he was advised by a *Bodhisattva* that, while remaining non-violent, he could still hiss and show his fire if need be (p. 33)!

In the period leading up to the 1993 elections, Ghosānanda – then sixty-nine years old – led a nineteen-day peace march from near the Thai border, through Khmer Rouge territory, to the capital Phnom Penh, where 8,000 joined the march. Often, the marchers were in danger of being caught in cross-fire, and UN troops were very concerned for their safety. In the end, though, their determination and faith won through, and the Khmer Rouge allowed them to pass unharmed, spreading an atmosphere of peace as they went. Ghosānanda's idea is that peace will only come to the country when people can walk the streets and roads without fear, and with peace in their hearts. Ghosānanda has done many marches for peace in Cambodia. In April–May 1994, he walked 175 kilometres with 800 monks and nuns from Battambang to Angkor Wat through the battle-stricken north-west. En route, a monk and a nun were killed by rockets fired from bushes while government soldiers were accompanying the march, guiding them through a mine-field (Rojanaphruk, 1995: 67). He has taken a leading role in the campaign to ban land-mines, both in Cambodia and elsewhere, and led an inter-religious delegation to support peace negotiations in Sri Lanka. He cites the Buddha's going to resolve the Sākiya/Koliya conflict (see p. 241) as a call for Buddhists to go into conflict situations to help resolve them (Ghosananda, 1992: 62–3).

Ghosānanda teaches the importance of the middle path of, and to, peace, which avoids struggling with opposites such as praise and blame,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62. Cf. Ariyaratne's implied ideal of a win-win situation, rather than seeking to win at other people's expense (above, p. 277).

'yours' and 'mine' (Ghosananda, 1992: 37–8). His thoughts on the path to peace include:

Non-action is the source of all action. There is little we can do for peace in the world without peace in our minds. And so, when we begin to make peace, we begin with silence – meditation and prayer.

Peacemaking requires compassion. It requires the skill of listening. To listen, we have to give up ourselves, even our own words. We listen until we can hear our peaceful nature. As we listen to ourselves, we learn to listen to others as well, and new ideas grow. There is an openness, a harmony. As we come to trust one another, we discover new possibilities for resolving conflicts. When we listen well, we will hear peace growing.

Peacemaking requires mindfulness [careful awareness of the inner and outer world]. There is no peace with jealousy, self-righteousness, or meaningless criticism. We must decide that making peace is more important than making war.

Peacemaking requires selflessness. It is selflessness taking root. To make peace, the skills of teamwork and co-operation are essential. There is little we can do for peace as long as we feel that we are the only ones who know the way. A real peacemaker will strive only for peace, not for fame, glory, or even honor. Striving for fame, glory, or honor will only harm our efforts.

Peacemaking requires wisdom. Peace is the path that is chosen consciously. It is not an aimless wandering, but a step-by-step journey.

Peacemaking is the middle path of equanimity, non-duality and non-attachment. Peacemaking means the perfect balance of wisdom and compassion, and the perfect meeting of humanitarian needs and political realities. It means compassion without concession, and peace without appeasement.

Loving kindness is the only way to peace. (pp. 51–2)

CONCLUSION

This survey of Buddhism thus shows that the tradition has strong resources to draw on for conflict resolution, but that these resources and related ideals must sometimes become better known and applied more fully. Japanese Buddhists did little to stem the violent Japanese nationalism of the early twentieth century, though they are now active in promoting peace. The post-colonial period has left a legacy of instability and social readjustment in several Buddhist lands, and it is clear that, in certain quarters, there has been a danger of religious revival degenerating into exclusion of non-Buddhist ethnic groups (Sri Lanka), egalitarianism degenerating into hatred (Cambodia), and anti-colonial nationalism degenerating into xenophobia (Burma). Ironically, this is a good illustration of the Buddhist teaching that ignorance and dogmatism are at the root of much human suffering.

We see an unfortunate tendency for Buddhists to fall sometimes into demonizing their opponents in war as embodiments of Māra, or as evil-doers who are less than human. This can be seen in the story of King Duṭthagāmaṇi (pp. 255–6), in Kittivuḍḍho (pp. 260–1), and in several conflicts in China.²⁰ In Zen, there is also a danger that certain teachings can be interpreted to allow the depersonalization of enemies (see pp. 266–7). In Burma, China and Japan, we see Buddhism as an ingredient in peasant uprisings against oppressive rulers, sometimes inspired by distorted popularized notions of a *Cakkavatti* ruler and the coming of the next Buddha (see pp. 261–2). In general, though, failures of Buddhists to live up to their non-violent ideals can be put down to unresolved human fears and attachments aggravated by politically unstable times.

In the twentieth century, we see Buddhists struggling against the violence of Communists and Marxists. While Kittivuḍḍho has advocated opposing them with violence, because of their threat to religious culture, other leaders have been non-violent in opposing them, as in Tibet, Cambodia and Burma, or in mediating between these forces and their American opponents, as in Vietnam.

We hear the voices of such people as A. T. Ariyaratne, Aung San Suu Kyi, Sulak Sivaraksa, Mahā-Ghosānanda, Nichidatsu Fujii, Daisaku Ikeda and Nikkyō Niwano, who are quietly but firmly reminding their fellow Buddhists of the profoundly non-violent and tolerant spirit of the Buddha. Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama have strongly embodied this spirit both in seeking to help their own people and in writings and activities directed beyond their lands.

Among contemporary Buddhist peace activists, the Dalai Lama and Aung San Suu Kyi have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and Ariyaratne, Ghosānanda and Nhat Hanh have been nominated for it. In them and others discussed above, we can see several interlocking threads. One is an admiration for Gandhi and his methods, seen in Fujii, Ariyaratne, Ghosānanda and the Dalai Lama. Though Gandhi was a Hindu, influenced by both Jainism and Christianity, his ideals and actions accord well with Buddhist values, and he has helped impress on people the efficacy of non-violent action. Accordingly, all the peace activists discussed above hold firmly to both non-violence and non-anger against oppressors. Another thread is the idea of compassion for both sides in a conflict, as seen in Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, Ghosānanda, Ariyaratne, Suu Kyi and Sivaraksa. Another thread is the emphasis that

²⁰ Demiéville, 1957: 358, 367; Welch, 1972: 280–1.

peace starts within the individual, and then spreads outwards, as seen in Ghosānanda, Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama. A thread emphasized by Mahāyānists – the Sōka Gakkai, Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama – is inter-dependence. We also see an emphasis on the avoidance of dogmatic clinging to views, and being open to the perspective of others, as in Ariyaratne, Ghosānanda, Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, Sivaraksa and even, on the non-religious front, the Sōka Gakkai.

CHAPTER 7

Suicide and euthanasia

Whatever monk . . . should praise the beauty of death . . . he is not in communion.

Vinaya-piṭaka III.73

CONSIDERATIONS AND ARGUMENTS AGAINST SUICIDE

While Buddhism emphasizes that there is much *dukkha* in life, this can, paradoxically, help dissuade a Buddhist from giving in to despair. If *dukkha* is to be expected in life, then there is less reason to take particular problems so *personally*: as the world conspiring against one. Reflection on the idea of phenomena as not-Self can also help a Buddhist to avoid being dragged down by unpleasant experiences. Reflection on the principle of impermanence should urge him or her to realize that all bad things come to an end, sooner or later. Reflection on the principle of karma should mean that he or she is more willing to live patiently through the results of his or her own prior action – and maybe learn something about the nature of life in the process – rather than sow the seeds of future suffering by new, rash actions.

Of course, someone faced with some weighty suffering might kill himself or herself in the hope of something less intolerable after death; yet there is no guarantee that matters may not be made worse by this act. From the Buddhist perspective, the next rebirth might be as an animal preyed on and eaten by others, as a frustrated ghost, or in a hell: so suicide may lead on to something *more* ‘intolerably painful’ than the present life. Even in the case of a human rebirth, there are many possible forms of severe suffering.

One of the three forms of craving is craving for annihilation (*vibhāva-taṇhā*): to get rid of unpleasant situations. Where one’s whole life-situation is perceived to be so unbearable that one says ‘no!’ to it, it may culminate in suicide. However, as it is craving which impels one through the round of rebirths, the state of mind which prompts suicide will be a crucial cause of yet another rebirth, along with its problems. So as an attempted escape from the sufferings of life, suicide is, according to Buddhist principles, totally ineffective. It will only be followed by a further rebirth, probably lower than a human one, in which the

sufferings will probably continue unabated – if due to karma – and perhaps be intensified. As dying in an agitated state of mind is seen as leading to a bad transition into the next life (cf. p. 25), suicide is seen as likely to lead to a bad rebirth next time. In the Tibetan tradition, the consciousness of one who commits suicide is seen as anguished and weighed down with negative karma, so as to need rituals to aid it (Sogyal, 1992: 301, 376).

In fact, while human life contains many difficulties, to cut it short means that the potential for spiritual development which is present in a rare ‘precious human rebirth’ will have been thrown away (see p. 30). Not only does suicide waste this opportunity for oneself, but it also deprives others of benefits that one may bring to them. This attitude is reflected in an early text in which the monk Mahā-Kassapa was asked by a materialist why, if rebirth existed, moral people such as monks did not kill themselves to gain the karmic results of their good actions. Kassapa replies with a parable of two wives of a brahmin who had just died. While one wife had a son, who was due to inherit, the other was in an advanced state of pregnancy. To find the sex of her child, and so gain part of the inheritance for him if he was male, the latter cut open her belly. She and her child died, though. Kassapa then says that moral people ‘do not seek to hasten the ripening of that which is not yet ripe’, for:

The purpose of virtuous renouncers and brahmins, of lovely qualities, is gained by life. In proportion to the length of time that such a man abides here, is the abundant karmic fruitfulness that they create, practising for the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world. (*D.* II.330–1; cf. *Miln.* 195)

One could add that, even for a not particularly virtuous person, suicide is an act which will bring grief to friends and relatives, and so, if for no other reason, is to be avoided.

SUICIDE AND THE PRECEPTS

Is it the case that suicide is seen as breaking the first precept? As Buddhism sees acts which harm oneself as morally unwholesome (see p. 47), and suicide can be seen in this way, one would expect so. While textual discussions of the first precept rarely mention suicide, killing oneself is just as much an act of killing as killing another person, so there seems little reason to see suicide as not breaching this precept. However,

the *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā-sāstra*, attributed to the Mahāyāna philosopher Nāgārjuna, says:

In the *Vinaya* it is said that suicide is not onslaught on a living being [*prāṇātīpātā*, i.e. a breach of the first precept]. Fault (*āpatti*) and karmic fruitfulness (*puṇya*) result respectively from wrong done to others (*para-vihethana*) or benefiting others (*para-hita*). It is not by caring for one's own body or killing one's own body that one acquires karmic fruitfulness or commits a misdeed. That is why it is said in the *Vinaya* that suicide is not a fault of onslaught on a living being, but it is sullied by delusion, by attachment, and by hate.¹

This alludes to a *Vinaya* passage as saying that suicide is not a breach of the first precept, though no such passage has been traced. However, it still accepts that suicide is an unwholesome act, as it is associated with the roots of unwholesome actions. Thus in the Tibetan tradition, while the first precept only applies to killing others, as the basis of the precepts is not causing harm to others, suicide is nevertheless seen as one of the gravest bad actions (Yuthok, 1995: 46, 48), as serious as murder (Mullin, 1987: 148).

David Evans argues that the first precept concerns not depriving someone of life when this is something they value, which is not the case in suicide (1987: 98). Admittedly, the general rationale for the precepts is: don't do to others what you would not like them to do to you (*S.* v.353–5). Yet this does not allow, for example, the masochist to go round hurting others as he does not dislike pain. He clearly has to learn to like himself more, by developing lovingkindness to himself. Similarly, if someone does not value his own life, this does not allow him to go round killing others. The precepts' rationale, then, has to be taken in the context (a) of what people generally don't like and (b) learning to have lovingkindness for oneself, overcoming ill-will (associated with craving for annihilation) to aspects of one's existence.

The seriousness with which the Buddha in fact viewed suicide can be seen from the following monastic precept, one of the few entailing 'defeat' (*pārājika*) in the monastic life, i.e. permanent expulsion. This particular rule was made in the context of two events. The first is that of some monks killing themselves, or getting another to kill them, after having misunderstood the implication of a sermon of the Buddha on the 'foulness of the body': that inside the skin it is rather unattractive, and not worthy of being the object of attachment (cf. *S.* v.320–2)! The

¹ K12, p. 149a, translated from E. Lamotte's French translation, 1949: 740–2. See Lamotte, 1987: 106 for a slightly different English translation. Lamotte, in a footnote to 1949: 740–2, refers to various passages in it of relevance to the issue of suicide. A parallel is found at *Uss.* 171.

second event was that of some bad monks persuading a layman to kill himself, so that they could seduce his wife. They ‘praised the beauty of death’ and argued that, as a good person, he would have a good rebirth. He thus deliberately ate bad food until he died (*Vin.* III.72–3). The rule that these two supposed events is said to have led to is as follows:

Whatever monk should intentionally deprive a human being of life, or should look about so as to be his knife-bringer, or should praise the beauty of death, or should incite (anyone) to death, saying, ‘Hullo there, my man, of what use to you is this evil, difficult life? Death is better for you than life’, or who should deliberately and purposefully in various ways praise the beauty of death or should incite (anyone) to death: he is also one who is defeated, he is not in communion. (*Vin.* III.73)²

This rule clearly concerns murder, assisting someone in suicide, or inciting or praising suicide. Lamotte (1987: 105), in commenting on this, notes that it is not said that suicide itself is an offence, and that therefore there is nothing wrong with it from the point of view of Buddhist ethics. This seems a wrong conclusion, though. The relevant rule concerns an action that will lead to expulsion from the monastic *Saṅgha*. If someone has killed themselves, this question does not arise.

Nevertheless, Demiéville reports that in the *Vinaya* of the Mahīśāsakas (Taishō 1421, II, 7b–c), the Buddha, before giving the above pronouncement, says that suicide is a grave offence, just falling short of a full offence entailing defeat (1957: 350). The text continues (8a) by saying that, when some friends suggest that a sick monk lets himself die, so as to be reborn in heaven, he replies that suicide would prevent the continued cultivation of the holy life, and in any case, he might still recover to practise it in his present life. Again, some badly injured lay people refuse to kill themselves, saying that the suffering undergone in the world teaches one to cultivate the action of the Buddhist way (Demiéville, 1957: 350–1).

Is an unsuccessful suicide attempt a monastic offence, though?³ At *Vin.* III.82 in the Theravādin *Vinaya*, an account is given of a monk who, ‘tormented by dissatisfaction (*anabhiratiyā*)’ – which seems to relate to sexual desire⁴ – climbs Vulture’s Peak and falls down a precipice, clearly in an attempt to kill himself. Though he survives, he kills someone else

² The *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* also says that the *Bodhisattva*’s generosity should not include giving someone an instrument for suicide or self-torture (49a; Dayal, 1932: 175).

³ Cf. Wiltshire, 1983: 130.

⁴ As explained by *Vin. A.* 467; also, at *Vin.* II.110, a monk actually cuts off his penis because of such torment!

through landing on him. The monk then wonders if he has committed an offence entailing expulsion, as he has killed someone. This is seen as inappropriate, though, presumably because there was no intention to kill the other person. The Buddha then says ‘Monks, one should not cast oneself off (‘na . . . attānaṃ pāṭetabbaṃ’). Whoever shall cast (himself) off, there is an offence of wrong-doing.’ That is, not an offence entailing defeat, but something approximating to one, of which there are two grades: a grave offence and an offence of wrong-doing, the latter being the less serious. The following case, of some monks who accidentally killed someone by throwing a stone off Vulture’s Peak, is dealt with in exactly the same way. This suggests that the offence, in both cases, was seen as one of culpable carelessness regarding the safety of others, and that in the first case, the offence did not reside in its being a case of attempted suicide.

Now, a possibility is that there is no monastic rule specifically on an attempted, but failed, suicide because monastic rules only relate to actions which succeed in their aim.⁵ However, this is not always so. At *Vin.* II.76, if a monk aims to kill a man by digging a pit for him to fall into, while he is only defeated if the man dies, he is still guilty of a grave offence if the man is hurt, and of an offence of wrong-doing if he falls in and is unhurt.

Nevertheless, as stated, the above rule says that one should not throw oneself off a cliff, and in fact the phrase ‘na . . . attānaṃ pāṭetabbaṃ’ can also mean, more generally, ‘one should not kill oneself’. *Miln.* 195–7 in fact cites this rule in arguing that virtuous people should not kill themselves, as they deprive the world of the benefit that they can bring to it. The commentary on *Vin.* III.82 (*Vin. A.* 467) says:

(1) And here, not only is (oneself) not to be cast off, also by whatever other means, even by stopping eating, one is not to be killed: whoever is ill and, when there is medicine and attendants, desires to die and interrupts his food, this is wrong-doing, surely.

(2) But of whom there is a great illness, long-lasting, (and) the attending monks are wearied, are disgusted, and worry ‘what now if we were to set (him) free from sickness?’: if he, (thinking): ‘this body being nursed does not endure, and the monks are wearied’, stops eating, does not take medicine, it is acceptable (*vattati*).

(3) Who (thinking) ‘this illness is intense, the life-activities do not persist, and this special (meditative) attainment (*visesādhigamo*) of mine is seen as if I can put my hand on it’ stops (eating): it is acceptable, surely.

⁵ As suggested by Damien Keown in an e-mail letter of 13 November 1995.

(4) Moreover, for one who is not ill, for whom a sense of religious urgency (*saṃvega-*) has arisen, (thinking) ‘the search of food is, indeed, an obstacle: I will just attend to the meditation object’, stopping (eating) under the heading of the meditation object is acceptable.

(5) Having declared a special (meditative) attainment, he stops eating: it is not acceptable. (numbers added)⁶

This extends the prohibition on throwing oneself off a cliff to any method of suicide, even a ‘passive’ method such as self-starvation (1), as used by Jain saints. It does, however, allow that some instances of self-starvation are acceptable. It is acceptable when one has no time to collect food because one is inspired to practise a meditation intently (4), but not if one has already attained a specific meditative state and thinks one need do nothing more (cf. *A. iv.22*) (5). It is not acceptable if one is ill, but help is to hand (1). It is acceptable in two other cases of illness: when there is a severe, long-lasting illness, and a monk allows himself to die so as not to trouble those who attend on him (2), and where there is an intense illness, the person is clearly dying, and he knows he has attained a meditative state he had been aiming at (3). Here, self-starvation is seen as acceptable when it is because it is an unintended side-effect of a more important task (4), when it is part of a compassionate act (2), or when death is already imminent and further eating would be futile, not even allowing the completion of a meditative task (3).

Early Buddhist literature also includes discussions of a few cases of those who are frustrated at not attaining Arahantship and thus cut their throats, but who attain Arahantship at the last minute by managing to attain full insight as they watch the process of dying, perhaps accompanied by remorse at their unwise act. It seems that these cases are not such as to make suicide in any way acceptable, though (Keown, 1996). Mahāyāna literature also contains examples of: (1) *Bodhisattvas* giving up their lives to save others, including a family of starving tigers (Conze, 1959: 24–6; Khoroche, 1989: 8; *Ss.* 24–8, 37–8, 51), and (2) people burning themselves alive as an act of worship (Kato et al., 1975: 305–7). The first can be seen as praising heroic altruism, not ‘suicide’, while the second can be seen as a rather unguarded way of urging the complete dedication of one’s life to a higher ideal: though a few in China took it literally (Yün-hua, 1965). The Chinese tradition also includes examples, influenced by Confucianism, of a person killing himself as an act of protest so as to try compassionately to bring about an improved situation in society: again,

⁶ Cf. the Chinese translation of the Pali *Vinaya* commentary, as translated by Bapat and Hirakawa (1970: 327–8).

of no great relevance to normal suicide scenarios, though the Vietnam War period saw some famous examples of Buddhists burning themselves to death that broadly fit into this tradition (Nhat Hanh, 1967: 9, 37–8, 118–19; Rahula, 1978: 114).

EUTHANASIA

From a Buddhist perspective, death is the most important and problematical 'life crisis', as it stands at the point of transition from one life to another. Within the limits set by a person's previous karma, his or her state of mind at death is seen as an important determinant of the kind of rebirth that will follow (see p. 25, and Sogyal, 1992: 224). Buddhism thus supports many of the ideals of the hospice movement, directed at helping a person to have a 'good death' (de Silva, 1994). Thus a San Francisco Zen Center has offered facilities for the dying since 1971, and it started a full-scale training programme for hospice workers in 1987.⁷ In the UK, the Buddhist Hospice Trust was formed in 1986 to explore Buddhist ideas related to death, bereavement and dying, and develop a network of Buddhists willing to visit the dying and bereaved, if requested. The ideal is to die without anxiety regarding those one leaves behind (*A. III.295–8*) and in a conscious state which is also calm and uplifted. Thus it would be preferable not to die in a drugged, unconscious state. To die in a calm state, free of agitation, anger or denial, and joyfully recollecting previous good deeds rather than regretting one's actions, means a good transition to a future life. Clearly it is best to *know* that one is dying, for then one can come to terms with death and talk to one's family freely about it, with an open and mutual sharing of feelings, uninhibited by a desire not to talk of the coming death.⁸ In Buddhist cultures, family and friends of a dying person do their best to facilitate a 'good death'. Buddhist monks may be invited to chant calming chants, to help inspire a tranquil and joyful state of mind. Some of the chants (those known as *parittas* in Southern Buddhism) are seen as having a protective effect, and, if a person is not seen as certain to die, they are regarded as aiding recovery. The dying person will also be reminded of good deeds that he or she has done in his or her life, so that he or she can rejoice at these, contemplating goodness (Terweil, 1979: 256). Monks

⁷ T. D. Schneider, 'Accidents and Calculations: The Emergence of Three AIDS Hospices', *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*, 1 (3) (Spring 1992) 78–83.

⁸ Sogyal, 1992: 177–8. Nevertheless, doctors in Japan often act in a paternalistic or authoritarian way, and so do not inform patients that they are dying (Becker, 1990: 553).

may also be fed on his or her behalf, so that he or she approaches death while sharing in a karmically fruitful act. In Northern Buddhism, a person will be read the *Parto Thötrol* (*Bar-do thos-grol*), commonly known as 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead', as he or she approaches and passes the point of death. This is to guide him or her through the experiences undergone in the between-lives period, so as to help him or her overcome lingering attachment to his or her body and family, and enable him or her to gain liberating insight into the processes of life and death, or at least to avoid an unnecessarily bad rebirth. In Eastern Buddhism, Pure Land Buddhists may put a painting of Amitābha Buddha at the foot of a dying person's bed, and place in his or her hands strings attached to Amitābha's hands. This is to help the person to die peacefully with the thought of being drawn to Amitābha's Pure Land.

'Euthanasia', which is derived from the Greek words *eu* and *thanatos*, literally means a 'good death'.⁹ As defined by the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1976), it means 'Gentle and easy death; bringing about of this, esp. in case of incurable and painful disease'. Though dying while receiving care and comfort in a hospice might be seen to come logically under the definition, this is not how the term is normally used, for it is seen to apply to cases involving the sick where death is the intended result of some action or inaction, hence the terms 'active euthanasia' and 'passive euthanasia'. Active euthanasia is intentionally hastening death by a deliberate positive act, such as giving a lethal injection. Passive euthanasia is intentionally causing death by a deliberate omission, such as by withdrawing food, including intravenously administered nourishment, or withholding or withdrawing medical treatment which would otherwise have delayed death (cf. Hämmerli, 1978: 191).

Whatever the means of euthanasia, it can also be differentiated as regards the nature of the volitional involvement of the person who dies as a result of it (cf. Keown, 1995a: 168–9):

1 *Involuntary euthanasia* would be that carried out against the wishes of the patient. This was done by the Nazis against psychiatric patients and other 'inadequates' and is universally condemned. It is simply equivalent to murder.

2 *Voluntary euthanasia* occurs where the patient requests the action, which is then taken by a doctor, or where the doctor provides the patient with the means of ending his or her life, which is a case of assisted suicide.

⁹ In Japanese, the word for 'euthanasia' is *anrakushi*, which in Buddhism is actually another name for the Pure Land (Becker, 1990: 550).

3 In what one might call *pre-voluntary euthanasia*, a patient makes a 'living will' to the effect that, if he or she becomes mentally incapable in the future then, under such and such medical conditions, he or she would want his or her life terminated. Where the medical conditions are such that the patient can justly be seen as dead when the action is taken, however – for example turning off an artificial ventilator if it is inflating the lungs of a corpse (see below) – this is not actually a case of euthanasia.

4 In *non-voluntary euthanasia*, the patient is not capable of either agreeing or disagreeing to termination of his or her life – because of being in a coma, being in an advanced state of Alzheimer's disease, or being an infant with a brain abnormality – and the decision to end the life would have to be taken by doctors in consultation with relatives, perhaps with the permission of the courts. As with the last type, this type of euthanasia raises the issue of the criteria by which a person can be pronounced 'dead', which will be discussed below. Any action performed on a body that can justly be called dead is not any kind of euthanasia.

Buddhist reasons for rejecting euthanasia

Active euthanasia is generally resisted by the medical profession and by public opinion – though it is accepted, if technically illegal, in The Netherlands¹⁰ – but some are willing to countenance some forms of passive euthanasia. As Buddhism sees intention as crucial to the assessment of the morality of an act, however, it would not differentiate between active and passive means if these were intended to cause or hasten death. The Buddha's strong condemnation of a monk or nun praising or aiding a suicide (see p. 289) is here relevant. To kill a person deliberately, even if he or she requests this, is dealt with in the same way as murder. As is pointed out by Damien Keown (1995a: 170), one who follows the first precept 'does not kill a living being, does not cause a living being to be killed, does not approve of the killing of a living being' (*D. III.48*). To request that one is killed would be to 'cause a living being to be killed', and would thus break the precept. This would be the case

¹⁰ And in 1994, the Michigan Commission on Death and Dying recommended that it be made legal in Michigan, if a terminal patient was likely to die within six months, and it was the patient himself or herself who initiated the action leading to death (the *Guardian* newspaper, 28 April 1994). In December 1994, Oregon introduced a Death With Dignity Act, under which doctors can prescribe a lethal dose of drugs to a terminally ill patient who is of sound mind and asks for this (the *Guardian*, 6 December 1994). The northern states of Australia also came to allow doctor-assisted suicide, but then the federal government over-ruled this decision.

even if the request were in the form of a 'living will'. If a doctor is requested to administer euthanasia, this does not absolve him or her from responsibility for the act of killing. In the case of a prior 'living will', there is not even any certainty that the patient, though now unable to communicate, has not changed his or her mind. The Buddhist emphasis that there is no permanent Self (see pp. 36–7) entails a recognition that people's views and intentions are often very changeable.

Now, voluntary euthanasia for one in intense pain is often referred to as 'mercy-killing', especially if it is a case of active euthanasia, and some argue that this should be allowed for humans as for animals.¹¹ Buddhists, though, are reluctant to carry it out even for animals (see p. 173). It might be thought that the Buddhist emphasis on compassion would allow such an act, yet several episodes from the *Vinaya* show that this is not the case (cf. Keown, 1995a: 60–4, 171–3). In all of these, the monks involved are held guilty of an act entailing defeat in the monastic life. In the first, monks 'out of compassion' praise the beauty of death to a sick monk so that he takes some undisclosed measure and dies (*Vin.* III.79). The commentary (*Vin. A.* 464) says that they urged him to die so as to gain a good rebirth as the result of his virtue, so that he stopped eating and so died. In the second case, involving a condemned man, the executioner kills him quickly after a monk asks him to, so as not to prolong his pain and miserable period of waiting (*Vin.* III.86). The third case involves the case of a man whose hands and feet have been cut off. When a monk asks the relatives looking after him if they want him to die, and they agree, he prescribes the feeding of buttermilk, which makes the man die (*Vin.* III.86).

In all such cases, the motive for the act can be seen to have been compassion, yet the act is still condemned. Here, Keown makes a useful distinction between motive and intention, as made in the courts (1995a: 62). Motive concerns the ultimate aim of an action, while intention concerns the more immediate goal of an action, an objective on the way to attaining an ultimate aim. Thus one who kills to obtain an inheritance has the motive of obtaining money, and also the intention to kill. Keown sees the above cases as showing that Buddhism has life as an ultimate value, or 'basic good', and that it should never be sacrificed even in the name of another such value, friendship or compassion. This means that to have compassion as a motive, but to intend death in the process, is unacceptable. This is one way of looking at the matter, though a Mahāyānist

¹¹ Stephen Levine (1992), a Buddhist meditator who has done much work with the dying, supports voluntary euthanasia under certain circumstances.

might argue that sometimes 'skilful means' implies that it is acceptable to kill if the motive is compassion (see pp. 135–8). However, Mahāyāna scriptural cases of 'compassion killing' are always to prevent the victim committing some evil deed against others: they are to prevent suffering to others, and also bad karma being generated by the victim. Such cases do not fit the euthanasia scenario.

In any case, perhaps a better way to interpret the Buddhist attitude to 'mercy-killing' is as follows. An action is unwholesome if it is rooted in greed, hatred or delusion (p. 46). Here, 'rooted in' can be seen to refer to an action's intention, to its motive or to both together. To advocate death on the grounds of compassion would be seen as an unwholesome act rooted in delusion, so that the compassion involved was unwise. The *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* (*AKB*, iv.36c–d) says that killing may arise from a variety of roots, including ignorance.¹² Examples of the latter are animal sacrifice and killing one's aged or sick parents, as the 'Persians' do. A note to Pruden's translation of the text (*AKB*, pp. 735–6) cites the *Vibhāṣā* (p. 605c16) as saying a certain people of the West thought it a good act to kill a parent if he or she was decrepit or in pain so that he or she would attain new organs and a painless life. This clearly implies that it is delusion to try to end suffering by killing the person who is suffering. Indeed, the *Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra* says that if one gives one's parent a weapon to kill himself or herself, or kills one of them at his or her orders, the atrocious offence of killing a parent is still committed (*Uss.* 179).

Why is killing a person in pain an act based on delusion? In the case of the sick monk, the commentary explains that more proper advice is: 'as the paths and fruits have arisen, it is not surprising you are virtuous: therefore do not be attached to residence etc., setting up mindfulness in respect of the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Saṅgha* and the body, develop heedfulness in attention' (*Vin. A.* 464; cf. Bapat and Hirakawa, 1970: 326). This suggests that a person should use the process of dying as an opportunity for reflection, so as to see clearly the error of attachment to anything which is impermanent, be it the body, other people, possessions, or worldly achievements. Dying presents the reality of the components of body and mind as impermanent, *dukkha* and not-Self in stark form; it is thus an opportunity for gaining insight into these. An enforced death cuts short this opportunity.

In Theravāda Buddhism, it is also commonly seen that 'no act of

¹² The others being greed, hatred and false views. Killing because of the last, which would include suicide and killing someone who wanted to die, would clearly be rooted in the view that a person is annihilated at death.

killing can be carried out without the thought of ill-will or repugnance towards suffering' (Ratanakul, 1988: 310). In the case of 'mercy-killing', a doctor's motive of compassion is good, but it is mixed with aversion to the patient's pain, which disturbs the doctor, so that 'Subconsciously he transfers his aversion to the suffering to the one who embodies it' (p. 310). Taniguchi, drawing on Theravāda texts, also says that if a mother in severe pain asks her son to end her life, and he does so, they share the delusion that death is the only way out, and the son is motivated by attachment to his mother and aversion to her pain.¹³ For such reasons, Pinit Ratanakul reports that in Thailand there is a growing consensus that euthanasia, active or passive, is morally unjustifiable (1990: 27). He nevertheless observes that, as in the West, nurses 'reported instances of lethal overdoses being given, of no-code orders [i.e. not to resuscitate] being written, of withdrawal of life-support systems or orders to withdraw treatment' (1986: 219). Though he says that such practices conflict with traditional Thai Buddhist values, he gives insufficient details of the contexts of such acts to give a proper moral assessment of them.

There is also the question of whether killing a sick person will actually end his or her suffering. For one thing, there is no guarantee that even a good person will have a pleasant rebirth in his or her next life, as there may be a backlog of bad karma to catch up with him or her (see p. 25). For another, if the suffering of a sick person is due to karma, then killing him or her is unlikely to end the suffering, as the karmically caused suffering will continue after death until its impetus is used up. Thus, it is better to deal with the suffering here and now, while one still has a human rebirth and can deal with the suffering better. However, it is not held that all suffering or illness is due to karma, for it may arise from: winds, bile, phlegm, a combination of these, change of season, stress, suddenly, *or* from the maturing of karma (see p. 23).¹⁴ As regards death and karma, the Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa says that death may be (1) due to the natural ending of a normal human life-span,

¹³ Shoyu Taniguchi, 'A Study of Biomedical Ethics from a Buddhist Perspective', MA thesis, Graduate Theological Union and Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, Calif., 1987, pp. 90–3, cited in Florida, 1993: 43.

¹⁴ Lesco cites several Tibetan sources, including the medical doctor Yeshe Donden, to the effect that Tibetans see all feelings and illnesses as ultimately due to karma, whatever the immediate causes for their arising (1986: 53–5). However, this may simply be based on the idea that one can have human illnesses and feelings only if one is reborn as a human, which is due to karma, rather than meaning that karma is the specific cause of all illnesses. In the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna philosophy, though, *all* experiences are seen as arising from specific karmic 'seeds'. In the Chinese tradition, Chih-i's *Great Concentration and Insight* lists various causes of disease, only one of which is the maturation of karma (Ikeda, 1994: 69–70).

or (2) due to the natural ending of the karma-determined life-span of a particular individual, or (3) an ‘untimely (*akāla-*) death’, for example by being murdered, due to karma which disrupts the normal life-span (*Vism.* 229; cf. *Kvu.* 543–4). This implies that all death, except of those who are very old, is due to karma. The *Sutta* passage which says that all illnesses are not due to karma, however, could be seen to imply that some premature deaths are not due to karma. Indeed, the *Karma-prajñapti-śāstra* (ch. xi, as quoted at *AKB.* II.45b) says that death occurs because of the exhaustion of karma leading to life, to objects of enjoyment or to both, or because of not avoiding a cause of harm, for example excess food. That some deaths have nothing to do with the results of karma is also implied by *Miln.* 150–4. This discusses the efficacy of *parittas*, Buddhist chants which are seen to have the power, in certain cases, of curing illnesses and so of saving a life. They do not work when a person is coming to the natural end of his or her life term, or when the illness is due to karma (p. 151); they only work for one who is in his or her prime and who has faith (p. 154). This admits that one in his or her prime might die even though he or she is not due to do so from karma, for want of the curative properties of such a chant.

If not all illness and death is due to karma, what follows? Firstly, that an illness should not just be passively accepted, as a ‘just’ result of karma. Doctors and relatives should do what they can to save a patient. Where an illness is clearly terminal, it then becomes likely, though not certain – particularly in the very old – to be due to karma. If it is due to karma, hastening death by euthanasia will not end the suffering involved, as karma will cause it to continue after death. If it is not due to karma, it is still important for the patient to ‘see the death-process through’, to learn from it. The case of those who are unconscious and so perhaps cannot ‘see the death process through’ will be discussed below.

Of course, one might say that it could be the patient’s karma to die by euthanasia. This could, in principle, be the case – but it no more excuses euthanasia than a murderer’s being due to the victim’s karma excuses the murderer. Wise compassion, then, should not include euthanasia.

Nevertheless, a Buddhist consideration which might be seen to support voluntary euthanasia is the importance of dying in a good state of mind: calm, conscious and so able to see the death process through (Becker, 1990: 553–5). *If* someone *knew* for certain that he or she would die soon, and that he or she would be in increasing pain, only maskable by drugs that rendered him or her unconscious, then he or she *might*

choose to go sooner in a good state of mind, in which he or she could be reasonably calm, and learn from the death process, than later in a prolonged unconscious or pain-agitated state. Yet the dichotomy is, at least nowadays, becoming a false one. When morphia was used as a pain-killer, it could quite easily render the patient unconscious. There are now pain-killers which minimize this, so as to allow a state which is neither unconscious nor pain-agitated, but a semi-conscious state from which a person can be roused (Hämmerli, 1978: 192). Pain will still be experienced to a degree, and the drugs may cause nausea and eventually lead to final unconsciousness,¹⁵ but to cut this short by euthanasia will abort a learning experience, albeit a difficult one. Moreover, if the person was *not* in fact bound for death in the near future, euthanasia would be throwing away the potential of human life. Keown also makes the fair point that 'Although it is important to die as mindfully as possible, it must be recognised that many people die peacefully, naturally and unconsciously in their sleep, without, one imagines, their spiritual progress being greatly hindered thereby' (1995a: 185). That is, while it is not good to die in an agitated state, dying while unconscious still avoids this. Moreover, at *S. v.369–70*, it is said that a person well practised in spiritual qualities, even if he or she dies while bewildered by the teeming bustle of a city, will gain a good rebirth.

It is clear, then, that on Buddhist principles, euthanasia is unethical and inadvisable. This does not entail, though, that completely self-administered euthanasia, without the help or connivance of another party – i.e. suicide in the case of a difficult illness – should be *illegal*. Indeed, of Buddhist countries, only Sri Lanka, because of British influence, criminalizes attempted suicide. In the case of Channa, a spiritually frustrated monk set on killing himself (*M. III.263–6*), the *Arahat* Sāriputta does what he can to dissuade him, but neither he nor the Buddha, on hearing of this, seeks to prevent Channa from carrying out his plan, since he is set on it and of sound mind; in the event he does so, but manages to become an *Arahat* while dying (Keown, 1996). Suicide (if followed by rebirth) is unethical, but a person still has a right to do unethical actions. He or she should consider, though, that his or her actions may well have a devastating effect on relatives and friends, which gives additional reasons for not doing them.

A relevant case, here, is that of Elizabeth Bouvia, who in 1983 asked the California Supreme Court to be allowed to die by starvation while

¹⁵ My thanks to my research student Liz Williams, an ex-nurse, for pointing this out.

receiving pain-killers and hygienic care. She was a twenty-six-year-old who was suffering from cerebral palsy and quadriplegia, with hardly any motor control, and who felt 'trapped in a useless body' (Nakasone, 1990: 72). After long and serious reflection, she felt that any option but death would be unfulfilling. The court refused her request, on the grounds that she was not terminally ill, that her death would be devastating for her parents and other disabled people, and that she could not ask a doctor to abandon the duty of care enjoined by the Hippocratic Oath (Nakasone, 1990: 72). Here, Buddhist principles would mean that it would be a wrong action on the part of a non-terminal patient to starve herself to death (above, p. 290, (1)). It is less clear whether it would be wrong for doctors to let her starve, if treatment for pain was being administered. If the patient could feed herself if she wanted to, and was of sound mind, then perhaps she should be allowed to die. If she could feed herself, though, she would have been less likely to want to die. The problem, here, was that she was completely dependent on others feeding her. This meant that she wanted others to kill her, by removing her feeding, rather than to allow her to kill herself. This would be asking them to commit an unethical act, and one which it is perfectly acceptable also to make illegal.

Cases of non-intended death

While Buddhist principles entail that genuine cases of euthanasia are unethical, this does not mean that cases which might be mistakenly viewed as euthanasia would be unethical. In one such type of case, death occurs as the result of an action, but is not the intended aim of the action. There are several scenarios which come under this description. The first relates to pain-relief for the terminally ill. Where the pain is intense, pain-relieving drugs might gradually kill the patient. As the body develops a tolerance to the drug, the dosage has to be increased gradually, and may reach a toxic level, so that the patient dies from the drug (Hämmerli, 1978: 192). In such a case, Keown (1995a: 175) points out that there is a useful distinction to be made between intention and foresight. One may know that a side-effect of one's action may be a certain result, but unless one's aim is to attain that result, one does not intend it. For example, one may know that driving a car will kill insects, but if one does not drive so as to kill insects, this is not one's intention. That such a distinction is recognized in Buddhism is perhaps shown by a case in the *Vinaya*. Here, a sick monk dies as a result of medicine given by other

monks (*Vin.* III.82–3). They are held to be guilty of no offence if they did not mean to cause his death, but of a grave offence, just short of one entailing defeat, if this was the intention (*Vin.* III.82–3). Death as the unintended side-effect of pain-killers is seen by Van Loon (1978: 76–7), Barnard (1978: 208) and Florida (1993: 46–7) as an acceptable case of ‘passive euthanasia’, though it seems preferable to reserve the word ‘euthanasia’ for cases where death is the intended aim, as explained above.

In another scenario, a patient might rightly feel that he was tying up scarce medical resources, or bankrupting his family with high medical bills. He might therefore, from compassion to others, *freely choose* to forgo the means of further life (Ratanakul, 1988: 312), as in the *Vinaya* commentary case mentioned above (p. 290, (2)). Of course, it is very important that a person would not feel pressurized by others to perform such an altruistic act. If this were the case, the pressurizers would in effect be committing murder. If a terminally ill person simply could not face eating, then it would be the duty of others to help him eat, and provide intravenous feeding if necessary.

In another scenario, in the advanced stages of a disease, for example cancer, there is the question of continuing with an excessively burdensome treatment if it is painful and not expected to produce a cure, so as to be futile or pointless.¹⁶ The patient, or his doctor in consultation with him, might decide that another round of chemotherapy was just not worth it, as it would detract from the quality of the remaining life term, and would not actually prevent death. To continue treatment, here, would be ‘to cling desperately to a life that is ending or to flail against the forces of impermanence’ (Anderson, 1992: 41). Sogyal Rinpoche affirms that:

Life-support measures or resuscitation can be a cause of disturbance, annoyance, and distraction at the critical moment of death . . . In general there is a danger that life-sustaining treatment that merely prolongs the dying process may only kindle unnecessary grasping, anger, and frustration in a dying person, especially if this was not his or her original wish. Relatives . . . should reflect that if there is no real hope of recovery, the quality of the final days or hours of their loved one’s life may be more important than simply keeping the person alive. (1992: 372)

Kalu Rinpoche has said that a terminal patient who himself chooses to be taken off a life-support system is doing an act which is karmically

¹⁶ Cf. Keown, 1995a: 176; Hämmerli, 1978: 192–3; Barnard, 1978: 205–8.

neither bad nor good (Sogyal, 1992: 374). Yet as this would probably have to have been by a previous 'living will', it would have to have been *very* carefully worded, and there is the danger that it no longer expressed the patient's current wishes.

Dr Elizabeth Kübler Ross, who has done much work with the dying, lists five stages that those approaching death go through: (1) shock and denial, (2) anger, (3) bargaining with God and fate, (4) depression and (5) acceptance.¹⁷ Buddhist counselling for those approaching death is to aid the acceptance process and teach them to let go (cf. *M.* III.258–62); to be aware of the feelings of fear, anger, denial, despair etc. that come up, but not to cling to them, and not to cling to the dying body, life or relatives (*S.* v.408–10). Meditation practice schools a person in letting go, and thus prepares him or her for this; indeed, there are meditations on the inevitability of death (for example *Vism.* 229–39). Dying, though, is a time when a person *has* to learn to let go, even if he or she has not yet done so. The more attached a person is, and the more he or she denies his or her impending death, the more difficult it will be for him or her and his or her relatives. To develop acceptance of the process, as the natural ending of a conditioned phenomenon, is to prepare for an easier passing away. As expressed by Jacqui James, a Buddhist meditation teacher who helped her mother through the last two weeks of her dying from cancer:

Learning how to die properly is all about learning how to let go, learning how to watch the natural ebb and flow of all things, learning that life is a process of continual beginnings and endings, continual birth and death. When you see this cyclical movement clearly then there is no more fear of death. When you have learnt *that* not only have you learnt how to die but you have also learnt how to live. (James and James, 1987: 150)

The Amaravati Buddhist Centre, near Hemel Hempstead, England, is a place where some people are now going to die in good surroundings. In the case of a nun who died there, the other nuns who attended her said that it was a privilege to be in the same room as her, as she had learnt to be at peace with her coming death, and exuded a radiance of spirit that was uplifting to share in (Sucitto, 1988). The Thai monk Mettānando also tells of a lady who was riddled with cancer and extremely agitated as a result. After she was taught a simple meditation, she became happy, and survived for six months rather than the two months that doctors had given her. She then died happy and at peace,

¹⁷ *On Death and Dying* (New York, Macmillan, 1970), pp. 38–137, cited in Ikeda, 1994: 97–8.

making a considerable impression on the doctors and nurses who observed her (1991: 208).

Where treatment of a terminal illness is futile, the non-administering of treatment might give up a chance to delay slightly death due to natural causes, but it would not hasten it – make it happen more quickly than it would have happened naturally without treatment – and death would not be the aim. It would thus involve neither suicide nor murder, and would be morally acceptable. The South African heart doctor Christiaan Barnard sees such a case as one of passive euthanasia, but as acceptable (1978: 208–9, 211), as does Florida, particularly if there are additional factors, such as the family being bankrupted by treatment, and a shortage of hospital beds in the locality (1993: 44). Now, while withholding treatment would prevent the delay of death, as in passive euthanasia, unless its *intention* was to thus cause death, it does not come under the full definition of passive euthanasia given above. This also seems to be the opinion of Kübler Ross. She opposes all euthanasia, which she refers to as ‘mercy killing’, but finds it acceptable to allow a patient to die in peace if he or she is beyond medical help (1989/90).

Regarding such a case, Taniguchi, articulating a Theravāda view, says: ‘If one chooses to die or refuses life sustaining medical treatment, one must be motivated by aggression towards one’s state of suffering, or be passionately attached to pleasant states, or be deluded that death is a way to avoid suffering.’¹⁸ This might be true if treatment was refused when it could do some good, but it need not be otherwise. The Thai doctor Pinit Ratanakul also holds that even when a terminal patient refuses extraordinary treatments, so that he dies, this is an unwise act which prevents bad karma ‘running its course’, so that it does not continue into the next life (1988: 309), and the Dalai Lama holds that it is best to face suffering, which is karmically caused, in the present, human life, where one is better placed to bear it than in, say, an animal rebirth (Sogyal, 1992: 375). This is an argument not about morality, though, but about the wisdom of an act. Here, three points can be made. Firstly, it is not certain that all illness or death is due to karma (see pp. 297–8). Secondly, ideas about karma are not usually seen to imply that pain-killers should not be taken because this ‘interferes’ with the flow of karmic results. Thirdly, allowing a disease to run *its* course without (futile) treatment is hardly interfering with the flow of karmic results.

¹⁸ Shoyu Taniguchi, ‘A Study of Biomedical Ethics from a Buddhist Perspective’, MA thesis, Graduate Theological Union and Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, Calif., 1987, pp. 89–90, cited in Florida, 1993: 42.

Thus, in the case of a severe terminal illness, where death will soon come anyway, avoidance of futile treatment would be acceptable. Indeed, the *Vinaya* commentary (above, p. 290, (3)) even sees it as sometimes acceptable for a person in such circumstances to stop eating. One can see such a case as one where neither the motive nor the intention is to die, but to be peaceful, and thus better able to compose oneself during a dying process which is already under way irrespective of what anyone does or does not do. The Dalai Lama gives some degree of support to this:

if a dying person has any chance of having positive, virtuous thoughts, it is important . . . for them to live even just a few minutes longer . . . If there is no chance for positive thoughts, and in addition a lot of money is being spent by relatives simply in order to keep someone alive, then there seems to be no point. (Anderson, 1992: 41; Sogyal, 1992: 372)

This would support non-treatment, but only where treatment would make it difficult to have ‘positive, virtuous thoughts’.

What of the avoidance of futile and/or expensive treatment when this is non-voluntary? Ratanakul raises the case of deformed infants – who of course may be severely mentally impaired – and says that it is morally unacceptable to Thai Buddhists to withhold treatment from them or allow them to die (1990: 27). In Japan, also, infants with severe brain abnormalities are sometimes cared for for years at the wish of loving parents (Becker, 1990: 545). Clearly, it is unacceptable to remove feeding from such infants. Anything should also be done which would *improve* their condition or maintain a viable state of health. Thus a child with Down’s Syndrome, for example, should be given every help. Where a child’s condition is such that he or she would be constantly battling with infections or other medical complications, and this would be painful and expensive and tie up scarce medical resources, then perhaps he or she should be allowed to die – for example by not having infections treated – if this is what the parents want.

Another scenario for avoidance of futile treatment is that of the non-resuscitation of a terminal patient who has a heart-attack (cf. Keown, 1995a: 174–5). While non-resuscitation would be acceptable if it was what the patient wanted, perhaps in a prior ‘living will’, it would probably also be acceptable if he had not expressed himself on the matter, if he were clearly already in the terminal phase of his illness. To die amidst the unnecessary techno-frenzy of a hospital ‘crash’ team is surely a disturbing experience! Non-resuscitation would be unacceptable if the patient had affirmed that he *did* want to be resuscitated. It would perhaps also

be immoral to resuscitate a genuinely terminal patient who had said that he did *not* want to be resuscitated. Hämmerli suggests that a doctor who insists on prolonging the life of a hopeless case as long as possible may in fact be treating his own guilty conscience, so as to appear a 'good' doctor (1978: 182), and Barnard sees this as possibly a case of selfishly not wanting to appear a failure (1978: 204).

The question of the criteria of death

Another type of case in which an action would be acceptable as no intentional killing occurs would be that in which the action can be seen to occur after the patient has died. This, then, raises the question of the criteria for being 'alive' and being 'dead'. The type of scenario which particularly raises this issue is that of a patient in a 'persistent vegetative state' (PVS). Here, a person is in a coma as the neocortex of his or her brain has been damaged. If this continues for a long time, the damage may be regarded as irreversible. If the brain-stem of the person is undamaged, however, the person can breathe unaided (though artificial respiration may be added as an aid) and digest, his or her heart will beat (though help may be needed in regulating it), and his or her body will retain certain reflexes such as dilation of the pupils and, usually, swallowing, yet the senses do not seem to work, and no voluntary movements are made (cf. Keown, 1995a: 160; Mettānando, 1991: 210). If someone is permanently without any sign of conscious awareness and the ability to make decisions, however, two questions arise:

- (1) is the patient still a 'person' with value?
- (2) is the patient alive?

Some would regard the life of a human who is 'not a person' as without value, so that it is not unethical to kill him or her. Buddhism, however, does not see the value of life as residing in personhood (Keown, 1995a: 27–30). This is shown by the fact that animals and humans in the womb have value and should not be killed. Some Buddhists would still say that a life without volition (Van Loon, 1978) or awareness/sentience¹⁹ would be without value. Yet even were one to accept these criteria, which are debatable,²⁰ there seems no way of knowing that, in the inner recesses

¹⁹ Geoffrey Redmond (of the Foundation for Developmental Endocrinology, Cleveland, Ohio), 'Application of the Buddhist Anatma Doctrine to the Problems of Biomedical Ethics', paper given at the conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Paris, 1991, pp. 19–20, 22, 33.

²⁰ See Keown, 1995a: 32–7, 143–4, 160–1. Such criteria would also seem to give scant grounds for not killing a person who was unconscious and insentient under anaesthetic!

of a patient's mind, these qualities are not present, albeit in an attenuated form. Buddhism accepts many meditative states in which consciousness behaves in non-ordinary ways. It also accepts 'formless' rebirths, where consciousness is not accompanied by any kind of body. It is therefore hard to be sure that physical tests will always be able to detect existing states of consciousness. Indeed, the remaining consciousness may be reflecting on the dying process, preparing for death, so as to attain as good a rebirth as possible (Mettānando, 1991: 210). Indeed, *Viśm.* 554 says that, as a person is dying, there is a phase in which the eye and other sense-organs stop working, but the sense of touch, the mind-organ and the vitality-faculty remain 'in the heart-basis alone' and consciousness is in the process of preparing for death.

Is a patient in a PVS alive, then? It seems that, by Buddhist criteria, he or she would be. Keown (1995a: 145–58) has a good review of the relevant textual material. Two passages (*S.* III.143 and *M.* I.296) affirm that a body is dead and 'will-less (*acetanan*) like a log of wood' when it is without three things: 'life (*āyu*), heat and discriminative consciousness (*viññāṇam*)'. It is explained that 'life' and heat depend on each other, like the light and flame of a lamp, and that the five sense-organs depend on heat (*M.* I.195). The 'life-activities' (*āyu-saṅkhāras*) are not states that are felt, otherwise one would die in the meditative state of the 'cessation of identification and feeling' (*M.* I.296).²¹ This is a state attained by advanced meditators in which all functions of the mind shut down, and on the way to attaining it, breathing ceases (*M.* I.296 and 301). Unlike a dead body, which has no life or heat, and has the sense-organs 'wholly dis-integrated', a person in the state of cessation still has life and heat, and his or her sense-organs are 'clarified'. It is left ambiguous whether consciousness still occurs in this state, and the different Buddhist schools had different opinions on this. In his study of the state of cessation, Paul Griffiths sees it as a state in which a person may seem dead (*M.* I.333; *Viśm.* 380), as he or she does not breathe and 'heartbeat, blood pressure, body temperature and metabolic levels in general have all fallen to a very low level', and mentally, a person is in a state which Western medical observers might liken to a profound cataleptic trance (1986: 10–11). It lasts for up to seven days (*Viśm.* 707).

The above shows that Buddhism holds it possible to be in a state in which there is no breathing, and no detectable mental activity, and yet

²¹ Though the *Vibhaṅga* says that it is sometimes associated with feeling (*Vibh.* 125), just as it is sometimes associated with consciousness (p. 131).

be alive. A persistent vegetative state is not the same as the state of cessation, but shares some of its qualities. One difference is that a person continues to breathe, unaided, in the PVS. Buddhism would clearly not regard one in such a state as dead, then, and to remove intravenous or tube feeding from such a person would be to kill him or her.

A famous case of this type was that of Tony Bland, who in 1989 was crushed in a football stadium disaster and was in a PVS. In 1993, the UK House of Lords ruled that the food provided to him by a tube was a form of futile treatment, and could legally be withdrawn, even though this would lead to his death. He then died in a heavily sedated state (Keown, 1995a: 159–68). This was in accord with the recommendations of the 1988 euthanasia report of the British Medical Association, which opposed active euthanasia, but accepted that futile treatment, which it saw as including artificial means of feeding, could be removed from terminal patients.²² Keown (1995a: 162–4), however, rightly disputes whether feeding could be regarded as ‘futile treatment’. Firstly, he points out that feeding, even if done by nurses, could not be seen as medical treatment unless it was of a kind specifically selected to cure an illness, which it was not. Even if it were regarded as ‘treatment’, its only possible aim was to sustain life. As it was succeeding in doing so, it could not be seen as ‘futile treatment’, i.e. treatment which was not attaining its goal. In a somewhat similar case in 1995, the Irish Supreme Court decided that a woman who had lain in a coma for twenty-three years could have her feeding-tube removed, even though she was not in a PVS but could still recognize people. The grounds were that feeding by tube was an intrusive and unusual method of feeding which interfered with the integrity of her body.²³ Yet the view of a dissenting judge in the Court seems correct: the action was intended to cause death by starvation. If someone cannot feed himself or herself, it is the duty of others to help him or her, by whatever means.

To say that a patient in a PVS is alive, and should not be starved to death, is not to say that extraordinary medical means should be used to keep him or her alive indefinitely. A patient in such a state is very prone to infections. As Keown argues, ‘it does not follow that there is a duty to go to extreme lengths to preserve life at all costs’ (1995a: 167). Such a person could be seen as beyond medical help, so that any *medical treatment* would be futile, as it could not restore health. If relatives wished medical complications such as infections to be treated, they should be, unless

²² The *Guardian* newspaper, 6 May 1998.

²³ The *Guardian* newspaper, 28 July 1995.

resources were genuinely not available. If not, the condition should go untreated, which could well result in the patient's death.²⁴

What, though, of patients whose brain-stems have died, so that they cannot breathe unaided (which those with live brain-stems *usually* can), and are without any reflexes: are they then to be regarded as dead, so that no action can be seen as 'killing' them any longer? Keown (1995a: 151–8) argues that brain-stem death should be taken by Buddhism as the correct criterion of death. He points out that *Vin.* III.73 defines killing as the 'cutting off of the vitality-faculty (*jīvit-indriya*)' and that *Vin. A.* II.438–9 specifies this as the physical vitality-faculty rather than the mental one, which in any case depends on it (1995a: 148). The commentary on *M.* I.296 identifies 'life (*āyu*)' with this material vitality-faculty (*M.A.* II.351), and the Abhidhamma defines this as:

That which, of these material states, is life (*āyu*), persistence, continuance, lastingness, movement, upkeep, keeping going, vitality, vitality-faculty. (*Dhs. sec.* 635)

Buddhaghosa says that it 'has the characteristic of maintaining consecutive types of matter. Its function is to make them occur. It is manifested in the establishment of their presence' (*Vism.* 447). It is identified with 'vital breath' (*prāṇa*) (*AKB.* IV.73ab), but clearly not with the physical breath, for as 'life', it is seen as occurring from the moment of conception, because of past karma (*AKB.* II.45b). It is thus clearly not identified with any organic structure or function, such as breathing, but as Keown says, seems to denote 'the basic biological processes of life' (Keown, 1995a: 149). As 'life' and heat are compared to the light and flame of a lamp, they can be seen as two processes which keep biological processes 'burning', i.e. functioning.

Keown refers to the meaning of *prāṇa* in Buddhist medicine, and in Buddhist-influenced Ayurveda (Indian traditional medicine) as ranging 'from the gross physical process of respiration to the flow of subtle energy which was thought to regulate the internal functioning of the body' so as to regulate 'respiration, heartbeat, swallowing, digestion, evacuation, menstruation, and many other bodily functions. In this capacity it seems to be closely related to the autonomic system' (1995a: 149).²⁵ He goes on (p. 151) to cite Mettānando (1991: 204) as saying 'This

²⁴ Cf. Mettānando, 1991: 209–11, though he only talks of withholding treatment, including life-support, if resources are needed for others in intensive care.

²⁵ In Tibetan Buddhist thought, consciousness is said to be mounted on the *prāṇas* or winds which circulate through many channels in the body (Sogyal, 1992: 248–9).

group of interrelated bodily functions attributed to the *prāṇa* we now recognize as bodily functions maintained by the nuclei of the brainstem.’ While Keown holds that, as ‘life’ and heat always occur together, so permanent loss of body-heat seems to be ‘the only empirical criterion offered by the early sources as a means of determining death’ (1995a: 151), he concurs with Mettānando in taking brain-stem death as signifying the end of life. Mettānando sees this as entailing that *prāṇa* and consciousness have gone (1991: 206), and Keown sees it as meaning that there is no body-heat, presumably as he sees the brain-stem as its cause (1995a: 152). Keown holds that early Buddhist texts see that ‘death is the irreversible loss of the integrated organic functioning which a living organism displays’ (1995a: 155), as when *M.* 1.296 says that death involves the ‘dis-integration of the sense-organs’. At death, often referred to as the ‘break-up of the body’, the operation of the sense-organs ‘is no longer co-ordinated as it would be in a living, self-regulating organism’ (1995a: 156). He regards the brain-stem as carrying out such a ‘co-ordinating function’, without which ‘the organism ceases to be a unified whole and can no longer survive’, even if components can survive a while longer: the heart continues to beat for up to an hour (1995a: 155), and remains alive for an hour or so even after this stops, and the skeletal muscles live for another six hours (Barnard, 1978: 201). Thus irreversible brain-stem death is the criterion for determining that death – an end to integrated organic functioning – has occurred, this being simultaneous with consciousness leaving the body (Keown, 1995a: 158). Keown does not actually identify ‘life’/‘vitality-faculty’ with the brain-stem, but sees it as closely related to it.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it can be seen that Buddhism regards human life as a precious quality that should not be thrown away by suicide, and maintains that people should not incite or aid others to kill themselves. Euthanasia scenarios present a test for the implications of Buddhist compassion, but the central Buddhist response is one of aiding a person to continue to make the best of his or her ‘precious human rebirth’, even in very difficult circumstances, rather than prematurely ending this. The adage ‘where there is life there is hope’ is appropriate, though ‘where there is human life, there is opportunity to reflect and learn’ is one which Buddhism might emphasize. At a certain point in terminal illness,

though, it may be appropriate to abstain from futile treatments that reduce the quality of life on its last short lap. It may also be appropriate to deal with mounting pain in such a way that death is a known but unintended, and unsought, side-effect of increasing dosage of drugs. Any help for the dying that does not include the intention of bringing death is acceptable.

CHAPTER 8

Abortion and contraception

Hard to gain is a human rebirth. *Dhammapada* 182

EMBRYONIC LIFE

Before discussing abortion, it is appropriate to examine Buddhist views about the nature of life in the womb. In Buddhism's rebirth-perspective, human life is not seen as something that gradually emerges as an embryo develops.¹ Consciousness is not regarded as an emergent property of this process, but is itself seen as one of the conditions for it to occur, as expressed in a passage from the Theravādin collection of *Suttas*:

'Were consciousness (*viññāṇaṃ*), Ānanda, not to fall into the mother's womb, would the sentient body (*nāma-rūpaṃ*) be constituted there?' 'It would not, Lord.' 'Were consciousness, having fallen into the mother's womb, to turn aside from it, would the sentient body come to birth in this present state?' 'It would not, Lord.' (*D.* 11.62–3)

Thus the flux of consciousness from a previous being is a necessary condition for the arising and development in the womb of a body (*rūpa*) endowed with mental abilities which amount to sentience (*nāma*, literally 'name'): feeling, identification, volition, sensory stimulation and attention (*S.* 11.3–4). The monastic code recognizes human life as starting at conception; for the minimum age for full ordination, twenty (*Vin.* 1.78), is reckoned from then, not from leaving the womb:

When in his mother's womb, the first mind-moment has arisen, the first consciousness appeared, his birth is (to be reckoned as) from that time. I allow you, monks, to ordain one who is aged twenty from being an embryo (*gabbha-vīsaṃ*). (*Vin.* 1.93)

The Theravādin commentary on a similar passage at *Vin.* 111.73 (*Vin.* A. 437) explains this time as 'from the first relinking mind (*paṭisandhi-cittaṃ*)'

¹ Below, 'embryo' or 'foetus' will be used equally for the being in the womb at any stage of development, even though there is a usage in which 'zygote' means fertilized egg, 'embryo' refers to the womb-being for the first eight weeks, and 'foetus' refers to the being after eight weeks.

(cf. *Vism.* 499), with the commentary on the above *D.* II.62–3 passage (*D.* A. 502) also using this term for the consciousness which falls into or enters the womb.² ‘Relinking’ mind or consciousness is a commentarial term for the consciousness which connects to a new life, immediately after the end of the previous one (*Vism.* 460, 554). It is equivalent to ‘arising’ (*uppatti*) mind, which in the Theravādin canonical Abhidhamma is described in the same way (*Ps.* 1.312–13) and is said to be accompanied by all the other personality-factors, including feeling (*Vibh.* 411).

Modern biological knowledge shows that there are two key events at the start of life:

- (a) *fertilization* of the ovum by a sperm, which takes place in the oviduct or Fallopian tubes, normally five minutes to an hour after intercourse (Keown, 1995a: 78);³
- (b) *implantation* of the fertilized egg in the lining of the womb, which takes place six or seven days later, by which time there are over a hundred cells; the egg takes eight or nine days to complete its attachment (Keown, 1995a: 76–7).

At what point would Buddhism see ‘relinking’ consciousness as arising? On this, a key early text describes the three conditions which must all be met for a human life to start:

If there is, here, a coitus of the parents, *and* it is the mother’s season, *and* a *gandhabba* is present: it is from the conjunction of these three things that there is descent of the embryo [and not if only the first, or only the first and second, condition is met]. Then, monks, the mother for nine or ten months carries the embryo (*gabbham*) in her womb with great anxiety for her heavy burden. When it is born, she feeds it with her own life-blood . . . that is to say, mother’s milk. (*M.* 1.266)

Here, there must both be the appropriate physical conditions of sexual intercourse at the right time of the month, and also the presence of a *gandhabba*. The latter term indicates a being who is ready to be reborn (*M. A.* II.310). While the developed Theravāda view is that ‘*gandhabba*’, here, is just a way of talking of the instantaneously transmitted consciousness of a person who has just died, as they accept no between-lives interlude, the Sarvāstivādins – and also the Mahāyānists – saw it (Skt *gandharva*) as the name for a between-lives being (*AKB.* II.4, 10, 13–15, 40). Indeed, even in the Theravāda collection of *Suttas*, there is a small but substantial body of evidence to support the idea of such a between-lives

² See also *Ps.* 1.52; *Vism.* 528, 600.

³ After fertilization itself, when the sperm penetrates the outer layer of the ovum, about twenty-four hours later the two sets of twenty-three chromosomes fuse together (Keown, 1995a: 82).

state, with the *gandhabba* as a kind of mutable, restless ‘spirit’ seeking out a new rebirth to ‘fall’ into (Harvey, 1995: 98–108).

What, though, is one to make of ‘descent of the embryo’ (*gabbhassāvakkanti*)?⁴ It clearly does not refer to the exit from the womb at birth – for the above passage sees this as coming later. Could it be alluding to ‘descent’ of the fertilized ovum to implantation? This seems ill supported by the above passage, for no literal ‘descent’ need be meant. *Avakkanti* has an alternative form *okkanti*, and the verbal form of this, *okkamati*,⁵ is used of ‘falling’ asleep (*Vin.* 1.15). The word can also mean simply ‘enter’. Damien Keown thus seems right when he holds that in modern terms, ‘we have every reason to locate the descent of the intermediate being at fertilisation’ (Keown, 1995a: 78), this being a very clear point of origin, from which everything else follows (Keown, 1995a: 79).

ABORTION AND BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES

Given the Buddhist view of embryonic life, it is not surprising that causing an abortion is seen as a serious act:

When a monk is ordained he should not intentionally deprive a living being of life, even if it is only an ant. Whatever monk deprives a human being of life, even (*antamaso*) down to destroying an embryo (*gabbha-pātanaṃ upādāya*), he becomes not a (true) renouncer, not a son of the Sākiyans. (*Vin.* 1.97)

The penalty for a monk intentionally causing an abortion is permanent expulsion from the *Saṅgha*:

Whatever monk should intentionally deprive a human being of life . . . he is also one who is defeated [in the monastic life], he is not in communion . . . *Human being* means: from the mind’s first arising, from (the time of) consciousness becoming first manifest in a mother’s womb until the time of death, here meanwhile he is called a *human being*. (*Vin.* III.73)

Such passages from the Theravādin *Vinaya* have their counterpart in the Sarvāstivādin *Vinaya* used in Tibet, which clearly forbids monks’ and nuns’ involvement in abortion (Stott, 1992: 173–4, 181). While these passages pertain to monks and nuns, rather than lay people, the rules which

⁴ *Gabbhassa avakkanti* in the citing of this passage at *Miln.* 123. The meaning can be either ‘descent’ (*avakkanti*) ‘of the embryo’ or ‘into the womb’, as *gabbha* can mean ‘embryo’ or ‘womb’ and the ending *-assa* could mean either ‘of’ or ‘to’. The commentary (*M. A.* II.310) favours the former meaning, which makes sense, given that the passage goes on to use *gabbha* to clearly mean the embryo.

⁵ The future form of which is used on consciousness ‘falling’ into the womb at *D.* II.62–3, quoted above.

entail expulsion if broken cover serious matters, and it is clear that, here, causing an abortion is seen as a case of murdering a human, a serious breach of the first of the five precepts applying to all lay Buddhists. David Stott, speaking on behalf of the Tibetan tradition, argues strongly that abortion is wrong, going against both Śrāvakayāna ethics and the Mahāyāna emphasis on compassionate cherishing of all beings. He thus holds that it is bad to have an abortion, perform one, or advise someone to have one (1986: 15).

As with all aspects of Buddhist ethics, intention is a key factor. This can be seen at *Vin.* III.83–4, on a series of cases where a woman asks a monk for an abortive preparation, either for herself or a rival co-wife.⁶ If he accedes to her request, then:

- (a) if the child dies, he is defeated, even if he is remorseful;
- (b) if the child does not die, but the mother does, this is a grave offence (lesser than defeat), entailing temporary suspension: this must be because this result was not that intended by the monk;
- (c) the same applies if neither die;
- (d) if both die, ‘ditto (*pe*)’: this must surely refer back to the judgement in case (a), defeat, rather than in cases (b)–(c), as the child dies, as intended;⁷
- (e) if he simply tells her how to cause an abortion by crushing or scorching, and the child dies, he is defeated.

In case (e), the commentary says that the monk is not defeated if the child is aborted, but by the woman using a different method from the one he recommended, or by a different person applying that same method to the woman.⁸ Here again, as in (b), the woman does not carry out what the monk had told her to do, so the offence is less serious.

A key reason why Buddhist principles treat abortion as such a serious matter is that human life, with all its potential for moral and spiritual development, is seen as a rare and precious opportunity in a being’s wandering in the round of rebirths (see p. 30). For a being to gain a foothold in a human womb and then be killed is to have this rare opportunity destroyed. Now it might be said: as all rebirth is due to past karma (see, for example, *Miln.* 128), might not a being with the karma for a human rebirth simply find another human womb if aborted from another? This

⁶ On monks’ involvement in medicine, see Keown, 1995a: 1–5.

⁷ McDermott, 1998:166–7 argues for this reading, and a personal communication from Damien Keown supports it. Note that the format of the text is rather abbreviated at this point. If any judgement other than defeat were intended here, the commentary would surely have discussed it, which it does not.

⁸ *Vin. A.* 468–9; see also Bapat and Hirakawa, 1970: 328.

is possible, but should no more 'excuse' abortion than the killing of an adult who might then be reborn as a human. In any case, the state of mind in which a being dies can affect its next rebirth (see p. 25), and the trauma of being aborted might lead to anger and fear in the foetus, meaning that it would have a less good rebirth than it was previously heading for, thus losing the opportunity for a human rebirth for some time. Now, being aborted might well be itself due to a foetus's past karma, but again, this should no more excuse abortion than saying that if a person murders an adult, this is acceptable as the death is due to the adult's past karma.

Given the seriousness of abortion, it is not surprising to find certain passages outlining its karmic results. A *Jātaka* story (*J.* v.269) thus refers to abortion-mongers in a hell, along with matricides and adulterers. In the *Petavatthu*, there are two stories of jealous elder wives causing younger ones to miscarry or abort (one at two months, the other at three months).⁹ In both cases, the women falsely swear that they did not do it, and go on to be reborn as ill-smelling ghosts on account of the deed and the lie. They also suffer in having to devour their own children, as they had sworn that they would if they were lying in their oaths (*Pv.* 1.6, 7).

Relevance of the age of the foetus

In law, it is often the case that abortion is permitted on certain grounds on foetuses of a certain age. In England and Wales, abortions can be carried out up to 28 weeks (though foetuses can survive from 23 weeks), while France only allows them up to 10 weeks. What is the Buddhist view in this area? In the above story, the karmic result is the same whether the foetus is two or three months old, and McDermott sees this as evidence that the age of an aborted foetus is not seen by Buddhism as affecting the seriousness of the act (1998: 160–1). Keown also holds that causing the death of a foetus is as grave an offence as killing an adult (1995a: 93), and Stott holds that a foetus is:

not a 'partially souled' being nor a 'potential' being but an embodied sentient being, however small. It would thus be difficult for any Western Buddhist to make the claim that the smaller the foetus, the less serious the abortion. (1992: 176)

Yet there is some ambiguity in the textual evidence. It is clear from *Vin.* III.73 that causing an abortion is seen as a case of murder, and the

⁹ See Reynolds and Reynolds, 1982: 98 and *Dhp. A.* 45–53.

commentary on *Vin.* 1.97 (see p. 313) says that the offence is committed even if the foetus is only in its first phase, as a *kalala* (*Vin. A.* 437–8), said to be like a drop of oil on a hair tip (*S. A.* 1.301). Yet *Vin.* 1.97, by using the word ‘even’, implies that, just as killing an ant is the least serious case of killing an animal, so killing a foetus is the least serious case of killing a human. Of course, even this is seen as a serious offence – which actually entails the same *monastic* punishment, expulsion, as any other killing of a human¹⁰ – yet this does not prevent other acts of murder from being more *morally* serious.

Trevor Ling, on the basis of a study of views in Thailand and Sri Lanka, says:

In general it can be said that in Theravāda Buddhist countries the moral stigma which attaches to abortion increases with the size of the foetus. This is an aspect of the general Buddhist notion that the seriousness of the act of taking life increases with the size, complexity and even sanctity of the being whose life is taken. It is relatively less serious to destroy a mosquito than a dog; less serious to destroy a dog than an elephant; it is more serious to take the life of a man than of an elephant, and most serious of all to take the life of a monk. It would thus be less serious to terminate the life of a month-old foetus than of a child about to be born. (1969: 58).¹¹

Here, there is probably an allusion to the commentarial passage at *M. A.* 1.198, as quoted on p. 52. Keown argues that the *size* criterion in this passage only applies to animals, not humans, for whom degree of virtue is seen as crucial (1995a: 96, 99). He argues that all human *life* is seen as equally valuable, but that extra virtue gives additional value to a person, too (p. 97). However, the passage in question does acknowledge that it is morally worse to kill some animals than others – even though the same *monastic penalty* applies – and worse to kill some humans than others.

Now, in the case of foetuses, they may be the reborn form of beings of greater or lesser virtue, but as this cannot be known by a person contemplating an abortion, this cannot be a relevant consideration for assessing his or her degree of fault in an abortion. The age/size of a foetus is, broadly, knowable, and while the above passage does not apply the size criterion to humans, it *does* say that the intensity of bad motive, and of the means used, make the act worse. Now, to abort a foetus at five

¹⁰ Also at *Vin.* iv.124–5, dealing with the killing of animals, the punishment only varies according to such matters as intention and foreknowledge of the monk, with no discussion of killing of different kinds of animals.

¹¹ Apart from this, he cites a Thai non-Buddhist popular belief that the *khwan* or spirit is only properly established in a child three days after birth, making it properly ‘human’ (p. 58).

months – by inducing contractions – arguably does entail more forceful means than to do so at, say, two months, by scraping out the uterus. This would mean that the act of the *abortionist* would be worse when the abortion was later – and also the act of the woman requesting the abortion *if* she knew that more violent means were to be used. In any case, with a later abortion, the woman would have a more developed relationship with the foetus, which would mean that her motivation to have an abortion at this stage would probably have to be more intense, and perhaps perverse, in order to go through with the abortion.¹² Thus on these two grounds, rather than on that of *size per se*, a later abortion would be worse than an earlier one, though an early one would still be a serious act. Both these points are contained in a statement of Dr Pinit Ratanakul, who holds that Thai Buddhists

believe in the uniqueness and preciousness of human life irrespective of its stages of development . . . To destroy any form of human life will yield bad karmic results . . .

The gravity of these results depends on many factors, such as the intensity of the doer's intention and effort, as well as the size and quality of the being that was killed . . . In the case of induced abortion, the stages of the development of the fetus aborted influence the degree of the karmic consequences for those who perpetrate abortion. These different stages also imply different degrees of the potential of the fetus which itself influences the weight of the karmic consequences. (1998: 56)

He thus sees Thai women's preference for earlier rather than later abortions as appropriate. While this preference *may* be partly because a late abortion is more difficult to hide from others, that is not the only consideration.

So, it is clear that Buddhism sees abortion as akin to killing an adult human, but that does not mean that all such acts are equally bad. As a parallel, note that in American law, murderers may get different sentences, depending on the circumstances and motive of the act. Those who kill in self-defence or in war are also treated differently. Thus there can surely be degrees of badness in abortion as in other forms of intentional killing.

Nevertheless, it is clear from *Vinaya* passages quoted above that deliberate abortion is *always* worse than killing an animal, which would

¹² Saying this would seem to imply that it is worse to kill someone with whom one has a positive relationship – a relative or friend – than a stranger. Though this is never exactly spelt out anywhere, the fact that it is seen as a terrible act to kill a *parent* intentionally might be seen to imply that it is also particularly bad, though to a lesser degree, to kill any relative.

include killing, say, an elephant, seen as a noble animal in Buddhism, or a chimpanzee, which is nowadays seen as the most developed of animals. As I think that there are Buddhist grounds for saying that an abortion becomes worse according to the age of the foetus, so we could say that abortion is not *as* bad as killing a newborn baby – though in the last few months of pregnancy, the difference may be minimal. We could thus say that the evil of an abortion lies somewhere between the evil of killing a chimpanzee and the evil of killing a baby, other things being equal.

Robert Florida argues that it is less bad to abort a younger foetus as this entails inflicting less pain, the degree of suffering caused being the criterion of how bad an action is (1998: 16). He goes too far here, though, for Buddhism would still object to killing someone painlessly. That someone feels pain in being killed is only *part* of the evil of killing,¹³ though when a killing entails more pain, it is appropriate to see it as worse. As regards the extent to which foetuses suffer, scientific evidence sees this as starting to occur at twenty-three weeks or earlier, as indicated by a huge surge in hormone stress level.¹⁴ While Buddhist texts see pain as entailed at any stage in the womb (*Vism.* 500) and some sense of touch as present from the beginning (*Vibh.* 413; *AKB.* II.14b), it seems valid to say that a more developed foetus would be *more* sensitive to pain, so that a later abortion would accordingly be *worse* if the foetus were not anaesthetized.

The fact that the killing of even very young foetuses is against Buddhist ethics has implications for fertility treatments and embryo research. *In Vitro* Fertilization, or IVF, entails fertilizing an ovum outside the womb, using the sperm of the husband or a donor, then placing it in the womb to grow. Stott holds that, while this might be acceptable in Buddhism in theory, in practice it is unacceptable, as it involves fertilizing up to ten ova, and implanting only the ‘best’ one or ones. The rest are discarded or used in research, i.e. killed, or frozen for later use, with a real risk that this will kill them. He holds that a Buddhist could only, with a good conscience, take part in the procedure if all the fertilized eggs were implanted, even those with a potential handicap, for ‘a handicapped being is as valuable as a non-handicapped one’ (1986: 13–14). However, no IVF centres operate using these conditions, and there is no guarantee that doctors would follow a couple’s wishes (Keown, 1995a: 137).

Doctors envisage that research on embryos might lead to improved

¹³ Keown, 1995a: 35–6 appropriately argues against taking sentience as the ‘essence’ of a living being, yet goes too far in apparently seeing the degree of pain inflicted as irrelevant to assessing the evil involved in a killing.

¹⁴ The *Guardian* newspaper, 8 July 1994.

contraceptives, alleviation of genetic abnormalities, infertility treatments, and cures for hereditary and other diseases. Yet such research involves killing many embryos, and destroying the human life of the very young to benefit others, or even, in some cases, to lead to further abortions of foetuses with newly detectable abnormalities (cf. Keown, 1995a: 119). As Stott says:

Since when has Buddha advocated the killing of one being for the benefit of another? One might as well argue that one should kill a rich man to make oneself and others happier. Such 'compassion' is, of course, not the limitless compassion without partiality that Lord Buddha teaches. (1986: 14)

Now, the Mahāyāna does envisage certain scenarios in which killing is allowable as a 'skilful means' to prevent further death (see pp. 135–8). Yet in such cases, most texts are *very* careful in delineating the special circumstances in which this is possible, and only concern the killing of someone who is himself involved in great killing. In the case of a foetus, it is an innocent bystander, so it would be inappropriate to use classical 'skilful means' arguments to justify abortion.

Possible grounds for abortion

In the various legal systems of the world, and in debate on the issue, a variety of reasons are accepted, or rejected, as grounds for a legally acceptable abortion. These can be grouped together in the focus of their concern:

- (1) *a threat to the mother's physical health:*
 - (a) if continuing the pregnancy will lead to the death of the mother;
 - (b) if continuing the pregnancy will harm the physical health of the mother, but not cause her death;
- (2) *a threat to the mother's mental health:*
 - (a) arising from the fact that the pregnancy is due to rape or incest, or where a minor is pregnant;
 - (b) if the pregnancy will threaten the mental health of the mother because of an existing medical condition;
- (3) *problems with the foetus's health:*

if the foetus is malformed or has a serious medical condition, such as being HIV-positive;
- (4) *socio-economic factors:*
 - (a) entailing a financial strain on the woman;
 - (b) entailing a strain on support for existing children;

- (5) *a woman's 'right to choose'*:
the woman has the 'right to choose' to have an abortion if she wishes, as she has a right to decide what happens to her own body;
- (6) *the needs of society*:
if the country is over-populated, abortions have their part to play in reducing this problem.

Some of these grounds are seen in the 1967 UK Abortion Act, which accepts abortion on grounds of

risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated

or if

there is substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

What are Buddhist considerations relevant to these 'grounds', given that it has been argued above that some abortions can be worse than others, depending on circumstances and related intention, so that an abortion might sometimes be seen as a very regrettable 'necessary evil'? What if the life of the mother is threatened by the pregnancy? In classical Hinduism, causing an abortion was strongly condemned, *except* where it was necessary to save the life of the mother (Lipner, 1991: 60), and Keown holds that in such a situation, 'it seems certain that Buddhism would share the view of Hindu jurists that it was morally permissible' (1995a: 193). In Sri Lanka, this is the only ground for a legal abortion. Nyanasobhano, an American Theravādin monk,¹⁵ in an article strongly arguing against abortion from a Buddhist point of view, also holds that it is acceptable on such a ground, though if it is simply to reduce some medical risk to the mother, things are less clear cut. Abortion in such a case would still be unwholesome to some extent, but this would be mitigated by the circumstances, as in killing from self-defence (1989: 26–7). A similar view is found in the Tibetan tradition, where His Holiness Ganden Tri Rinpoche holds that, where the life of the mother is definitely at stake, abortion is permissible, but not if there is just some implied threat to the mother's mental health.¹⁶ This reasoning seems apt, though ancient Theravādin texts do not envisage the possibility of abortion for medical reasons, seeing abortion as generally carried out by a married woman who was pregnant by a lover, or a

¹⁵ Leonard Price, ordained 1987.

¹⁶ Lesco, 1987: 217, citing an audience in September 1985.

jealous woman wishing to prevent her co-wife from presenting their husband with an heir (McDermott, 1998: 170).

Now, one way of thinking through the relevance of possible grounds for abortion is to use what one might call the ‘baby and chimpanzee test’. As I have argued above that the evil of abortion is somewhere between the evil of killing a baby and killing a chimpanzee, then:

- (1) *If* there are any circumstances which would mean that killing an infant would be a ‘necessary evil’, then this would imply that this would be so for an abortion on parallel grounds;
- (2) in circumstances which would *not* ‘justify’ killing an infant but *would* or *might* justify killing a chimpanzee, abortion in a parallel case *might* be seen as a ‘necessary evil’.

Now, if there were constrained circumstances, perhaps in a tragic accident, where saving a woman’s life meant having to do something which killed her baby, then this might, tragically, be acceptable – though the woman might altruistically choose to save her child. Thus abortion to save the life of a mother would, as a parallel, be a tragic necessity.

If a woman’s illness could be cured by killing a baby for one of its organs, would this be justifiable? No. Would it be justifiable if it was a chimpanzee that was being killed (if its organs could be made genetically acceptable to a human body)?¹⁷ If the illness was not a fatal one, surely ‘no’, on Buddhist grounds. If the illness might be fatal, then ‘perhaps’, especially if no other species was a possible donor. Thus an abortion to prevent damage to a woman’s physical health would only be a ‘necessary evil’ if the illness might be fatal.

What of rape? In the restrictive Thai law on abortion (1956), abortions are permitted only on grounds of a threat to the mother’s life or a serious threat to her physical health, or in the case of rape – which also covers cases where the woman is under thirteen, or under eighteen in the sex trade, or over eighteen if she is in the sex trade against her will (Hall, 1970: 122). On the matter of rape and abortion, the texts have nothing to say – though the fact that cases of abortion due to rape are never mentioned is itself interesting. Nyanasobhano, while acknowledging the horror of pregnancy due to rape or incest, and the bravery needed to continue with such a pregnancy, implies that this is an ‘extra mile’ that a woman might altruistically tread, in consideration for the innocent child within her (1989: 23–4). In a similar light, Philip Lesco says:

¹⁷ Whether or not this is actually possible is not relevant: one is considering a hypothetical case so as to sharpen up one’s ethical thinking.

Does her suffering justify the taking of the human life within her as the means of resolving the problem? The Buddhist would argue against this, basing the position on the high value placed upon the human rebirth. (Lesco, 1987: 216)

Shoyo Taniguchi argues against abortion on many Buddhist grounds, and she holds that to allow abortion on the grounds of rape or incest, 'where violence initiates life, is to allow another kind of violence towards another individual' (Taniguchi, 1987: 78).

What might the 'baby and chimpanzee test' suggest? If a trauma drug could be developed by injecting a baby with a substance, then extracting a product of this from the baby after it had been killed, would this be justified if it could partially alleviate a woman's trauma from being raped and made pregnant, even if the baby used was an abandoned one of the rapist's? Surely not. What if a chimpanzee were used, rather than a baby? Well, on the one hand, trauma is not a fatal condition. On the other hand, a woman pregnant from rape will continually be reminded of the rape and rapist by the pregnancy, and hatred for the foetus may ensue. The case is one of a potentially grave threat to mental health. A grave threat to mental health might lead to a kind of psychological 'death' (which itself might raise the risk of suicide), so killing a chimpanzee, or the foetus, *might* sometimes be a 'necessary evil' in such a case.

What of other cases of a threat to the mental health of a pregnant woman: could this justify killing a baby? No, surely. What of a chimpanzee? If there has been no rape, there will not be a nine-month reminder of a trauma involved. If the threat to mental health would arise after the birth of the child, the child can be adopted, so there would be no justification for killing, whether of a chimpanzee or a foetus. If, though, the woman's mental health would also be severely threatened if she gave up the child for adoption, then abortion *might* be a 'necessary evil'.

What of cases of foetuses that are somehow damaged? Lesco holds that as a 'meaningful life' for children with Down's Syndrome or spina bifida is possible, Buddhism is strongly against aborting such individuals (1987: 216). Taniguchi argues that such a person may be a very worthy one, asking the rhetorical question: 'Which is more qualified as a human, a severely handicapped person full of loving-kindness (*mettā*) or an Olympic gold medallist full of jealousy and greed?' (1987: 82). One might add that, given that Buddhism sees suffering as a part of any life, a factor in seeking to abort an impaired human being might be simply a desire only for the 'perfect' and to hide from unpleasant, but real, aspects of life.

Pinit Ratanakul reports that when Thai women are informed that

they are carrying a foetus with some abnormality, it is usual to carry the baby to full term, babies with Down's syndrome rarely being aborted (1998: 58–9). He regards this as being because they see the baby's handicap as due to both its and their own bad karma – which would follow logically from Buddhist principles – and have no wish to increase their bad karma by having an abortion. Another factor is the preference for letting the bad karma of the child exhaust itself in the present, rather than allowing it to lead on to further problems for it (Ratanakul, 1998: 59). Those who go on to care for their handicapped children hope that their nurture, and other good actions, will help overcome the bad karma of both the child and themselves. Nevertheless, some women, having avoided the evil of abortion, go on to abandon their newborn babies at the hospital; 70,000 were so abandoned in the years 1992–4, with a number of these being children of HIV-positive mothers, though in some such cases the baby is aborted (Ratanakul, 1998: 59). In fact, only around 30 per cent of babies born to HIV positive mothers register in tests as infected with the virus, and this reduces to 12 per cent by the time the babies are eighteen months old, the higher figure being due to effects of the mother's, rather than the baby's, infection.¹⁸

Dr Somsak, vice-chairman of the Thai Medical Council, though, reports that 'in more cases than not, women who contract German measles while pregnant choose to have an abortion, to avoid giving birth to a blind baby who might also be deaf and with a defective heart'.¹⁹ Here, one relevant consideration *might* be that, though Buddhism sees a human rebirth as a rare and precious opportunity for spiritual development, to be *fully* 'precious', one needs all one's senses, in a context supportive of spiritual growth (see p. 30). Thus, while it is still bad to abort a baby if it has defective senses, it might be seen as less bad than if this were not the case. Lesco also considers cases of foetuses with Tay-Sachs disease, for which life outside the womb will only ever be of a short duration. Given this scenario, he holds that abortion could be seen as a form of euthanasia (1987: 216). Yet Buddhist principles do not support any genuine case of euthanasia (see pp. 294–300), and seem rather to indicate allowing the birth of such babies and giving support in their limited life.

As regards the 'baby and chimpanzee test', if we ask whether it would be justified to kill a baby which was itself malformed or with a serious medical condition, the answer, on Buddhist principles, must be 'no',

¹⁸ *Bangkok Post*, 2 May 1990 and 5 June 1994. My thanks to Louis Gabaude for all citations from this newspaper and from *The Nation*. ¹⁹ *Bangkok Post*, 5 June 1994.

though perhaps one can avoid extreme methods of keeping it alive. What of a chimpanzee in the same scenario? I would say that the same reasoning applies. So aborting a damaged foetus would not be a 'necessary evil'.

What of cases of pregnancy posing a financial burden on the mother and any existing children? Would it be justified to kill a baby to reduce the economic strain on a family? No. Would it be justified to kill a family's chimpanzee on such grounds? No, though it might need to be found a new home. So abortion on socio-economic grounds is not justified. Stott argues that it is not 'compassionate' to have an abortion carried out on such grounds, asking how it is morally permissible to kill another being because one is unhappy or poor (1986: 14–15). Likewise, Nyanasobhano says,

The fact that we are suffering now does not make us immune from future harm if we do harm to someone else. We cannot, in the long run, get out of suffering by causing more suffering. (1989: 19)

Buddhist principles entail that it is the karma of the foetus and the karma of the mother that bring them together, and it is best to accept the responsibility that this entails, rather than forcefully rupturing this link, sweeping away something that is unwanted. Moreover, killing a foetus not only harms it, but will sow the seeds for more suffering for the mother than she sought to avoid by having an abortion.

If a poor family had a newborn baby dumped on it, would it be right to kill it? We would surely say 'no': it can be passed on for adoption, provided the family does not choose to look after it. Why would the same not apply to a child from an unwanted pregnancy? Of course, giving up a baby for adoption brings its own pains, in the form of wondering, over the years, what is happening to it. Yet it would seem odd if the life of a child and the happiness of adoptive parents were outweighed by this. In any case, the child from an unwanted pregnancy may come to be accepted and loved, as everything is subject to change, and if not, adoption is still an option (Nyanasobhano, 1989: 21). Moreover, one could see giving up a child for others to adopt as a form of *dāna*, or giving, to them. It can also be noted here that Buddhist monasteries and nunneries have often looked after orphans. Against a view that says it is 'unfair' to allow a child into the world under certain circumstances, Buddhism would say: it will be born in some shape or form anyway, soon, according to its karma. So it is better to do the best one can for it in the circumstances it is already heading for.

What of the woman's 'right to choose' an abortion, based on the idea that she has a right to do what she wants with her 'own' body? Buddhism, with its emphasis that there is no Self which can be found as 'owner' of mental and physical processes, would dispute this:

This body, monks, is not yours, nor does it belong to others. It should be regarded as (the product of) former karma, effected through what has been willed and thought out. (*S.* II.64–5; cf. *Dhp.* 62)

Taniguchi thus says:

If a woman can claim the woman's right to the use of her body in the case of abortion, saying 'a fetus belongs to me, because it is in my womb, therefore, I can do whatever I want to do with it', she can also claim the right to the life of her one-day-old . . . In reality, this is not so. (Taniguchi, 1987: 78)

That is, a foetus is not just 'a part' of a pregnant woman, but another living being, 'temporarily housed in the body of another', as Keown puts it (1995a: 106), whose life must be properly considered, not just swept aside by a 'right to choose'. To do that could be to act from all three of greed, hatred and delusion, the three roots of unwholesome action:

Greed, that is passionate attachment, would lie behind a person's considering only their own interests or pleasures in the situation. It would also solidify the notion that an 'I' owned the foetus and could do with it what 'I' would. Hatred would motivate one to strike out to eliminate the perceived cause of discomfort, the foetus. Delusion might cloud one's understanding and lead to denial that the foetus is a living being. (Florida, 1991: 41–2)

If it is argued that the woman's interests should always outweigh that of her foetus, Buddhist principles would say: but because of the karmic results of abortion, it is not actually in the woman's long-term interests to have an abortion, unless the circumstances prompting it are extreme. As Nyanasobhano says, 'A woman might convince herself that an abortion is justified in her case, but she cannot convince the law of kamma (karma)' (in NIBWA, 1988: 9). Apart from any longer-term karmic results, the woman may, as a result of the abortion, be harmed through haemorrhaging, sterility or infection, or the guilt, self-accusation or depression which may develop. To return to the 'baby and chimpanzee test': would it be justified for a woman simply to choose to kill a baby or chimpanzee, because of her difficult circumstances? No, surely. So, again, the 'right to choose' does not justify an abortion.

As regards using abortion as a means of reducing a country's overpopulation, this seems a drastic measure when compared to using contraception. In Communist China, the 'one child policy' means that

women are sometimes given abortions against their will. This combines murder of the foetus with assault on the mother, and is surely a barbaric practice. To use the 'baby and chimpanzee test': would it be right for a woman to kill a baby so as to help reduce a country's over-population? No. Would it be justified for her to kill a chimpanzee if the chimpanzee population were seen as too high? No. Even though elephants are sometimes culled/killed on such grounds, population, at least in the case of humans, can be controlled by contraception (though this needs to be made easily available). So population control does not justify abortion.

Thus, on Buddhist ethical principles, abortion could be seen as a 'necessary evil', in the cases of:

- (1) a real threat to the life of the mother;
- (2) a possible threat to the life of the mother;
- (3) rape causing great trauma,
- (4) the alternative being a mentally ill woman further traumatized by having to give up her child for adoption.

Cases (2)–(4) would need careful medical/psychological assessment. The woman would have the right to choose against medical advice *not* to have an abortion, but not to choose to have an abortion where the medical grounds were insufficient. In cases of psychological assessment, of course, she would herself be involved in ascertaining the grounds. The later the abortion, the worse it would be, though ground (1) above might entail a late abortion.

CONTRACEPTION

If Buddhist principles counsel strongly against abortion, what is Buddhism's attitude to contraception? Ling found that in both Thailand and Sri Lanka, Buddhists felt that a population increase which was out of proportion to availability of food would lead to poverty and crime (1969: 54). In Thailand, for example, contraception has been widely taken up. In Bangkok, there is a restaurant called Cabbages and Condoms which helps fund family-planning activities, and family-planning education has included blowing up coloured condoms on the *klongs* (canals) of Bangkok. A 1968 study found 71 per cent of married women of child-bearing age in favour of contraception (cited in Ling, 1969: 57). Stott also cites the Tibetan Lama Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche as saying 'I see no great fault in preventing conception' (Stott, 1992: 174).

In fact, Buddhism does not say that people should 'go forth and mul-

tively', just as it does not see marriage as a religious rite. Yet given the nature of human drives, it is expected that, however much Buddhism holds up a celibate, monastic ideal, there will be no shortage of people who wish to marry and have children. Given that contraception prevents a human life rather than destroys it, as does abortion, Buddhist objections to contraception are limited.

Nevertheless, some forms of 'contraception' in fact work by (1) preventing the implantation of a fertilized ovum, rather than (2) preventing ovulation or fertilization. They are thus agents of an early abortion. In the first category, the 'morning after' pill is an obvious abortifacient, but the Intra-uterine Device (IUD) or coil also acts mainly by impeding implantation. Most 'pills' combine a low dose of oestrogen, which *may* prevent fertilization, but also contain progestogen, which prevents any fertilized ovum from implanting. In the second category come the high-dose oestrogen 'pill', the condom, the diaphragm, the rhythm method, sterilization, vasectomy and the male pill, if it is developed (Stott, 1986: 18; Keown, 1995a: 122–3). Stott therefore sees methods of the first group as objectionable on Buddhist grounds.

The extent to which Buddhists actually worry about 'contraceptives' which cause early abortions varies. W. F. Wong reports that the informed Buddhist view in Sri Lanka is that the IUD and the 'morning after pill' are unacceptable on these grounds.²⁰ Yet Ling reports that, when Buddhist medical research workers in Thailand were acquainted with the fact that the IUD/coil might cause the early destruction of a fertilized ovum, they did not think that its use should be discontinued (1969: 58). In fact, a 1965 study in Thailand found the IUD (Lippes-loop) to be the most popular contraceptive (77 per cent), followed by some form of the pill (13 per cent) and condom (9 per cent).²¹ By 1967, though, twice as many women were using the pill as were using the IUD (Ling, 1969: 57). It thus seems that as birth-control methods have become more widespread there, a preference for the pill over the IUD has developed. Nevertheless, the IUD is still widely used. This is surprising, but is perhaps based on health concerns about the pill, concern that condoms *can* be unreliable, and the thought that a very early abortion is preferable to a later one. On the other hand, it might be based on a

²⁰ 'Re: Contraception, Abortion and Buddhism' posting on 'Buddha-L' Internet forum, 8 November 1995, citing 'a group discussion with a Professor of Buddhism from Sri Lanka'.

²¹ Planning Committee for the International Conference on Family Planning Programs, Geneva, August 1965, *Family Planning and Population Programs* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 98.

line of reasoning which says: many fertilized ova do not implant anyway; certain medical conditions can make this more likely; using the IUD is akin to deliberately setting up such a medical condition. Yet the problem remains that, as an intentional human act, this should not be free from ethical assessment.

Only occasionally do Buddhists express concern over contraception proper, but on not very strong grounds (Ling, 1969, 1980b):

- (a) it encourages promiscuity: but it is surely preferable to abortion;
- (b) it allows the proportion of non-Buddhist ethnic groups in a country to rise, as with the Tamils in Sri Lanka (cf. pp. 258–60): but this is a judgement based on little evidence, made in a conflict-charged atmosphere;
- (c) it prevents more beings from attaining a human rebirth: but if overpopulation is the result, the conditions for existing humans to develop spiritually would be reduced; in any case, the human population is still rising.

ABORTION IN BUDDHIST CULTURES

Among Tibetans

Tibetan Buddhism has preserved the Indian Buddhist view that abortion is the taking of a human life and is thus wrong. Philip Denwood says on it:

nowadays all peoples from Tibetan-speaking areas regard it with horror as the killing of a living being which has done no wrong. It is hard to see what incentive there would have been for it – there was no pressure of population and I doubt if it was known as a technique for saving the mother's life.²²

David Stott reports that, from anecdotal evidence from lay people and religious authorities among Tibetan refugees in Nepal and India, abortion is not practised 'to any extent' in the community, despite its being legal in India (Stott, 1992: 177). Stott also affirms that, without exception, the various Tibetan authorities he asked held that abortion was 'unvirtuous' or 'expressly forbidden' (1992: 174, 180). In 1978 Lama Lodo, when in San Francisco, said the following to someone who reported that a friend was considering an abortion:

The best thing for you to do would be to try to talk her out of the abortion because it is an act of profound negative consequences to kill a human being

²² Personal communication, 19 July 1983.

A human being's body is so precious that it would be better if you talk her into having the baby and then putting it up for adoption.²³

Around 1985 in the USA, Dharmadhatu, the organisation of the influential Tibetan Lama Chogyam Trungpa, planned to start a Buddhist adoption agency, and formed a Family Services Council to encourage women to consider alternatives to abortion, such as adoption (Spring Wind, 1986: 172).

Nevertheless, spiritual help for those who have had an abortion is seen as appropriate by Tibetan Buddhists. Stott holds that one should be compassionate to them, as they will eventually suffer pain and anguish: 'we must cherish both those who commit the sin of abortion and their unborn victims, as we cherish ourselves' (1986: 15). He goes on to advocate a method of self-purification for those who have had an abortion, using the power of sincere confession (cf. pp. 27–8; Stott, 1986: 15). Such a purification would not work, however, if one had previously *planned* to have an abortion and then to purify oneself; for the regret and resolution never to have an abortion again, which are part of it, would be insincere (1986: 15). Ven. Sangye Khadro, an American nun ordained in the Tibetan tradition, has likewise suggested such a method as a way to heal the pain and guilt after an abortion (NIBWA, 1988: 13–14), and Sogyal Rinpoche recommends such actions along with dedicating the karmic fruitfulness of good deeds to the baby's future enlightenment (Sogyal, 1992: 376).

Lands of Southern Buddhism

In Sri Lanka, where abortion is only legal if the mother's life is at risk, Ling found a more frequently expressed objection to abortion, and a less unanimous acceptance of contraception, than in Thailand (1969: 57–8). For example, the Sarvodaya Śramadāna rural development movement is radically opposed to abortion (Macy, 1983: 86). Nevertheless, there are some moves towards 'liberalizing' the law to allow it on the grounds of a threat to the woman's physical and mental health.²⁴ The law does not seem to have been changed, though. In Burma, Jane and Manning Nash claim that children are rarely born out of wedlock 'because either a pregnancy means a marriage, or abortion is a common resort' (1963:

²³ Lama Lodo, *Bardo Teachings* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1987), p. 41, as quoted in Keown, 1995a: 103.

²⁴ R. J. Cook and B. M. Dickens, *Abortion Law in Commonwealth Countries* (Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1979), p. 75, 86.

252). Abortion, performed by midwives pressing the foetus till it dies, 'is frequently practised as preferable to a forced marriage of young people' (p. 265), given that marriage is seen to involve a loss of autonomy for both partners. Beyond this, little other information is available on abortion in what is otherwise a strongly Buddhist country. It is worth noting the remark of Melford Spiro, though, who says that the 'distinction between what is good from the ultimate perspective of religion (*lokuttara*), and what is necessary from the relative perspective of worldly existence (*loki*), permeates . . . Burmese attitudes' (1971: 450).

In Thailand, if an unmarried woman becomes pregnant, this is not welcomed, though most often the child is born and accepted into the family, or the woman is married to the father, if he is agreeable (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 442). Trevor Ling reports a 1968 study of 960 women of child-bearing age in which 91.8 per cent were in favour of abortion if it was needed to save the life of the mother, 95.6 per cent against it simply as a means of limiting family size, and 12.7 per cent in favour of it for unmarried women (1969: 57–8). The existing 1956 Thai law on abortion is rather restrictive (see p. 321), yet it is ill enforced, and there have come to be many illegal abortions. A 1981 estimate for Thailand gives around 300,000 abortions per year, whether legal or illegal, in a population of around 50 million, i.e. around 6 per 1,000 population. As Keown points out, this means that abortions in Thailand were 'running at some 50 per cent higher than the number in the USA for the equivalent number of citizens' (Keown, 1998: 4). The rate was also about double that for England and Wales, which had around the same population as Thailand then.²⁵

Comparative abortion rates are given using various scales: per 1,000 population; per 1,000 women of child-bearing age; and as a ratio to 1,000 live births. In 1981, abortions in Thailand amounted to 37 abortions per 1,000 women of child-bearing age (Florida, 1998: 23). In the same period, figures for some other countries were: Canada 11.1; USA 24.2; Hungary 35.3; Singapore 44.5; Japan 22.6 officially, but probably between 65 and 90; USSR 181 (Florida, 1998: 23). If we look at the Thai abortion rate per 1,000 live births, a different picture emerges, though. In 1981, abortions ended 10 per cent of pregnancies in Thailand (Florida, 1998: 23), which if we guess that 10 per cent of pregnancies ended in miscarriage, means a rate of around 125 abortions per 1,000

²⁵ Based on the fact that there were 102,677 legal abortions in England and Wales in 1977 (the law was radically changed in 1967), climbing to 170,463 by 1989 (from *The Observer* newspaper, 5 January 1997).

live births, while in the USA, in 1976, there were 312 abortions per 1,000 live births.²⁶ This suggests that, while the crude abortion rate per 1,000 population is higher in Thailand than in America, this is because, while Thai women are less likely to terminate a pregnancy than American women, they have a higher rate of pregnancy. This suggests that if Thai women's relative reluctance to terminate a pregnancy remains, while their use of contraception increases, the abortion rate per 1,000 population will fall. We see, in fact, that the 1994 Thai figure was considerably lower, for the Thai Medical Council reported that there were around 100,000 abortions in Thailand then,²⁷ compared to 174,000 that year in England and Wales.²⁸

A 1993 study of abortions in 200 Thai hospitals showed that only 8 per cent of the 2,351 abortions were legal, and that in 65 per cent of cases, they were done by traditional birth attendants, not doctors.²⁹ In urban centres, a high proportion of those having abortions are young and single, reflecting the heavy social stigma attached to being an unmarried mother, but prostitutes have a low abortion rate (Odzer, 1998) and, overall, most abortions are had by married rural women (Florida, 1998: 23–4).

In 1981, the Thai Parliament debated a bill to 'liberalize' the existing abortion law, motivated by the desire to avoid health risks from illegally performed abortions, to allow abortion (up to twelve weeks) on grounds of:

- (1) danger to the mother's mental health;
- (2) expected physical deformity or mental retardation of the child;
- (3) social or financial reasons;
- (4) failure of a prescribed contraception (WFBR, 1981: 24).

Those who opposed the bill – who included Buddhists, Roman Catholics and Muslims – held that it would lead to abortion on demand. In September 1981, the bill was passed by the lower house (79 for, 3 against, with 219 abstentions), pending consideration by the upper house. In December, however, this rejected the bill by 141 to 1, in response to strong campaigning by various religious groups and individuals (WFBR, 1981: 52). The lower house chose not to raise the issue again in the Parliamentary agenda.³⁰

As of 1981, no medical practitioner had been prosecuted under the existing law (Florida, 1998: 24), though this changed in 1994, when

²⁶ *The Observer* newspaper, 5 January 1997.

²⁸ *The Observer* newspaper, 5 January 1997.

³⁰ *Bangkok Post*, 30 February 1982.

²⁷ *Bangkok Post*, 9 January 1992.

²⁹ *Bangkok Post*, 30 June 1994.

several clinics were raided after aborted foetuses were found dumped by a roadside. At the same time, the government sought to improve sex education, and improve facilities for caring for babies of women who could not look after them.³¹ At the time, there was much debate in Thai newspapers on abortion. Ratanakul thus affirms that the high rate of illegal abortions is becoming a matter of urgent concern to Buddhists (1998: 53). He holds that:

Thai Buddhists do not condemn those women whose life situations make the decision to abort seem unavoidable. There is a concern for the dilemmas women face with unwanted pregnancies, the results of poverty, immaturity, contraceptive failure or severely defective fetuses and maternal health threats, yet there is a refusal to isolate abortion simply as a matter of a woman's reproductive choice. (1998: 63)

For Thais, abortion is discussed not in the language of rights – to life or choice – but of ‘benefit and harm, with the intent of relieving as much human suffering in all its states, stages and situations as circumstances allow’, with an emphasis on reducing the circumstances leading women to feel that they need to have an abortion (Ratanakul, 1998: 64–5).

After an abortion, Thai women tend to be full of remorse and sorrow, and try to ease their psychological pain, and aid the dead foetus, by doing actions generating karmic fruitfulness, and sharing this with their short-lived child (Ratanakul, 1998: 57). There are no specialist rituals for doing this, as in Japan (see below), as this would be seen as drawing attention to the abortion and perhaps partially validating it (Florida, 1998: 25–6), but general rituals such as feeding monks, releasing captured birds, or making donations to temples or charities are used. Given that Buddhism does not encourage brooding guilt, it is useful that such actions ease the minds of the women to some extent.

Lands of Eastern Buddhism, especially Japan

In the People's Republic of China, abortion law is controlled by the Communists, whose ‘one child policy’, to ease population pressures, means that abortions are sometimes compulsory and unwanted. In Japan, there is a very liberal abortion law, and there has been much discussion on how Japanese Buddhists relate to abortion, notably Robert LaFleur's *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (1992).³² In Japan, ethics is derived from Confucianism, Buddhism, Shintō and, now, secular influences. Confucianism has traditionally attached much

³¹ *The Nation* Thai newspaper, 27, 28 and 31 May 1994.

³² See Tanabe, 1994 for a critical review.

importance to the family and correct social relationships, Shintō has been concerned with nature, ritual purity and strengthening the nation. Classical Buddhist ethics is thus only one of the factors affecting the moral outlook of Japanese Buddhists.

After Japan's defeat in the Second World War, a baby-boom developed as soldiers returned to their families, so that there was a fear of over-population at a time of great economic hardship. Many babies were unwanted, so that there was a sudden rise in abortion and infanticide (LaFleur, 1992: 135). Concern over the population rise, backed by doctors' concern over the dangers of illegal abortions, led to the passing of the 1948 'Eugenic Protection Law' (Hall, 1970: 261). Supported by all political parties, this allowed abortion in the first five months³³ on various grounds, including the 'health of the mother', which could be interpreted as mental health (LaFleur, 1992: 135). A 1949 law went on to allow abortion on economic grounds (Hall, 1970: 261), and a 1952 amendment then allowed doctors complete discretion in the matter, without a need to justify their decision to any government authority (LaFleur, 1992: 135). Abortion thus became easily and cheaply available in the most permissive abortion system in the world (van der Tak, 1974: 30). Abortion became the preferred means of birth control, and abortion on demand, though technically illegal, was available.

Reported abortion numbers climbed from 246,104 in 1949 to a peak of 1,170,143 in 1955 (Hall, 1970: 262), though under-reporting, due to private doctors wishing to avoid tax, meant that this represented a real figure of between 1,755,000 and 4,330,000 (van der Tak, 1974: 31), i.e.:

- (1) a 1955 rate of 13.1 (real 20 up to 48) per 1,000 population (van der Tak, 1974: 31), compared to 6 per 1,000 for Thailand in 1981;
- (2) 676 (Hall, 1970: 262), or perhaps 2,000 (van der Tak, 1974: 31), per 1,000 live births in 1959), compared to around 125 in Thailand in 1981, and 312 in the USA in 1976.³⁴

Thus perhaps two-thirds of healthy foetuses were being aborted in Japan in 1959! Bardwell Smith, writing in 1988, gave a conservative estimate of 1 million abortions a year in Japan: about three times the rate for the UK and a third higher than the USA rate at the time (1992: 70). Japanese women had often had two abortions by the time they were 40, this being most likely prior to marriage or once two children had been born (1992: 71).

Yoshio Koya points out that, in 1954, only 27 per cent of women who

³³ The *Guardian* newspaper, 27 January 1996.

³⁴ The *Observer* newspaper, 5 January 1997.

had had abortions had practised contraception (1954: 288), though abortions started to decline after 1960 as contraceptive use increased (van der Tak, 1974: 31). By 1971, 53 per cent of women reported current contraceptive use, of whom 73 per cent used condoms and 33 per cent the rhythm method, with the pill and IUD practically unavailable because of medical opposition on the grounds of their side-effects (van der Tak, 1974: 33–4),³⁵ or perhaps doctors' fears over losing income from performing abortions (LaFleur, 1992: 136). Moreover, naivety about contraceptive methods is not dealt with in schools on account of reluctance to discuss sexual matters (on which Confucianism has, traditionally, been very coy), so ignorance in this area persists (Smith, 1992: 71). Women are reluctant to use a diaphragm, as it would probably be fitted by a male gynaecologist (Smith, 1992: 70).

LaFleur argues that a factor in Japan's high abortion rate is the way in which Japanese people have come to think of foetuses, drawing on popular ideas of 'returning' them, which had already crystallized in the Tokugawa era (1603–1867). LaFleur holds that 'many Japanese, especially in modern times, prefer to be somewhat imprecise about the "preexistence" of the fetus or newborn', but they have a 'vague sense' of it as coming from some sort of previous life (1992: 26). The idea of 'return' fits in with this preferred imprecise view, and implies a period of waiting to come into this world later, perhaps in the same family (p. 26). 'In that sense the aborted fetus is not so much being "terminated" as it is being put on "hold", asked to bide its time in some other world' (LaFleur, 1992: 27). Such a view is, of course, in great tension with classical Buddhist ideas of the rarity and preciousness of human rebirth. Likewise, popular views of the status of the foetus are potentially at odds with classical Buddhist views on this. A key term, here, is *mizuko*, 'water-child' or 'water-children', which is used to refer to a miscarried or aborted foetus, though it originally also applied to a stillborn child or one who died soon after birth (Hoshino and Takeda, 1987: 308; LaFleur, 1992: 16, 23). The term suggests a being whose 'status is still in flux' – its viability in this world still being in question (LaFleur, 1992: 29): as a *mizuko*'s form has not yet 'solidified' in the world, it is seen as acceptable to 'return' it to a formless state (p. 24). Traditionally, parents might hope for a return of the child after a temporary repose in a kind of *mizuko* limbo, or perform rituals to aid the *mizuko* to a better world among the ancestors and *kami*, or in a Pure Land among

³⁵ The government finally allowed the sale of oral contraceptives in 1999 (the *Guardian* newspaper, 3 June 1999).

Buddhas (p. 27). The idea of a *mizuko* as a being-in-flux need not jar with classical Buddhist notions, if it simply reflects the idea of impermanence and the special perils facing a foetus or young baby. Yet to the extent that the idea allows a deliberate 'return' of a foetus, it is in great tension with classical Buddhist ideas. Accordingly, Keown comments that 'No doubt the *mizuko* concept has more significance than Western folk-tales about child-bearing – such as that babies are brought by a stork – but perhaps not *that* much more' (1998: 207).

We find, in fact, that while Japanese women have frequent recourse to abortion, a significant number of them go on to experience emotional problems, sometimes years later (Smith, 1992: 68). This is partly exacerbated by the decline of the traditional family in urban Japan, so that the individual must increasingly deal with such matters without wider support.³⁶ Even women who have no initial regret at an abortion later feel sadness, a need to mourn, and perhaps guilt (Smith, 1992: 72). Since around 1975, Buddhist priests have popularized rituals to help deal with these feelings, and people have increasingly sought these to 'assuage the guilt or alleviate the distress they are feeling about abortion' (LaFleur, 1992: 4).

The rites are known as *mizuko kuyō*: a memorial service (*kuyō*) for a *mizuko*. These seek to nourish and aid the spirit of the aborted foetus or stillborn child, and thus console the mother and perhaps also the father (Smith, 1992: 73). Elizabeth Harrison describes such rites as intended

to appeal to an appropriate deity to provide for the well-being of the dead, to transfer merit to the karmic account of the dead child so that he or she may proceed more quickly to a felicitous rebirth, and to appease the dead so that they might become a benevolent influence in the lives of their living family. (1998: 93)

The rite may be performed once, monthly, or on the anniversary of the death, individually or, more commonly, as part of a rite for many *mizuko* (Smith, 1992: 73). Increasingly, the rites are moving inside the temples, with priests officiating to a congregation of 'parents' (LaFleur, 1992: 149). Forms of the rites vary, but they include the chanting of *Sūtras* on the perfection of wisdom and to the compassionate *Bodhisattva* Kannon, and songs of praise to the *Bodhisattva* Jizō. A mortuary tablet is also inscribed and placed in a shrine at the temple or at home. Other features are sermons and counselling.³⁷

³⁶ Smith, 1992: 67; cf. Hoshino and Takeda, 1987: 315.

³⁷ Smith, 1992: 74; for further details, see Brooks, 1981: 123–5.

Jizō (Skt Kṣitigarbha) is seen as a *Bodhisattva* who has vowed to help humankind until the next Buddha, Maitreya, teaches on earth. He is seen as a guardian of travellers, of those in trouble, and women and children. He is particularly seen, in Japan, as looking after dead children, especially those who have died young (LaFleur, 1992: 45), who in medieval Japan came to be seen as languishing in a kind of limbo state for a period of time (LaFleur, 1992: 58, 63–4; Brooks, 1981: 123). Offerings are made to the Buddha on behalf of the child and an image of Jizō or of an infant is bought and placed in a special part of the temple grounds; coloured bibs will be attached to the image on the anniversary of the death (Pye, 1983: 27). LaFleur points out that, as Jizō is shown as a shaven-headed monk, he looks childlike, so that his statue is explicitly seen to represent both the aborted foetus and its *Bodhisattva*-protector (LaFleur, 1992: 8, 53). Families come to wash the statues and to offer flowers, and also toys, as a way of communicating with the dead child (pp. 9–10). The statues may also be dressed in raincoats, baseball jackets or knitted shawls (Brooks, 1981: 125).

For some temples, fees for *mizuko kuyō* rituals have become a useful means of support as other income reduces. While some temples offer such rituals with reluctance, others see them as performing a useful function, both for the bereaved and for the temples themselves (Smith, 1992: 68). For the Hase-dera temple in Kamakura, such rites have come to be its major activity: by 1983 its cemetery had around 50,000 Jizō statues for *mizuko* (LaFleur, 1992: 3–4). Some ‘temples’ – really just cemeteries or memorial parks – have also opened which perform only *mizuko kuyō* rites, almost entirely for aborted foetuses (pp. 5–6). These operate in a somewhat commercial way, selling Jizō statues which, perhaps two feet high, are arrayed in rows, and one can even pay for the rite to be performed on one’s behalf (p. 149).

Mizuko kuyō rites seek to deal with guilt by apologizing to the dead foetus. Sometimes at temples to memorialize *mizukos*, people place brief letters of apology (on wooden pallets) to their *mizuko*. As, in Japan, apology is much used to restore relationships, and apology and thanks shade into each other, so the attitude to *mizuko* can be seen as a mix of apology and thanks for vacating its place in the womb (LaFleur, 1992: 147). Letters written to the dead foetus as part of the rite say, for example, ‘My baby, I am sorry. You came just too early for us’, or ‘Please forgive your foolish father . . .’ (Brooks, 1981: 122–3). Some feel that the practice is only a start towards making up for what they have done (Harrison, 1998: 114). Yet some women now just perform the rite as it has become

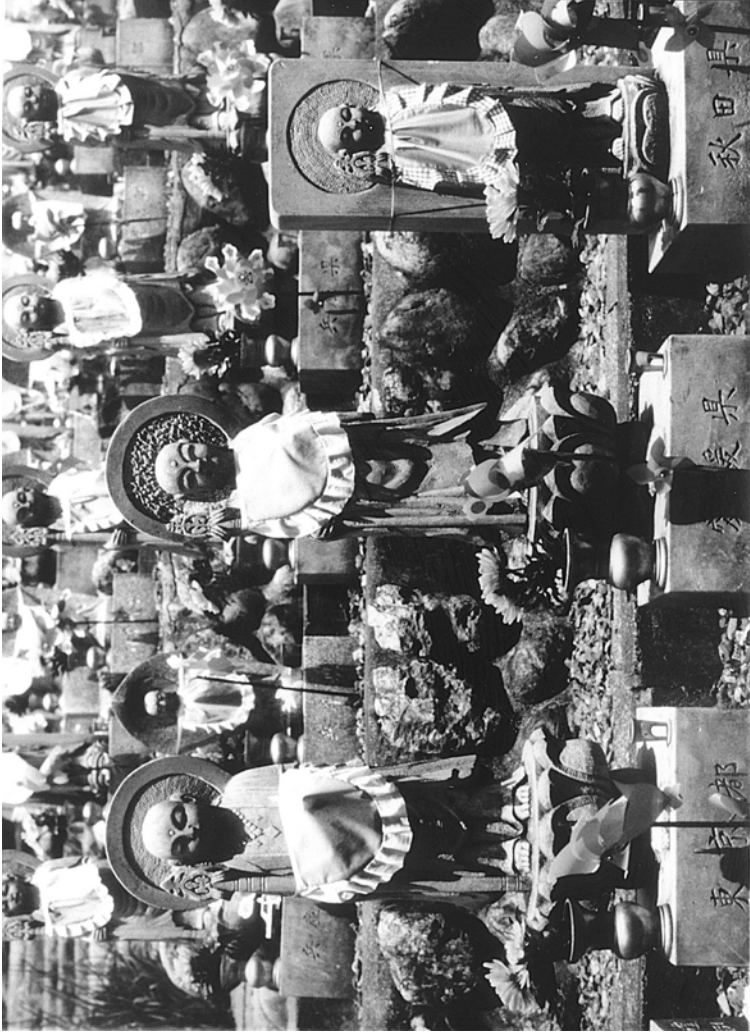


Plate 8. A Japanese cemetery, with statues of the *Bodhisattva Jizō* dedicated to aborted or stillborn babies.

the 'done thing' (p. 112), and while a large number of women who have had abortions participate in *mizuko kuyō* rites, they are still a minority (Harrison, 1998: 112).

Along with offering apology and assuaging guilt, another reason for the popularity of *mizuko kuyō* is to deal with fear. From Shintō comes the idea that the neglected dead can feel *urami*, bitterness or malice (Brooks, 1981: 135), so as to be dangerous and want to wreak revenge, *tatari*, on the living (LaFleur, 1992: 54). Combined with Buddhist ideas about the karmic results of abortion, this means that women often see an earlier abortion as the cause of later repeated illness, financial troubles, or family tensions (Smith, 1992: 78). *Mizuko kuyō* rites are seen to transform the child from a potentially threatening unsettled spirit into a benign protector, with a place among the family ancestors – a concern coming from Chinese Confucianism (Smith, 1992: 82). Anne Brooks cites a Dr Suzuki as saying that only 10 per cent of those practising *mizuko kuyō* did so from fear, but she felt that this was too low an estimate (1981: 136).

From the mid 1970s, advertising of *mizuko kuyō* rites has helped arouse criticism, in the media and elsewhere, of temples indulging in crass commercialism which exploits the fears of women (LaFleur, 1992: 138; Harrison, 1998: 97), as well as heightening guilt feelings (LaFleur, 1992: 162). At the Purple Cloud temple in Chichibu city, which specializes in the rite, Jizō statues cost £1,125, with an annual upkeep charge of £31.³⁸ Brooks cites an advertisement which, after referring to the diseases and other problems caused by the spirits of aborted foetuses, had an order form for Jizō statues, priced from \$8 to \$700 (1981: 140). In questioning forty-three professional men such as professors and journalists, LaFleur found support only for simple, inexpensive rites for the foetus, with no opposition to the existing abortion law (1992: 164–6).

Mainline temples only started doing the rites in the mid 1970s, when parishioners asked; for otherwise they would have gone to new entrepreneurial temples. Yet they are sensitive to the above criticisms. The Jōdo and Jōdo-shin Pure Land denominations have been extremely reluctant to perform the rites, being particularly critical of the notion of the foetus seeking revenge, which they see as in tension with Buddhist ideas (LaFleur, 1992: 163–4); indeed, a major Jōdo-shin sub-sect put up roadside messages condemning *mizuko kuyō* (Harrison, 1998: 98). Likewise Ochiai Seiko, a newspaper correspondent and wife of a Jōdo-shin priest, regards *mizuko kuyō* as un-Buddhist, being more like an exorcism to ward

³⁸ The *Independent on Sunday* newspaper, 12 September 1993.

off foetal reprisal. Yet she opposed any suggestion of reforming the abortion law as right-wing illiberalism. She felt that life, including that of foetuses, animals and rice, should be respected, but that the process of living entailed that 'it is necessary for us to go on "taking" the lives of various kinds of such beings' (LaFleur, 1992: 170).

On the other hand, Domyo Miura, a leading priest of the tantric Shingon school, and first chairman of the Japan Buddhist Society, promotes the *mizuko kuyō* rite but does not see it as mitigating the seriousness of abortion itself:

even before a child comes into the world, Buddhists regard it as a life from the very instant when consciousness is born . . . Out of billions of sperms one unites with one ovum, life starts. (quoted in Keown, 1995a: 110)

For him, the concept of a foetus as a 'water-child' does not justify abortion (Keown, 1998: 207–8). Likewise, the Purple Cloud *mizuko kuyō* temple, discussed above, sees abortion as wilful and unnatural (LaFleur, 1992: 171), with serious karmic effects (p. 223), and wants the abortion laws tightened up (p. 169).

Japanese Buddhist organizations, though, do not generally go in for stating public 'positions' on social issues (LaFleur, 1992: xiii). LaFleur holds that most mainline Buddhist denominations seem to support legalized abortion (1992: 192): they 'tolerate, and make moral space for, abortion' (p. 195). He cites a 1995 review of his book by Noriko Kawahashi,³⁹ in which she says that she discussed the review with some Sōtō Zen monks. These differed in their opinions. One said it was a 'sin' (*tsumi*) for a woman to take the decision about abortion into her own hands, while an older monk felt that LaFleur had got it about right in suggesting that the tradition allows Buddhists to think of abortion in terms of suffering rather than 'sin' (LaFleur, 1995: 194).

In 1978, the Japanese Buddhist Federation pointed out that, while Buddhists have not, in general, voiced any criticism of abortion (p. 137), the *Abhidharma-kośa* states that 'life is there from the moment of conception and should not be disturbed for it has the right to live'.⁴⁰ Yet it said too that, while Mahāyāna Buddhism advocates respect for life, it also 'teaches that it is inevitable for man to sacrifice some forms of life in order to protect and nourish himself':⁴¹ farmers have to kill pests, for instance. It went on to say that 'one should accept reality with all of its

³⁹ *Cross Currents*, 13 (1995) 371–8.

⁴⁰ Japan Buddhist Federation, *Understanding Japanese Buddhism* (Tokyo: Kyodo Obun Center Co., 1978), p. 162, cited in Brooks, 1981: 133.

⁴¹ P. 158–9, cited in Brooks, 1981: 137.

contradictory demands as one's *karma*. At the same time, however, one should continue to reflect on the universal principle and strive for the ideal.⁴² Brooks sees the *mizuko kuyō* rite as a way of mediating between practicality and the ideal, in a way which is characteristic of Japanese Buddhism, which emphasizes state of mind and attitude rather than the morality of overt behaviour (1981: 138).

Indeed, LaFleur sees the apologies which are part of *mizuko kuyō* as helping people to 'retain their sense of their own humanity', so that they can see themselves as caring and sensitive (1992: 155). Thus the *mizuko kuyō* rites

make it possible for many Japanese to tolerate the practice of abortion and still think of themselves as moral and even 'sensitive' – both individually and collectively . . . That is, through this ritual their moral options are not limited to either categorically forbidding abortion or, at the exact opposite pole, treating the fetus as so much inert matter to be disposed of guiltlessly. (LaFleur, 1992: 58)

The language of the ritual clearly does not treat the foetus as a thing, and 'parents' show their 'softness' by offering such things as pinwheels and other toys, as well as sweaters to keep the Jizō statues 'warm' (pp. 158–9). LaFleur points out that Japanese people do not usually use euphemisms for a foetus such as 'foetal tissue': they acknowledge that it is a child, even when planning to abort it. So the clash with the first precept is not hidden by such wording (LaFleur, 1992: 11). Using the *mizuko kuyō* rite, 'a woman is free to acknowledge any feelings of bonding that have developed within herself. Such feelings need not bar her from deciding to have an abortion' (LaFleur, 1992: 213). These may be partly why Buddhists in Korea (Tedesco, 1998) and Taiwan, where generally relaxed attitudes to abortion are also found, are starting to adapt the Japanese practice of *mizuko kuyō*.

Reflecting on the Japanese situation on abortion, what is one to make of the gap between theory and practice, which is also seen, to a lesser extent, in Theravāda Thailand? This might look like, but is not, hypocrisy, which is acting in a way that is the opposite of what you *tell others* to do. Here, though, the point is that, in admitting that abortion is wrong, a right view of things is held to, and this is itself a form of wholesome action: wholesome mental action (see p. 57). To have an abortion is clearly unwholesome physical action, and may also entail unwholesome verbal action, but it is less bad than having the abortion and denying that it is an unwholesome action, as this would then involve wrong view, a

⁴² P. 166, cited in Brooks, 1981: 138.

form of wrong mental action (see p. 48). While this reading of the situation is rational in terms of Buddhist principles, it should be noted that the approach it outlines has a different emphasis from that in Indian-based *Vinaya* (monastic discipline). Here the emphasis – for those who choose to become monks or nuns – is on overt physical and verbal behaviour that is in line with agreed norms. While this is clearly part of a way of life intended to train the mind, the monastic code does not concern itself with views or beliefs,⁴³ even if expressed verbally. Yet both approaches, here, share in accepting that one's views must be genuinely held, and cannot be compelled, and the *Vinaya* does not denigrate the importance of right view: it is just that, as a kind of legal code, it does not focus on it.

Mizuko kuyō, then, is a good practice inasmuch as it accepts that abortion is wrong (as well as seeking to help the dead foetus), yet this element must be preserved if the ritual is to have any real Buddhist worth. The rite may also be beneficial in helping those who have had an abortion 'to come to terms with any unfinished business the experience leaves in its wake' (Keown, 1998: 213). Yet to expect the rite to wipe the karmic slate completely clean, rather than to weaken the bad karmic effects, would be to expect too much of ritual. For a person to plan to perform it, as a ritual 'fix' after having had the abortion that it will 'apologize' for, would be to undermine the sincerity of the apology and regret. Anne Brooks reports that among those who conduct *mizuko kuyō* rites, some sincerely teach devotees Buddhist ethical teachings, while some just offer a ritual route to averting problems and gaining peace of mind (1981: 138–40). As a way to deal with guilt over an abortion, the rite needs to be handled carefully. It is good to recognize a past unwholesome action as unwholesome, yet if this is done to the extent of stimulating heavy guilt and self-hatred, this would be to stimulate agitated 'restlessness and unease', one of the hindrances to spiritual development (see p. 61). The important thing is remorse for a past wrong and a determination not to repeat it. As for people who stimulate reflection on a past abortion making money from those who then decide to have a *mizuko kuyō*, this is questionable: if people *wish* to make a donation or *want* to buy a Jizō statue, that is perhaps acceptable, but it should be up to them, and this should be made clear. Brooks in fact feels that the practice of families erecting individual Jizō statues tends to foster commercialization (1981: 141).

⁴³ With one exception: the view that there is nothing wrong with sensual desire: see p. 55 n. 27 above.

ANTI-ABORTION BUT PRO-CHOICE? THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN MORALITY AND LAW

To point out the position of Buddhist ethics on abortion is not the same thing as saying that those who agree with these principles should seek to ensure that the law of their countries completely enforces such ethical principles. In Buddhist countries, while there have been and are certain legal restrictions on the killing of animals, which clearly breaks the first precept, these are limited. Butchers are not sent to prison. Likewise, though selling alcohol offends against the principle of 'right livelihood', doing so is not banned in any Buddhist country. Again, attempted suicide is generally not illegal. This is because the relationship between morality and law is not a straightforward one-to-one match.

In most countries, Buddhist or otherwise, there are actions seen as unethical, such as various forms of lying, which are not illegal. There may also be certain legal offences which many people see as ethically neutral, and some may be seen as morally praiseworthy, such as illegal demonstrations against oppressive regimes. The extent to which a country encodes the ethics of its people in law is a matter for debate, and this involves a consideration of the function of law, i.e. social norms backed up by punishment by the state if they are infringed.

Philip Lesco holds that Buddhism is both 'pro-life' and against 'attempts to legislate individual morality' (Lesco, 1987: 217), and the female Western Zen teacher Rōshi Jiyu Kennett says:

I personally would never have an abortion, and I will *never* agree to legislation that abolishes abortion whilst *never* ceasing to try to dissuade other women from having abortions. To legislate against abortion would leave too many women in danger of death. If suicide did not get them, the quacks would. (1978: 17)

A character called Sunyata, in the *Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities*, after arguing strongly against abortion on Buddhist grounds, goes on to say that it should not be made illegal:

Ethics cannot be imposed on others; morality has little meaning unless there is a choice involved. The purpose of ethics is to avoid killing and suffering, so there is no benefit in women dying at the hands of backyard abortionists if abortion was made illegal and doctors had to turn them away. (NIBWA, 1988: 12)

Helen Tworokov argues for a 'pro-choice/anti-abortion position' (1992: 62). She quotes a female American Zen priest as saying both that the idea of abortion 'makes me sick' and that she would still vote 'pro-choice' on the issue. Tworokov goes on:

In the past year, the American Buddhist women I spoke with (from all different lineages) agreed that abortion may sometimes be necessary but is never desirable, and should never be performed without the deepest consideration of all aspects of the situation. This came from women who said that they themselves would, under no circumstances, ever have an abortion, from women who could imagine circumstances under which they would consider abortion, and from women, like myself, who had experienced an abortion. All of us are currently committed to a pro-choice ballot. (1992: 63)

She says that after her own abortion, in 1960, she denied that a life had been taken, but in time, partly through becoming a Buddhist, she saw that this was not so. It was a serious matter, and yet women should be allowed a choice over it.

So far the views of some Western Buddhists. What of Asian ones? What do we find when we look at Buddhist-influenced pre-modern law? Of all Buddhist countries, Burma has had a traditional legal literature most strongly influenced by Buddhist norms (Huxley, 1995a: 49–50). In Sri Lanka, no traditional law-texts survive, and caste was the basis of dispute settlement and social organization. In Thai and Khmer traditions, the king was seen as the primary source of law. In China, Buddhism could only marginally influence the existing legal tradition. Surprisingly, Tibet's laws were much less influenced by Buddhist ideas than Burma's, perhaps because it took its law from Central Asian states to its north (Huxley, 1995a: 55).⁴⁴ In Burma, as elsewhere in South-east Asia, the main types of law texts were:

- (1) *Rājathat*: the less ephemeral of a king's commands (Huxley, 1995a: 48), which included general guidance to the judges in the royal courts (Huxley, 1997: 75).
- (2) *Dhammathat*: 'customary law' (Huxley, 1995a: 52), which gives guidance on unofficial dispute settlement, especially at village level (Huxley, 1997: 74). In the form of digests of law for popular consumption, its rules 'should be obeyed because they are as old as human society, or because they are universally acknowledged as correct because they are implicit in the Buddha's dhamma' (Huxley, 1997: 73). Indeed, they were seen as 'editions of the age-old law text which is written on the walls at the boundary of the universe' (Huxley, 1995a: 52).⁴⁵
- (3) *Pyatton*: *Jātaka*-type stories of clever judges or reports of cases

⁴⁴ Though French reports that Buddhist ideas affected the way the law was applied (1995: 114).

⁴⁵ One seventeenth-century Burmese view was that *rājathat* takes precedent over *dhammathat* in regard to disputes over property, life and injury to humans (Huxley, 1995b: 74–5).

(Huxley, 1995a: 49) which give 'helpful legal information' in the form of non-binding precedents (Huxley, 1997: 78).

The *dhammathat* texts were often composed by monks (Huxley, 1995a: 48), especially those expert in monastic discipline (p. 53); indeed, the *Vinaya* is often quoted from in South-east Asian legal literature, and its reasoning style is influential on law (Huxley, 1997: 70–1). Both in Burma and elsewhere in South-east Asia, it is notable that 'no sharp distinction was made between law, morality and good behaviour. Law texts [of any of the above three types] are often bound together with Jatakas and other works on ethics and *politesse*' (Huxley, 1997: 81).

In spite of the strong Buddhist influence on traditional Burmese law, Andrew Huxley, an expert in this field, can find no ruling on abortion in it.⁴⁶ He speculates that this may be because abortion did not 'threaten the king's peace . . . nor does it lead to a claim for compensation to be mediated at village or suburb level', and so came under the remit of neither *rājathat* nor *dhammathat*. All Burmese kings used the rhetoric of enforcing Buddhist morality, but few went to the lengths of Alaungpaya (c. 1755) and Badon (c. 1790), who outlawed the slaughter of animals, and it seems that Badon even imposed the death sentence for alcohol or opium use. That the law books do not seem to mention abortion implies that, however much this was seen as against the first precept, it was not regarded as a matter that the king's law or customary law needed to concern itself with. So far then, there seems to be support for the 'anti-abortion, pro-choice position'.

In Thailand, one 1978 study found that the majority of people saw abortion as immoral, yet also held that the abortion law should be liberalized to allow it on socio-economic grounds and for a broader range of medical reasons.⁴⁷ In 1981, when Parliament was debating liberalization of the law, a poll of monks found that 75 per cent held that the bill was immoral, yet 40 per cent felt that it should pass, with only 40 per cent opposing this (12 per cent of nuns thought that it should pass and 78 per cent that it should not).⁴⁸ While such a mismatch of views might seem surprising, there is a logic to it. On the one hand, Buddhism is clear that

⁴⁶ Personal communication.

⁴⁷ Referred to in The Population Council, *Abortion in Thailand: A Review of the Literature* (Bangkok: The Population Council Regional Office for South and East Asia, 1981), p. 91, as cited in Florida, 1998: 24.

⁴⁸ Amongst others, 65 per cent of workers saw the bill as immoral, though 66 per cent agreed with it, the figures being 38 per cent and 85 per cent for businessmen-traders. On the other hand, 50 per cent of students and lecturers did not think the bill immoral and 81 per cent supported it, the figures for doctors and nurses being 42 per cent and 87 per cent (WFBR, 1981: 30).

abortion is an unwholesome action; it also holds that to deny that an unwholesome action is unwholesome is itself a potentially unwholesome action (see p. 57). On the other hand, Buddhists may be concerned about the suffering of women having botched illegal abortions which threaten their health, with only the wealthy being able to afford safe abortions.

Given both of these facts, it is not surprising that Buddhists sometimes both acknowledge that abortion is immoral and also want the abortion law liberalized. For the Buddhist women who have abortions, the above logic also means that it is less bad to have an abortion when this is acknowledged as being unwholesome than to have one believing that there is nothing wrong with doing so.

Yet in 1981, there were Buddhists arguing against reform of the Thai abortion law. The monk Sobhonganaphorn argued that morality was universal and based in nature, not a variable man-made matter, so man-made law should not flout it (WFBR, 1981: 21). The editor of the *World Fellowship of Buddhists Review*, however, while admitting that those involved in abortion must face its karmic results (WFBR, 1981: 33), held that one cannot force absolute morality onto people in dire circumstances (WFBR, 1981: 35); while an editorial in the *Bangkok Post* argued that to impose religious ideals on a society could lead to extremes, as was occurring then in Iran (WFBR, 1981: 29). In 1994, the monk Somchai Kusalacitto held that abortion, including abortion of damaged or ill foetuses, was wrong, but that:

There are times when people choose to commit a sin in exchange for something better or more righteous . . . They have the right to make their own decisions on what to do so long as they are willing to accept the Karma or outcome of their actions.

He went on to say that the social conditions that led to unwanted pregnancies should be addressed.⁴⁹ At the same time, Dr Vithoon Eungprabhanth said 'Doctors who choose to commit sins to help others should have the right to do so. At the same time, those doctors who are afraid of committing sins must be allowed to pursue their beliefs.'⁵⁰

However, one problem with the above is that Buddhist ethics seems to treat abortion as being as serious as murder, and it is normal for legal systems to make murder illegal, so as to protect people. Why, then, do Buddhists tend to treat abortion as an immoral action which should not be against the law in all cases, unlike murder? This perhaps springs from

⁴⁹ Quoted in *The Nation* Thai newspaper, 13 June 1994.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

seeing the role of government and law as one of ensuring peace in society. Abortion does not threaten social order in the same way that murder does – especially as, in Buddhist countries, there are no violent conflicts between pro- and anti-abortionists, as in America. Thus, while a Buddhist would expect the karmic results of abortion to arise in the future, she may see less need for legal punishment to follow from the act. Thus the support for liberalizing the law, or the lax enforcing of the existing law, as occurs in some countries.

Yet what view on the proper relationship between law and morality do we find in Buddhist texts? The *Aggañña Sutta* describes early human society as gradually increasing in immorality and disorder until the people choose their first king to punish wrong-doers (*D.* III.92; see p. 114). In the *Cakkavatti-sihanāda Sutta* (*D.* III.58–79; see p. 114), an ideal ruler is said to revere *Dhamma*, in the sense of moral norms and compassionate justice, and to rule only in accordance with it. He should both prevent crime and advise people on what is moral and immoral. One such *Cakkavatti* ruler is said to have been loved by his people as a father, and to have loved his people as a father does his children (*D.* II.178). These passages suggest that the job of a ruler or government is to prevent immorality descending into disorder and to encourage morality, if not rigidly enforce it. The emperor Asoka (268–239 BCE) was inspired by such ideals (see p. 115), and sought to rule justly. While placing some legal restrictions on the killing of animals, he felt that careful reflection and meditation were better means to moral improvement than legal compulsion (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 40). Nevertheless, he strongly encouraged non-violence in his subjects, and saw his role as including that of encouraging them in various facets of following *Dhamma*, in the sense of morality and spiritual development (Nikam and McKeon, 1959: 33–4). Government should thus have a moral dimension, though compelled morality is not the ideal. How much is it good for people to let them get away with bad actions, though?

One Mahāyāna text, the *Suvarṇa-bhāṣottama Sūtra*, or ‘Supreme *Sūtra* of Golden Light’, suggests that a ruler should err on the side of restrictions, if anything. In a section giving advice to kings, it says:

For the sake of suppressing what is unlawful, a destroyer of evil deeds, he would establish beings in good activity in order to send them to the abode of the gods. (*Svb.* 135)

If he overlooks an evil act, a king does not exercise his kingship according to the duty for which he was consecrated by the lords of the gods . . . He is called king

because he acts in various ways in order to demonstrate the fruition and fruit of acts that are well done or ill-done . . . He must not knowingly without examination overlook a lawless act. No other destruction in his region is so terrible. (*Svb.* 141–2)

For when a king overlooks an evil deed in his region and does not inflict appropriate punishment on the evil person, in the neglect of evil deeds lawlessness grows greatly, wicked acts and quarrels arise in great number in the realm. The chief gods are wrathful . . . Unfavourable winds will blow . . . Crop, flower, fruit and seed will not properly ripen. Famine will arise there where the king is neglectful . . . Through the anger of the gods his region will perish. (*Svb.* 135–7)

Thus quarrels, war, death, famine etc. will arise, while ruling according to *Dharma* will please the gods. Here, a king must not let crime go unchecked as this will lead to social disorder, and thence to other problems as the gods are upset by this. He should also impress on people that actions have karmic consequences.

Chapter 6 of the *Ārya-satyaka-parivarta*, or ‘Noble Discourse of the Truth Teller’,⁵¹ also has some interesting things to say here. This early Mahāyāna text, perhaps influenced by Asoka’s edicts (*ASP* 8, 46), has the *Bodhisattva* Satyavādin advising a king on state policy. In this, he emphasizes that a righteous king should be compassionate, but he criticizes the too easy compassion of a Prince Abhaya:

If a ruler is too compassionate, he will not chastise the wicked people of his kingdom which will lead to lawlessness and, as a result, the king will be unable to remove the harm done by robbers and thieves. (*ASP* 228)

As with the *Sūtra* of Golden Light, the mistake of lax punishment is specified, here, as social disorder. Yet the ‘Discourse of the Truth Teller’ does not just see the king as having the role of preventing social disorder. As with the other sources cited above, it sees the king as having a role in improving the morality of his people:

Rulers . . . are called pleasing ones (*rāja*) in that they (are responsible for) maintaining the happiness of people, causing them to be good. (*ASP* 180)

His compassion includes ‘chastising the wicked’ (*ASP* 188), and this implies compassion for evil-doers in an attempt to reform them. In punishing people, his aims should be to convince them not to neglect their obligations (*ASP* 188–9) so that they ‘might become good persons again’ (*ASP* 200). Just as the *Cakkavatti* mentioned above looks on his subjects as

⁵¹ See pp. 199–200. Jamspal holds that it was composed some time between the second century BCE and the first century CE, and says that it was a favourite handbook of many teachers in Tibet, such as Tsong kha pa, particularly in their advice to rulers (*ASP* 2, 46).

like his children, so the righteous ruler should punish wrong-doers in a like spirit to that of a father disciplining a wayward son:

Everything is done in order to remove their faults with the wish: 'I should train them to prevent the arising of faults.' This is the way a ruler gets tough. (*ASP* 191)

A righteous ruler 'with compassion should root out wicked people just as a father disciplines a son'. He should view the wicked as sick, and 'like a doctor a ruler should not get angry with them but rather make effort to remove their faults' (*ASP* 209). Such passages imply that punishments by the state have, at least in part, the function of moral reform.

This *Sūtra* includes amongst evil-doers in need of punishment 'slaughterers, bird killers, and pork sellers' (*ASP* 193). That is, people who in many societies would not be targeted for punishment, but who go against Buddhist ethics. Nevertheless, the recommended 'punishment' for such people, here, is only one of being chastised and warned not to continue in their actions (*ASP* 194). While those from Western liberal democracies might see even this as an attempt to impose morality on people, Buddhism would say that there are certain objective moral standards: morality is not just a matter of opinion. Nevertheless, any punishment should be motivated by compassion for the wrongdoer.

If the law seeks to prevent social disorder and encourage moral reform, it also seeks to protect people. Thus the 'Discourse of the Truth Teller' says that the righteous king, in compassion, 'should also protect them from harm and ill caused by robbers and thieves, armies from other states, and from each other' (*ASP* 188). Should his remit extend to the protection of unborn foetuses? Perhaps someone might say that these are not yet 'members' of the society that a king rules and seeks to offer protection over? Yet no-one would seriously argue that a baby, not being a *full* member of society, should not be given full protection. So why should a foetus not be offered protection, given that human life is seen to start at conception? A righteous ruler should offer some degree of protection even to animals in his realm (see p. 114), so why should even greater protection not be offered to human foetuses?

The above shows that the 'anti-abortion/pro-choice' position of Tworokov and others does not sit too well with the views of a number of Buddhist texts, which see the state as having a *moral* function which is not only that of ensuring social peace. Tworokov's view may be partly due to her being an *American* Buddhist, because of America's tradition of a

strong separation between church and state, a notion which is foreign to many Buddhist lands. That some countries with large Buddhist populations have lax abortion laws, or laxly enforced ones, is to be regretted, on Buddhist grounds.⁵² Buddhist principles suggest that the state should do what it can to persuade people to give up evil. It is true that Buddhism has never advocated making all immoral actions illegal, as doing so might itself threaten social order, as well as removing genuine moral choice from people. But for Buddhism, non-illegal immoral killings, at least in peacetime, have involved animals, not innocent humans. Should protecting innocent humans be outweighed by the fact that this would upset some people and reduce their choice? On Buddhist grounds, the answer is surely 'no'.

In a war, if this is a genuine defensive one, killing of humans might be seen as an evil which is legal as it is necessary in order to protect innocent lives and social order. There are no parallels here for abortion, though, for with abortion innocent life is being taken and there is no real threat to social order.

Perhaps the only possible ground for abortion where it might be acceptable to be more 'liberal' in law than in Buddhist ethics is in the case of a foetus which is badly impaired. While Buddhist principles would counsel against an abortion here, it does not seem appropriate to compel a woman by law to have such a child. This is not on the grounds of 'compassion' for the child, but on the grounds of compassion for the woman.

But what of the consequences of making abortion illegal on all but the grounds summarized on p. 326, with the addition of the case of badly impaired foetuses? The problem is that women will have illegal abortions on other grounds, and that these may be performed by 'quacks' who damage the women's health or cause their deaths. Here, the issue is not unlike the question of whether hard drugs should be legalized, to prevent drug-related killings arising from the high price of illegal drugs, and to prevent AIDS deaths due to sharing dirty needles. Yet in this case, (a) it is possible to make clean needles available without legalizing hard drugs and (b) those killed in drug-related killings are not innocent of relevant fault, as is a foetus. For a closer analogy, we need to

⁵² When abortion laws are fairly restrictive but are not enforced, the 'law' becomes, in effect, a publicly declared standard of morality, rather than law proper, but this brings the law into disrepute as it is no longer treated *as* law. Here, either better enforcement, as is now happening in Thailand, or liberalization, or both, seems best.

return to the 'baby and chimpanzee test' (see p. 321). If it were found that people were dying because of side-effects of a particular way of killing babies, should killing babies be legalized, so that people could have easy access to less dangerous means? No. What if it were unwanted chimpanzees, not babies? Surely, we would have to ask: why are people killing chimpanzees? Thus the moral answer to dangerous illegal abortions is not a liberal abortion law, but resources for easily available contraceptives, with encouragement to use these, and good adoption and fostering services. Even with a liberal abortion law, resources would be needed to fund easily available abortions, or people would still go to quacks on financial grounds. Of course, there will be countries where contraceptives are not yet easily available on account of people's inability to afford them. While it should be a priority to make them available and affordable (or free), until they are, enforcement of laws on abortion should not be done harshly.

CONCLUSION

We can thus conclude the following:

- (1) the Buddhist scriptural tradition is clear in its opposition to abortion. It considers abortion as worse when the foetus is older and when the reason for considering an abortion is weaker. It always considers it as worse than killing an animal in parallel circumstances;
- (2) Buddhist principles indicate that those having abortions should recognize their action as evil to some degree, otherwise it will be an even worse action;
- (3) Buddhists are more willing to condemn abortion on moral grounds than to oppose legalisation of it, often being more permissive in practice than in their outlook;
- (4) yet classical Buddhist textual views of the function of law and government do not support the spirit of 'abortion is wrong but should be allowed by the law'.

We have seen that Buddhists have accommodated themselves to abortion to varying degrees, and that there are those who argue that the not infrequently permissive practice of Buddhists is the best ground on which to base a 'Buddhist position'. The trouble with this is that a classical Buddhist idea is that people's moral practice declines over the ages, and permissive practice on abortion could simply be seen as a sign of this, not of any true expression of Buddhist principles.

It is clear, at the very least, that the great majority of Buddhists agree that abortion is killing a human being, and is an evil that should be avoided, other things being equal. A crucial issue, though, is *how* evil is it, and what 'other things' can come to outweigh this evil, so that abortion comes to be seen as a 'necessary evil' in certain circumstances? It seems that in Japan and Korea, almost any grounds for abortion have been seen to make it a 'necessary evil'. At the opposite end of the spectrum are Tibetan Buddhists, Sri Lankan Theravādins, and a number of Theravādins in Thailand. In between comes a sizeable body of opinion in Thailand. The position in Burma has been that, in pre-colonial times at least, abortion was not liable to punishment, and there is some evidence of its currently being accepted in society, if not widely practised.

The absence of angry demonstrations outside abortion clinics in any Buddhist countries is perhaps partly to be explained by the fact that Buddhism sees anger as a destructive, unwholesome emotion, even so-called 'righteous' anger. In America, there have even been abortion clinic workers who have been killed by anti-abortionists. At a theoretical level, one might wonder whether Mahāyāna 'skilful means' reasoning could even be used to justify such an action. Such a 'justification' could be along the lines: the doctor is engaged in killing many beings, so to kill him would be to save them and save him from the evil of killing. Yet the argument does not work: the killing of an abortionist would be an action which would incite outrage, fear and anger, and the hardening of positions on the abortion issue, which would not be conducive to real reflection and change. Even if this were not the case, the kind of advanced *Bodhisattva* who could do such an action, the very opposite of normal Buddhist ethics, without great spiritual danger, is extremely rare.

The approach to abortion most in tune with central Buddhist principles would be:

- (1) encouragement of reflection on the value of human life;
- (2) encouragement of responsible use of contraception, so as to minimize the chances of women even having to consider an abortion;
- (3) encouraging the non-use of 'contraceptives' which actually cause early abortions, and the development of more effective contraceptives which do not do this;
- (4) encouragement and support for adoption services, with 'giving up' a child for adoption being seen as a form of *dāna*;

- (5) support for legal abortion only where the case for its being a 'necessary evil' is strong (see p. 326), or where the foetus is badly impaired;
- (6) compassion for those who have had an abortion by provision of some kind of ritual to alleviate their psychological pain, encourage an expression of sincere regret and attempt to benefit the dead child spiritually.

CHAPTER 9

Sexual equality

To one for whom the question arises, ‘am I a woman or am I a man in these matters?’ . . . to such a one is Māra fit to talk! *Samyutta Nikāya* 1.129

‘Sexual equality’ covers a range of issues on which religion can have a direct or indirect bearing:

- (1) access to religious teachings and practices, and encouragement to follow them;
- (2) images of men and women’s spiritual potential;
- (3) opportunity with regard to specialist religious roles, and status within them;
- (4) status, authority and respect within the family;
- (5) equality of legal status with regard to such matters as inheritance and divorce;
- (6) access to educational and other resources, and encouragement to use them;
- (7) opportunity with regard to work and earnings;
- (8) opportunity with regard to political power and rights;
- (9) the actual achievement of equality as allowed/facilitated by a religion or culture.

These are affected by the way a culture construes the differences between men and women: with how biological differences of sex are used as a basis for a set of differing expectations and characterizations of ‘male’ and ‘female’ genders. In most cultures, any sexual inequality is usually at the expense of women; thus the issue is generally focused on the status of women. Nevertheless, some feminists have questioned whether ‘equality’ with men is always the appropriate goal for women to seek, if it simply means equal access to a world where the rules are set by men.

In the West, while feminism and its precursors have brought about valuable changes to the position of women, feminism not infrequently leads to dogmatic viewpoints being taken up, both *between* feminists and non-feminists and *within* both ‘camps’. This can lead to ‘clinging to views’ – holding to particular views with attachment and indignation –

which Buddhism has always been wary of, although Buddhists have not always managed to avoid it. Whatever debate there is on the status of women among Buddhists, the ideal should always be to assess critically both one's own existing views and those of others, so as not to be swayed simply by either habitual and/or traditional attitudes or by newly fashionable viewpoints. The bottom line, from a Buddhist perspective, is whether a particular idea, attitude or practice conduces to an increase or decrease – for both men and women – in such qualities as generosity, non-attachment, calm, kindness, compassion, clarity of mind, and awareness of, and insight into, the nature of mental and physical states. The aim, then, is true human welfare, judged by criteria that are not regarded as gender-specific. The extent to which this inclusive goal needs to take account of real differences between men and women has, and does, receive different answers from Buddhists.

Before examining the situation of women 'in' Buddhism, it is worth pointing out that as Buddhism has evolved over many centuries, its many forms have existed in a variety of cultural milieux. The views and behaviour of Buddhists have been influenced not only by Buddhism, but by other traditions such as Hinduism or Confucianism, as well as by such factors as particular traditional kinship systems or, of course, their own psychological limitations.

WOMEN IN EARLY HINDUISM

What of the position of women in the culture which preceded Buddhism and developed alongside it in India? In the *Veda Saṃhitās* (c. 1500–1000 BCE), there were a few little-worshipped goddesses among many gods; there were probably some women among the poet-seers who composed the texts, and perhaps some among those trained to sing sacrificial hymns. Women were greatly honoured as mothers, and were permitted considerable freedom of movement by their menfolk.¹ As Vedic religion developed, the *Brāhmaṇas* were composed (1000–700 BCE) as guides to complex rituals seen to have a controlling power over the cosmos. Priestly specialists were now needed, who required a special education away from home. This was only given to males of the brahmin class; their sisters only received it if their fathers had the requisite knowledge. A son was seen as necessary to perform the funeral rite for a father, so that he could win the heaven world, and for rites to

¹ Young, 1987: 60–4; Jhingran, 1989; Dewaraja, 1981: 6.

benefit male ancestors. There were thus rituals to prevent the birth of a girl, for daughters tended to be seen as an unwelcome burden until they were married, which was their duty (Jhingran, 1989: 92). A wife came to be seen primarily as a child-bearer and as subservient to her husband and his parents. Thus, as the Vedic religion became increasingly dominated by the brahmin priests, women's status decreased. In the mystical, ascetic texts known as the *Upaniṣads* (700–200 BCE), there is reference to a few women debaters, such as Gārgī, but asceticism was generally seen as a male preserve, and ascetics often saw women as temptresses.

From the fifth century BCE, Buddhism and Jainism came to have considerable success, and Brahmanism went on the defensive, seeking to become more popular by drawing in cults of various Indian deities. The brahmins also developed a number of texts, known as *Dharma-śāstras*, to regulate the life of society in accordance with their developing norms. In these, one can see the status of women continuing to decline. Perhaps the most influential of the religious law-books was the *Manu Smṛiti*, the 'Laws of Manu',² dating from around 100 CE, which clearly codified a developing tradition. In it, women were prohibited from reading the sacred Vedic texts, and could not perform sacrifice or worship without men (Dewaraja, 1981: 6–7). While it was held that the honouring of women pleased the gods, and that families did not prosper without their happiness (III.55–7), nevertheless, 'a woman is never fit for independence' (IX.3), even in her own house (V.147). She must be protected by (IX.3) and be subject to (V.148) her father, then her husband, then her grown-up son. This was partly because women were seen as highly sexed and ever ready to seduce men (IX.13–18), though other Hindu law texts prescribed tougher penalties for adultery by a man than by a woman (Jhingran, 1989: 96). A woman's religious duties were simply those of serving her husband and looking after the home (II.67). She should always obey him (V.151) and revere him even if he was adulterous or devoid of virtues (V.154). A man could divorce his wife (IX.81), but a woman had no right to divorce her husband.

Such brahmin ideals were followed to varying extents by Hindus, especially those of higher castes. By the Gupta period (320–540 CE), Hinduism was regaining considerable strength in India. Given that Buddhism had less interest in regulating the specifics of lay life, Hindu

² Selections on women are given in S. Radhakrishnan and C. A. Moore (eds.), *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 172, 189–92.

ideas inevitably had an effect on ordinary Buddhists, though they were resisted to varying extents.

THE EFFECT OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism's emphasis on individual karma lessened the need for *sons* to perform a man's funeral rites. A person's destiny after death was due to his or her *own* karma, perhaps with a little help from that shared with him or her by others, male or female. In general, the Buddhist era was one in which women 'commanded more respect and ranked as individuals. They enjoyed more independence, and a wider liberty to guide and follow their own lives' (Horner, 1930: 82), so that women's position was one of 'approximation to equality with men'.

From a Buddhist perspective, there was no reason to feel gloomy at the birth of a daughter. When King Pasenadi was downhearted at the birth of a girl to Queen Mallikā – later to lead her husband to be a Buddhist (*M.* II.106–12) – the Buddha said:

Indeed, a woman of a certain sort is better than a man, lord of folk:
 Wise, virtuous, revering her husband's mother, a devoted wife.
 The man born of her is a hero, ruler of the regions,
 Such a son of a good wife is one who advises his realm. (S. 1.86)

Here, the Buddha gives a statement which skilfully combines an elevation in the status of women – a 'wise, virtuous' woman may be better than a man – and a comforting statement to the king about getting a worthy grandson! Nevertheless, early Buddhism did not just look on women as child-bearers, and marriage was not their only aim. To be an unmarried adult woman was a legitimate role, and women might also become Buddhist nuns. It is said that the faithful laywoman should encourage her beloved only son to emulate the best laymen or monks, and her beloved only daughter to emulate the best laywomen or nuns (*S.* II.235–6).

Miss I. B. Horner (1930: 287–8) summarizes the elements of sexual equality that are found in the early Buddhist texts:

- (1) The Buddha is said to have won enlightenment for the sake of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen (*S.* I.196), and to have taught *Dhamma* to all four.
- (2) The virtues and vices of all four groups are said to have an analogous effect on the persistence or disappearance of Buddhist knowledge and practice (*A.* III.247). Thus the *Saṅgha* is 'illuminated' by a monk,

nun, layman or laywoman who is ‘accomplished in wisdom, disciplined, confident . . . practising according to *Dhamma*’ (*A.* II.8), and the same set of virtues or vices leads to hell or heaven for a man or woman (*A.* v.283–7).

- (3) Women may have both the same spiritual limitations and the same spiritual powers as men.
- (4) Nuns may develop to the same extent as monks.
- (5) The Buddha said that he would not die until he had monks, and nuns, and laymen, and laywomen who could teach *Dhamma*, ‘establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear’ (*D.* II.104, 113).
- (6) The Buddha gave the same teachings to both sexes, and sometimes went out of his way to teach women.

At *D.* II.96–7, the Buddha refused a meal invitation from some proud and rich young men, as he had already accepted an invitation from the courtesan Ambapālī, which he honoured even when the young men objected. Ambapālī was later ordained and became an *Arahat* (*Thig.* 252–70).

THE SPIRITUAL POTENTIAL AND ACHIEVEMENT OF WOMEN

The historical Buddha’s perspective on the spiritual potential of women is usefully described by Alan Sponberg as one of ‘soteriological inclusiveness’ (1992: 8–13). This does not assert, as such, the social equality of men and women, but that the spiritual path is equally open to both, for sex and gender differences are ‘soteriologically insignificant’ (p. 9). Sponberg sees this attitude as probably ‘the most basic and also the most distinctively Buddhist attitude regarding the status of women’ throughout Buddhist literature (p. 8). This relatively revolutionary attitude, though, was complemented, in early Buddhism, by what Sponberg calls ‘institutional androcentrism’ and then by what he calls, more contentiously, ‘ascetic misogyny’ (see below, pp. 379–83).

Female Arahats

That the Buddha agreed that women could become *Arahats* is seen from his overview of his disciples’ achievements, there being ‘far more than 500’ in each of the following categories: (1) monks who are *Arahats*, (2) nuns who are *Arahats*, (3) celibate laymen who are Non-returners, (4) celibate laywomen who are Non-returners, (5) laymen who are without doubt and perplexity (i.e. are Stream-enterers), (6) laywomen who are

without doubt and perplexity.³ His pre-eminent nuns, and their qualities, were (*A.* 1.25): Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī – the Buddha’s aunt and foster-mother (chief of nuns of long standing); Khemā (great wisdom); Uppalavaṇṇā – who was raped in the forest after she became an *Arahat* (*Dhp.* *A.* 11.48–51) (psychic power); Paṭācārā (monastic discipline); Dhammadinnā (*Dhamma* teaching); Nandā (meditation); Soṇā (energetic striving); Sakulā (the divine eye); Bhaddā Kuṇḍalakesā – once a free-lance debater (*Dhp.* *A.* 11.217–26) and personally ordained by the Buddha (*Thig.* 109) (quick higher knowledges); Bhaddā-kapilānī (memory of past lives); Bhaddā Kaccānā – seen as the Buddha’s ex-wife (*A.A.* 1.198) (great mastery of higher knowledges); Kisā Gotamī – whom the Buddha had cured of grief at the death of her child (*Dhp.* *A.* 11.270–5) (wearer of coarse robe); Sigālamātā (released by faith).

In the Pali Canon, the *Therīgāthā* consists of seventy-three sets of verses attributed to 102 early nun *Arahats*.⁴ Among the attainments referred to are those of thirty nuns who gain the ‘threefold knowledge’ during the three watches of the night, as the Buddha had done (*Thig.* 120). The nun Sumedhā recalls that, prior to her ordination, she had been acknowledged as ‘Virtuous, a brilliant speaker, having great learning, trained in the Buddha’s teaching’ (verse 449). Not wanting to be married to a king, she had had great detachment, and a desire to escape the round of rebirths: ‘Either there will be going forth (ordination) for me, or death; not marriage’ (verse 465). She goes on to compare sensual pleasures to vomit (verse 478), a butcher’s knife (verse 488), delusive dreams (verse 490) and a pit of coals (verse 491). When the king came to her, she threw down the hair she had just cut off, as a consolation for him (verse 514).

Some female *Arahats* saw themselves as having begun to develop spiritually even while in an unhappy marriage. Thus Muttā says:

I am well-released, properly released by my release by three crooked things, by the mortar, pestle, and my crooked husband. I am released from birth and death. (*Thig.* 11)

Another, unknown nun is simply happy to be beyond such a marriage:

Well-released, well-released, properly released am I from the pestle. My shameless man, even his sunshade etc. (disgust me). My pot gives forth the smell of water-snake. (*Thig.* 23)

³ *M.* 1.490–1; cf. *M.* 11.277; *Ud.* 79; *S.* 1.33. See pp. 39–40 on *Arahats*, Non-returners and Streamers.

⁴ See *Thig.* and *Thig. A.* Discussed in: Horner (1930: 162–210), Murcott (1991) and Blackstone (1998).

The nuns were ordained for a variety of reasons, though, not just to escape such marriages. According to Horner, at least thirty-two were unmarried, eighteen had clearly been married, three of whom had been widowed (1930: 173–4), and a number were ordained because of grief, especially at the loss of a child (p. 194).

Among the early *Arahat* nuns, at least thirty looked to Paṭācārā – who had lost her two children in tragic circumstances (*Dhp. A.* 11.264–5) – as their teacher (*Thig.* 117–21). Of other great teachers who are nuns, Dhammānā answers an array of questions from her ex-husband on subtle points of doctrine, with the Buddha then praising her answers as the ones he would have given (*M.* 1.299–305). Khemā, said to be ‘widely learned, a brilliant speaker’, addresses a famous passage, to a king, on a Tathāgata as being ‘deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom as is the great ocean’ (*S.* 1v.376). Sikkā laments that the men of Rājagaha, as if drunk, do not attend to her teaching *Dhamma* but the wise drink it up (*Thig.* 54–5). *S.* 1.128–35 gives verses attributed to a number of nuns, such as Vajirā, who likens the five personality factors to the parts of a chariot: a famous simile later taken up in the *Milindapañha* (pp. 27–8).

Of particular interest are the verses of Somā. On going deep into a wood, the tempter-god Māra comes to her to make her afraid and so desist from meditation. Māra insinuates:

That vantage-ground (i.e. Arahatsip) to be attained by sages is hard to win. With her two-finger-intelligence, no woman is able to attain that.

Somā recognizes Māra, though, and replies:

What (difference) should a woman’s state (*itthi-bhāvo*) make, when the mind is well concentrated, when knowledge is rolling on, when she rightly has insight into *Dhamma*? To one for whom the question arises, ‘am I a woman or am I a man (in these matters)?’ or ‘what indeed am I?’. To such a one is Māra fit to talk! (*S.* 1.129; cf. *Thig.* 60–2)

Māra therefore knows that she can see through him, and slinks off. This passage in some ways parallels that of Māra’s tempting of Gotama just prior to his enlightenment. In Somā’s case, specious doubts arise concerning a woman’s ability to attain spiritual states, but she conquers them by seeing the irrelevance of gender: what matters is appropriate spiritual practice and insight. Likewise, Māra unsuccessfully tries to tempt other nuns as follows: you should enjoy sensual pleasures and ‘be not a woman who regrets too late’ (*S.* 1.128); have you come to the wood, alone, looking for a man (p. 130)?; you are beautiful and should enjoy yourself with a young one such as he (p. 131); are you not afraid of ‘the

wiles of seducers'? (p. 131); don't you want to be reborn? (p. 133); who made the human form? (p. 134).

The *Therī-apadāna*, a late Theravāda canonical text on the lives and past lives of the nuns whose verses are given in the *Therīgāthā*, contains many stories which Jonathan Walters sees as unmistakably combating 'misogynist attitudes that continued among Indian Buddhists' (1995: 114). He translates material from the text on Mahā-Pajāpatī Gotamī, the Buddha's foster-mother and the first nun, which focuses on her, aged 120, passing away into final *Nirvāṇa* at death. In this she, referred to simply as Gotamī, is portrayed as paralleling the Buddha, Gotama (1995: 117), both having a 'great final *Nirvāṇa*' (verse 75). To the Buddha, she says: 'But by your nurturing was reared my flawless dharma-body' (verse 32), and to the not-yet enlightened Ānanda, who helped her persuade the Buddha to ordain women, she says:

That state which is not seen by elders [senior monks]
nor by non-Buddhist teachers
is witnessed by some Buddhist girls
when they are only seven. (verse 66)

However, she says to the Buddha:

It is thought, chief of the world,
that women are all flawed.
If there should be some flaw in me,
compassion-mine, forgive me. (verse 44)

The Buddha goes on to say:

Yet still there are these fools who doubt
that women can grasp the truth.
Gotamī, show miracles,
that they might give up their false views. (verse 79)

She then says that she has the six 'higher knowledges' (verse 78), as had the Buddha and certain other *Arahats*, and shows the first of these by rising into the air, multiplying her form, diving into the earth, walking on water, flying etc. (verses 80–90), and the fourth by telling of her deeds in past lives (verses 95–119), with the Buddha's confirmation. The 500 nuns she was ordained with also display their psychic powers (verses 120–3). Gotamī then goes through the same series of meditative states that the Buddha is to do on his death, before passing into final *Nirvāṇa* (verses 145–8), at which there is an earthquake and flowers fall from the sky (verses 148–9), as at the Buddha's death. The Buddha then says:

The Buddha's great nirvāṇa, good,
but not as good as this one:
Gotamī's great going out
was positively stellar. (verse 173)

Know this, O monks, she was most wise,
with wisdom vast and wide.
She was a nun of great renown,
a master of great powers.
She cultivated 'divine-ear'
and knew what others thought. (verses 183–4)

Mahāyāna images of female spiritual perfection

While Arahātship is the spiritual goal of the Theravāda, the Mahāyāna aims at becoming a *Bodhisattva* and then a Buddha. In perhaps the earliest extant Mahāyāna text, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtra* (c. 100 BCE–100 CE), the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*) is praised as the 'mother' of all Buddhas (Conze, 1973: 31, 172). *Prajñā*, which is grammatically feminine, is analytically based intuitive liberating insight into emptiness (see pp. 124–5). When this is developed, it acts as the basis for the 'birth' of Buddhahood.

While the 'feminine' perfection of wisdom gives birth to Buddhahood, this requires other qualities, too; for wisdom is also seen to give birth to and nourishes lesser levels of realization (Cabezón, 1992: 185). For the *Bodhisattva*, on the path to becoming a Buddha, though, compassionate skilful means (*upāya kauśalya*) is needed as well as wisdom (Lamotte, 1976: 126–7). In Mahāyāna and especially Vajrayāna thought, such skilful means, and also the compassionate aspiration to Buddhahood (*bodhi-citta*), is envisaged as male, akin to a father, as a complement to the feminine wisdom.

From around 400 CE, female holy beings gradually came to appear in Mahāyāna texts and then art, such as the Perfection of Wisdom personified as a female *Bodhisattva* (Conze, 1967: 243–60), and they became particularly popular in tantric Buddhism (see pp. 141–2) and thus in the lands of Northern Buddhism. Here, a very important figure is Tārā, the 'Saviouress': a *Bodhisattva* said to be 'mother of all the Buddhas' (Williams, 1989: 236–8). Among her twenty-one forms, the 'Green' and 'White' ones came to be some of the best-loved deities in Tibet (Beyer, 1973). They are seen as graceful, attractive and approachable, and as ever ready to care tenderly for those in distress.



Plate 9. A popular print from Sri Lanka, showing the Buddha returning to earth from a heaven after teaching his dead mother the *Abhidhamma*, a complex compendium of analytical wisdom.



Plate 10. An image of Tārā, the 'Saviouress', in the courtyard of a temple in Kathmandu, Nepal.

From 700 CE, some Indian tantric texts added female consorts of the heavenly Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas* (Conze, 1967: 82). In any such couple, the female was known as the *prajñā*, or 'wisdom' partner, and the male symbolized (skilful) 'means' (*upāya*): skilful compassionate action, facilitated by the more passive wisdom symbolized by the female partner. The ideal was for a practitioner to unite these two qualities, to a very high

degree, in his or her own person, so as to produce the great bliss of enlightenment. This, in turn, was symbolized, in Tibet, by pairs of holy beings in sexual union, known as *yab-yum*, or father-mother, forms. In some forms of tantric practice, lay practitioners would actually perform sexual yoga with a partner, in a very self-controlled way, to manipulate and transform the sexual energies, as a means to spiritual development (see pp. 141–2).

Commenting on the Mahāyāna's incorporation of the feminine principle, Edward Conze says (1967: 81):

The Mahāyāna believed that men should, in their meditations, complete themselves by fostering the feminine factors of their personality, that they should practise passivity and a loose softness, that they should learn to open freely the gates of nature, and let the mysterious and hidden forces of this world penetrate into them, stream in and through them. When they identify themselves with the Perfection of Wisdom, they merge with the principle of Femininity . . . without which they would be mutilated men.

Here Conze is specifically discussing the early Mahāyāna valuing of the perfection of wisdom, but his remarks equally apply to later tantric notions of male and female as symbolizing a spiritual complementary pair. Sponberg sees the latter perspective as one of 'soteriological androgyny' (1992: 24–8). Here, sexual/gender differences 'are acknowledged as provisional, as not ultimately real, and they are further affirmed as potentially powerful means of soteric transformation' (p. 25). Both sexes are seen as having 'masculine' and 'feminine' traits, and both sets of complementary traits are seen as 'essential to the ideal state, a state of androgynous integration' (p. 25). Thus a male must draw on and develop repressed 'female' energies, and vice versa, to transform them and remove their destructive potencies (pp. 25–6). This would be done, for example, by working with a *yidam*, a chosen deity who would be vividly visualized and then mentally identified with (Harvey, 1990a: 261–4). A man might be assigned a *yidam* who was female, just as a woman might be assigned one who was male.

Sponberg holds, though, that the ideal of androgynous integration seems to have been mainly for the benefit of men (1992: 28), as might be inferred from the Conze passage quoted above. Women were not excluded, though. Of the eighty-four famous tantric masters (the *Mahā-siddhas*) of India (eighth to twelfth centuries), mostly lay practitioners, four were women (Ray, 1980), and tantric masters such as the Indian Nāropa and the Tibetan Marpa had wives or consorts who were also accomplished tantric masters (Willis, 1989: 69).

Some tantric texts, on the level of practice known as *Anuttara-yoga*, say that it is possible for a woman to become enlightened in one lifetime (Tsomo, 1988: 42). They also emphasize that all women should be respected, as some may be *ḍākiṇīs* (p. 84). *Ḍākiṇīs* are a type of female *yidam* who are seen as playful but, when the dynamic energy they represent is blocked in a person, also wrathful (Allione, 1986: 41–2), often being shown dancing upon a male figure (see Allione, 1986: 25–46). Tibet has many stories of their appearance to practitioners at crucial moments in their lives, so as to issue an incisive challenge to their fixed ideas and superficial understanding (Allione, 1986: 37; Willis, 1989: 63–5). The Tibetan translation of *ḍākiṇī* is *Khadoma* (*mKha* 'gro ma), which means something like 'Sky-goer': that is, one who, through wisdom, is at home in emptiness, and who creates openings for people to deepen their wisdom, and develop in a more rounded way (Willis, 1989: 61–2, 66, 73). In art, such beings are often shown wielding a knife with a crescent-shaped blade and a hook on it (Allione, 1986: 32–3). The hook represents saving compassion, while the blade symbolizes their power to cut up ego-centred delusions. In the Dzog Chen (rDzogs-chen) teachings of the Tibetan Nyingma (rNying-ma) school, *ḍākiṇīs* are seen as guardians of teachings hidden by the great teacher Padmasaṃbhava, regarded as their founder, and also as demanding guides to those who may rediscover these.

Padmasaṃbhava (eighth century) said of Yeshe Tsogyel (Ye-shes mTsho-rgyal), one of his two main consorts:

The human body is the basis of the accomplishment of wisdom, and the gross bodies of men and women are equally suited. But if a woman has strong aspiration, she has higher potential.⁵

This, even though she claimed:

I am a woman – I have little power to resist danger. Because of my inferior birth, everyone attacks me . . . If I have wealth and food, bandits attack me . . . Because I am a woman, it is hard to follow the *Dharma*.⁶

This first-generation Buddhist may well, though, have been saying this mainly to help her win certain secret teachings from Padmasaṃbhava.

In India and Tibet, the most popular *Bodhisattva* has been Avalokiteśvara, embodiment of compassion, who was seen as male. In China, however, where he was known as Kuan-yin, 'he' gradually came

⁵ Willis, 1989: 17, quoting Dowman, 1984: 86.

⁶ Willis, 1989, 96, quoting Tarthang Tulku, 1985: 105.

to be portrayed as female (Reed, 1992; Paul, 1979: 247–80). This may have been because the Chinese saw compassion as a ‘female’ quality. Other factors may have been a female allusion in his *mantra*, his association with Tārā, and the fact that, from the fifth century, some of ‘his’ popular incarnations were female. ‘He’ may also have merged with a pre-Buddhist goddess thought to care for mariners. In time, Kuan-yin came to be seen as an all-compassionate ‘mother-goddess’, the most popular deity in all of China. In several of the legends of her incarnations, she acts in a way that rejects the Confucian emphasis that women should marry (Reed, 1992: 167–8). As the princess Miao-shan, she becomes a nun, to the great anger of her father, but goes on to cure his blindness and give him spiritual insight (which is a Buddhist way of enacting the Confucian value of respecting parents). In another legend, she has men compete for her hand in marriage by learning many verses from the Lotus *Sūtra*; she then dies before the winner can marry her. Kuan-yin was thus called on by women to save them from unwanted marriages or from sexual attacks. Married women also called on her to aid difficult child-births, and to gain a son, which increased their power within the Confucian-dominated family ethos.

Also in China, a popular idea in a number of schools was that of the ‘Buddha-nature’: a Buddha-potential latent in all, male or female. This notion is strongly expressed in the ‘Lion’s Roar of Queen Śrīmālā’ (*Śrīmālā-devī Siṃhanāda*) *Sūtra* (c. 250–350 CE; Paul, 1979: 281–302). This concerns the teachings of the wise *Bodhisattva* daughter of King Prasenajit (Pali Pasenadi): the same daughter whom the king had initially lamented over for not being a boy (see above, p. 356)!

The Chinese Ch’an (Zen) school particularly came to emphasize sexual equality, in contrast to the prevailing Confucian social ethic which saw men as clearly superior. The Ch’an ideal, based on the idea of all sharing the Buddha-nature, and on the emptiness of worldly distinctions (Levering, 1982: 20), can be seen in Ta-hui Tsung-kao’s (1089–1163) statement:

For mastering the truth, it does not matter whether one is male or female, noble or base. One moment of insight and one is shoulder to shoulder with the Buddha. (Levering, 1992: 139)

His description of one of his most successful laywomen students is as follows:

Can you say that she is a woman, and women have no share (in enlightenment)? You must believe that this matter has nothing to do with (whether one is) male

or female, old or young. Ours is an egalitarian Dharma-gate that has only one flavour. (Levering, 1992: 139)

Here, one sees a strong echo of the verses of Somā in the Theravādin *Sutta* collection (see p. 359). Yet such teachers saw enlightenment as for the exceptional person with great determination and courage: a ‘great hero (*ta-chang-fū*)’, which term had clear masculine connotations in Chinese culture (Levering, 1992). Indeed, the above-mentioned monk said of another laywoman disciple:

When you look at her you see a woman, but this is like the action of a man (*chang-fū*), and she is able to complete the affairs of a great hero (*ta-chang-fū*). (Levering, 1992: 149)

Thus a woman was seen as able to attain the same spiritual level as a man could reach, but doing so required her to excel in qualities particularly associated with men.

However, one should not forget that Zen also has its more gentle, ‘feminine’ side, such as the tea ceremony (Wawrytko, 1991: 267–8). Moreover, the openness of enlightenment to both men and women is a recurrent theme in Ch’an and Zen. While this was often more rhetoric than reality, lay followers particularly seem to have advocated equality, as seen in stories in which the daughter of the famous Layman Pang outwits her father (Faure, 1991: 244). The founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan, the renowned Dōgen (1200–53), argued that, as women could be enlightened, men should be prepared to have such women as their teachers, otherwise they showed that they did not understand the *Dharma*. He asked ‘By what right are only males noble?’ (Wawrytko, 1991: 273):

What demerit is there in femaleness? What merit is there in maleness? There are bad men and good women. If you wish to hear the *Dharma* and put an end to pain and turmoil, forget about such things as male and female. As long as delusions have not yet been eliminated, neither men nor women have eliminated them; when they are all eliminated and true reality is experienced, there is no distinction of male and female. (Levering, 1982: 31)

Levering explains that in saying this, though, Dōgen was not challenging the accepted position of women in Confucian-influenced Japanese lay society (1982: 30). In practice, it also seems that he had few female disciples (Faure, 1991: 244), whatever the reasons were for this. While even his spiritual egalitarianism came to be neglected in later Japanese Zen (Uchino, 1986), it has been taken up again in Western Zen (Shasta Abbey, 1981).

GENDER, REBIRTH AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

To return to the Indian cultural sphere, what, though, is the traditional Buddhist understanding of sex differences and their significance? In the *Abhidhamma* literature, which carefully details the nature of mental and physical processes, there is only said to be a specific kind of differentiation between men and women at the physical, not mental, level: the subtle qualities known as the female-faculty and male-faculty. The first is defined as

That which in a female is feminine appearance, feminine characteristic, feminine behaviour, feminine deportment, femininity, being feminine. (*Dhs.* 633)

with an exactly parallel definition of the male-faculty. Both are seen as types of invisible material form (*Vibh.* 72) and as being present from the moment of conception (*Vibh.* 414–15). In the Theravādin commentaries (*Asl.* 321), ‘appearance’ etc. are seen as the *products* of the two faculties, which are like their seeds. Gods of the lower heavens, still within the ‘realm of sense-pleasures’, still have the sexual faculties, but those of the higher, ‘(elemental) form’ level of *brahmā* gods lack them (*Vibh.* 418; *AKB.* II.12b–c). Yet the Sarvāstivādins, and perhaps Theravādins saw these beings as still being ‘male’ through having at least the body shape and voice of a male (*AKB.* II.12b–c). For both schools, though, both men and women can be reborn in their next life at this level.

While the *Suttas* occasionally refer to the general ‘mind-set’ (*citta*) of a man or woman (see below), the *Abhidhamma* does not detail any *citta*, here meaning a specific mind-state, particular to either men or women. It thus implies that any difference between the psychology of men and women pertains to the particular *mix* of mental states that tend to occur in them. Moreover, in a late part of the Pali Canon, it is said that each of the five personality-factors is ‘not a female, not a male, not a Self, not what pertains to Self’ (*Nd.* II.280). That is, there is no permanent woman-essence, man-essence or Self in the changing physical and mental processes making up a ‘person’. This is partly because it is accepted that sex can change during a person’s life (*Asl.* 322).

Between lives, sex is *generally* seen to remain the same, but this is not invariably so. In the *Vimānavatthu*, on heavenly rebirths, when the gender is specified by the text or its commentary, it is always the same. The *Petavatthu* (II.13) discusses the case of a woman said to have been a queen 86,000 times; yet she had not always been a woman: ‘you were a woman, you have been a man, and as an animal also you were born’ (verse 12).

Similarly, it is said to be hard to find a being who, in some past life, has not been one's mother, or who has not been one's father, or brother, sister, son or daughter (*S.* II.189; cf. *Thig.* 159).

Thus, sex can change from life to life – but for what reasons? The above *Petavatthu* story continues by saying that the woman, having developed a mind full of lovingkindness and 'faded out the mind-set (*citta*) of a woman', was reborn in a *brahmā* world, i.e. beyond sexual differentiation (verse 19), though at *J.* III.93–4, a being of much good karma from a *brahmā* world is reborn as a woman who becomes an ascetic with the *Bodhisattva*. At *D.* II.271, a male god, Gopaka, says that he *had* been a woman, Gopikā, but by faith in the three refuges, and carefully fulfilling the precepts, 'having faded out the mind-set of a woman and developed the mind-set of a man', he was born in his present male form. He contrasts his state with that of three not very good monks, whom (s)he had supported, who were now reborn in a much lower heaven serving the higher gods. He thus says,

While as for me – see the difference!
From household life, and female, I
Am now reborn a male, a god,
Rejoicing in celestial pleasures! (*D.* II.273)⁷

At *Thig.* 400–47 (cf. *J.* V.232–9), a male adulterer is reborn in a hell, then as three kinds of animal who were castrated, as a hermaphrodite human, a troublesome co-wife, and finally as a woman rejected by several husbands (who was then ordained and became an *Arahat*). Such passages demonstrate that gender *is* seen as changeable, but that it is regarded as remaining the same, as if by force of momentum, unless: (1) some specific redirection of the mind is made to this end (see *Asl.* 65), or (2) the fruition of karma makes it particularly appropriate that there is a gender change. They also suggest that there is a difference between transcending sexual differentiation, as in the *Brahmā* worlds, and losing it, as with being a hermaphrodite.

If there is a suggestion that a female rebirth is not quite as good as a male one, this may well be due to the idea that there are five particular forms of suffering that a woman, but not a man, undergoes: (1), 'at a tender age, she goes to her husband's family and leaves her relatives behind', (2) menstruation, (3) pregnancy, (4) giving birth, and (5) 'she waits upon a man' (*S.* IV.239). Of these, the middle three are biologically

⁷ See Schuster Barnes, 1987: 259 for a Mahāyāna text in which this 'Gopaka' says that sexual differences are empty of inherent reality.

set, while the first and last are culturally based. The passage does not say that these *should* be so, but simply that they were the case in the society of the Buddha's time – as they have been in many others. One could broaden this to say that, given certain physical pains involved in being a woman – indeed, in the past, child-birth was not infrequently life-threatening – and given that many societies have not treated women equally with men, rebirth as a man might be seen as preferable. Thus a nun who had previously lost a child says:

The state of a woman has been said to be painful by the charioteer of men-to-be-tamed [the Buddha]; even the state of being a co-wife is painful; some, having given birth once, even cut their throats. (*Thig.* 216–17)

Of course, of the five forms of suffering particular to a woman, a nun who has never married is only subject to menstruation.

The Indian brahmin background of the most famous Theravādin commentator, Buddhaghosa (fifth century CE), is perhaps an influential factor on his saying that 'the male appearance is higher (*uttamaṃ*), the female appearance is lower (*hīnaṃ*)' (*Asl.* 322). He also says that, among precious things or 'treasures',

- (1) Sentient ones, such as elephants, are 'considered foremost', when compared to insentient ones such as gems, as they are adorned with them as ornaments.
- (2) Among sentient treasures, humans are foremost, as they use animal treasures as conveyances.
- (3) Among the human treasures, the man treasure is accounted foremost as 'the woman treasure performs service for the man treasure' (*Khp.* A. 178).

Of course, this overlooks the fact that women's serving men is simply a cultural factor. It is not surprising, though, that Buddhaghosa regards rebirth as a man as established by strong wholesome actions, and rebirth as a woman as established by weak wholesome actions. As regards the case of a person coming to take on physical characteristics of the opposite sex during life, strong unwholesome action is the cause of a man coming to look like a woman, while weak unwholesome action is the cause of a woman coming to look like a man (*Asl.* 322).

In later Theravādin literature, the idea of a female rebirth as a less good one seems to be expressed. In the *Jātakas*, the wise princess Rujā says that she will be an honoured female for the next six lives; then, 'I shall be born as a son of the gods, with great power, a male deity, the best in a divine body' (*J.* vi.239, commentarial section). The *Dhammapada* com-

mentary, story 3.8, incidentally says (1.327) that a woman will be reborn as a man by good works and resolving that the karmic fruitfulness of her actions should lead to such a rebirth; also, that a wife who treats her husband well will be reborn as a man. Further than this, the Sarvāstivāda school taught that a woman who attained the ‘path of seeing’, i.e. stream-entry, would no longer be reborn as a female (*AKB*. IV.21a–b).

Among Mahāyāna texts, the ‘*Sūtra* on Changing the Female Sex’ says that a woman has more greed, hate and delusion than a man (Paul, 1979: 308). In the ‘Questions of the Daughter Pure Faith’, Pure Faith asks the Buddha how to be no longer reborn as a female. While the text implies that a woman of sufficient insight would not ask such a question, the Buddha tells her how to attain her aim, by avoiding such things as envy, and being devout, giving up attachment to home and family, and developing indifference to her female body (Schuster, 1981: 36–7). In the *Bodhi-caryāvatāra* (x.30), aspirations for beings to be free of misfortunes include one that women achieve rebirth as men, but also that those of higher status – by implication men – be without conceit. The *Sūtras* on Amitābha Buddha’s Pure Land (c. 200 CE) (see pp. 142–3) say that it will be populated only by male humans and gods, but faith will allow one who is currently female to be reborn there (Paul, 1979: 169–70).

VIEWS ON SPIRITUAL STATUSES UNATTAINABLE BY WOMEN

Of the three focuses of devotion in all schools of Buddhism, the first (the Buddha) is male, the second (*Dhamma*) is neuter and the third (the *Saṅgha* of those who have fully or partially attained *Nirvāṇa*) consists of both males and females. On the gender of a Buddha, the pre-Mahāyāna texts (*M*. III.65–6; *A*. 1.28) say that it is impossible for:

- (1) a female to be an *Arahat* who is (also) a Perfectly and Completely Awakened One (*sammā-sambuddha*): i.e. a full Buddha, one who rediscovers the Path after it has been lost to human society, and shows it to others (*M*. III.8);
- (2) a female to be a *Cakkavatti* king: a compassionate and just emperor of a huge realm (see p. 114). In many respects, such a person is seen as the secular counterpart of a perfect Buddha: at his birth, Gotama could have been either, and he said that his remains should be dealt with like those of a *Cakkavatti* (*D*. II.141)

or for any female to attain the state of:

- (3) a Sakka: ruler of the thirty-three gods of the pre-Buddhist Vedic pantheon (in which he is known as Indra), a decisive and very active god

who makes frequent appearances in the *Jātakas* to aid virtuous beings;

- (4) a Māra: an evil, tempter god who uses his power to keep people attached to the rounds of rebirth, and thus repeated death;
- (5) a Brahmā: in the realm of (elemental) form, there are sixteen heavens, the third of which is that of a Great Brahmā (*Vibh.* 424–5): a type of god full of lovingkindness and compassion (*D.* 1.249–51), who has influence over a thousand, or up to a hundred thousand world-systems (*M.* III.101–2). Nevertheless, such a being is prone to conceit and the delusion that he is eternal and a creator of worlds (*D.* 1.18). Sometimes, the beings in all the form realms are referred to as *brahmās*. The Theravādin commentary (*M. A.* IV.123), though, makes it clear that only *brahmās* in the restricted sense, i.e. Great Brahmās, are meant here. It goes on to say that while *brahmās* are neither male nor female, a human male can be a Great Brahmā in his next life, while a woman cannot.

Here, various key cosmic positions (sometimes known as the ‘five ranks’), both the worst and the best, are seen as unattainable by a female. The key qualities of the excluded positions seem to be: (1) compassionate leadership in the discovery and teaching of key knowledge, (2) compassionate rule of a huge realm, (3) decisive leadership and action for good, (4) leadership in evil and (5) power linked to kindness (and conceit). Overall, it is implied that females do not go to the extremes of attainment as do men, and, as seen in all of the above exclusions except (4), cannot combine compassion with great power. While, in the *Karaṇīyametta Sutta* (*Khp.* 8–9), a mother’s love for her only child is taken as a key example of lovingkindness, the radiation of this type of feeling is recommended to *all* beings, without exception.

Nevertheless, it is still seen as possible for a woman to be an *Arahat*, a ruler, or a god, or be reborn in most of the elemental form heavens. In the *Jātakas* (*J.* 1.201), when some men try to exclude some women from the good deed of constructing a meeting hall, a friendly carpenter helps them to be included, for ‘excepting the world of Brahmā, there is nowhere bereft of womankind’. Yet the exclusion of women from certain activities is sometimes portrayed as understandable. Thus the Buddha, when asked why women did not (at that time, in India) sit in court, engage in business or go abroad, says that it was due to their being angry, envious, greedy, of weak wisdom (*A.* II.82–3). Yet as the questioner here is Ānanda, who is frequently shown to be very helpful to women (Horner, 1930: 295–300), the exchange has less the flavour of a put-down

than a question out of sympathetic concern, even if it now sounds patronizing.

While the early texts countenance the possibility of a woman ruler, later texts of the pre-Mahāyāna schools do not seem keen on the idea. A commentarial passage in a *Jātaka* (*J.* II.326) says, ‘Where women rule, the seeing lose their sight, the strong grow weak . . . virtue and wisdom fly’, though this is not necessarily seen as the fault of women themselves. In another story (*J.* I.154–5), a stag is killed by hunters through following an attractive doe to a dangerous area, though she had warned him. The *Bodhisattva*, having watched this, says (canonical section), ‘Woe to the man pierced by the arrow-shaft (of desire)! Woe to the land where women are leaders! And they are also blamed who go under the sway of women!’ The *Jātakas* even recognize that some women deserve to rule but are stopped by cultural norms. In the (non-Theravādin) *Mahā-vastu*, a tigress wins a competition to be king of quadrupeds by winning a race. Because the animals would not have a female king, as ‘Everywhere males are king’, they say that the one she chose to marry would be king (*Mvs.* II.69–72).

Buddhist texts have a variety of views on the question of whether a female can be a *Bodhisattva*, a compassionate seeker of perfect Buddhahood. In the Theravādin *Jātakas*, on the Buddha’s previous lives as a *Bodhisattva*, he is never female, whether as a human, animal or god (Jones, 1979: 20). On the ascetic Sumedha’s resolve to strive for Buddhahood, a canonical *Jātaka* verse (*J.* I.14) and the canonical *Buddhavaṃsa* (*Bv.* ch. II, verse 59) include ‘attainment of the sexual characteristic (*liṅga-sampatti*)’ and will-power among the qualities needed for this resolve to succeed. The *Jātaka* commentary sees this as meaning that a *Bodhisattva* has to be male, and of heroic resolve, being prepared to swim across a huge ocean, if he had to, to attain Buddhahood (Warren, 1896: 14–15). Thus a female, while still in a rebirth as a female, cannot become a *Bodhisattva* and then a Buddha. Yet in the context of Theravāda Buddhism, this is in practice hardly a restriction, as Buddhas are seen as *extremely* rare individuals. The key goal is to become an *Arahat*, which is open to women.

The Mahāyāna, which encourages most to follow the *Bodhisattva* path to full Buddhahood, does generally accept that women can be *Bodhisattvas* – with texts often addressed to both ‘good sons’ and ‘good daughters’.⁸ There are different opinions in the texts, though, as to how

⁸ Though the latter are only usually included when both are addressed (Paul, 1979: 107).

far along this path they can progress while still female. One of the most restrictive is the ‘*Sūtra on Changing the Female Sex*’, which says that a woman who awakens to the thought of enlightenment ‘will not be bound to the limitation of a woman’s state of mind’, and thus be reborn (?) male from then on (Paul, 1979: 175–6). On the other hand, Asaṅga’s *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* holds that a *Bodhisattva* may be a female for the first third of the long *Bodhisattva* path, his brother Vasubandhu seeing this as lasting up to and including the seventh of the ten *Bodhisattva* stages, after which a *Bodhisattva* is irreversibly bound for Buddhahood (Paul, 1979: 212–13). The present Dalai Lama, though, holds that even such an idea of restriction on female ability was probably just due to past social influences on Buddhism (Tsomo, 1988: 42).

Not infrequently, women recognized as *Bodhisattvas* are said to be magically transformed into men, prior to further progress.⁹ The best-known example of this is in the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, or Lotus *Sūtra*,¹⁰ which reached its final form around 200 CE. Here, the eight-year-old daughter of a dragon king¹¹ is said to have great knowledge, understanding and resolve, and faultless practice. In a moment, she attains the state of an advanced *Bodhisattva*. A male *Bodhisattva* then points out that the *Bodhisattva*-path is very hard and long, so how could a young girl have done this? An *Arahat* then says that, while still female, she cannot become an irreversible *Bodhisattva*, one certain to become a Buddha (in the Sanskrit version of the text); or alternatively a Buddha, one of the ‘five ranks’ (see p. 372) (Chinese text). After the Buddha immediately accepts a gift from the girl, she likewise immediately changes into a male *Bodhisattva* and then a Buddha, to the amazement and edification of everyone present. In commenting on this episode, scholars of the Chinese T’ien-t’ai school, which saw the Lotus *Sūtra* as the highest expression of truth, held (1) that for a woman with deep insight into emptiness, change of sex is not necessary in order to attain Buddhahood, or (2) that the dragon king’s daughter was already a tenth-stage *Bodhisattva*, on the very brink of Buddhahood. They thus held that a woman could attain Buddhahood in her present life (Paul, 1979: 282–4; Schuster Barnes, 1987: 125). The Ch’an/Zen school saw the above episode as showing that sudden enlightenment was possible for anyone with appro-

⁹ Ibid., 23, 134; Lamotte, 1976: 169, n. 37; Schuster, 1981.

¹⁰ Pp. 251–3 of the Kern translation (1884), from Sanskrit, pp. 212–13 of the Kato et al. one (1975), from Chinese. See also Paul, 1979: 185–90 and Schuster, 1981: 42–4.

¹¹ *Nāgas*, snake or dragon deities, were seen to have preserved the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras* taught by the Buddha until humans were ready to receive these teachings.

priate insight (Levering, 1982: 24–5; Schuster Barnes, 1987: 126–7). The story was not seen to show that the girl had to become a male before becoming a Buddha, but that, already having attained Buddhahood through sudden insight, she then went on to manifest a male form (Levering, 1982: 26–7, 31).

Other Indian texts discussed by Diana Paul (1979: 190–211, 232–6) and Nancy Schuster (1981: 31–46) have young girls of great wisdom being challenged to change sex. At first they say that this is not necessary, and then do so anyway, but in the process make such remarks as: ‘I formerly had a female body, having the nature of emptiness, it was not real . . . Contrary views of that body arise from discrimination’ (Paul, 1979: 198). They say that enlightenment is attained by neither a female nor a male, for ‘it’ is not something to ‘attain’ at all (Schuster, 1981: 31–5), or that if one cannot attain Buddhahood in a female body, one cannot attain it in a male body either, for the thought of enlightenment, and the seeing of emptiness, is neither male nor female (Paul, 1979: 232–6).

In these texts, the notion that a female cannot be an advanced *Bodhisattva* or Buddha is being played with and critically examined. It is clear that a woman can go on to become such a being. On the one hand, there is no need to transcend the female sex to reach spiritual excellence; on the other, the wise see no reason to be attached to it, by refusing to change it. For one thing, doing so helps liberate men from their doubts about the spiritual potential of females. For another, to change sex illustrates that it has no fixed, inherent existence. This is more clearly shown in the sixth century CE *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* (Paul, 1979: 230–2; Lamotte, 1976: 169–72). Here an irreversible *Bodhisattva* goddess, when challenged by a male *Arahat* to change her sex, says that she has sought ‘femaleness’ for twelve years, but has not found it, for it is empty, an illusion. She then uses her magical powers to exchange forms with the *Arahat*, and asks him: why don’t *you* change *your* female form? Lastly, she emphasizes that being male or female is only a matter of appearances and convention, for no *dharma*s (phenomena) are either male or female. ‘Maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ are not essential ingredients of people, but relative and conditioned states or labels.

Alan Sponberg sees this approach as expressing an ideal of ‘nondualistic androgyny’ (1992: 24). Over against doubts concerning women’s spiritual abilities, which were strongly articulated in contemporary Hindu texts, and seem to have had currency among some Buddhists, these texts argue that, for those who understand emptiness and the consequent ‘sameness’ of all phenomena, distinctions of sex have no relevance to the

Bodhisattva-path (Schuster, 1981: 54–6). While it remains true that all the named Buddhas in Mahāyāna texts are actually seen as male, Tibetans now generally see Tārā (see p. 361) as a fully fledged female Buddha, as they also do Vajra-yoginī and Sarasvatī (Tsomo, 1988: 84). In one account, it is said that Tārā had once been a princess who made the *Bodhisattva* vows. When monks advised her to take the form of a man, she replied that there is no such thing as a ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘self’ or ‘person’. She then vowed that, as there were few female *Bodhisattvas*, she would remain female in all her lives as a *Bodhisattva* (Beyer, 1973: 65; Willson, 1986: 34).

IMAGES OF WISE AND WAYWARD WOMEN

The *Jātaka* stories (see p. 9), which are full of heroes, heroines and villains, contain both positive and negative images of women. It is clear that many of the stories were taken up from a floating fund of Indian folk-tales, and, in this process, attitudes which were not always Buddhist came to be included.

A number of Theravādin *Jātakas* concern virtuous or wise women. Story 194 (*J.* II.121–5) tells of a woman who saves her husband from a scheming and cruel king by calling on the gods to help, through the power of her own virtue; Sakka comes to the rescue. In story 519 (*J.* v.88–98), a virtuous woman cures her husband of leprosy by drawing on the truth-power of her statement that she loves only him. In story 544, a sixteen-year-old princess teaches *Dhamma* to her father to prevent him from believing the teachings of some ascetics of wrong view (*J.* VI.232–41). In story 66, a queen skilfully cures an ascetic of lust for her by showing him the various weighty responsibilities of married life. In story 539 (*J.* VI.64), a wise girl counsels a queen to let her ascetic husband wander alone: while two bangles on one arm knock together and make a noise, a single one does not: thus it is better to be on one’s own. In story 419 (*J.* III.436–8), a man intends to kill the wife who had previously saved him from death, in order to take her gold jewellery. Knowing of this, she pretends to bow to him and manages to push him off a cliff. The verses say, ‘A man is not always clever; here and there women are clever (*pañḍitā*) and attentive’ (p. 438). Unlike in the previous stories, this woman’s wisdom brings no benefit to a man! Wise women also appear in the *Dhammapada* commentary. Story 13.7 concerns a sixteen-year-old weaver’s daughter, who is the only person among the people of Āḷavi to take heed of the Buddha’s sermon on the need for meditation on death.

Three years later, the Buddha keeps his audience waiting while he waits for her, so that he can test her understanding. She then becomes a Stream-enterer.

In the Theravādin *Jātaka* collection, the sections most focused on women are the 'section on women' (*J.* 1.285–315) and the *Kuṇḍala Jātaka*, story 536 (*J.* v.424–56). The former contains ten stories, numbers 61–70, though only eight actually concern women. The latter stands out as particularly misogynous, being a string of stories purportedly given to monks incited by their former wives into being discontented. It talks of the untrustworthy and fickle nature of women, of their embracing men only to get their money, and their unfaithfulness to their husbands, though it includes eight reasons for a woman to despise her husband, for example his drunkenness, stupidity and neglect of her (*J.* v.433). Bollée, in his translation of this *Jātaka*, notes parallels to misogynist verses in the Hindu *Mahā-bhārata* (1970: 119–21), and also various Hindu parallels to sub-stories within it (for example pp. 150–1). Indeed its form is atypical for a *Jātaka*, as it consists of a *series* of stories, has some canonical *prose*, and has verses other than canonical ones. Bollée holds that most of the verses of the *Kuṇḍala Jātaka* are not Buddhist. Moreover, it is a *Jātaka* that has not been much portrayed in Buddhist art or other literature (p. 166), and neither a roughly parallel *Jātaka* in Chinese (p. 129) nor a thirteenth-century Sinhalese text which uses aspects of it (p. 131) is misogynous.

In a few of the other *Jātaka* stories, negative aspects of women are focused on to various extents. Stories 6, 61, 63 and 193 tell of vain or treacherous women, with the message that this is to be expected of all women. As stories of bad men do not attribute their evil to their being men, it can be seen that the *Jātakas* are generally cast in a man's 'voice', in which women are 'other'. Stories 64, 65 and 130 see women as full of wiles, with 64 saying 'Don't be glad if you think "she likes me"; don't be sad if you think "she doesn't like me"'. The state of women is hard to know, like the path of fish in water!' (*J.* 1.300). Stories 62 (prose part, *J.* 1.293) and 199 (prologue, *J.* 11.134) generalize that women are unfaithful to their husbands, with stories 120 and 130 giving notable examples of this. The sensual, worldly nature of women is emphasized in story 402, which says that women can never have enough of 'intercourse, adornment, and child-bearing' (prose, *J.* 11.342), with story 120 (prose, *J.* 1.440) saying that 'women never tire of sex, it is the nature of (their) birth'.

The message that 'they can't help it', though, is used to counsel that husbands should not be angry at their wayward wives: stories 65

(*J.* I.301–2) and 191 (*J.* II.114). The message that women make themselves available to any man, like a road (story 65), is countered by a passage in the *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya*, which says that a man breaks the third precept through delusion if his sexual behaviour is based on the view that women are just to be used (*AKB.* IV.68d). Moreover, in story 534, the view of women as unfaithful is countered by the *Bodhisattva* saying that women should not be censured, for ‘as great beings, women are born in the world’, and as mothers, they are the source of life and breath to a man (verses, *J.* V.368).

In his survey of the Theravādin *Jātakas*, John G. Jones (1979: 81–116) cites twenty-four (4.4 per cent) as explicitly addressed to monks who wished to disrobe in order to marry or remarry (p. 81), such stories painting a negative picture of life with a woman (see, for example *J.* V.209–10). Jones also cites another nineteen stories (3.5 per cent) which see women as unfaithful, untrustworthy and fickle etc. He also refers (p. 100) to fourteen stories with a more positive image of women. However, the negative depiction of women in some *Jātakas* is not something that the Theravādin tradition emphasized. Of the thirty-five *Jātaka* stories which are specially selected in the canonical *Cariyā-piṭaka*, on the various perfections of the *Bodhisattva*, only one of Jones’ ‘offending’ forty-three is included (no. 443, at Cp. II.4), and here, the story is not actually misogynous. In the *Dhammapada* commentary stories, the strain of negative thought on women in the *Jātakas* is ignored except for story 18.5 (text, III.348–9), which has the message that a man should not be angry with his wife for adultery. While it is not to be denied that there is a strain of negative imagery on women within the *Jātakas* – which Sponberg (1992: 18–24) refers to as ‘ascetic misogyny’ – it should be noted that the 1895 English translation (as used by Jones, but not above) exaggerates this to some extent.

One can see the *Jātakas*, when they are particularly depicting or discussing women, as:

- (1) warning monks tempted to break their vows of celibacy that it is not worth it;
- (2) warning laymen not to be distracted by their wives’ actions from coming to listen to Buddhist teachings;
- (3) helping laymen not to take any failings of their wives personally, and thus not to be angry with them;
- (4) to support an ideal of mutual support within marriage, unless one partner – usually the male – wishes to be ordained;
- (5) giving positive role-models for women, as virtuous, wise women who

support the ideal of renunciation of family life, for those who wish to pursue it.

ASCETIC WARINESS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX

The Buddha often emphasized the overcoming of desire for and attachment to sensual pleasures (see p. 89): an ideal which is at the basis of the Buddha's founding of a celibate *Saṅgha*. In this, for example, monks should look on women as if they were mothers, sisters or daughters (*S.* IV.110–11). At *A.* III.68–9, the Buddha tells his monks that there is no sight, sound, smell, taste or touch so enticing and distracting as that of a woman, so that he who clings to any of these grieves for a long time. He then goes on to say that, in whatever posture or action, a woman 'persists in overpowering a man's mind (*cittaṃ pariyādāya tiṭṭhati*)'. Women are thus to be seen as a 'snare of Māra', such that it is safer for a monk to sit down with a poisonous snake, or a man with a sword, than sit down alone with a woman, particularly if he is without mindfulness. Accordingly, it is said that woman is the 'stain' of the holy life (*S.* I.38), and the following discussion is found:

Lord, how are we to act towards women?' 'Do not see them, Ānanda.' 'But if we see them, how should we behave, Lord?' 'Do not speak to them, Ānanda.' 'But if they speak to us, Lord, how should we behave?' 'Practice mindfulness, Ānanda.' (*D.* II.141)

It is also said that a monk should not teach *Dhamma* to women, without the presence of a learned man, in more than five or six sentences in one session, though this could be expanded if they asked questions (*Vin.* IV.20–3).

Nevertheless, just as there is nothing like the sight, sound, scent, taste or touch of a woman to 'persist in overpowering a man's mind', exactly the *same* is said of the effect of a man on a woman, in the very first *Sutta* of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* (*A.* I.1–2). Thus such texts are not to be seen as expressing misogyny, but as warnings to celibates to be wary of the attractions of the opposite sex. It is unfortunate that the Pali Text Society translation of *A.* III.68–9 (above) wrongly says that a woman '*will stop to ensnare the heart of a man*' instead of that she, through her sight etc. 'persists in overpowering a man's mind', because of *his* attachment to the female form. Sponberg (1992: 20–1), Schuster Barnes (1987: 257, n. 1) and Paul (1979: 54, n. 14) all use this incorrect translation. Paul (1979: 6–7) also holds that a passage at *S.* I.124–7, in which 'Māra's daughters' –

craving, discontent and attachment – fail to tempt the Buddha with the various beguiling female forms they take, shows a ‘prototype of woman as evil’. If this were so, then Māra’s being male would show a ‘prototype of man as evil’. But Buddhism does not see either as inherently evil. Schuster Barnes (1987: 110–14) has a good critique of the incorrect notion that Buddhist asceticism led to monks ‘despising’ women.

The stories of temptations of Māra to certain nuns quoted above (p. 359) show that they were as liable to sensual distractions as monks. The nearest one gets to misogyny in such passages is perhaps in one where the Buddha is said to tell his monks that womankind has five disadvantages, like a black snake: ‘she is unclean, bad-smelling, timid, fearful and betrays friends’; like such a snake, she is also angry, grudging, deadly poisonous – for ‘she mostly has strong attachment’, a forked tongue – for ‘she mostly indulges in back-biting speech’, and betrays friends – for ‘she mostly commits adultery’ (*A.* III.260–1). Here, ascetic wariness about the opposite sex becomes a focusing on purported unattractive features of it.

The overcoming of distractions posed by the opposite sex was seen as a form of heroic strength, for monks or nuns. This is shown by *A.* III.89–93, which compares five types of warriors and monks. Just as a warrior may give up at the sight of the dust raised by an approaching enemy, or his flag, or his sound, or on being struck, or is victorious, so a monk may disrobe when he hears of some beautiful girls, or when he sees them, or on being railed at and scorned by a woman, or when a woman deliberately cuddles up to him; or he remains mindful, even if a woman cuddles up to him. Likewise, when a man tries to seduce a nun, she says, ‘it is not fitting, sir, that a man should touch a woman who has gone forth’ (*Thig.* 367). As he is so entranced by her eyes, she takes one out and gives it him, to shock him out of his attachment to her body (*Thig.* 396).

The *Vinaya* certainly refers to weaker monks making various attempts to get round the rule against abstinence from sexual activity, for example keeping a female monkey to have sex with (*Vin.* III.21), or having intercourse with a wooden doll (*Vin.* III.35–7). There is also reference to a monk agreeing to have sex with a woman when she ‘assures’ him that she alone will make all the necessary movements (*Vin.* III.36), and to a monk speaking lewdly to some women (*Vin.* III.128). That is, monks are not seen as helpless victims of temptresses, but as having the potential for plenty of weaknesses themselves! Moreover, if the texts have more warning to monks than to nuns to be careful as regards the opposite sex,

this may well have been partly because alms-givers were generally women, and thus monks had more meetings with the opposite sex (cf. *M.* 1.462, *A.* III.259).

As regards Mahāyāna texts, Diana Paul gives translations of two texts which she sees as portraying women as 'sexually uncontrollable' (1979: 3) and 'diabolical' tempters of monks (p. 8). She thus sees the texts as showing 'extreme prejudice' against women (p. 10) from the supposedly resentful monks who composed them (p. 6). In fact, the first text (Paul, 1979: 11–25), the '*Sūtra* of the Buddha Teaching the Seven Daughters', betrays no such attitudes. In it, the Buddha simply points out that wise women do not get attached to their appearance, for they know that this fades with age and ends with death. He also warns women against jealousy, as this is a frequent reason for their being reborn in hell. His audience then 'not as male or female, were ecstatic' (Paul, 1979: 22–4). The second text is the 'Tale of King Udayana of Vatsa' (Paul, 1979: 25–50). This concerns a king who nearly kills a very virtuous wife on account of the slander of her by a jealous co-wife. On realizing his mistake, he goes to the Buddha, ashamed of his deed, and asks him to explain fully the 'flattery and deceit . . . the faults of women, their obsequiousness and their lying and treachery' (p. 29), for women influence him to do things leading to hell. The Buddha replies that, to understand the faults of women, the king must first know men's faults, which lead them to be perplexed by women. He describes men as having four such faults:

1 They have insatiable desire for women, such that they do not frequent monks and brahmins and do not cultivate moral and spiritual states (pp. 29–35). Being like hungry demons, they are shackled to women through their desire, and consequently do evil. Such men are seen as like dogs on heat. It is said that 'women can ruin the precepts of purity . . . causing one to go to hell' (p. 31). In cavorting with prostitutes, or having affairs when they are already married, men generate suffering for themselves. Such men are foolish and confused as, intoxicated by desire, they turn away from wisdom and virtue.

2 They turn against their parents when they marry (pp. 35–7; cf. *S.* 1.176).

3 They vainly pass their time, doing evil, not realizing that life is short (pp. 37–9). In this, they are confused by desire, and act in cruel ways.

4 When rich, they lavish money on women, being submissive to them through desire, and do not give to monks or brahmins (pp. 39–49). Intoxicated by desire, they race towards women like hogs towards mud, but these bewilder and deceive them, and can be pitilessly cruel. It would

be better for a good man to be seized by a killer than to be close to a woman. A woman's external beauty hides inner (physical) impurity, of blood, bones and mucus etc., so that women are more detestable than a dead dog. But 'fools are bound to the appearance of women'. Through flattering men, women catch them like a fisherman using a net. But fools still commit adultery, and assault women, and thus generate future pain for themselves in hell. The Buddha complains that even those who have heeded his teaching sometimes fall away because of lust.

Paul sees the above as a 'vituperative polemic against women' by 'monks who projected their own insecurities and weaknesses onto women', being jealous of them as powerful competitors for people's attentions (1979: 26). Yet the above passages could just as easily be read as a survey of the suffering generated through men's actions being dictated only by their sexual desire, and women selfishly exploiting their power to sexually attract men. In this regard, both men and women can be at fault.

Clearly the passage discussed by Paul does contain a strong dose of ascetic unromantic realism about the unattractiveness of much of the human body. Early texts likewise have contemplations on body components – in oneself and others – and rotting corpses, to undercut sensual desire and attachment (*M.* 1.57–9). But such considerations apply equally to both male and female bodies. Thus, after describing the 'unclean' nature of a woman's body, so as to undermine male lust, Nāgārjuna says:

Since your own body is
As filthy as a woman's,
Should not you abandon
Desire for self and other? (*RPR.* 165)

Admittedly, the unattractive features of the body are often described in the texts as those of a female body, or just a body of unspecified sex. This is probably because monks were more numerous than nuns, and had a greater role in handing on the texts. Describing negative features of the *female* body is an appropriate medicine, a skilful means, for a celibate male who is having difficulty dealing with lust. It should be understood in this practical context, and not be taken personally by female readers. In fact, as male lust is often directed at a male's fantasy-influenced constructed image of a woman, reflections on the unattractive features of the body can simply be seen as a way of deconstructing this *image* in a man's mind. The emphasis on unattractive features of a *female* body may perhaps also be because men have a somewhat greater

tendency to be attracted to the *appearance* of a female body than women have to be attracted to the *appearance* of a male body, rather than such factors as a sense of humour and the sound of the voice.

In any case, to emphasize, in certain contexts, the unattractive aspects of the body beneath its surface attractiveness is in no way to look down on either a female or a male person. The early texts encourage the development of lovingkindness to all beings (for example *S.* v.119; cf. *Vism.* 382), and in fact genuine friendliness to a member of the opposite sex may be facilitated precisely by *not* seeing him or her in terms of his or her sexual attractiveness.

One can, though, see a continuity, in the Mahāyāna passages referred to above, with some of those on women in the *Jātaka* stories. As many Buddhist texts are addressed to men, the negative features of women get over-emphasized. When this happens, Sponberg may be right in seeing a convergence with a concern for purification from pollution that has its roots in pan-Indian ascetic traditions with pre-Buddhist origins (1992: 22). The *Śikṣā-samuccaya* contains a passage, for example, which says that hindering someone – man or woman – from being ordained leads a man into such rebirths as being blind, an outcast, a hermaphrodite, a woman, a dog or a snake (*Ss.* 73–4).

The Mahāyāna, though, also contains texts which seek to undercut the idea that the body is intrinsically impure. Candrakīrti often cited a passage in the *Dyḍhādhyāśaya-pariṣṛccha Sūtra* which says that, just as it would be foolish to contemplate the impurity of a woman conjured up by a magician, so it is for a person to contemplate the impurity of anything that does not truly exist: for everything is empty of inherent existence (Sponberg, 1992: 23).

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

A Buddhist *Saṅgha* of nuns (*bhikkhunīs*) was founded by the Buddha five years after his enlightenment. The issue is dealt with in Theravāda texts at *Vin.* II.253–83 and A. IV.274–80 and discussed by Horner (1930: 95–161), Khantipalo (1979: 133–8), Nattier (1991) and Sponberg (1992: 13–18).

Prior to there being a Buddhist order of nuns, one had existed in Jainism (see *Thig.* 107–11), a slightly older religion. The Jain order, though, for both men and women, was more solitary and less organized than the Buddhist one. Moreover, by the first century CE, Jainism had split into the ‘White clad’ (*Śvetāmbara*) and ‘Sky clad’ (*Digambara*) fraternities

(Basham, 1967: 291), with the latter (whose monks wear no clothes) actually denying that women were capable of liberation (see Jaini, 1991). As regards other precedents, Buddhist texts also refer to a few women religious wanderers (*M.* 1.305) and free-lance debaters.

In the Theravāda *Vinaya* (Pali texts on monastic discipline), discussion of the issue starts by referring to Mahā-Pajāpati Gotamī, the aunt and foster-mother of the Buddha (see p. 360). She comes to the Buddha and asks him to allow women to be ordained. The Buddha replies, 'Be careful, Gotamī, of the going forth of women from home into homelessness.' She asks twice more but receives the same reply each time. She then goes away, crying, and then she and her companions shave off their hair and don yellow monastic robes, to show their sincerity and determination. They then follow the Buddha to another place, arriving dirty, with swollen feet and in tears. They meet Ānanda, the Buddha's faithful attendant monk. When Gotamī explains why she is crying, Ānanda says that he will ask again, on her behalf. Asking three times, he receives the same reply as she had. He then changes his tack and asks,

Now Lord, are women, having gone forth from home into homelessness in the *Dhamma* and Discipline proclaimed by the Perfect One, able to realize the fruit of Stream-entry, or of Once-returning, or of Non-returning, or of Arahatsip? (*Vin.* 11.254)¹²

To this, the Buddha replies that they can indeed attain these states of sanctity (see pp. 39–40). Ānanda then says that, because of this, and because Gotamī had been the Buddha's foster-mother, it would be good if the Buddha would grant ordination to women. The Buddha then agrees, on condition that the nuns accept eight 'important rules (*garudhammā*)' (*Vin.* 11.255; discussed below), which they do.

The Buddha's apparent hesitation on this matter is reminiscent of his hesitation on whether to teach at all (*M.* 1.168–9), as he at first thought that no-one else would understand the profound discovery he had made at his enlightenment. In both cases, he only agrees once good reasons are cited: some 'have little dust in their eyes' and will understand; women can attain advanced states of insight. While the ordination of women was not a complete innovation, I. B. Horner comments that it was considered unusual at the time, and was made in the face of the 'dead weight' of public opinion (1930: 110), so that 'What Gotama did for women shines as a bright light in the history of freedom' (p. 113).

¹² *Dhp. A.* 1.115 says that Mahā-Pajāpati, at a time prior to the death of her husband and her request for ordination, was already a Stream-enterer.

The Buddhist tradition actually sees it as impossible for the Buddha not to have agreed finally to Gotamī's request. The Buddha says that the holy life instituted by him would have been incomplete without nuns undertaking to practise *Dhamma* (*M.* 1.491–3). Some of the thirty-two characteristics that Gotama's body was said to have had, from birth, are seen as indicating that, if he became a Buddha, he would be popular among and loved by monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen (*D.* III.167–8). Again, the Buddha is portrayed as knowing, soon after his enlightenment, that he would have an order of nuns (*D.* II.113). Descriptions of past Buddhas at *D.* II.4–7 mention the names of their two chief male disciples, but do not specifically refer to any female disciples. However, the *Buddhavaṃsa*, a late canonical text, gives the names of the two chief nun disciples of each (for example *Bv.* II, verse 214), and the names of Gotama Buddha's chief nun disciples are 'predicted' (III, verse 15). Given that the outline of a Buddha's life is seen as following a set pattern, this implies that the founding of an order of nuns was regarded as a set part of such a life. A Buddha is thus destined to have spiritual 'daughters' as well as spiritual 'sons'.

The *Vinaya* passage on the start of the nun's order continues with the Buddha saying (once Gotamī had withdrawn; p. 256) that, but for the ordination of women, the 'holy life' would have lasted long, and 'true *Dhamma*' (i.e. the highest level of practice of Buddhism, prior to any decline: cf. *Miln.* 132–4) would have lasted a thousand years; now it would only last for five hundred years (but for twice as many people). He then backs this up by comparing a religious order with women in it to: (1) a household with many women and few men in it, which easily falls prey to robbers, (2), a rice field that does not last long, because of an attack of mildew, (3), a field of sugar-cane that does not last long, because of an attack of red-rust. That is, he is portrayed as seeing the monastic *Saṅgha* as less strong and healthy by admitting women to it. He then says that he has instituted the eight important rules for nuns as a precaution against future problems. Buddhaghosa's Theravādin commentary, here, sees the eight special rules as ensuring that the 'true *Dhamma*' will last a thousand years, with Buddhism as a whole lasting five thousand years.¹³

E. J. Thomas (1949: 110), though, questions the historicity of aspects of the Pali account of the ordination of nuns, as this is said to be five years after the Buddha's enlightenment, and just after the death of his

¹³ *Vin. A.* 1291, translated in Tsomo, 1988: 261–2.

father (*Thig. A.* 141; Rhys Davids and Norman, 1989: 72). However, the *Vinaya* account implies that Ānanda was the Buddha's attendant at the time, though he is not said to have been appointed formally as attendant until twenty years after the enlightenment, which would also be too late for the death of the Buddha's father. A further point, made by Liz Williams,¹⁴ is that at *M.* III.253–5, Gotamī is described in a way indicating that she is a lay person – as following the five lay precepts – in a passage which continues with the Buddha talking to Ānanda of gifts given to both the *Saṅgha* of monks and the *Saṅgha* of nuns. If the nuns' order existed when Gotamī was still a lay person, then the account which includes her being the first nun is cast into doubt;¹⁵ though the conflict may arise from *M.* III.253–5 consisting of two originally separate passages being put together in one text.

The Sarvāstivādins, in their *Madhyamāgama*, and the Dharmaguptakas, Mahīśāsakas and Haimavatas, in their *Vinaya* texts, give an account close to that of the Theravādins (Nattier, 1991: 29). All these monastic fraternities were heirs of the Sthaviravādins of the first schism (around 315 BCE), who disagreed with the Mahā-sāṃghikas on certain matters (Nattier, 1991: 30–2). While surviving texts of the latter fraternity are meagre, none of them contains an account of the founding of the order of nuns, even the *Mahā-vastu*, which contains much miscellaneous story material that might have included it. Jan Nattier thus holds that the account as we have it is later than the first schism. Alan Sponberg sees the account, particularly the relatively elaborated Pali version, as a mythicized account of the processes of mediation surrounding the founding of the nuns' order, a result of reconciliation and compromise between different factions of the *Saṅgha* (1992: 13–16). He dates the account between 200 and 237 BCE, after the Sarvāstivādins and Vibhajyavādins (parent body of the Theravādins) split, but before the Mahīśāsakas split off (1992: 32–3). Given that the Sarvāstivādins broadly share the account, though, such a late date seems implausible. Moreover, the above argument for it being later than even the first schism rests only on the lack of evidence in Mahā-sāṃghika texts, of which few survive. No school using a monastic code of this school has survived; monastics of Southern, Northern and Eastern Buddhism all use codes from the Sthaviravādin schools.

Diana Paul (1979: 80–7) gives the translation of an account of the

¹⁴ One of my research students.

¹⁵ A strange echo between the two conflicting passages, though, is Ānanda's reference, in identical words, to the ways in which Gotamī had looked after Gotama as his foster mother.

ordination of nuns from a fragment of a Sanskrit text, *possibly* of the Mūla-Sarvāstivādin school. In this, the account is given in the first person, by the Buddha (which is odd for an early Buddhist text). The Buddha at first refuses ordination for women, except for Gotamī. He then agrees to allow it for other women too, after Ānanda asks him, but there is no reference to the spiritual potential of women, or to Gotamī's having been the Buddha's foster-mother. Here, the Buddha's agreeing without there being any further argument seems odd. The Buddha first says that it is unsuitable for women to be ordained, giving the similes of a family with few women in it etc., then gives the eight important rules as a preventative measure which will allow ordination. Sponberg (1992: 32–4) sees this as an earlier version than the Pali one. However, a continuation of the text (at Paul, 1979: 92) refers to newly ordained nuns as having three 'supports': robes, alms-food and medicine. There is no reference to the root of trees as home, for while this was allowed in the early period of the nuns, they came to be prohibited from living in the forest, for their own safety (*Vin.* II.278). This suggests that the text is not a particularly early one.

The Theravādin account of the beginnings of the nun's order (*Vin.* II.253–83) *also* refers to three supports for nuns (p. 274), though in a passage which comes *after* others which show that the nuns' order had already been in existence for some time when *they* were composed. Nevertheless, Hirakawa has argued that the content of the eight chief rules shows that they were not formulated when the Buddha first gave ordination to women, but later.¹⁶ The different traditions of monastic discipline do not completely agree, for example, on what the six rules for a probationary nun, referred to in one of the eight, are (Tsomo, 1988: 256).

The most likely reason for the Buddha's caution over ordaining women – if we take the Theravāda account at face value – was concern over the danger of sexual relations between monks and nuns, if they were to be in close association. In this topic, it is worth noting a passage at *M.* I.306, on renunciants and brahmins who hold that 'There is no fault in pleasures of the senses' and so take their sexual pleasure with girl wanderers, saying that 'Happiness is in the young, soft and downy arms of this girl-wanderer.' Their view, that sense-pleasures are no 'stumbling-block' for a monk or nun, is, in fact, the only actual *view*, as opposed to overt behaviour, for which a monk can be condemned (if he

¹⁶ 1982: 37, as cited in Tsomo, 1988: 224.

persistently makes it; *Vin.* iv.133–6). Given the centrality of celibacy to the monastic life, then, the danger of sexual relations could indeed be viewed as a ‘mildew’ etc. in the *Saṅgha*. Moreover, women were themselves regarded as strongly orientated towards sex and having children (see p. 402). In any case, given the importance of the *Saṅgha*’s being above suspicion, a focus of devout, uplifting respect for the laity, male and female, any excuse for scandal-mongering had to be avoided. The eight rules can thus be seen as a guard against even suspicion of sexual relations among monastics, as well as a way of promoting and preserving the integrity of the order of nuns as a group independent of the secular world, except through material support.

The first special rule is that ‘A nun who has been ordained (even) for a century must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined hands, do proper homage to a monk ordained but that day’ – a rule also found among those for Jain nuns (Jaini, 1991: 20). After accepting this rule, it is said that Gotamī, via Ānanda, later tries to get the Buddha to relax it (*Vin.* ii.257–8), so that the monks and nuns would greet each other (by bowing etc.) simply according to the length of time in the *Saṅgha*, as is the case among monks, and among nuns. The Buddha refuses, though, saying that other sects, with less concern for guarding their discipline, did not allow the greeting of women, so how could he? This reply seems to suggest that this rule arose mainly as a wish not to go too much against the grain of the current views of the relationship between men and women. It is interesting, though, that *Vin.* ii.262 adds a rider to the rule: a monk is *not* to be formally greeted by nuns if he has flirted with, or tried to seduce, a nun. In any case, the important thing might be seen as the fact that there was a clear way of deciding who bows to whom in the *Saṅgha*, as bowing is beneficial to all who do it. Juniors should always bow to seniors, and members of the ‘junior’ order – i.e. that which was established later – should bow to members of the senior one. Even among monks, one who bows to a senior might still be more spiritually advanced than him, for it is said that even a Stream-enterer lay person will bow to a monk who is an ordinary person (*Miln.* 162): so order of bowing is not the same as order of spiritual advancement.

The sixth special rule was ‘When, as a probationer (*sikkhamānā*), she has trained in the six (probationary) rules for two years, she should seek ordination from both *Saṅghas*.’ The category of being a probationer only applied to women, who had to follow the first five of the ten precepts of a novice (which include celibacy: see p. 88) plus not eating after noon. Having shown herself worthy of ordination, a woman had to be

ordained as a nun by a group of nuns and then the ordination had to be confirmed by a group of monks. Monks only needed to be ordained by monks. In the original ordination ceremony, a woman was asked if her mother and father had given permission for the ordination (as for monks), not her husband. Later, though, it became an offence (requiring expiation) to ordain a woman without her husband's permission (*Vin.* II.271; *Vin.* IV.334–5). There is no necessity to ask if a prospective monk has his wife's permission, though it is common to ask anyway, out of a sense of social obligation. Another relevant point, here, is that if a nun left the *Saṅgha* to join a non-Buddhist sect, she could not be reordained later, whereas a monk could be, after a four-month probationary period (*Vin.* I.69).

Overall, the eight special rules show that the nuns always had to show formal respect to the monks, were dependent on them for a number of ceremonies, and were under their protection. This implies that, in some ways, there are parallels between their relationship and the Buddha's view of the proper relationship of men and women in marriage. This can be seen in the case of the *Sigālovāda Sutta* advice on marriage (see p. 100):

- (1) while a man should hand over authority to his wife, the monks are the source of authority in monastic matters, but delegate it to the nuns;
- (2) while the husband should not disparage his wife, and should give her clothes and jewellery, monks should respect nuns and share with them their greatest possession: *Dhamma*, by teaching them;
- (3) if treated well by her husband, a wife will run the household well; if taught well by the monks (and by other nuns), nuns will practise well;
- (4) while both a husband and wife should be faithful, both monks and nuns should be faithful to the monastic discipline, especially celibacy.

As Jampa Tsedroen, a German nun in the Tibetan tradition, sees it, in the Buddha's day, women were not used to making independent decisions, but looked to men for guidance and protection. To have made the nuns independent of the monks would thus have been impractical and made the nuns vulnerable. Thus the Buddha sought to ensure that the nuns gained knowledge and advice from the monks (Tsomo, 1988: 47–8). As an alternative to seeing analogies between the monk–nun relationship and marriage, one might see it as akin to that of protective elder brother to younger sister (Kabilsingh, in Tsomo, 1988: 226). Such a view is tenable as the monks are sometimes said to be spiritual 'sons' of the Buddha (*D.* II.84), with the nuns as his 'daughters' (*Thig.* 336; cf. 46).

Alan Sponberg (1992: 13–18) speaks of the position of nuns, under male authority, as showing an ‘institutional androcentrism’ in Buddhism. He argues that social acceptability was a key concern to the *Saṅgha*, given that it depended on material support from lay society. Monks and nuns had to be sufficiently separated to give no excuse for accusations of improper conduct between them, but not so separate that the nuns became an autonomous group of women uncontrolled by some male authority, which was unacceptable to society at large (p. 17). Perhaps one sign of this is the fact that only a fully ordained monk can split a *Saṅgha*: not a nun, a novice, or a lay person (*Vin.* 11.204; *Miln.* 108; *AKB.* 1v.100a–b). Thus, ‘For all its commitment to inclusiveness at the doctrinal level, institutional Buddhism was not able to (or saw no reason to) challenge prevailing attitudes about gender roles in society’ (Sponberg, 1992: 18).

Indeed, it seems that monks were not always happy with the fact that the Buddha had ordained nuns. At the first council, convened just after the Buddha’s death, Ānanda is held to account on various matters, including having made efforts to attain the ordination of women, this being said to be an ‘offence of wrong-doing’ (a minor offence). While he does not himself see it as an offence, he acknowledges it as one, out of faith in the *Arahat* monk elders of the council (*Vin.* 11.289). The council consisted of 499 *Arahat* elder monks – no nuns – selected by Mahā-Kassapa (the most senior monk), with Ānanda, who became an *Arahat* on the eve of the council, as an important final member (*Vin.* 11.285–6). Mahā-Kassapa had been praised by the Buddha as excelling in the quality of shaking off inner defilements by careful attention to monastic discipline (*A.* 1.23), and had a great concern that the *Saṅgha* be healthy and long lasting, emphasizing that a contented, abstemious life was the key to this and its ability to produce *Arahats* (*S.* 11.194–224). He was a very ascetic monk who loved the simple life in the forest, away from the crowds (*Thag.* 1051–62) – and where nuns were not allowed to dwell. Moreover, on one occasion, he had to be asked three times by Ānanda to go and teach the nuns (*S.* 11.215). In short, he seems to have had little to do with the nuns, and was concerned lest the foundation of their order might have a bad effect on the persistence of good discipline and spiritual realization.

In her introductions to her translations of the *Vinaya*, the *Book of the Discipline*, I. B. Horner points out:

Life for the nuns was probably harder than it was for the monks. In spite of the sympathy with which their troubles were met, they were to some extent discriminated against. (vol.v, p. xiv)

Fairly frequently, the monks had a lesser penalty than nuns, for the same offence. (vol. III, p. xxxviii)

A great number of women are traditionally held to have flocked to the Order of nuns. It is conceivable that they were generally regarded as of poorer quality than the monks, and therefore there had to be a severer testing in order to weed out those who had entered without having a real vocation. (vol.v, p. xiv)

For nuns, there are four extra offences entailing expulsion from the *Saṅgha*: with sensual intent, touching a man anywhere between collar bone and knee or going to a rendezvous with him; not making known that another nun has broken a rule entailing expulsion; and persistently imitating a monk suspended for bad behaviour (*Vin.* IV.211–25). Of course, the fact that nuns have more rules to follow (311 in the Theravādin *Vinaya*, against 227 for monks) is a product of the fact that they have to follow all the rules for monks along with those particular to themselves.

One measure of the status of women is the amount of karmic fruitfulness (or ‘merit’: *puñña*) that is said to accrue from giving alms to nuns. Such karmic fruitfulness is said to vary in proportion to the virtue and holiness of both the recipient and the donor (*M.* III.256). This, in turn, is probably due to the extent of positive, joyful intention which tends to accompany acts of giving, this being the greater when the donor and/or recipient is/are particularly virtuous. At *M.* III.256–7, the order of karmic fruitfulness from giving to different sections of the *Saṅgha* is, in decreasing order, as follows:

Both *Saṅghas* with the Buddha at their head.

Both *Saṅghas* after the Buddha’s death.

The whole *Saṅgha* of monks.

The whole *Saṅgha* of nuns.

A number of monks and nuns specified by the *Saṅgha*.

A number of monks specified by the *Saṅgha*.

A number of nuns specified by the *Saṅgha*.

Here, nuns always come after monks at any level of generality, though there is more karmic fruitfulness in giving to all the nuns rather than a limited number of monks. The slightly lesser karmic fruitfulness accruing from gifts to nuns can best be seen as a reflection of the male-centredness of Indian society in the Buddha’s day. In that situation, there would be more joy – in a man or woman – in giving to a male monastic than a female one.¹⁷ Of course, the same reasoning would imply that in any modern society which was not male-centred, this would not be the case.

¹⁷ Note that, at *Vin.* II.268, if a layman or laywoman bequeaths goods to ‘the *Saṅgha*’, they belong to the monks, not nuns. If a nun makes such a bequest, though, the goods belong to the order of nuns.

NUNS AND OTHER FEMALE RELIGIOUS ROLES IN
BUDDHIST CULTURES

Ancient India

In accordance with the above, it appears that it was harder for nuns to get alms than for monks. At *Vin.* iv.175–6, it is said, in relation to a starving nun, that ‘Women obtain things with difficulty’ (as at *Vin.* iii.208). It is also stated that nuns should not ordain new nuns every year, as there was not enough accommodation for them (*Vin.* iv.336). The relative difficulty of nuns getting alms seems to have persisted in India. In the *Bodhi-caryāvātāra*, an eighth-century CE text, Śāntideva includes the aspiration ‘May nuns be materially sufficient, abandon quarrelling (with each other) and be unharmed’ (*Bca.* x.44). Moreover, the idea of female renunciation, if this involved leaving young children, was frowned on. Thus in the *Ĵātakas*, the *Bodhisattva*, as an ascetic who has left his children in the care of relatives, mildly rebukes his ex-wife for having gone off to be an ascetic without thought of them (*Ĵ.* iii.376–83). Elsewhere, though, there is no censure when the *Bodhisattva* leaves his wife, once she has given birth to the child she was carrying, to become an ascetic (*Ĵ.* ii.139–41).

In the early period, the nuns nevertheless seemed to have flourished. In the edicts of the emperor Asoka (268–239 BCE), there are a number of references to nuns, and their status can be seen from the fact that his own daughter became a nun, Saṅghamittā. Nuns were also numerous and well supported up to around 300 CE, though they appear only rarely in Mahāyāna *Sūtras* (Paul, 1979: 79). Respected women in Mahāyāna texts are usually laywomen, towards whom certain texts are specifically directed (Tsomo, 1988: 101, 175).

After 300 CE, nuns’ numbers seemed to drop, as evidenced by the much smaller number of inscriptions recording donations to Buddhist temples etc. by nuns,¹⁸ and the fact that the records of Chinese pilgrims visiting India in 399–400, 629–43 and 671 CE do not mention many communities of nuns in their accounts. The 671 report (of I Ching) also says that nuns did not receive the same material support as monks (Falk, 1980: 209–11). As Hinduism reasserted itself, Hindu social norms for women, which may have gradually influenced Buddhists, would have led to reluctance to support women who renounced their expected roles as wives and mothers. That Buddhists nevertheless sought to resist this

¹⁸ From donations given them by the laity, or by the laity on their behalf.

trend is shown, for example, by the sixth-century Tamil epic *Maṇimekalai*. This undercut existing Hindu ideals of romance, and argued for Buddhist ideals, through the story of a courtesan's daughter who resisted suitors and became a nun (Richman: 1992). Historical and archaeological records show that nuns probably existed in India till the general demise of Buddhism there, in the tenth or eleventh century (Kabilsingh, 1991: 30). Nevertheless, it can be seen that the order of nuns came to lose its original prestige and creativity as it faded into relative historical obscurity (Sponberg, 1992: 18).

Lands of Eastern Buddhism

In Eastern Buddhism, Confucian strictures on the behaviour of women meant, for example, that Chinese nuns had to live in isolated localities. Nevertheless, the order of nuns was very successful in China, and China, Taiwan and Korea are the only places where fully ordained *bhikṣuṇīs* (Pali *bhikkhunīs*) still exist. In China, nuns were sometimes quite influential in both religious and political matters, which may have been due to the fact that the organizational structures of monks and nuns were always separate in China (Paul, 1979: 80). The *Pi-ch'iu-ni chuan* records the biographies of sixty-five eminent nuns over the period 317–516 CE (Tsai, 1994; Conze et al., 1954: 291–5), including those excelling in asceticism, meditation, faith and teaching, or scholarship and teaching (Schuster Barnes, 1987: 124; Schuster 1985: 93–6). Some wrote commentaries and treatises, though no such work known to be by Chinese women has survived. Moreover, no-one added to this early record of nuns, in the way that similar records of eminent monks were added to (Schuster Barnes, 1987: 130).

The popularity of becoming a nun may have been partly because it offered respite from the low status of women in secular society (Welch, 1967: 392), though this effect did not seem to lead to the popularity of nuns in a Hindu-dominated India. At various times, the number of monks and nuns in China has been recorded, as shown in table 1:

Table 1

Year	Nuns	Monks	Ratio	
729	50,358	75,524	1:1.5	(Ch'en, 1973: 85)
1221	61,240	397,615	1:6.5	(Ch'en, 1964: 401)
1930	225,200	513,000	1:2	(Welch, 1967: 412–14)

The low ratio of nuns to monks in 1221 may reflect the rising influence of Neo-Confucianism. While the number of monks and nuns in Communist China is now much lower, as it is in Communist Vietnam, the Chinese order of *bhikṣuṇīs* is strongly established in Taiwan, where members outnumber the monks (around 6,500 to 3,500): with greater affluence, families no longer have a financial need to have a son looked after at a monastery. Taiwan's biggest monastery is largely run by the nuns, who outnumber the monks there by three to one. Taiwan can in fact be seen as the main stronghold of Buddhist *bhikṣuṇīs* in the world. The nuns have the same opportunities in Buddhist education as the monks, and the same responsibilities in teaching. They are also involved in social and medical work, teaching in schools, Buddhist colleges and universities, and working in Buddhist publishing ventures (Tsomo, 1988: 121–3, 179, 189–94). The Chinese order of nuns is also found to some extent in countries which include Chinese populations, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand. In South Korea, the *bhikṣuṇī* order is also strong and active: it is the mainstay of day-to-day Buddhism, with the nuns also being strong on monastic discipline and meditation, and having good educational facilities (Tsomo, 1988: 134).

Insufficient *bhikṣuṇīs* reached Japan from Korea ever to ordain Japanese *bhikṣuṇīs*, so Japanese nuns have only been novices following ten precepts, plus the *Brahmajāla Sūtra Bodhisattva*-precepts that the monks also followed (Tsomo, 1988: 129). From at least the seventeenth century, nuns did not have a high status, having been unable to live in proper temples (only remote hermitages), to conduct funerals in their own right, or be recognized as Zen masters. Nevertheless, at least one, Ryonen Gensho (1646–1711), attained renown for both her artistic and her spiritual achievements (Spring Wind, 1986: 180–7). Education for nuns was minimal, but this started to change with the modernization of the country in the Meiji era (1868–1911), which led to nuns petitioning for improvements in their status in the 1920s and 1930s. Restrictions gradually started to be lifted, and this accelerated in the more liberal climate since 1945 (Uchino, 1986). Today, the nuns are not formally ordained as novices, but just follow the *Bodhisattva*-precepts, are celibate, and do not drink alcohol or eat meat.

In the pre-modern period, Japanese monks no longer followed the ancient monastic code of a *bhikṣu* (Pali *bhikkhu*), but only the *Bodhisattva*-precepts. Following a government decree in 1872, they, but not nuns, increasingly began to marry. After a period of celibate training, they become married priests. At first, the status of their wives was low, but in

the more recent liberal climate, they have received more recognition and have come to be allowed to take on certain priestly duties – a change that the celibate nuns, who undergo much more training than they, are not too pleased with. There are around 2,000 celibate nuns, most of whom live alone, running their own temples; some have assistants. They do not receive support from their sect organizations, but depend on their parishioners, fees for such things as teaching the tea ceremony, savings, family support, and some help from their Buddhist teacher. Training institutes for them exist, but there have not, until recently, been many new nuns coming forward; contemporary two-children families are not very willing to let one go to be ordained. Consequently, most nuns are quite old (Tsomo, 1988: 124). There are now some university-educated young ones, though.

Lands of Southern Buddhism

In Southern Buddhism, the *Mahā-vamsa* chronicle (ch. 34, verses 7–8) refers to a royal donation to 60,000 monks and 30,000 nuns in the first century BCE. While the order of *bhikkhunīs*, following 311 precepts, long flourished there, it came to die out in 1017 CE, after a disastrous invasion.¹⁹ In principle, it could have been reintroduced from Burma, where it existed till at least the thirteenth century (Gombrich, 1988: 168), probably being ended there because of Mongol attacks on the region. Nevertheless, while the ordination line for monks was reintroduced into Sri Lanka from Burma in 1070 CE, that for *bhikkhunīs* was not reintroduced. In Thailand, and neighbouring Laos and Cambodia, it seems never to have been established.

A Theravādin ‘nun’ is now a woman who in general permanently keeps the eight or ten precepts of a devout lay person (see pp. 87–8), though these nuns are not accorded the status of *sāmaṇerīs*, female novices, who used to keep the ten precepts permanently.²⁰ They are known variously as *dasa-sil-māṇiyō* (‘ten-precept-mothers’: Sri Lanka), *thela-shin* (‘possessors of the precepts’: Burma) or *mae ji* (‘honoured mothers who are ordained’: Thailand). As with a monk, the head is shaved, a Pali name is taken and a robe is worn: white, yellow, brown or pinkish-brown according to country and whether eight or ten precepts are followed. The nuns’ status, though, is ambivalent, for they are not

¹⁹ On Theravāda nuns in ancient India and Sri Lanka, see Khantipalo, 1979: 128–65.

²⁰ On contemporary Theravāda nuns, see Kabilsingh, 1991: 36–66, 87–93; Khantipalo, 1979: 153–63; Tsomo, 1988: 109–11, 138–49, 229–32, 262–6.

officially counted as members of the monastic *Saṅgha*, but as pious lay women (*upāsikā*). In Thailand, they are not under the auspices of the Department of Religious Affairs, and do not pay reduced fares on public transport, like monks; and yet, like monks, they are not allowed to vote (nor can they vote in Burma). As more karmic fruitfulness is seen to be generated by giving to a more virtuous person, and monks follow more moral/monastic precepts than the nuns, lay donors are less willing to support nuns than monks (Kawanami, 1990: 25). The number of Theravādin nuns has been increasing during this century, however. In Sri Lanka, there are now about 3,000 (to around 20,000 monks), which represents around 0.06 per cent of Buddhist females. In Thailand, there are roughly 10,000 nuns (to around 250,000 monks, during the rains retreat, when many men are ordained temporarily), which represents around 0.04 per cent of females. In Burma, there are around 25,000 nuns, about 0.14 per cent of females. Around sixty Theravāda nuns now also exist among recently (re-)converted Buddhists of Nepal, and they take an active part in teaching and spreading Buddhism there (Tsomo, 1988: 138–9).

In Thailand, nuns tend to do domestic chores around the monastery, and manage its finances, with less time than monks for study. They receive rather patchy support, though the development of a nuns' Institute in 1969 has been helping to improve facilities for them and upgrade their status. In Burma, nuns are better respected and supported, with more time for study than in Thailand. Some are eminent scholars and others are very experienced meditators. In Sri Lanka, the status and activity of nuns have increased during the twentieth century as part of a revival in Buddhism, so that it is no longer true that most nuns are aged.²¹ Since the 1980s, they have developed an organization increasingly like that of the monks. In many respects, eight-precept nuns act like novices, and ten-precept ones like monks. Both are much respected by the laity. Their time is spent in study and meditation, and in serving the laity much as monks do. Yet, on account of their simple life-style and their meditation, they are often seen by the laity as more virtuous than city and village monks, though not forest-dwelling monks (Bloss, 1987: 23–4, 27). Recently educational facilities for nuns, which have not been good, have started to improve (Kabilsingh, 1991: 89).

²¹ Bartholomeusz, 1994 and 1992: 43–61; Bloss, 1987: 9–17; Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 274–95.

Some lay activists, especially among the urban elite in Sri Lanka, hope that the Theravādin *bhikkhunī* (and *sāmaṇerī*) ordination-line can be re-established. However, that would require ordination by both a group of ten properly ordained *bhikkhunīs* and a similar group of monks (*bhikkhus*). It is therefore necessary to find a community of *bhikṣuṇīs* (Sanskrit equivalent of Pali *bhikkhunīs*) from Eastern Buddhism who come up to Theravādin standards on ordination-line and discipline. The monastic discipline that such nuns follow is not a 'Mahāyāna' code (though they also follow an additional Mahāyāna code), but that of the Dharmaguptas, one of the early schools closely allied to the Theravāda. The Chinese ordination-line, in fact, partly derives from some nuns brought by sea from Theravāda Sri Lanka in 429 and 433 CE (Conze et al., 1954: 291–3; Khantipalo, 1979: 151–3). Some claim, though, that in Chinese and Korean tradition, nuns have generally been ordained by monks alone (Tsomo, 1988: 248–9).

In 1971, a Thai eight-precept nun, Voramai Kabilsingh, was ordained as a *bhikkhunī* in Taiwan, but the Thai *Saṅgha* sees her, at best, as a Mahāyāna *bhikkhunī* (Kabilsingh, 1991: 48–54; Spring Wind, 1986: 202–9). However, in 1974, the President of Sri Lanka, William Gopallawa, declared that the government would support the re-establishment of a *bhikkhunī* order, a concern which was helped by the presence in the country of the German nun Ayya Khemā and her outspoken support for re-establishment (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 147). A register of nuns was started in 1984, and in 1988 a minister proposed rules to unify female renunciants and also create an order of lay nuns. In 1985, the government sent a representative to study the Chinese nuns, and asked monks and scholars to submit views on the possibility of re-establishing the *bhikkhunī* ordination-line (Tsomo, 1988: 114). Nevertheless, most monks and even lay nuns are wary of a threat to the integrity of Theravāda Buddhism if ordination comes from Mahāyāna nuns (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 147, 181).

In America, Sri Lankan Theravādin monks of Los Angeles have been impressed by the enthusiastic interest of American women in Buddhism (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 187). In 1988, with the help of Mahāyāna nuns of various traditions, a Thai lawyer (in May, at the LA Buddhist Vihāra) and five Sri Lankan nuns (December, Hsi Lai temple) were ordained as *sāmaṇerī*, or novices, as a first step towards ordaining *bhikkhunīs* (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 181, 186–7). At the second ceremony, Ayya Khemā also became a *bhikkhunī*. Nevertheless, older monks in Sri Lanka

contested the ordinations, especially that of Ayya Khemā. In March 1998, there was also a *bhikkhunī* ordination in Sri Lanka itself, at a monastery in Dambulla, but this has also been seen as invalid by senior *Saṅgha* leaders on the island.²²

For the *bhikkhunī* community to be formally restarted – which I certainly hope will happen – the agreement of senior monks in Theravādin countries would be required, which would be difficult at present to attain. Some monks may fear that donations to them will decrease if there are also *bhikkhunīs* for the laity to support. Many senior monks in Sri Lanka also refer to the canonical passage which has the Buddha initially holding back from ordaining women (see p. 384; Bloss, 1987: 22). Also, many nuns may prefer their present status, in which they are more independent of monks than they would be as *bhikkhunīs* (Bloss, 1987: 19; Bartholomeusz, 1992: 51). In Sri Lanka, most nuns already see their monastic vocation as equal to that of monks, or even superior (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 190).

Demands and agitation by women are likely to be counter-productive. For *bhikkhunīs* to exist, their discipline will require an ongoing working relationship with monks. Change will come slowly. At present, a minority of senior Sri Lankan monks do support the ordination of women (Bloss, 1987: 22). Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya (1896–1998), who was perhaps the most respected monk on the island, was sympathetic (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 302), though he opposed formal re-establishment of the Theravādin *bhikkhunī* order from Mahāyāna nuns as too contentious. Rather, the nuns should follow all the *bhikkhunī* precepts even if they cannot be formally ordained as *bhikkhunīs* (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 168–9). Among more junior monks, though, Katz found in 1983–4 that 22 of the 37 he asked in the university town of Peradeniya were supportive. Even among the eleven who did not support it, there was often a feeling that it was a shame that it could not be done (1986; 1988: 147). Such monks are likely to form a nucleus of those who come to accept the ordinations now being carried out. In Thailand, also, the young educated monks who act as secretaries to very senior ones are more open to the idea of full ordination for women. In time, they may come to take up senior posts themselves (Kabilsingh, 1986: 147). Improved education for existing eight- and ten-precept nuns will also facilitate the recognition of them as worthy of higher ordination as *bhikkhunīs*.

²² *Yasodhara: Newsletter on International Buddhist Women's Activities*, 14 (3) (April–June 1998), 11. By fifteen months later, there were around 150 *bhikkhunīs* at Dambulla, according to the *Guardian*, 14 August 1999.

Lands of Northern Buddhism

In Northern Buddhism, Tibet has a few recognized female incarnation-lines, one going back to the eighth-century Yeshe Tsogyel (Ye-shes mTsho-rgyal), consort of Padmasambhava (see p. 365), herself seen as a manifestation of the female *Bodhisattva* Vajra-vārāhī, Dorje Phagmo (rDo-rje Fags mo in Tibetan).²³ One of the incarnations was as the much-loved twelfth-century mystic Machig Lapdron (Ma-gcig Lab-sgron), founder of the Mahāmudra Chod (gCod) lineage of practice (Allione, 1986: 143–204). The current incarnation of Dorje Phagmo is among the most revered people in Tibet.²⁴

Notable female saints of Tibet have generally lived as hermits and wandering practitioners, outside the main monastic centres, and have not belonged to the dominant Gelug (dGe-lugs) tradition (Allione, 1986: 14–15). The order of nuns was never properly introduced into Tibet, because of the difficulty of nuns travelling there from India to ordain them. Some monks ordained *bhikṣuṇīs* themselves in the twelfth century, but this was seen by most as an invalid form of ordination. Thus Tibetan Buddhist nuns (Tibetan *a-nis*) are not full *bhikṣuṇīs*, following the 366 rules of the Mūla-Sarvāstivādin monastic code used in Tibet, but are *śrāmaṇerikās* following the ten rules of a novice, plus twenty-six more. In the case of Mongolia, even the *śrāmaṇerikā* ordination was not transmitted. *A-nis* are thus akin to Theravāda nuns in the number of precepts that they follow, except that they are formally recognized as novices, unlike the Theravādin ones.

While families have been encouraging to sons who wished to be monks, they have often been less willing for their daughters to become nuns, preferring them to marry (Willis, 1989: 106, 122). In the harsh Tibetan climate, the physical risk to mother and child of child-birth meant that fertile women were much prized to keep the family line going. Sir Charles Bell reports that the ratio of nuns to monks in Tibet was about 1:35 (1928: 164), though Willis reports a ratio of 1:9.²⁵ Prior to the Chinese Communist occupation, there were 18,828 nuns in Tibet: around 0.75 per cent of the female population, probably the highest of all Buddhist lands. Of these, about 8,000 lived in large communities of over a hundred nuns, the largest housing around a thousand

²³ Dowman, 1984; Tarthang Tulku, 1985; Willis, 1989: 11–32.

²⁴ Miller, 1980: 155; Allione, 1986: 29–32; Willis, 1989: 104–5, 121.

²⁵ 1989: 100, citing T. W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 6.

(Willis, 1989: 119, 163–4). While there are no figures for the number remaining there, there are around 1,930 living as refugees in India or Nepal or among existing communities there or in Bhutan (Tsomo, 1988: 151).²⁶

Traditionally, the education of Tibetan nuns focused on chanting and meditation, not on Buddhist philosophy, as for the monks. Today, in the exiled community in India and Nepal, nuns are being included in logic and philosophy training (Tsomo, 1988: 152; Willis, 1989: 124–34). The Dalai Lama sees improving the status of the nuns as helping, for example, in the spread of Buddhism in the West (Tsomo, 1988: 51). He has also affirmed that, without a *bhikṣuṇī* order, Tibet cannot be considered a ‘central land’, that is, a Buddhist heartland (Tsomo, 1988: 41). He is therefore supportive of Tibetan nuns gaining *bhikṣuṇī* ordination from their Chinese sisters (Tsomo, 1988: 242, 267–75). A start was made in 1984, with the ordination of four of them in Hong Kong (p. 246). The Dalai Lama alone, however, cannot grant recognition of Tibetan *bhikṣuṇīs* without the agreement of other senior monks.

The aspirations of nuns of all types were strengthened by the holding of an international conference of Buddhist nuns in February 1987 at Bodh-Gayā, India, where the Buddha attained enlightenment (see Tsomo, 1988). It was organized by an American *bhikṣuṇī* of the Tibetan tradition, Karma Lekshe Tsomo, a Thai Theravāda laywoman, Dr Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, and a German Theravāda nun, Ayya Khemā (Tsomo, 1988: 49); participants came from twenty-six countries, and included the Dalai Lama. The German monk Nyanaponika, long resident in Sri Lanka, sent a message of support, as did the Sri Lankan Commissioner of Buddhist Affairs. The meeting saw the formation of Sakyadhītā, ‘Daughters of the Buddha’, the International Association of Buddhist Women, which is doing important work in helping Buddhist nuns throughout the world learn about each other and helping to improve their education and status.

Excluding the People’s Republic of China (which includes Tibet), Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, for which figures are not available, there are around 60,000 Buddhist nuns in the world: 38,000 Theravāda nuns; around 15,000 *bhikṣuṇīs* of the Chinese or Korean traditions; 3,000 *śrāmaṇerikās* of these traditions; 2,000 *śrāmaṇerikās* of the Tibetan tradition; and 2,000 Japanese nuns (cf. Tsomo, 1988: 53–4).

²⁶ For further information on Tibetan nuns, see Havnevik, 1991 and Willis, 1989: 96–134.

LAYWOMEN IN BUDDHIST TEXTS

In praising particular disciples, the Buddha includes a number of laywomen as excelling in various qualities (*A.* 1.26): Sujātā (being first to take refuge), Visākhā (giving to the *Saṅgha*), Khujjuttarā (being learned), Sālavātī (dwelling in lovingkindness), Uttarā (meditation), Suppavāsā (giving choice alms-food), Suppiyā (nursing the sick), Kāṭiyānī (being of unwavering faith), Kālī (having faith even from hearsay) and Nakulamātā (conversing intimately): at *A.* III.298, the Buddha tells the latter's husband that he is lucky to have such a compassionate wife as his counsellor and teacher. A similar list for laymen also includes someone who excels in teaching *Dhamma*. Among these women, Visākhā is particularly notable (see Horner, 1930: 345–61), a rich, self-assured housewife who supported and attended to the needs of the *Saṅgha* with great care, and to whom the Buddha gave a long discourse (*A.* 1.205–14). Elsewhere, the Buddha advises Visākhā to use her own judgement regarding whether or not the quarrelsome monks of Kosambī taught in accordance with *Dhamma* (*Vin.* 1.355–6). Her action also causes the Buddha to make a rule that the word of a trustworthy laywoman disciple should be listened to if she says that a monk has sat down in a secluded place with a woman and indulged in some form of sensual behaviour (*Vin.* III.187–8).

In the *Suttas*, Visākhā is a key donor, as is the man Anāthapiṇḍika, a wealthy merchant. While the latter was noted for periodic large gifts such as the buying of land for the Jetavāna monastery with a huge amount of gold, Visākhā gives more in the form of a constant supply of the daily necessities of life for monks and nuns (Falk, 1990: 132). While they are not often mentioned together in the *Suttas*, Nancy Falk has shown that in the Theravāda commentaries to the *Dhammapada* and *Jātakas*, these two become increasingly paired and paralleled (1990: 136) as 'a matched pair of "perfect" male and female donors' (1990: 139), standing 'in place of father and mother' to the *Saṅgha* of monks (*J.* III.119). Each type of giving is increasingly seen as being also carried out by the other, which implicitly denies 'that any gift is more appropriate for male or female' (1990: 138–9). Nevertheless, giving, a key Buddhist value, is often much practised by women. Indeed, in the *Vimānavatthu*, a Theravādin canonical text on the heavenly rebirths of various good people, most of the donors are female (Falk, 1990: 140).

Horner (1930: 83–94) points out that, in the early Buddhist texts, most adult women referred to (other than nuns) are married women supported by their husbands. There is reference, though, to women workers

among poorer people. Many worked in households as domestic slaves, along with their male counterparts. The evidence is that such people were not maltreated or overworked. They could be released by their master, for example in order to be ordained. Women also worked in agriculture, and as acrobats, musicians and dancers. Some worked as prostitutes, including some very rich courtesans.

The early texts recognized that many women gained their specific identity through marriage. Thus it is said that a fire is made known by its smoke, a kingdom by its king, and a woman by her husband (*S.* I.41–2), probably meaning that a woman is often known as ‘so-and-so’s wife’. Yet one *Jātaka* story mocks the popular view that a woman is ‘naked without a husband’ (*J.* I.307); for it praises a woman who saves her brother, not her husband, from a threatening king, as she can get another husband but not another brother. Nevertheless, it seems that the Buddha saw women as primarily orientated towards gaining a husband and children, and thus power in a household. At *A.* III.363, he outlines the goals and aspirations of various kinds of people. Those of nobles (*khattiyas*), brahmins and householders relate to success in their sphere of activity or work, while for women: their goal is a man; their ambition is adornment; their resolve is for a child; their desire is to be without a rival; and their fulfilment is to gain authority (*issariya*), by implication within their own marriage-based household. Of course, any of these kinds of people could go beyond these usual aims, for example by focusing on enlightenment. That a woman’s ‘resolve’ is for a child is echoed by a passage which says that women end life ‘unsated by and not opposing’ sex and child-bearing (*A.* I.78). This was said partly because giving a child to a family was a source of power, as part of the network of marital dynamics. The Buddha thus describes the five ‘powers’ (*balas*) of a woman as those of beauty, wealth, kin, children and moral virtue (*sīla*; i.e. keeping the precepts). With these, she dwells at home in confidence, overpowering her husband and continuing to get the better of him. Against these powers, a man can only get the better of his wife by the power of authority (or being masterful, *issariya*-; *S.* IV.246). Of her five powers, only the last is essential, both for a lasting relationship and for a good rebirth (*S.* IV.247–8). It could also allow a woman to be head of a prosperous household, for it is said that one of the reasons why a family prosper is that they ‘place in authority (*ādhipacce*) a virtuous woman or man’ (*A.* II.249).

Elsewhere, it is said that a monk should have the qualities of a woman with a ‘lovely reputation’ (cf. *A.* III.37), being ‘gentle, meek, and tranquil (*upasantā*)’, that is, not easily angered (*M.* I.125–6). The valuing of such calm in a wife, and as a general spiritual quality, is also seen in relation

to legends of the compassionate and powerful *Cakkavatti* kings (see p. 114). Among such a king's seven 'treasures' is his wife (as at *D.* 11.175–6), who is seen to parallel the spiritual 'treasure' of 'tranquillity' (*passaddhi*; *S.* v.99). Nevertheless, it is recognized that women are not always calm: 'the power (*bala*) of children is crying, the power of women is anger, the power of thieves is a weapon, the power of kings is ruling . . .' (*A.* 1v.223).

In the Vessantara *Jātaka* (see pp. 63–4), the *Bodhisattva* shows his unstinting generosity by even being prepared to give away his children and then his wife. This, of course, implies that he in some sense 'owned' them. This interpretation does not seem amiss given that it is said that a woman is 'the best of possessions',²⁷ and the Western idea of a father 'giving' his daughter in marriage also reflects such an idea. Yet in Buddhism, all 'possession' is only a provisional, not an ultimate concept – for as all is not-Self and impermanent (see pp. 34–6), nothing can be truly 'mine' – and if a wife was seen as in some sense a possession, she had to be a willing one. Thus the Buddha says, admiringly, that one of the conditions for the prospering of the Vajjian republic is that they 'do not forcibly abduct others' wives and daughters, and do not compel them to live with them' (*D.* 11.74).

LAYWOMEN IN BUDDHIST CULTURES

A history of European conflict with Islam has meant that there has long been a view in the West that 'women are benighted in Asia'. When some contemporary feminist views are added to this, strong negative expectations can be set up regarding the position of women in Asian cultures. As a point of reference, it might be borne in mind that women had few legal rights in the USA prior to the 1920s, and until 1976 had to overcome barriers to obtain credit or set up in business. Italian women had no right to divorce prior to the mid 1970s, and Frenchwomen had no legal right to control their own incomes prior to the mid 1960s (Miller, 1980: 156). Thus to assume that the West historically has a better track record on sexual equality than Asia is not necessarily correct.

Lands of Southern Buddhism

In the lands of Southern Buddhism, the good position of women in the pre-modern era was often remarked upon by Western colonial observers (Dewaraja, 1981). Inheritance laws treated sons and daughters

²⁷ *S.* 1.43; cf. *M.* 1.162, *Mih.* 192, *Thig.* 406–25.

equally, and both husbands and wives had legally recognized grounds for divorce. In Burma, Sir Guy Burgess held that, 'Unlike the Hindu wife, the Buddhist wife is considered as practically on an equality with her husband, and she generally takes an equal part in the management of the family affairs',²⁸ with Fielding Hall (1902) seeing the Burmese wife as very free as compared to nineteenth-century Western women. In Thailand, influence from Brahmanized cultures between the mid fourteenth and mid eighteenth centuries put women at a relative disadvantage compared to Sri Lanka and Burma, but this was gradually overcome in the modern period, and Thai women won the right to vote at the same time as men in 1932.

In contemporary Burma, there is a 'marked equality obtaining between the sexes' and women 'enjoy social position equivalent to men (except in some religious spheres)' (Nash and Nash, 1963: 263, 260). This is so even though women see men as superior, being able to be Buddhas, being more 'noble', having pleasanter lives, and not having to bear children (Spiro, 1971: 82–3). Around a third of the Burmese women hope to be male in their next life (Spiro, 1971: 81), with a smaller proportion hoping so in Sri Lanka (Dewaraja, 1981: 11), though in Thailand, such a view is rare, and it is seen as better to be a wealthy woman than a poor man (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 436). In Sri Lanka, *Vipassanā* meditation is now popular among the laity, with a majority of practitioners being women, and teachers also include laywomen (Bond, 1988: 178–87, 209). Practitioners often hold that lay people have an advantage over the monks as they experience more suffering, and that 'Women have an even greater advantage than laymen, for women experience more *dukkha* [suffering] than men' (Bond, 1988: 184).

Lucien and Jane Hanks report that, while most social relationships in Thailand are structured on the basis of senior/junior or patron/client, the relationship of husband and wife is one of equality (1963: 437). Advice at marriage is for the wife to please her husband, and be gentle and understanding; the husband should love and protect his wife, and be just and considerate; there is no mention of obedience (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 437; Terweil, 1979: 152). It is not expected that every woman should be married, at least in rural Burma, where it has been noted that the role of unmarried men or women (whether spinsters, bachelors, divorced or widowed people) has been a legitimate and

²⁸ As quoted in Lee, 1978: 266, from G. Burgess, preface to U Gang's *Digest of the Burmese Buddhist Law*, vol. III, (Rangoon, 1897), p. 132.

respected one in society (Nash and Nash, 1963). Thai parents do not have a preference for sons rather than daughters, and boys and girls play the same games. Younger children are looked after by, and obey, older ones, of either sex (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 432, 436). Nevertheless, traditional Western ideas, with their sharper distinction between the sexes, are having an influence. The dress of young children, once almost indistinguishable for boys and girls, has become more sexually typed (Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 447).

In Southern Buddhist lands, the royal harem traditionally had a major political role. Moreover, in recent times, the first woman prime minister in the world was in Sri Lanka, Mrs Bandaranayake, widow of an assassinated political leader. Her daughter is now president of the country. In the Sarvōdaya Śramadāna village development movement (see pp. 225–34), moreover, women are encouraged to overcome their traditional shyness so as to speak up and take an active part in a village's activities of self-renewal (Macy, 1983: 79–89). In Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi, daughter of an important political leader, is head of the party which won the 1990 election, though a military junta has prevented this from taking power (see p. 270). For Thailand, Jane Bunnag holds:

as in western society, the most educated and enterprising women can also achieve positions of real power and influence, both in business affairs, and in the national bureaucracy. (1973: 14)

In rural Burma and Thailand, there is little differentiation of jobs along gender lines. Indeed, in Burma, 'men cook, wash, baby tend, sew, weave and knit. Women plant, harvest, build houses, drive ox carts, fish, keep stores, and chop wood' (Nash and Nash, 1963: 263). In Thailand, women have traditionally had a large role in trading activities (Kirsch, 1975; Hanks and Hanks, 1963: 446), from local markets to transport, construction and real-estate companies: in 1965, 90 per cent of Bangkok real estate was owned by women (Kirsch, 1975: 175). Men nevertheless tend to look down on such work as worldly and linked to greed:²⁹ if they can, they gravitate to high-status jobs of an administrative nature, where they outnumber women by around ten to one.

In Thailand, as is well known, there are a large number of prostitutes (Kabilsingh, 1991: 67–86; Odzer, 1998), even though Buddhism sees prostitution as an unseemly way of life and using a prostitute's services as indulging in a low form of supposed happiness. Some prostitutes see their way of life as the result of bad karma and seek to make up for this

²⁹ Note that in Russia, many women are doctors, but this is not seen as a high-status job!

by generosity to Buddhist temples, releasing captive birds, or making donations to children's homes or flood victims (Odzer, 1998: 41–2). The number of prostitutes greatly increased in the 1960s and 1970s, boosted by the presence of many American servicemen on 'rest and recreation' leave from the Vietnam War. Since then, the 'sex industry' has continued with the women, and men, workers supporting poor families back in their villages, or in some cases using their income to gain consumer goods. However, in the north, where many prostitutes come from, Abbot Phra Thepkavī Kusalō has set up a foundation aimed particularly at training young women in traditional handicrafts so as to empower them and protect them from the economic lure of prostitution (Swearer, 1995: 123).

Lands of Eastern Buddhism

In the lands of Eastern Buddhism, Confucianism has been the dominant influence on social ethics. In this, women have been seen as inferior, and were bound to obey first their father, then their husband, and then their grown-up son, if they were widowed, though a woman could gain power through her sons. Sons have been preferred to daughters, for only they could carry out the rites for the family ancestors. On marriage, a woman entered her husband's extended family as its most junior member. A man had seven grounds on which he could divorce his wife, but a woman had no grounds on which she could divorce her husband (Kelleher, 1987: 143).

The egalitarian strains of Mahāyāna Buddhism often softened this discrimination, but it did not remove it. In nineteenth-century China, there was a movement among financially independent women of rural Canton who wished to improve the lot of women, their patron being the *Bodhisattva* Kuan-yin. They either refused to marry, living in nun-like groups, or postponed the consummation indefinitely, through staying in their own family's home. Their aim was to avoid loneliness or oppression in marriage, lack of financial independence, or the pain of childbirth.³⁰

In Japan, also, the influence of Confucian and Shintō social ethics put women in an inferior position, and set up strong sex-role differentiations. As in China, Mahāyāna Buddhism partly adapted to this, while also keeping up some more egalitarian emphases. In the Heian period

³⁰ Topley, 1975; Reed, 1992: 169; Carmody, 1989: 104.

(794–1185 CE), when Buddhism was particularly strong, there were a number of notable women writers, including the author of *The Tale of Genji*, the first novel in the world (Carmody, 1989: 117). In the war-torn Ashikaga period (1333–1573), though, Confucianism had a strong influence on the code of the *bushi* class of warrior-knights. While the males were expected to give their all for their feudal lord, their wives were expected to do the same for them. This included ritual suicide if their chastity was threatened, or if their husband's attention to them might compromise his devotion to his lord (Carmody, 1989: 118–19). In the Tokugawa period (1603–1867), when Neo-Confucianism was the state ideology, and Buddhism was used as an arm of the state, the position of women was at its lowest point, and women were excluded from Buddhist sacred places and mountains (Uchino, 1986: 149).

In the pre-1947 legal code, a divorce was only instituted by a man, or by his family, if they did not like the wife, or she could not give birth to a son to continue the family line. This could occur even if the couple did not want to divorce. A wife could only act in legal matters with the approval of her husband's family, and adultery was only a ground for divorce if committed by the wife (Pharr, 1980: 40). The American-influenced 1947 constitution made it illegal to discriminate against people on grounds of sex, and equalized divorce, inheritance and property rights (Maykovich, 1978: 387, 390). Since then, women have eagerly taken advantage of the greater educational opportunities that have developed. For the majority, though, this is seen to be a way of 'polishing' themselves so as to be able to win an appropriate husband (Jahan, 1982: 22). In a 1982 survey, 71 per cent of Japanese women agreed with the idea that 'woman keeps house while man works outside' (Tanaka, 1986: 70). While this is itself a narrowing of a woman's role as compared to her traditional role in agriculture and small businesses, women in some way benefit, for 79 per cent of women also said that they have the final say in how family income is spent, as compared to 37 per cent in the USA and 33 per cent in England (Tanaka, 1986: 74). In the political sphere, while a formal career in politics would once have been unthinkable, the Japanese Socialist Party has in recent years had a woman, Mrs Doi, as its leader.

Lands of Northern Buddhism

In the lands of Northern Buddhism, as in those of Southern Buddhism, Buddhism has been the dominant influence on social ethics. A Chinese

anthropologist who studied Tibet in the 1940s advised his government that China might have much to learn from the Tibetans as regards:

the independence of women from male subservience; the ability of women to inherit and maintain households, lands and economic enterprises without male guardianship; the freedom of women to enter into, and to sever marriage bonds, etc. (cited in Miller, 1980: 158)

More recently, a Western anthropologist has commented:

In the Buddhist societies of Tibet and the borderlands of Nepal . . . Women enjoy as much sexual freedom as men, and both have equal rights to property. Women are not subject to the discipline and control of men, but are recognized as personalities solely responsible for their actions and moral character. (Furer-Haimendorf, 1967: 223)

While monogamy has been the most common form of marriage in Tibet (in around 70 per cent of households), polyandry has been fairly common among peasants and herdsmen of some regions (in perhaps 50 per cent of households there), and polygamy has been found among wealthy families. In the case of polyandry, a woman generally married several brothers (Bell, 1928: 192–4). Among peasants, this helped prevent the break-up of precious family lands; among nomadic herdsmen, it meant that the wife was not left alone when one of the husbands was away. In such a marriage, her power and influence were considerable (p. 159). If a man married a daughter of a family with no son, he then took her family name and was subordinate to her in management of the family estate (Bell, 1928: 156–7; Miller, 1980: 161). The family line might descend through either males or females, and a number of families consisted entirely of women: grandmother, mother and daughter (Miller, 1980: 162). As to laws of inheritance in pre-Communist Tibet, these varied between regions. In the east, only sons and brothers inherited, not wives or daughters. In central Tibet and in Bhutan, the sons inherited, though where there were none, daughters did (Bell, 1928: 87–8).

In past centuries, when Tibet was sometimes ruled by regional chiefs, some of these were women, widows or daughters of previous chiefs (Bell, 1928: 14, 160–1). Earlier this century, Bell notes that Tibetan chiefs, ministers and officials were never women, but that they often consulted their wives on official work, and that the Queen of Sikkim (an area of Tibetan culture) was more active in administration than the King (pp. 161–2). Thus women have had much political influence in forming opinions and policies (Miller, 1980: 163). Among Tibetans in exile today, there are many women in positions involving great responsibility: a woman is the

moving force behind the Tibetan Homes Foundation in India (Miller, 1980: 160, 164). In Tibet itself, laywomen as well as nuns have been very active in demonstrations against the Chinese occupation of the country. Traditionally, women have also been in charge of retail trade in Tibet (Miller, 1980: 163), and men and women have shared in agricultural tasks, though the men usually do the ploughing (Bell, 1928: 158–9). In Ladakh, while men take leadership roles in the public realm, women have great power within the household-based economy, which until recently has been more important (Norberg-Hodge, 1991: 68–9).

In the West, Buddhism, to varying extents, is adjusting to feminist-influenced social norms, as it has adjusted to other social norms in Asia. Especially in North America, women are taking a very active part in it,³¹ and this is having some influence on the Asian teachers establishing their centres there. In a context where people can choose between Buddhist traditions, the latter's views and practices relating to women may be a factor influencing in their choice.

CONCLUSION

Overall, one can say that the rise of Buddhism in India brought an improvement in the status of women relative to their position in Brahmanism. As Hinduism reasserted itself and influenced more aspects of Indian culture, however, less positive views of women came to be accepted in some *Jātaka* stories and early Mahāyāna texts. In turn, though, the Mahāyāna tradition sought to subvert these elements, and the Theravāda downplayed them. In the Chinese cultural area, Buddhism likewise lived alongside a tradition which broadly sought to keep women 'in their place'. While partly accommodating itself to this, Buddhism also sought to subvert it. Buddhism has, in a variety of ways, sought to improve the position of women living in discriminatory, or otherwise unfortunate, situations. Through its practices, it has also facilitated the self-confidence, empowerment and spiritual liberation of both women and men.

While most traditions have a spiritual 'glass ceiling' precluding a female from being a full Buddha, all traditions accept female *Arahats*, and the Mahāyāna accepts advanced female *Bodhisattvas*, and occasionally female Buddhas. Within the monastic setting, while Buddhism has had

³¹ See: Boucher, 1993; Friedman, 1987; Gross, 1994; Hopkinson et al., 1986; Lenore, 1987; Tsomo, 1995; Shasta Abbey, 1981; also Carmody, 1989: 84–5, 88–9, and Spring Wind, 1986: 52.

ordained women from the time of the Buddha, some traditions did not overcome difficulties in transmitting their ordination-line, or let it lapse, and nuns have been in a number of ways junior partners to the monks. Yet the role of ordained women has been strengthened in the twentieth century. Moreover, amongst laywomen, in societies where Buddhism has been the dominant religion, women's freedoms, rights and status have often been compared favourably with those in many others in Asia or, until recently, the West.³²

³² My thanks to my colleague Dr Pamela Anderson, and my research student Liz Williams, for comments on a draft of this chapter. They raised issues that I had not thought of, though my final view may not agree with theirs.

Homosexuality and other forms of 'queerness'

His Holiness opposes violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation.

On the Dalai Lama in San Francisco, 1997

The word 'homosexuality' derives from the Greek *homos*, 'same', rather than the Latin *homo*, 'man', so it refers to sex between either men or women. Nevertheless, 'lesbianism' is usually used to refer to sexual relations between females (Herdt, 1987: 445). Same-sex relationships span a spectrum from brotherly or filial affection, which is universally admired, to affectionate respect for a spiritual teacher, or strong bonds of friendship, likewise generally admired, to erotic feelings for those of the same sex, to sexual activity with those of the same sex, to a person's conscious self-identification as 'homosexual', 'gay' or 'lesbian'. In modern Western culture, any man who engages, or has engaged, in homosexual activity has tended to be identified as 'a homosexual', though this way of identifying a person based on his or her sexual orientation is not found in other cultures. Gilbert Herdt identifies three forms of the cultural structuring of what is now seen as 'homosexual' activity (usually of males) across different cultures:

(1) age-structured homosexuality, in which people of the same sex but of different ages are sexually involved; (2) gender-reversed homosexuality, wherein a person adopts the dress, mannerisms, and sexual activities of the opposite sex; and (3) role-specialized homosexuality, in which a person, by virtue of his or her social and religious role, is entitled to engage in homosexual activity. (1987: 446)

The first type, which occurred in ancient Greece, has been the most common, and does not preclude the junior participants' later marrying and having children, though perhaps taking boy lovers also. The Greeks, however, strongly condemned passive homosexuality in adults, i.e. being penetrated, rather than being the 'active' penetrator (Herdt, 1987: 447). Early Christianity was antagonistic to homosexuality, but was then ambiguous on it until the eleventh century. It was strongly condemned from the time of Thomas Aquinas, and came to be punishable by the stake.

Herdtscholdt holds that

the modern social category and erotic identity signified by the term *gay* is not the same as the homosexual organizations or roles found in ancient times and in other cultures . . . it is in several respects a unique development in human society. This suggests a change from a predominantly gender-reversed feminization to a more frequent masculinization of overt homosexuality in popular culture. (1987: 452)

The term 'gay pride' has positively affirmed an overt homosexual identity, and in America, this has also led to 'gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (and/or transsexual)' people to appropriate positively the once abusive term 'queer' to refer to themselves as a group (Corless, 1995: 1).

In order to gauge the attitude(s) of Buddhism to homosexuality, 'homosexuals' and others who now call themselves 'queer', it is first necessary to examine its understanding of and attitude to those of non-standard sexuality.

SEX-CHANGE

Early Buddhist texts refer to the sex of a person as something that can change within one life, as well as between lives. In the *Vinaya*, there is reference to a monk in whom the sexual characteristics of a woman appeared, and a nun in whom the sexual characteristics of a man appeared.¹ In both cases, the Buddha appears to accept this and simply say that the ex-monk nun should follow the rules of the nuns, and the ex-nun monk should follow the rules of the monks. In commentarial literature, the sex of a person is seen as determined at conception, but as subject to possible change (*Asl.* 322).² Causes of sex-change are seen as karmic in nature. The *Dhammapada* commentary tells of a man instantly turning into a woman when he is sexually attracted to a monk; after marrying and giving birth, she then turns back to a man when she asks the monk's forgiveness, and goes on to become an *Arahat* (*Dhp. A.* 1.325–32; cf. *AKB.* iv.55a–b). Sex-change, then, is not seen as limiting spiritual potential.

HERMAPHRODITES

While men and women can both be ordained, and attain enlightenment, even if they change sex, this is not the case with a hermaphrodite, one 'having the sexual characteristics of both sexes' (*ubhato-byañjanaka*).

In the *Vinaya*, it is said that because of the possibility of a hermaph-

¹ *Vin.* iii.35; cf. *Mibn.* 267 and *AKB.* iv.13c and 38.

² Biologically, sexual identity is manifested at ten weeks' gestation.

rodite enticing a fellow monk or nun into having sex, hermaphrodites should not be ordained (*Vin.* I.89; *Vin.* II.271). The Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa held that there were female hermaphrodites, who could both impregnate and give birth, and male ones, who could not give birth, and that either type could be sexually attracted to both men and women (*Asl.* 322–3). In this, he perhaps conflates hermaphroditism and bisexuality (Zwilling, 1992: 206).

As to the karmic causes of hermaphroditism, in the seventh century *Ta-ch'eng tsao-hsiang kung-te ching*, composed in China or Central Asia, these are (for a man):

(1) Uncleaness where there should be reverence and respect; (2) lust for the bodies of other men; (3) the practice of lustful things upon his own body; (4) the exposure and sale of himself in the guise of a woman to other men. (Beyer, 1974: 53)

Just as Buddhaghosa sees hermaphrodites as bisexual, this sees homosexual activity as leading to hermaphroditism. The text holds, though, that such results can be avoided if a person has deep repentance and faith, and builds a Buddha image.

The *Milindapañha* sees hermaphrodites as among those who are 'obstructed' and so cannot attain understanding of *Dhamma*, even if they practise correctly. No reason is given, but the others who are also obstructed are *paṇḍakas* (see below), ghosts, one of false view, a cheat, one who has done one of the five heinous acts, a self-ordained person, a monk or nun who has gone over to another sect, the seducer of a nun, one who has committed an offence entailing the formal meeting of the *Saṅgha*, and a child under seven years (*Miln.* 310). Apart from the young child, ghost and *paṇḍaka*, these are clearly those with moral failings.

PAṆḌAKAS

A *paṇḍaka*, or 'one without testicles' (Zwilling, 1992: 204), is often discussed in similar contexts to the hermaphrodite. The term has generally been translated as 'eunuch' – i.e. someone deliberately castrated – in the past, but Leonard Zwilling argues that this equation is wrong, as eunuchs were virtually unknown in pre-Muslim India. Rather, he holds, it and its synonyms were used in a metaphorical way, 'as we do in English when it is said of a weak or pusillanimous person that he (or even she) "has no balls"' (1992: 204). Indeed, they are said, like women, to cry when a prince is banished (*J.* VI.502).

Before discussing what exactly the term refers to, it is useful to point

out that it is applied to a man who lacks the normal characteristics of maleness, or occasionally (*Vin.* II.271) to a woman who lacks the characteristics of femaleness. In outlining the variety of sexual types, whether among humans or animals, the *Vinaya* talks of females, males, hermaphrodites and *paṇḍakas* (*Vin.* III.28). While the hermaphrodite has the sexual characteristics of *both* genders, it appears that the *paṇḍaka* is seen as one who has the characteristics of *neither* gender. This accords with a set of four logical possibilities often referred to in Buddhist texts: that something is *x*, or not *x*, or both (in part) *x* and (in part) not *x*, or neither *x* nor not *x*, where ‘*x*’ refers to a certain characteristic. A common commentarial gloss for *paṇḍaka* is *napuṃsaka*, the ‘non-male’, and the usage of the term shows that it refers to someone who is neither a normal male nor a normal female, i.e. a ‘neuter’. In the discussion of various monastic offences of a sensual nature for a nun, the *Vinaya* states that the act, if done in relation to a human male, is a full offence, and a lesser offence if it is done in relation to a non-human male, or in relation to a *paṇḍaka*, who is thus seen as non-male human (*Vin.* IV.215, 233, 269). Zwilling points out, in fact, that the pre-Buddhist *Artharva Veda* distinguishes *paṇḍakas* from ordinary males and females, and implies that they were transvestites (Zwilling, 1992: 205).

Buddhaghosa sees a particular kind of mind-consciousness, accompanied by neutral feeling, as occurring at the time of conception, and thereafter as the background, resting state of consciousness (*bhavaṅga*), for ‘the blind, the deaf, the foolish, the mad, a hermaphrodite, a neuter (*napuṃsaka*-)’ born as humans (*Asl.* 264–5), or simply for ‘*paṇḍakas* etc.’ among humans (*Vism.* 457). Thus a person is seen as a non-male, or *paṇḍaka*, from the time of conception: being one is not a this-life choice, or a result of castration.

Buddhaghosa also describes five types of *paṇḍaka*:³

- (1) the ‘sprayed (*āsitta*)-*paṇḍaka*’: one who quenches his lust by fellating another man to ejaculation;
- (2) the ‘jealous (*usūya*)-*paṇḍaka*’: ‘one who, through the arising of jealousy, quenches his lust through watching others have intercourse’: a voyeur;
- (3) the ‘by-a-means (*opakkamika*)-*paṇḍaka*’: one for whom ‘semen is expelled using some special means’;
- (4) the ‘fortnight (*pakkha*)-*paṇḍaka*’: one who, because of past karma, is a

³ At *Vin. A.* v.1015–16, commenting on the *Vin.* 1.85–6 prohibition of ordaining a *paṇḍaka*; cf. Zwilling, 1992: 204.

paṇḍaka only for half the lunar month; the other half, he can quench his lust;

- (5) the 'non-male (*napuṃsaka*)-*paṇḍaka*': one who, from the time of conception, is lacking.

Here, it seems that types (1)–(3) can only attain sexual arousal by some unusual method and type (4) is one who is impotent for part of the month, while type (5) is perhaps one who cannot attain ejaculation as he has been 'lacking' since before birth; Vasubandhu sees this type as having an 'incomplete body [*ātmabhāva*]' (*AKB*. iv.97b–c). This could perhaps refer to a 'male' born without testicles, or one whose testicles remain undescended, so as to appear absent. In the *Mahāvastu*, *paṇḍakas* are among various people such as 'hunchbacks, dwarfs, and pigmies' (*Mvs*. II.469; cf. II.47) who attend a king in his palace. They are also among a small group of people allowed to enter the women's apartment, and even the apartment of the chief queen (II.469). This seems to imply that they are somehow deformed, and are regarded as no sexual threat to a king's wives or harem. Zwilling sees the term as signifying 'those with a variety of sexual dysfunction' who all 'share the common quality of being "*napuṃsaka*", "lacking maleness". That is, for one reason or another they fail to meet the normative sex role expectation for an adult male' (1992: 205).

The female *paṇḍaka* is mentioned on a few occasions also. In the *Vinaya*, two passages imply that a 'female *paṇḍaka*' cannot be a sexual partner for a man (*Vin*. III.129, 144). Zwilling says that the term, 'by analogy with the male *paṇḍaka*, would seem to be no more than the female of the species and equivalent to the *nārīṣaṇḍa*, or lesbian, of the medical literature' (1992: 208). Just to equate the female *paṇḍaka* with a lesbian is problematical, though: while she might be sexually attracted to women, she is also clearly seen as having some organic abnormality of the uterus. This is apparent from the nature of a list of those who cannot be ordained as nuns, namely those:

without sexual characteristics, and who were defective in sex, and bloodless, and with stagnant blood, and who always wore a menstrual cloth and were dripping and deformed, and female-*paṇḍakas*, and man-like women (*vepurisikā*), and those (whose anus and vagina) were run-together, and those who were hermaphrodites. (*Vin*. II.271)

Sexual behaviour of paṇḍakas

The Buddha is said to have prohibited the ordination of any *paṇḍakas*, and required the disrobing of any who were already ordained, because

of the following situation (*Vin.* 1.85–6). A *paṇḍaka* monk approached some young monks, then some fat novices, then some mahouts and grooms, asking each in turn to ‘defile’ him. While the first two groups sent him away, the last group agreed to his request. They then spread it about that Buddhist monks were *paṇḍakas*, or that those who were not *paṇḍakas* nevertheless ‘defiled’ *paṇḍakas*.

This indicates that a *paṇḍaka* was seen as some kind of promiscuous passive homosexual. That (male) *paṇḍakas* were seen as potentially sexually available to men is clearly indicated by its being said that even a good monk is mistrusted and suspected if he goes for alms to the haunts of prostitutes, widows, coarse young girls, *paṇḍakas* or even nuns (*A.* III.128; cf. *Vin.* 1.70). Thus Buddhaghosa sees them, like prostitutes and coarse young girls, as dominated by lust and longing for friendship with anyone (*Vin. A.* v.991–2). They are ‘non-males (*napuṃsakā*) who are full of defilements, with unquenchable lust’. Accordingly, a monk should not sit down in a private place with a *paṇḍaka*, though this is a lesser offence than sitting in such a place with a woman (*Vin.* iv.96). Zwillling affirms that in the *Vinaya*, *paṇḍakas* are nearly always referred to in the context of sexual, specifically homosexual, behaviour (1992: 205). He sums up his views by describing them as ‘a socially stigmatised class of passive, probably transvestite, homosexuals’ (1992: 209).

To have such people in a celibate male community would be seen as problematic, hence the bar on their ordination. For a monk to penetrate any being, including another man or a *paṇḍaka* (*Vin.* III.28), with his penis, in any orifice, was an offence entailing expulsion. Interestingly, this disjunction implies that being penetrated by another man did not necessarily mean that a man was a *paṇḍaka*. It may perhaps be that he was raped, though the seventh-century *Tā-ch’eng tsao-hsiang kung-te ching* even distinguishes between one reborn as a *paṇḍaka* and one ‘with the lusts and desires of a woman, and enjoys being treated as a woman by other men’, through such past karmic causes as having despised other men or enjoyed dressing as a woman. Thus not even all passive homosexuals are classified as *paṇḍakas*. Moreover, in the *Vinaya*, penetrating another man or a *paṇḍaka* was not seen to make a man a *paṇḍaka*. In the Hindu *Kāmasūtra* also, it was ‘atypical gender behavior and coital role’ – i.e. being penetrated – that were crucial in seeing a man as ‘queerly different’ (Sweet and Zwillling, 1993: 595).

Zwillling sees the ordination-bar as simply a ‘practical concession to prevailing conventions’ (1992: 209); but

Because the classical definitions of sexual misconduct mirror the taboos and concerns of pre-modern Indian society, might they not be reformulated based on a relativistic and situational appraisal of contemporary social mores? The textual sources surveyed here are at least consonant with a contemporary view of homosexuality as a probably organically or genetically based orientation, with the same moral significance (or insignificance) of [*sic*] heterosexuality. (1992: 210)

On this, one can say that Buddhism, except perhaps certain strands in Japan and America, does not follow a 'relativistic and situational' ethic. It is true that the Indian sources surveyed above see a *paṇḍaka* as something one is *born* as, though the term only covers certain types of *passive* homosexuals. It is true that penetration of a man or a *paṇḍaka* is seen as no worse an offence for a monk than penetrating a woman, i.e. 'homosexual' penetration is seen as no *worse* than 'heterosexual' penetration, for a celibate male. Yet the state of being a (passive-homosexual) *paṇḍaka* is seen as one with various spiritual disabilities, as will now be seen.

The psychological nature and limited potential of paṇḍakas

Milindapañha 310 sees *paṇḍakas*, like hermaphrodites, as among those who are spiritually obstructed from attaining understanding of *Dhamma* even though they are practising correctly. The Theravādin commentator Buddhaghosa holds that *paṇḍakas*, hermaphrodites and those of fixed wrong view are those who are described at *Vibh.* 341 as 'hindered by defilement': they cannot develop 'any meditation subject at all' (*Vism.* 177). Among others likewise hindered are those who have committed a heavy evil act having an immediate effect on rebirth ('hindered by karma'): all such are incapable of entering into the certainty of rightness in wholesome states. Likewise, in his *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya*, Vasubandhu sees *paṇḍakas* as subject to the 'obstacle of the defilements' because they suffer from chronic, continual defilements:

Defilements which surge up from time to time, even if their impulse is strong, can be overcome, but not continual defilement, even though it is at rest. The person in whom this is found does not find the time to make an effort to overcome it. From being small, they become medium sized; and from medium sized, they become strong: thus they form an obstacle. (*AKB.* iv.96)

This means that *paṇḍakas* are obstructed from attaining insight into the Noble Path and from those acts preparing for this.

Vasubandhu also holds that, while *paṇḍakas* and hermaphrodites can

do ordinary good deeds (such as acts of generosity), they are not susceptible to either discipline (*saṃvara*) or indiscipline (*AKB*. iv.43a–d; cf. ii.1b). The first is:

Because they possess, to an extreme degree, the defilements of the two sexes; because they are incapable of the reflection necessary to combat these defilements; and because the vigour of self-respect and concern for consequences is absent in them.

The second is:

Because the intention of committing transgression [*pāpāsaya*] is not strong among them; because indiscipline is opposed to discipline; and only one who is susceptible to discipline is susceptible to indiscipline . . . their bodies are similar to soil saturated with salt wherein there can neither grow wheat, nor bad herbs.

However, in the Tibetan tradition, sGam-po-pa (1079–1153), founder of the bKa’bgyud school, holds that the *paṇḍaka* and what Guenther translates as ‘the impotent’⁴ can practise the discipline of the *Bodhisattva*, consisting of not harming others, and positively benefiting them, if not that of the monk or nun (Guenther, 1959: 107).

Vasubandhu also holds that *paṇḍakas* and hermaphrodites are counted among sensualists, whose basis (*āśraya*) is in movement, unfirm like those in bad rebirths, so that they cannot cut off the roots of good (*AKB*. iv.80a–b). Likewise, the *Milindapañha* says that *paṇḍakas*, because of their ‘uncertainty’, cannot keep a secret (*Miln.* 92–3). Again, Vasubandhu says that if they kill their mother or father, it is not as heinous as if anyone else did this, because of the ‘mediocrity of their kindness and respect’:

because their parents, having given to the *paṇḍaka* only an incomplete body [*ātmabhāva*] and having only a mediocre affection for their son, are mediocre benefactors; because, on the other hand, the *paṇḍaka* does not experience strong respect for his parents the destruction of which would render him guilty of mortal transgression. (*AKB*. iv.97b–c)

The above passages thus portray the *paṇḍaka* as one who can do ordinary good deeds, but is obstructed from success in meditation, understanding *Dhamma* or gaining insight into the Path, because of continual mental defilements. He has a sensual, shameless nature replete with the defilements of both sexes, but is uncertain and wavering, and cannot reflect on his defilements. He is incapable of spiritual discipline and so cannot be blamed as if he were being undisciplined intentionally. He is unloved by his parents.

⁴ Tib. *za.ma*, Skt *ṣaṇḍha*.

Paṇḍakas and rebirth

Being 'neither a man nor a woman' is among a string of karmic effects in certain cases of adultery (*Thig.* 436–47; *J.* VI.237–9), while the *Pravrajāntarāya Sūtra* says that if a layman hinders someone from ordaining, reviles the *Dhamma*, or is angry at monks or brahmins, then, if he is 'addicted to' these, various bad forms of rebirth may follow, including being a *paṇḍaka* (cited at *Ss.* 73–4). The *Ta-ch'eng tsao-hsiang kung-te ching* says that rebirth as a *paṇḍaka* has four karmic causes:

(1) castrating another man; (2) laughingly scorning and slandering a recluse that keeps the precepts; (3) transgressing the precepts himself because of lustful desires; (4) not only transgressing the precepts himself but also encouraging others to do the same.

However, awakening faith and building a Buddha image will prevent the result of these acts, and he will always be a man 'with all his faculties intact' (Beyer, 1974: 53). Again, Vasubandhu holds that a *paṇḍaka* who saves bulls from being castrated will regain the sexual characteristics of a man (*AKB.* IV.55a–b).

In a less judgemental context, the American Zen priest Rōshi Daizui MacPhillamy says that the 'traditional Buddhist' explanation for homosexuality is that the immediately previous lives of a homosexual were as members of the opposite sex, and that certain inclinations or memories carry over from these to colour the present life (1982: 29). Moreover, Ian Stevenson, in his study of children who seem to have detailed knowledge of past personalities of whom they claim to be rebirths, has some interesting cases relating to gender-identity. He says that he has investigated many cases in which the previous personality was of the opposite sex, and in each of five such cases about which he has written, 'the subject as a child showed traits characteristic of the opposite sex', including a partiality for its clothes and mode of play. In most cases, such behaviour fades as the child grows older, but there are exceptions, such as a Burmese woman, who claims to have been a Japanese soldier in Burma in the Second World War and who 'has remained intransigently masculine in her conduct and outlook up to her middle 20s' (1977: 318).

HOMOSEXUAL ACTS

As has been seen above, the monastic code punishes a monk with expulsion if he penetrates any orifice of any being with his penis. Any other

sexual or sensual act, with a woman, *paṇḍaka* or man, is treated less severely. Nevertheless, many rules are designed to avoid such acts, or those entailing expulsion. Masturbation is a serious offence for a monk, and this includes emitting semen on another person (*Vin.* III.113), a monk getting a novice to masturbate him, or himself masturbating a sleeping novice (*Vin.* III.117), which could be seen to include homosexual acts. It is a lesser offence, of expiation, for nuns ‘tormented with dissatisfaction’ to slap each other’s genitals with their palms or any object, with the slapper ‘enjoying the contact’ (*Vin.* IV.260–1). It is similarly an offence of expiation for two nuns to lie together on one couch (*Vin.* IV.288–9), which could also be seen to pertain to potential homosexual behaviour (Wijayaratna, 1990: 95). It is a lesser offence, of wrong-doing, for monks to eat from the same dish, or share one couch (*Vin.* II.124), which is elsewhere seen as sensual behaviour by ‘depraved monks’ with women (*Vin.* II.10). Lastly, at *A.* III.270, the Buddha warns that a monk should not be excessively devoted to another monk as ‘dear and pleasing’, otherwise he will have no devotion to other *Saṅgha* members, be offended if the *Saṅgha* disciplines his favourite, and not listen to *Dhamma* from any other monk. Zwillling sees this as a warning against having ‘homoerotic feelings’ for another monk (1992: 208).

In all of this, rules relevant to homosexual activities or feelings are simply part of those aimed at minimizing *any* expressions of sexuality by monks or nuns. Homosexuality is not picked out for any *special* condemnation. Zwillling is thus correct for the monastic context when he says ‘when homosexual behaviour is not ignored in Indian Buddhist writings it is derogated to much the same degree as comparable heterosexual acts’ (Zwillling, 1992: 209). It would be wrong, though, to regard the *Vinaya* as seeing homosexual relationships as *more* *condonable* for monks and nuns than heterosexual ones, as John G. Jones does (1979: 79). He does so as the *Vinaya* has more to say on heterosexual activity than homosexual activity, and because homosexual relationships could not lead to children. However, the larger amount of attention given to heterosexual activity can simply be seen as due to the fact that it is more common. Moreover, if a monk having sex with a man was condonable as no children would ensue, then it is unlikely that *paṇḍakas* would actually have been barred from being ordained.

When it comes to homosexual feelings or activities between lay people, the even-handed opposition to both heterosexuality and homosexuality breaks down. José Cabezón is thus wrong in his generalization on Buddhist attitudes to homosexuality when he says that homosexual-

ity has been condemned only because homosexual activity breaches celibacy, not because it goes against the norm of heterosexuality (1993: 82). In the Theravāda tradition, Buddhaghosa regards 'desire and attachment in men for men, in women for women' (*D. A.* 853) as the meaning of 'wrong practices' (*micchā-dhammo*) at *D.* III.70, which says that these began to occur at a certain time in the past as part of the moral decline of society. In the Mahāyāna tradition, Śāntideva's *Śikṣā-samuccaya* cites the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* thus:

Likewise, endless varieties of punishments [in a future life] are described for the wrong deed of sexual intercourse between two men. The one who commits misconduct with boys sees boys being swept away in the Acid River who cry out to him, and owing to the suffering and pain born of his deep affection for them, plunges in after them.⁵

Roger Corless points out, however, that the *Śikṣā-samuccaya* is 'an anthology which has preserved other oddities such as the prediction that one who wipes snot on a sacred text will be reborn as a book . . . Such statements are hardly mainline Dharma' (1995: 3). Even in the condemnation, though, there is a hint of sympathy for the karmic plight of the paederast.

To what extent is homosexual sex seen as breaking the third precept, on sexual misconduct? In the Theravāda tradition, Buddhaghosa sees transgression of this precept as 'the will, carried out through the body by an immoral means, to transgress against those whom one should not go into'. While Conze's translation (1959: 71) of the relevant passage (*M. A.* 1.199) says 'By "those whom one should not go into", first of all, men are meant', this is in fact incorrect; the passage is simply saying that 'for men', intercourse with various categories of females breaks the precept. The *Upāsaka-janālaikāra*, a popular guide to Buddhism written in twelfth-century Sri Lanka, where Buddhaghosa worked, also explains the third precept (pp. 178–9) simply by discussing the categories of women with whom a layman should not have sex. Zwilling holds that, among the Indian commentators, only Buddhaghosa (which the above shows is debatable) and the anonymous author of the commentary on the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* included men among the forbidden sexual objects for men (1992: 207). This may simply be due to an oversight, in which the texts concentrate on the most common ways of breaking the third precept, rather than a positive acceptance of homosexual acts. Even so,

⁵ See *Ss.* 80, but this translation draws on the partial translation given by Zwilling, 1992: 209.

it shows that most Indian Buddhist commentators did not have a particular bee in their bonnet about condemning such acts. On sexual acts between women, Indian Buddhist texts are in fact completely silent, other than alluding to them in the *Vinaya*.

In Tibet, though, sGam-po-pa (1079–1153) includes homosexuality in his discussion of the third precept in his *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. After discussing various forms of sexual misconduct of a man with a woman, in a way which seems partly derived from the *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya* – which omits reference to homosexual acts (see pp. 72–3) – he adds ‘It also means to have intercourse with a male or in a *paṇḍaka*’s mouth or anus’ (Guenther, 1959: 76).

In his study of the *Jātaka* stories, John G. Jones says:

When one remembers the enormous amount that is said in warning of the dangers of forming heterosexual relationships in the *Jātaka* stories, it is quite remarkable that there is not one word warning of the dangers of a homosexual relationship. The only reservation ever expressed is with regard to the corrupting influence of an evil friend. (Jones, 1979: 115)

The stories certainly do give many examples of suffering arising from heterosexual relationships, while warmly affirming close friendship between men. In this, Jones sees ‘a good deal of homosexual emotion operating’ (1979: 113). Even though the Indian tradition would not describe it in this Westernized way, it ‘has never seen warm, tender, loving feelings between males as anything but good so long as the males concerned were mutually motivated towards the good’ (p. 113). Yet in looking for accounts relating to homosexual *practice*, all Jones can come up with are the following three stories (1979: 113–15). In story 211, a young boy becomes the attendant of a king, and then a very dear favourite: Jones *assumes* that as kings were little given to sexual restraint, the relationship would have been sexual. Story 253 concerns an ascetic who values the close affection (*sineha*; *J.* II.283) of a serpent in human form, though there is no reference to sexual passion (*parilāha*); if there had been, the story would have had the ascetic concerned over his breaking of celibacy. Story 346 refers only to friendly affection between a brahmin and his aged teacher. One text which Jones cites (1979: 107) and Cabezón takes up as ‘homoerotically suggestive’ (1993: 89) is story 498, on two deer who always went about together, ‘ruminating and cuddling together, very happy, head to head, nozzle to nozzle, horn to horn’ (*J.* IV.392). Cabezón overlooks the fact, however, that the two are described as *brothers*, so here there is only an example of brotherly affection!

Consequently, while the *Jātakas* can be seen to affirm close friendship, there seems to be no positive evidence of a moral acceptance of homosexual acts.

HOMOSEXUALITY IN BUDDHIST CULTURES

Cabezón claims that history shows Buddhism to have been 'ambivalent' about homosexuality, and that 'the evidence seems to suggest that as a whole Buddhism has been for the most part neutral' on it (1993: 82). He sees this 'essential neutrality' as having enabled Buddhism to adapt to the sexual mores of different cultures, so that its attitudes have ranged from condemnation of homosexuality (without advocating persecution of homosexuals) through condonement to active praise, as in Japan (p. 82). This, however, depends on the doubtful notion of there being an overall 'essence' of Buddhism. Let us look at the evidence, then.

Lands of Southern Buddhism

The contemporary teacher of a form of Insight meditation, N. Goenka, an Indian by birth, 'feels that homosexuality is dangerous because it mixes what he regards as male and female energies' and that prolonged meditation means that 'the homosexuality will go away'.⁶ Phra Chao, leader of the Thai *Saṅgha* at the beginning of this century, saw the prohibition on ordaining *paṇḍakas* as applying to homosexuals.⁷ The Thai social critic Sulak Sivaraksa, however, has claimed that 'the Buddha never mentioned homosexuality and only said that we should not use sex harmfully'.⁸ Gay clubs do exist in Bangkok, and homosexuality may be contributing to Thailand's mounting AIDS crisis, though prostitution must surely be playing its part here. In Burma, Melford Spiro reports that monks are mostly scrupulous in keeping their vows of celibacy, avoiding both heterosexual and homosexual digressions from it. Lay people expect the monks to keep to the *Vinaya*, and the openness of monasteries to visitors makes illicit sexual acts hard to hide. Nineteenth-century Christian observers also remarked on the good discipline of the monks (Spiro, 1971: 366–8).

Spiro also reports that, when in Sri Lanka, he was told that homosexuality was not infrequent in the *Saṅgha*: between monks, monks and

⁶ Corless, 1995: 4, citing personal communications dated 1994 and 1995.

⁷ *The Entrance to the Vinaya* (Bangkok: Mahamuktara-javidyalaya, 1969), vol. 1, p. 57, cited in Zwilling, 1992: 213.

⁸ Corless, 1995: 6, citing a personal communication from Eric Kolvig, 1994.

novices, and monks and laymen (Spiro, 1971: 368). Martin Southwold, though, found that Buddhist lay people in Sri Lanka reacted with hilarity to the suggestion that most monks had latent homosexuality as a character trait. In their experience, the average monk enjoys the company of women and seems to find them attractive (1983: 38). It should perhaps be noted that ordination in Sri Lanka, unlike in Thailand and Burma, is usually for life, so it is socially unacceptable to disrobe even if there are difficulties in dealing with sexual desire. This *may*, of course, lead to some monks' sexuality being diverted to being expressed in relation to other men, however much this breaks key monastic rules.

Tibet

Among Tibetan laity, homosexuality is seen in a very negative light, and it seems to have been confined almost exclusively to the *lDab ldobs*: irregular monks who saw to the physical running of the larger monasteries, took part in athletic competitions, and acted as policemen (Goldstein, 1964; Cabezón, 1993: 93). Melvyn Goldstein describes them as monks who did not readily fit into the discipline of monastic life, but who did not wish to lose the prestige and economic security of being a monk by returning to lay life. They were potential deviants whom the monastic system tamed by allowing them to exist on its edge, before absorbing them into the body of more disciplined monks. In larger monasteries, they might comprise up to 10 per cent of the population (1964: 125, 137–8, 140). The *lDab ldobs* were known to engage in sexual acts with boys, yet avoided committing an offence entailing expulsion by not penetrating any orifice. Rather, they attained stimulation by insertion of the penis between the legs of the partner from behind (Goldstein, 1964: 134; Cabezón, 1993: 93). Young monks or lay youths might sometimes be abducted by *lDab ldobs*, but the victim would keep quiet about this from fear of both *lDab ldob* retaliation and the stigma of having been a homosexual partner (Goldstein, 1964: 135). *lDab ldobs* sometimes also fought for the favours of a voluntary partner, and for this they were often punished by the monastic authorities, both for fighting and homosexuality (Goldstein, 1964: 135). Their failings, however, have not prevented them from being respected by laity and monks alike, because of their contributions to society, and for their non-attachment to wealth and people (Goldstein, 1964: 138). While they are recognized as bad monks, they are not seen as the worst kind: one who hypocritically hides his bad behavi-

our behind a screen of piety (Goldstein, 1964: 138–9). The *lDab ldob* is at least seen to have the virtue of honesty, which is prized by Tibetans.

Lands of Eastern Buddhism

In China, records from the mostly pre-Buddhist Han period (206 BCE–220 CE) show that certain emperors took male lovers. Male prostitution and transvestism were common in the Sung period (960–1279), though corporal punishment and a fine was decreed for male prostitutes around 1111, and homosexuality was sporadically discouraged by laws thereafter (Wawrytko, 1993: 200–1; Faure, 1991: 254). Sexual repression was more noticeable in the Ch'ing dynasty (1644–1912), and Western ideas then added to this, but the harsh treatment, even execution, by the present Communist government is unprecedented (Wawrytko, 1993: 206).

When non-Buddhist Chinese of the pre-modern period have expressed reservations about homosexuality, it has been due to a Confucian concern with the stability and continuity of the family and the corruption of those in power, or Taoist-related concern for a healthy use of sexual energies, especially for men (Wawrytko, 1993: 204–10). Nevertheless, Confucianism tended not to condemn homosexuality except where it compromised family or social obligations. There is even reference, in the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), to families giving approval to male homosexual couples living together. Lesbianism for love-starved women was seen as preferable to adultery. In the seventeenth century, Jesuit missionaries reported, with surprise, on the lack of moral outrage at homosexual behaviour. Same-sex relationships were not uncommon among actors (all male), in royal harems, between co-wives, and in brothels (Wawrytko, 1993: 201–3).

Sandra Wawrytko reports that literature of the Ming dynasty not infrequently expresses suspicion that some Buddhist nuns were lesbians. One 'lesbian classic' has the two heroines vowing to be reborn as husband and wife and invoking the Buddha as witness to their 'marriage' (1993: 203). In the nineteenth century, a Buddhist-influenced movement of financially independent silk-weaver women (see p. 406), known as the 'Golden Orchid Association', sometimes included lesbian marriages (Cabezón, 1993: 84).

In the twentieth century, prior to the Communist period, Holmes Welch reports that monks saw homosexuality in the monasteries as very rare and regarded it as 'low-taste' and pointless. However, one ex-monk

reported that there was considerable emotional attachment between older and younger monks (Welch, 1967: 118). John Blofeld reports that, during his nine-month stay in a Chinese monastery, he saw no trace of any sexuality, and all were 'uninterested in homosexual attachment', though there was much attachment between friends (1972: 164). It must be remarked, in fact, that in Chinese culture, men and women have often moved in different circles, and this has encouraged close same-sex friendships. Holding hands in public is a sign of such close friendship, as in India, though not of erotic feeling, *per se* (Wawrytko, 1993: 199).

In recent years, the Ven. Master Hsüan Hua, a much-respected Chinese monk who founded monasteries in America, held that 'homosexuality . . . plants the seeds which lead to rebirth in the lower realms of existence'.⁹ In the Korean tradition, which is similar to that of China, the contemporary Master Soen Sa Nim has said that homosexuality is a result of karma, but that the chanting of appropriate *mantras* can lead to a homosexual becoming heterosexual.¹⁰

In Japan, while the current penal code makes no reference to homosexuality or sodomy (Wawrytko, 1993: 219), a 1987 study of male college students nevertheless found that those who were actively homosexual (4.5 per cent) tended to hide their sexual preferences because they did not want to shame their families (Wawrytko, 1993: 215), perhaps on account of Confucian influence. Moreover, Umezawa asserts that the Japanese desire not to be shamed before others explains why 'the Japanese way of thinking does not allow people to become homosexual easily' (1988: 171).

Nevertheless, as in China, the general separation of men and women in traditional Japanese culture has led to close same-sex relationships. Moreover, the indigenous religion of Shintō has encouraged a generally permissive attitude towards sexuality, as a perfectly natural aspect of humanity. Homosexual relationships have traditionally been readily tolerated so long as the partners have had commitment to and sympathy for each other. There was a high incidence of homosexuality among the *bushi* warriors, who became the ruling elite after 1192. Among them, the 'way of the young man' (*shudō*) positively affirmed age-structured homosexuality, apparently as part of male-bonding in a tight-knit military group which excluded women (Wawrytko, 1993: 212–13). Such an asso-

⁹ *Buddhism: Essential Teachings*, compiled by Bhikshu Heng Shure (Talmage, Calif., City of 10,000 Buddhas, privately circulated, p. 65), cited in Corless, 1995: 4.

¹⁰ Corless, 1995, 4, citing 'Relationships Aren't a This or a That: An Interview with Bobby Rhodes', *Turning Wheel* (Fall, 1992), 19.

ciation of manly exertion and homosexuality can also be seen in ancient Greece and among the *lDab ldob* of Tibet. In the Tokugawa period (1603–1850), homosexuality was encouraged among the *samurai* as a way for youths to learn virtue, honesty and appreciation of beauty from these older men.¹¹ In the Tokugawa period there is also evidence of lesbianism among prostitutes, members of harems, and neglected wives, and nineteenth-century sex-manuals include explicit passages on and illustrations of homosexual activities (Wawrytko, 1993: 213–14).

There are several connections between Buddhism and homosexuality in Japan. In a fourteenth-century text, *Chigo Kannon engi*, the *Bodhisattva* Kannon rewards a devoted monk by appearing in the form of a beautiful young novice (*Chigo*) as a male lover (Cabezón, 1993: 91). In a fifteenth-century poem, and three later texts, it is said that Kūkai, the ninth-century founder of the Tantric Shingon school of Buddhism, introduced male homosexual love from China to Japan. From the fifteenth century, various heterodox texts of the Tantric Shingon school glorified heterosexual sex as a way to enlightenment; the above-mentioned texts added homosexual love as legitimate activity for priests.¹² In the 1598 'Kōbō Daishi's Book', a vision of Kūkai gives instruction on methods of intercourse between priests and novices (Schalow, 1992: 216–20). In 1667, in a period when the celibate monastic ideal was starting to give way to that of a married priesthood (Cabezón, 1993: 92), a scholar wrote 'Rock Azaleas', a collection of homoerotic poems, mostly addressed by priests to their novice lovers. The 1687 'Great Mirror of Male Love' (*Nanshoku ōkagami*)¹³ claims that Kūkai had not taught male love except in the monasteries, but that now it was becoming popular among *samurai* and merchants (Schalow, 1992: 222–8). The book is positive towards such male love, but criticizes monks of various sects for being hypocritical, in that they tried to hide the fact that they indulged in it, whether with novices or boy prostitutes. The text even complains that Rinzai Zen monks' visits to boy prostitutes had inflated their price.

In the sixteenth century, Francis Xavier, a Christian missionary to Japan, was shocked both at the incidence of 'abominations of the flesh' among Buddhist monks in particular and at the social indifference to it

¹¹ King, 1993: 146–7, citing Tsuneo Watanabe and Jun'ichi Iwata, *The Love of the Samurai: A Thousand Years of Japanese Homosexuality* (London: GMP Publishers, 1989), pp. 88, 11.

¹² Schalow, 1992: 215–16, 228; cf. Faure, 1991: 254.

¹³ Translated by P. G. Schalow, *The Great Mirror of Male Love by Ihara Saikaku* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989).

(Faure, 1991: 249; Wawrytko, 1993: 213). Bernard Faure summarizes his survey of homosexuality and Buddhism in China and Japan (1991: 249–57) by saying:

Most authors agree that male homosexuality was relatively well accepted in Japanese society and became a prevalent feature of Japanese monastic life. It was seen as a kind of compensation for the prohibition against the presence of women in the monasteries, a prohibition particularly enforced under the Tokugawa rule . . . its transgressive nature diminished with time, so that it was eventually perceived as a privilege of the monks. (p. 255)

Of course, by the standards of original Indian Buddhism, affirm in all Buddhist lands except Japan, (and to a certain extent Korea, through Japanese influence), any monk found to have engaged deliberately in penetrative sexual activity of any kind should automatically be expelled from the monkhood. Japanese Buddhists were not without some condemnation of homosexuality, though. In *Ōjō yōshū*, the Tendai monk Genshin (942–1017) says that homosexuals go straight to hell, because of their moral transgression and worldly attachment (Faure, 1991: 253). In the middle ages, the Tantric Tachikawa-Ryū sect, which advocated sexual yoga as a way to enlightenment, condemned homosexuality as sterile and counterproductive (Stevens, 1990: 82). Zen masters also warned that monks who had sex with novices and young boys would experience bad karmic results, and that what they taught was suspect. Ikkyū (d. 1481), though he took part in monastic homosexuality as a Zen novice, came to condemn it as leading to jealousies and strife in monasteries (Faure, 1991: 257). He preferred himself to

shun what he saw as the facade of monastic celibacy, and be openly sexually active with women. (Stevens, 1990: 97)

Western Buddhism

What of Buddhism in the West? In the UK, the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order (FWBO: see pp. 103 and 225) welcomes homosexuals, and its outreach activities to various groups in society include introductory meditation retreats for gays and lesbians.

A number of Order members live in single-sex communities, and the FWBO holds that there is a need to revive same-sex friendships, seen generally to avoid the tensions and projections that can be involved in friendship between the sexes. Same-sex friendships are seen as usually deeper, and as facilitating greater trust and spiritual communication and

guidance (Subhuti, 1994: 155). Yet if men are wary of a homosexual aspect of friendship with a man, or even of just physical contact as part of such a friendship, they should face 'the fact that there may be some element of sexual attraction towards their friends' (Subhuti, 1994: 166). Though sexual contact should *not* be seen as a necessary part of same-sex friendships, people should not be afraid of the idea, and if it happens, it should be seen as perfectly ordinary (Sangharakshita, 1987: 12; Subhuti, 1994: 166).

The current FWBO attitude is that, provided the third precept is not infringed, heterosexuality, homosexuality and transvestism are all equally morally neutral (Subhuti, 1994: 172). This position of 'neutrality' seems a move away from an earlier preference, among some FWBO members, for homosexual relationships. According to Sāgaramati:

At one time – in the late 1970's/early 1980's – it was voiced that homosexual relations might be best from a 'spiritual' point of view in that they were less 'polarized' than their heterosexual equivalents, resulting in less jealousy, attachment, coercion, and other negative mental states. However, experience has shown that this is not the case: homosexual relationships are just as prone to such negative states as heterosexual ones! (I know that this is now Sangharakshita's view.)¹⁴

It is now held that, while 'There is nothing that makes gay sex more or less unskilful than heterosexual sex', 'For Buddhism, sexuality is something that one seeks ultimately to transcend, and contented celibacy is the ideal' (Maitreyabandhu, 1995). Celibacy is seen as an aid to non-attachment, though in the past, the FWBO has sometimes also used promiscuity as an aid to this (Subhuti, 1983: 167).

It is seen as important that sexuality is only of relatively peripheral concern to a person, so that he or she can gradually move towards full celibacy (Sangharakshita, 1987: 14). Likewise, spiritual development is seen to entail a progressive transcendence of polarized identification with a person's masculinity or femininity (Subhuti, 1994: 171). The FWBO ideal is one of androgyny, where initial gender-related self-images are overcome by men and women, each having developed, in single-sex situations, qualities normally associated with the other, and 'there is no self-identification as either a man or a woman' (Subhuti, 1994: 166). For this reason, Sangharakshita is critical of homosexuals whose self-identity is based on their sexual orientation (Sangharakshita, 1987: 12; Subhuti, 1994: 172).

¹⁴ Letter, 21 November 1995.

A different kind of view on homosexuality is expressed by Jacqui and Alan James, UK teachers of a form of Insight meditation. They see it as a 'problem area' in which the male homosexual rejects the feminine 'facet of the life-stream' yet often imitates certain female qualities, and the lesbian does the opposite. They thus see it as:

a confusion of the desire to blend the masculine and feminine principles. It is to go on the wrong path through hatred . . . The rejection of one polarity which always accompanies homosexuality is a major stumbling block to the integration and transcendence of masculinity and femininity which signifies real progress on the meditative path. (1987: 42)

They hold, interestingly, that a 'slightly worse problem' is to take to celibacy simply out of fear of sexuality, and thus to repress it with a blind denial of its reality. Such an approach includes 'fear of the responsibility involved in trying to blend the masculine and feminine elements . . . men have to acknowledge the softer side of their nature, the compassionate side. Women need to acknowledge and develop their analytical skills and their impartiality' (pp. 43–4). Also in the UK, the Forest Sangha, which seeks to continue the traditions of Thai meditative monasticism in the West, allows ordination of homosexuals who are able and willing to be celibate, though not of those 'not completely a male' (i.e. *pandakas*).¹⁵

In the USA, in his research among Buddhist groups in the San Francisco Bay area, Roger Corless has found that they are either 'neutral or openly accepting' towards 'queer practitioners' (1995: 6). Likewise, José Cabezón reports that in North America, while homophobia is not unknown among Buddhists, he knows of no Buddhist institution that has marginalized its lay homosexual constituency, or required their sexual abstinence. He also knows of no Westerner being denied ordination in North America through being a homosexual (1993: 94). Broadly speaking, one can see this attitude as largely a result of the mixing of the Japanese attitude, conveyed through Zen and Pure Land teachings, and Western liberalism, which has affected both these and a largely de-traditionalized form of Theravāda Insight meditation which is now becoming popular.

Reverend Daizui MacPhillamy, a clinical psychologist and Sōtō Zen priest, has affirmed that:

homosexuality is not an impediment to Enlightenment and gay people are welcome in Buddhist training. How could it be otherwise? How could love

¹⁵ Ajahn Sucitto, letter dated 16 November 1995.

between *any* sentient beings be contrary to the Buddha Nature . . . ? . . . The Buddhist mind understands that All is One *and* All is different. (1982: 28)

He points out that the Sōtō community at Shasta Abbey has included both gay monastics and lay people, and that 'their progress in training has been no different from that of heterosexually-oriented trainees and at least one of them has had a full *kenshō*' (p. 28). The only difference is that they have to deal with the internalized homophobia of society, which sees gays as 'evil, sick or deformed', so that they may be either ashamed or proud of being gay (p. 32). A gay trainee should be willing to give up his present sexual orientation: but only in the sense that any dedicated practitioner, gay or straight, should be *willing* to give up anything for awakening, whether or not he or she actually has to do so (pp. 29–30). Some homosexuals might be changed by the practice, others not, such as the one who had a *kenshō*.

There are various gay and/or lesbian Buddhist groups (Corless, 1995: 5, 14–17), and in 1994, a Gay Pride march in New York City included Zen Buddhists marching under a 'Zen Queers' banner.¹⁶ Such groups aim at a sense of belonging and at mutual support in helping heal the wounds arising from internalized homophobia and the AIDS crisis. Indeed, the 'queer' Buddhists of San Francisco like to cite the Buddha's saying 'If you, monks, do not tend one another, then who is there who will tend you? Whoever, monks, would tend me, he should tend the sick' (*Vin.* 1.302) (Corless, 1995: 11). The Hartford Street Zen Centre runs Maitri, an AIDS hospice, one of the first of its kind (Corless, 1995: 5). Corless points out that the awareness of mortality attendant on the AIDS crisis has helped develop or quickened the interest of 'queers' in Buddhism (1995: 9–10). Another response to the AIDS crisis has been by Eric Kolvig, of the Insight Meditation Center, Barre, Massachusetts, who came to San Francisco in 1993 to teach Insight meditation in a way that would help gays deal with the fear, rage and grief arising from the AIDS epidemic, and the self-hatred that they and lesbians have ingested from the surrounding society (Corless, 1995: 10–11).

Professor Taitetsu Unno, a minister of the Pure Land Buddhist Churches of America, has conducted ceremonies of commitment between Buddhist gay couples (Corless, 1995: 6). The Japanese-based Sōka Gakkai International, which at first saw homosexuality as something to be overcome by a heterosexual marriage, announced in 1995

¹⁶ *Indra's Network* newsletter (October/November 1995), 11, reproducing an edited article by Arline Klatté, 'Mindful Warriors', from the American *Trends* magazine.

that it would conduct same-sex marriages, as its former advice was not working (Corless, 1995: 5). In the Tibetan tradition, Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche agreed to the marriage of a gay Buddhist to a gay Catholic in a joint Buddhist-Christian ceremony.¹⁷

The current Dalai Lama, when asked about homosexuality, at first alluded to the traditional Tibetan view that oral and anal intercourse are wrong, then said that 'homosexual conduct is not a fault as long as both partners agree to it, neither is under vows of celibacy, and the activity does not harm others'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in 1996, he published a book, *Beyond Dogma*,¹⁹ in which he said that 'A sexual act is proper when the couples use the organs created for sexual intercourse and nothing else.'²⁰ This concerned some liberal American Buddhists, especially gays, who had thought that Buddhism was non-judgemental on sexual matters. In June 1997, the Dalai Lama visited San Francisco, where a large number of gay people live, and said in an address to followers and the press:

We have to make a distinction between believers and unbelievers . . . From a Buddhist point of view, men-to-men and women-to-women is generally considered sexual misconduct. From society's viewpoint, mutually agreeable homosexual relations can be of mutual benefit, enjoyable and harmless.²¹

This did not go down well with his listeners, with Steve Peskin, co-founder of the Buddhist AIDS project in San Francisco, criticizing the Dalai Lama for contributing to anti-gay attitudes.²² The Dalai Lama also discomfited both heterosexual and gay followers by saying:

Sexual misconduct for men and women consists of oral and anal sex . . . Even with your wife, using one's mouth or other hole is sexual misconduct. Using one's hand, that is sexual misconduct,

though 'To have sexual relations with a prostitute paid by you and not by a third person does not constitute improper behaviour.' Given their concern at the Dalai Lama's remarks, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Buddhist community asked for a private meeting with him to discuss the issue of homosexuality, and he accordingly met

¹⁷ Corless, 1995: 6, citing Jeff Logan-Olivas, 'Story of a Gay Wedding', *Turning Wheel* (Fall 1992), 20. ¹⁸ Corless, 1995: 6, citing Scott Hunt, 'Hello Dalai', *Out* (February/March 1994), 102.

¹⁹ (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books).

²⁰ *The Sunday Times* newspaper, 15 June 1997, 'Gays Rail at Straight Talk by Dalai Lama'.

²¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 June 1997, as cited by David S. da Silva Cornell, 'More re: Dalai Lama and Sex' posting to 'Buddhist' Internet discussion forum, 7 July 1997. See also *The Sunday Times* newspaper, 15 June 1997, 'Gays Rail at Straight Talk by Dalai Lama'.

²² *The Sunday Times* newspaper, 15 June 1997, 'Gays Rail at Straight Talk by Dalai Lama'.

a delegation on 11 June. After this, he gave out a short press release which said that he

was greatly concerned by reports made available to him regarding violence and discrimination against gay and lesbian people. His Holiness opposes violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation. He urges respect, tolerance, compassion, and the full recognition of human rights for all . . . Since these matters [of sexuality] are complex and require careful consideration, His Holiness welcomes the invitation and suggestion for further study and discussion on human sexuality to be organised by some of the meeting participants.²³

The LGBT Buddhists, who were heartened by the meeting, also gave out a press release:

In a warm, relaxed meeting, the Dalai Lama sought to clarify his understanding of traditional Buddhist texts concerning sexuality . . . He expressed his willingness to consider the possibility that some of these teachings may be specific to a particular cultural and historical context. He stressed that he does not have the authority to unilaterally reinterpret Buddhist scriptures, but urged those present to build a consensus among other Buddhist traditions and communities to collectively change the understanding of the text for contemporary society. His Holiness expressed interest in the insights of modern scientific research and its value in developing new understandings of these texts.

His Holiness . . . was characteristically open and non-judgemental.²⁴

Subsequently, LGBT Buddhists in the USA and Hong Kong started to reflect on how to build a new consensus, and embarked on setting up an Internet discussion forum with this in view.²⁵ One gay Buddhist went on to note that the Dalai Lama had previously said that a problem with oral, anal and manual sex was that they disturbed the inner energy channels which are central to tantric meditation. Accordingly, said the Buddhist, they *could* be seen as acceptable for those Buddhists not involved in such practices.²⁶

CONCLUSION

While close friendships have been accepted in monasteries, homosexual activity has not been, except in Japan and, in a moderated form, among

²³ David S. da Silva Cornell, 'Official Press Releases from Lesbian and Gay Meeting with Dalai Lama' posting to 'Buddhist' Internet discussion forum, 7 July 1997. ²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David S. da Silva Cornell, 'After HHDL's Meeting w/LGBT Buddhists' posting to 'Buddhist' Internet discussion forum, 27 June 1997. For those who are interested, Cornell's e-mail address is: cornelld@hayboo.com.

²⁶ David S. da Silva Cornell, 'Re: Dalai Lama and Sex-Reply' posting to 'Buddhist' Internet discussion forum, 7 July 1997.

irregular monks in Tibet. In the case of the type of sexually dysfunctional passive homosexual known as a *paṇḍaka*, ordination has been barred, and the spiritual potential in the present life of such people seen as limited. In Japan, which has had some influence on American Buddhism, resistance to the ideal of monastic celibacy, which culminated in the development of a married priesthood, led to a toleration and even advocacy of homosexual activity in the monasteries. Homosexual activity among lay people has been sporadically condemned as immoral in Southern and Northern Buddhism, but there is no evidence of persecution of people for homosexual activities. An attitude of unenthusiastic toleration has existed. In China, there has been more tolerance, and in Japan positive advocacy.

Glossary and details of historical figures and texts

P = Pali, S = Sanskrit, E = English

Abhidhamma (P); *Abhidharma* (S): third section of early Buddhist Canon, on systematized teachings, psychology, philosophy.

Abhidharma-kośa (S): a key text of the Sarvāstivāda school, by Vasubandhu.

Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya is his own commentary on this, mainly from the point of view of the Sautrāntika school.

Arahat (P); *Arhat* (S): a fully liberated saint who has experienced *Nirvāṇa* by uprooting and destroying his or her attachment, hatred and delusion.

Asaṅga: fourth- or fifth-century CE Indian author of a number of Mahāyāna treatises, especially of the Yogācāra school.

Asoka (P); Aśoka (S): Buddhist ruler (c. 268–239 BCE) of a large Indian empire; left many stone-carved edicts indicating his rule according to Buddhist social ethics.

Bodhi-caryāvatāra (S): a work of Śāntideva on the path of the *Bodhisattva*.

Bodhisatta (P); *Bodhisattva* (S): a being-for-enlightenment: one fully dedicated to becoming a perfect Buddha. In the Theravāda, mainly used for Gotama in many of his past lives, as described in the *Jātakas*. In the Mahāyāna, a being, human or divine, on the long *Bodhisattva*-path.

Bodhisattva-bhūmi (S): a text, by Asaṅga, on the stages of the *Bodhisattva*-path, with a substantial section on ethics.

Brahmanism: early form of Hinduism.

brahmin (E) (P and S *brāhmaṇa*): a Hindu priest, member of the highest of four social classes in the Hindu system.

Buddhaghosa: famous Indian commentator on texts of Theravāda school. Active in fifth-century CE Sri Lanka.

Cakkavatti (P); *Cakravartin* (S): a ‘wheel-turning’ king: a compassionate and just emperor. Seen as a secular parallel to a Buddha.

Candrakīrti: late sixth-century CE Indian writer and commentator of the Mahāyāna Madhyamaka school.

Conditioned Arising (E) (P *paṭicca-samuppāda*; S *pratīya-samutpāda*): also known as Dependent Origination. The doctrine that all mental and physical states arise from and depend on conditions. A common application of this principle is a series of twelve conditions, including spiritual ignorance and craving, culminating in the arising of *dukkha*.

Dalai Lama: the current political leader of the Tibetan people in exile, and former ruler of Tibet. Seen as one in a line of Dalai Lamas, each of whom is regarded as both a reincarnation of the last one and a re-manifestation of the compassionate *Bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara.

Dhamma (P); *Dharma* (S): the Buddha's teachings, the path of Buddhism, and the experiences attained by practising that path, culminating in *Nirvāṇa*. In a socio-moral sense, non-violence, justice and compassion. Also the natural law-orderliness of the world.

Dhammapada (P): part of the *Sutta* section of the Pali Canon. A collection of 423 verses, many of an ethical nature.

dhammas (P); *dharmas* (S): basic patterns/processes, whether mental or physical, seen in the *Abhidhamma* to be the interacting component processes making up the world.

dukkha (P); *duḥkha* (S): 'suffering', or general 'unsatisfactoriness' or 'imperfection' of everything but *Nirvāṇa*.

emptiness (E) (S *śūnyatā*): Mahāyāna idea of the lack of inherent nature in anything, on account of everything being conditioned and interrelated.

Eastern Buddhism: form of Buddhism mediated by Chinese culture, i.e. Buddhism of China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore and parts of Malaysia. A form of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Gotama (P); Gautama (S): family name of the historical Buddha, c. 480–400 BCE.

Jātaka (P and S): a 'birth story' purporting to be about a past life of the Buddha as a *Bodhisattva*. A text relating such a story.

karmic fruitfulness (P *puñña*, S *puṇya*): the auspicious power of good actions to purify the mind and bring good karmic fruits. Often translated as 'merit'.

knowledge, the threefold (E) (P *tevijjā*; S *traividyā*): memory of past lives; the 'divine eye', i.e. seeing how other beings are reborn according to their karma; experience of *Nirvāṇa* and full insight into the other Noble Truths.

knowledges, the six (E) (P *abhiññā*; S *abhijñā*): psychic power over matter; the 'divine ear', i.e. hearing sounds – human and divine – at great distances; thought reading; and the 'threefold knowledge' – see last entry.

Mahāyāna (S): the 'Great Vehicle'. Form of Buddhism which puts much emphasis on the *Bodhisattva*-path to Buddhahood, for the sake of all beings. Found mainly in China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet and Mongolia.

mantra (S): a sacred phrase, word or syllable that is used to tune into a particular holy being and its power.

Mantrayāna (S): 'Vehicle of Sacred Words'. More or less equivalent to Vajrayāna.

Māra (P and S): An evil tempter-deity, seen as the embodiment of desire and death, dwelling in the highest of the sense-desire-realm heavens.

merit: see karmic fruitfulness.

Milindapañha (P): a post-canonical Theravādin text, of around the first century CE, purporting to record dialogues between King Milinda (155–130 BCE) and the monk Nāgasena.

mudra (S): a ritual gesture, often used to amplify the efficacy of a *mantra*.

Nāgārjuna (c.150–250 CE): Indian founder of Mahāyāna Madhyamaka school.

Nibbāna (P); *Nirvāṇa* (S): literally ‘extinction’, in the sense of the going out of the ‘fires’ of attachment, hatred and delusion, which cause *dukkha*, and the end of *dukkha* itself. The goal of Theravāda Buddhism, attained initially in life, then finally entered at death.

Noble One (P *ariya*; S *ārya*): one who has gained a first glimpse of ultimate reality, so as to be at least a Stream-enterer (Theravāda) or first-stage *Bodhisattva* (Mahāyāna).

Northern Buddhism: form of Buddhism mediated by Tibetan culture, i.e. Buddhism of Tibet, North-west China, Mongolia, Bhutan, and parts of Nepal and the far north of India. Is a form of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna.

observance day (P *uposatha*; S (*u*)*poṣadha*): a type of ‘sabbath’ day on the full-moon, new-moon or one of two half-moon days, when lay people’s visits to a temple are more common and observance of precepts more assiduous.

Pali: language in which the Theravādin texts are preserved, also used for chanting.

Pali Canon: Theravādin collection of scriptures, consisting of sections on *Vinaya*, *Sutta* and *Abhidhamma*, the first two of which substantially date from the time of the Buddha. Passed on by communal recitation until first written down in around 80 BCE.

precepts, five: undertaking to avoid: intentional harming of any living being; theft and cheating; sexual misconduct; lying; unmindful states due to alcohol or drugs.

refuges, three: the Buddha, *Dhamma* and (Noble) *Saṅgha*, seen as inspiring focuses of inspiration and inner strength, and thus as uplifting objects of devotion.

renunciant (P *samaṇa*; S *śramaṇa*): one who has renounced lay life to become a celibate religious practitioner who lives by alms. The term is applied to non-Brahmanical religious wanderers such as Buddhist and Jain monks and nuns.

saṃsāra (P and S): ‘wandering on’: the round of rebirths and, more generally, the conditioned world, as contrasted with the unconditioned, *Nirvāṇa*.

Saṅgha (P); *Samgha* (S): the monastic community, and in the highest sense, the community of anyone, monastic or lay, who is a Noble One.

Sanskrit: language in which many of the texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism came to be written. These now mainly exist only in Tibetan and Chinese translations.

Śāntideva: seventh-century CE Indian Mahāyāna poet.

Sarvāstivāda (S): a non-Mahāyāna school of early Buddhism, once very successful in northern India.

Sarvāstivādin (S): follower of the above school.

Sarvodaya Śramadāna: name of a Gandhian-influenced Sri Lankan Buddhist rural development movement.

Śikṣā-samuccaya (S): a compilation, from various Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, by Śāntideva.

Southern Buddhism: form of Buddhism particularly mediated by Sri Lanka, i.e. Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, parts of south Vietnam. Theravāda with a little residual influence from Mahāyāna.

Śrāvaka-yāna (S): ‘Vehicle of the Disciples/Listeners (*śrāvakas*)’: a Mahāyāna

- term for followers of non-Mahāyāna schools, for example Theravādins and Sarvāstivādins: those who follow the Buddha's teachings so as to be able to become *Arhats*.
- Stream-enterer (P *sotāpanna*; S *srotāpanna*): first grade of sainthood, attained by first glimpse of *Nirvāṇa*.
- Sutta* (P); *Sūtra* (S): a discourse attributed to the Buddha, or a similar teaching taught by a disciple of his and approved of by him.
- Tantra* (S): a 'system' of meditation and ritual, preserved in a text (also called a *Tantra*) used in Vajrayāna Buddhism.
- Theravāda (P): the 'Ancient teaching' or 'Way of the Elders' school, one of the major pre-Mahāyāna schools of Buddhism, and the only one to survive into the modern day, found mainly in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.
- Theravādin (P): a follower of the Theravāda school.
- Upāsaka-śīla Sūtra* (S): a Mahāyāna text, popular in China, on lay ethics.
- Vajrayāna (S): 'Diamond Vehicle' form of Mahāyāna dominant in Tibet and Mongolia, emphasizing the visualization of holy beings and the use of *mantras*, or sacred words of power.
- Vasubandhu: fourth-century CE author of the *Abhidharma-kośa* and its *bhāṣya* (commentary). An author of the same name, who may be the same person, was the half-brother of Asaṅga, both of whom wrote a number of works of the Mahāyāna Yogācāra school of philosophy.
- Vīnaya* (P and S): The monastic discipline, including a code of rules and how to conduct monastic business. The texts containing this.
- Visuddhimagga* (P): a work of Buddhaghosa outlining the whole Theravāda path of training in moral conduct, meditation and wisdom.

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