

limit of existence. This is the deepest, most profound, and most mentally detached of states. But lack of perception is not the equivalent of inerrant perception. The former is a temporary escape from *dukkha*, the latter is *dukkha's* solution.

Before moving to the third aspect of the Buddhist path — insight, characterized by correct view and correct intention — we may consider one important corollary of advanced mental discipline; namely, that the cultivation of concentration endows a meditator with superhuman abilities and psychic powers. The Sanskrit term for such abilities is *abhijñā*, which translates literally as “higher knowledge.” To maintain the quasi-technological comparison, one may imagine that facility with deep mental concentration enables the development of *abhijñā* in the same way that possession of a scanning electron microscope enables the skillful biochemical manipulation of genetic materials. Both technologies allow one to see worldly stuff at the level of its component parts and give one the ability to manipulate that stuff deliberately, to recombine its elements, and thus, seemingly, to make magic. As the science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke once observed, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

Just as recombinant DNA techniques can be used to cure diseases or create new viruses, the thaumaturgic skills that accompany deep awareness are sources of ambivalence for Buddhist authors. The ability to remember one's past lives, for instance, was not unique to Shakyamuni or Buddhist arhats. Similarly, the ability to walk on water, swim through dry land, or fly up and touch the moon is available to anybody with the know-how. Insight has no role in it. The Fourth Noble Truth proposes that unwavering one-pointed concentration is a prerequisite for progress across the full length of the Buddhist path. But the magical abilities one gains along the way can be used for ill or, at the least, can become traps if treated as ends in themselves. The third stage on the path, wisdom, ensures that one does not become sidetracked thus. Correct view — whereby one does not mistakenly imagine a Self where there is no Self, or stability where things are unstable — leading to correct volition — which grasps after neither being nor becoming — is the end of the path. This path begins with morality, willing the right things, and ends with wisdom, willing in the right way.

We have already spent some time on the rudiments of Buddhist wisdom. So, rather than recontextualizing those points within this discussion of the path, let us conclude this section by returning to the buddha as the perfecter of the Noble Eightfold Path. Above I noted that Buddhist literature demonstrates a certain ambivalence about thaumaturgic powers. In fact, only four actions require a monk's immediate expulsion from the order: killing, lying, stealing, and claiming possession of superhuman abilities. Be that as it may, we have also

seen that such psychic powers are central to Shakyamuni's success as a buddha. Shakyamuni's awakening relied directly on his recollection of past lives; these lives provided the raw data through which he deduced links between karma, *anatman*, and codependent origination as he worked out the Four Noble Truths. These powers hold equal importance, however, for defining Shakyamuni's roles as teacher and religious founder. Perfectly wise and perfectly compassionate, a buddha not only knows what it takes to introduce somebody to the Dharma, he also possesses the ability to do what has to be done to accomplish that conversion. There is a Sanskrit term for a buddha's combination of ready wit and superhuman power: *upāya-kauśalya* (skill-in-means). When Shakyamuni invited the gods to Kapilavastu so as to overcome his father's pride, he was practicing skill-in-means. The buddha-to-be's decision to kill the evil merchant in order to prevent him from killing five hundred others is another instance of skill-in-means. So too, the story of Shakyamuni's skill-in-means in the conversion of his mother places his superhuman abilities to the fore. Mahamaya died seven days after Siddhartha's birth, and was immediately reborn, a goddess in heaven. Years later Shakyamuni used his abilities to move between worlds in order to go to that heaven, where he spent three months setting his mother on the path of Dharma. Had Shakyamuni lacked insight into the Four Noble Truths, his ability to transport himself to heaven would have been a mere amusement, since he would have had nothing worthwhile to offer his mother. But insight, too, was not enough. Had Shakyamuni lacked superhuman abilities, his mother would have been truly lost when she died; her status as Shakyamuni's mother would have been greatly to her detriment rather than her benefit. Shakyamuni, too, would have been lost, since he would have then failed to accomplish the full complement of deeds required of a living buddha.

Act 5: Founding an Institution

It is *dharmata* that a living, breathing buddha will not attain nirvana until he delineates a congregational boundary.

This expectation differs from the others so far encountered. The gathering of arhats on the shore of Lake Anavatapta and the conversions of Shakyamuni's parents, for example, were onetime events. Although they pointed us toward Buddhism's inner structures, these acts were also remarkable for the pagantry of their unique occurrences. The requirement explored in this section lacks such a bold display; the associated stories are rather drab and down-to-earth. In a sense this is appropriate. This requirement of living, breathing buddhas points less to the buddhas' own personal glory than to their struc-

tural role as founders of a religious institution that flourishes even in their absence. Buddhism's monastic community is purported to be the longest continuously existing human institution, a remarkable feat in light of the fact that Buddhism has no overarching structures for regulating group belief or individual morality. All issues of discipline, practice, and doctrine are dealt with on the local level by groups of men acting as a corporate body. The inclusion on the list of ten necessary deeds that a buddha must establish a distinct monastic community by delineating a spatial boundary demonstrates a fundamental fact about Buddhist social history: this religion's longevity can be attributed, in large part, to its dynamic rules for the establishment and regulation of communities of monks. In fact, Buddhist traditions are themselves fully aware of the fundamental importance of their rules for community formation and administration. The early biography of the buddhas, *The Great Story*, tells that ninety-one cosmic aeons ago Vipashyin Buddha taught his monks the Dharma and then sent them in the four directions to spread it. Vipashyin gave these monks only one order: every six years they must reunite as a group in order to recite the monastic rules. Note, although the members of Vipashyin's *sangha* traveled the world as teachers, when they rejoined together as a community they focused on straightening the orthopraxy of their daily lives, not the orthodoxy of their teachings. Perhaps people are more forgetful now than in Vipashyin's day: Shakyamuni's monks recite an abridgment of their rules on a biweekly basis.

What is a congregational boundary (*sīmā*), and why is it so crucial that a buddha designate one? The answer to the first question is straightforward; the second, more important question brings us directly to the heart of how Buddhists define the *sangha* and situate it within social structures. The answer to both begins with a story. One of Shakyamuni's most important disciples was a wealthy banker named Anathapindada. As the story goes, Anathapindada first met Shakyamuni at the house of a friend who had invited the buddha and monks for a meal. Anathapindada saw his friend preparing a great feast, but no wedding was imminent, nor had the king announced a visit. Anathapindada asked his friend about the preparations, and so learned that a buddha and *sangha* were coming for a meal. Anathapindada had never heard this word, *sangha*, before in such a context, but for some reason it thrilled him. Covered with goose bumps, he asked his friend what he meant by this word. The answer given is a cliché, found not only in this story but throughout Buddhist literature:

There are sons of good family belonging to warrior families who cut off their beards and hair, put on red robes, and with proper faith follow in renunciation the blessed one, who himself went forth from the home to the homeless

life. Similarly, there are sons of good family belonging to priestly families, to merchant families, and to artisan families, who cut off their beards and hair, put on red robes, and with proper faith follow in renunciation the blessed one, who himself went forth from the home to the homeless life. This is called the *sangha*.³⁰

Shakyamuni had been awakened for only three years when Anathapindada's friend is purported to have described the *sangha* thus. Indeed, the first monastic residences had only just been established. Before Shakyamuni's monks had monasteries, they lived where and as they pleased, in the woods, under rock overhangs, in graveyards, or in huts temporarily erected. These were men who abandoned everything they possessed, every association with kin and social life, out of faith in Shakyamuni as a buddha. They were rootless wanderers united by their dedication to liberative truth and in need of unlearning the spiritual naïveté of worldly life.

Although in Anathapindada's day Buddhist monks may have been predominantly wanderers, when the Mulasarvastivada's list of ten necessary deeds was composed much had changed. By that time, what had been described to Anathapindada as the *sangha* was more properly termed "the *sangha* of the four directions." This new term retains the archaic notion of monks as wayfarers without a home. But notice here that a monk's lack of fixed abode becomes a noteworthy marker of his identity within the broader assemblage of Buddhist renunciants. When Mulasarvastivada theologians stipulated that a buddha must demarcate a monastic boundary before he can attain nirvana, the majority of monks were not wanderers at all but rather were affiliated with specific monasteries set in specific places. These monks, usually called "residents," delimited their institutional identity in spatial terms, through the location of the monasteries in which they resided. Thus there was a *sangha* of the town of Shravasti, a *sangha* of Vaishali, a *sangha* of the Western Mountain. Even more properly, every monastery (or cluster of residences) was considered to possess its own *sangha*. And each of these separate *sanghas* was distinguished from the others by its location as defined through specific geographical boundaries. These boundaries, called *sima*, could delimit a large space — up to about nine square miles — using natural demarcations. Thus a monastic rule book records Shakyamuni's explanation of the *sima*: "The blessed one said: 'Resident monks and visiting monks should set fixed markers for a large boundary in all four directions. To the East, the marker can be a wall, tree, rock, rampart, or moun-

30. *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sayanāsanavastu and the Adhikaraṇavastu, Being the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Sections of the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin*, ed. Raniero Gnoli (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1978), p. 15.

tain-slope; to the South, West, and North, the marker can be a wall, tree, rock, rampart, or mountain-slope. . . . Following that, a single monk should make a motion and an action of the *sangha* may be performed.”³¹ Alternately a *sima* could be small and adopt things such as a road, a designated rock, or pillars erected and set in the ground to mark its boundaries.

The *sima* is the basic unit of social life for Buddhist renunciants. Without a *sima* there is no community of monks, only a haphazard collection of individuals who may (or may not) share doctrinal, practical, and moral ideals. Actually Buddhists use the term *sangha* in several ways: (1) this term identifies the general assemblage of Buddhist monks, in line with the clichéd description given to Anathapindada above; (2) this term specifies those Buddhists who have attained a clear understanding of *dukkha* and its causes; (3) this term is a catchall for all Buddhists, both lay and monastic; finally (4) a *sangha* is a unit of renunciant social life, defined as the set of individual monks located within the circumscribed limits of a *sima* at the time in which there is an occasion for monks to act as a corporate group. It goes without saying that human institutions persist only insofar as there are rules for their organization and mechanisms for enforcing those rules. For Buddhist monks to establish, change, enforce, or affirm their rules of behavior, and therefore act as members of a social institution, they must first delimit a *sima*. As the text stipulates in the paragraph above, after *sima* boundaries are set, one monk should make a motion and an action of the corporate *sangha* may be performed.

Thus, for instance, Buddhist monks are required to gather fortnightly to recite the *pratimoksha*, the disciplinary rules of monastic life. This ceremony is permitted to take place only when the entire local *sangha* is present. Whoever is present within the *sima* when the ceremony begins must be present at the ceremony; whoever is outside the *sima* is not deemed to be a member of that *sangha* for that time. Similarly, if a disciplinary action has to be taken against a specific monk — for instance, suppose there is a monk who brags about psychic powers he does not really possess and therefore merits expulsion from the monastic community — the entire body of monks residing within the *sima* must be present. Not only must every monk be present, but all monks must assent unanimously to an order of expulsion. Individual dissent is not allowed, for the *sangha* is constituted as a single corporate body and must act as such. A *sangha* functions in undivided unanimity or does not function at all. A seventh-century pilgrim from China describes the strict adherence to this discipline in a monastery he visited on India's eastern coast: “When any business happened, it

was settled by the assembly; and if any priest decided anything by himself alone . . . without regarding the will of the assembly he was expelled.”³²

Socially speaking, a *sangha* is a group of individual monks gathered in one place at one time working in unison to accomplish an action that has bearing on themselves as members of a community. This has proven a remarkably dynamic and adaptive social structure. The fact that every monk within a community must assent — if only through silent acceptance — to the doings of the corporate body unifies the community, strengthening it. Indeed, the will of the community is absolute over its members. But membership itself is fluid: one can vote with one's feet and leave a *sangha* with which one disagrees. Buddhist lawbooks say as much, advising monks that at the time of the biweekly recitation of monastic rules they should be in a place in which the residents are pure and share their views, not one in which the residents are quarrelsome or argumentative. From a bird's-eye view, the longevity of the Buddhist *sangha* lies in the fact that one monk's “troublemaker” is another monk's “friend,” and there is no final arbiter or supreme authority to say which perception is correct. Members of different *sanghas* could disagree over religious practice or, less importantly, doctrine; they could calumniate each other, or even attempt to excommunicate each other. But ultimately, because there is no internal mechanism by which one monastery's monks could be definitely affirmed as proper and the other's as heretical, as long as the renunciants living in opposing monasteries retained material support, both could exist and call themselves “Buddhist.” Highly successful, Buddhism's formula for community formation reads: allow heterogeneity between *sanghas* but require homogeneity within each *sangha*.

Though this formula is neither authoritarian nor universalist, it is also not anarchic. The potential for endless schism and differentiation within the broader Buddhist community is limited by the fact that the Buddhist *sangha* is a *social* institution woven into a web of parallel institutions — economic, political, familial, medical, cultural, environmental — that have no necessary stake in the *sangha's* perpetuation. Societies in which monks are part of the larger social fabric have distinct expectations about what it means to be a professional Buddhist. Insofar as an individual monk, or community of monks, transgresses those expectations, that monk or *sangha* stands to lose material support. And such support is necessary, for the majority of monasteries have not been economically self-sufficient. Instead, they have relied on local donors and local rulers for steady donations. And though, historically, some monasteries have be-

31. *Mūlasarvāstivādinayavastu*, ed. S. Bagchi (Darbhanga, India: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1970), 2:115.

32. I-Tsing, *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practiced in India and the Malay Archipelago (AD 671-695)*, trans. J. Takakusu (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982 [1896]), pp. 62-63.

come quite wealthy — owning fields and slaves, gold and silver — even these institutions retain their charters and bounty only through the assent of the reigning king. Even the wealthiest of monks is still a *bhikshu*, a term that translates as “beggar,” one who lives on alms. Thus monastic rule books represent Shakyamuni as fervent in his pursuit of a monastic “good neighbor” policy. The sole rationale for many restrictions on conduct is that certain behaviors violate the circumspect decorum lay folk expect of renunciants. A monk must not speak while eating, for instance. This is ordered not because table manners possess an intrinsic moral worth, but rather because when monks spoke while eating, people complained to the buddha, saying that such behavior is acceptable for the rude, crude masses but not for monks. For the same reason, a monk may not rub his genitals against a tree, sleep on a high bed, or splash while bathing. Indeed, even practices that seem to cut right to the heart of the lay/monk distinction — yogic meditation and the biweekly recitation of the *pratimoksha*, for instance — may have been made normative for monks in response to lay demands. According to sacred biography, Shakyamuni requires his monks to perform these acts only after lay followers complain that members of other religious groups engage in these practices but his do not. In short, there is a complex dynamic play of expectations, obligations, and actions that enables Buddhist monks to disagree among themselves over rules of behavior, doctrine, and religious practice, but that functionally limits those disagreements by acknowledging that a *sangha* cannot survive without the laity's respect. Buddhism is what society at large allows Buddhism to be. Indeed, monks seem to have been concerned to lower lay expectation over the limits of acceptable conduct. The Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*, for instance, states explicitly that householders will be corrupted and lose faith in the buddha if they become aware of precisely what is required of monks. A monk who reveals the rules to the laity is thought to commit a grave sin.³³

When scholars desire to describe the state of the *sangha* as an institution within the broadloom of social institutions, they often use the term “domestication.” Domestication connotes the successes of agriculture and animal husbandry: the taming or refinement of wild biological entities, enabling a better, safer, richer life. This same connotation carries over into the term as used for the *bhikshu-sangha*. Here are men who entered something of a “state of nature,” following the buddha from the home to the homeless life. These same men nevertheless re-formed a community of their own and affirmed the importance of binding that community to lay society by conforming their behaviors to its ideals. Why? Following the metaphor of “domestication,” we would expect that by

acting so, Buddhist monks furthered their own aims as well as those of their supporters. The former, because Buddhism does not generally promote severe asceticism. Monks who lack material necessities — food, robes, a begging bowl, medicine, etc. — cannot pursue higher religious attainments. The latter, because, as we have already seen, the rationale for supporting the *sangha* was expressed in terms of merit making. From the lay point of view, the *sangha* is a depository for gifts, a “field of merit,” the “fertility” of which is directly related to the moral purity of its members. For a *sangha* to be pure, its members must gather to recite their rules and to punish those who have fallen. This gathering, in turn, requires a *sima*. Thus, in a sense, the *sima* is not merely the boundary of a monastic enclosure, nor the basic unit of social life for Buddhist renunciants. Rather it is a line that marks the very possibility of Buddhist society, civilization, and culture. As a ritual act, the establishment of a *sima* is the condition of possibility for the *sangha's* domestication.

One scholar, Ivan Strenski, has discussed these points very neatly. Strenski writes: domestication occurs “whenever the *sangha* participates with the laity in institutions” through the mechanism of gift exchange; “Buddhist society was formed in the process of ritual giving.”³⁴ Indeed, the symbiotic give-and-take of exchange between laity and monks can be seen in many stories found in Sanskrit Buddhist literature. One tells of a small monastery, home to a monk who assiduously sweeps, cleans, and polishes its buildings and maintains a lush garden of trees and flowers, attracting the sweet songs of birds. Once a traveling salesman spent the night at this monastery. He was so impressed by the site's tranquil beauty that he made a munificent gift to the *sangha*.³⁵ In this case a desire for merit was *not* the motivating factor in the gift, but rather the donor's wish to express his pleasure at a thing of beauty created and maintained by this monk. Another story, however, is quite explicit in its calculus. In this case lay Buddhists in a certain area are flush with faith, and build a number of small monasteries. There are not enough monks to fill all the dwellings, so thieves use the empty buildings as hideouts. The householders complain to Shakyamuni that, although they build monasteries for the *sangha*, they are not gaining the expected merit. (Remember, quantity of merit depends as much on the moral quality of a donation's recipient as on the mental volition of its giver.) To remedy the situation, Shakyamuni orders the monks to move from monastery to monastery during the course of the day, so that each structure is used by a Buddhist monk at least once daily.³⁶ In still

34. Ivan Strenski, “On Generalized Exchange and the Domestication of the *Sangha*,” in *Religion in Relation: Method, Application, and Moral Location* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 134, 141.

35. *Mūlasarvāstivādinayavastu*, 1:225-26.

36. *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sayanāsanavastu*, p. 35.

33. *The Book of Zambasta: A Khotanese Poem on Buddhism*, ed. and trans. R. E. Emmerick (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 341.

another story, a lay Buddhist builds a monastery, hoping for merit, but no monks use it. When he asks why his gift goes unused, he is told that building a monastery is insufficient. In this area there are more monasteries than monks to fill them. To attract monks he must also satisfy their other material needs with robes and other goods.³⁷ In still another story, the lay devotee Anathapindada is laying out the ground plan of a Buddhist monastery. He is told that as he chalks in the foundation on earth, a foundation is simultaneously being laid in heaven for the celestial palace in which he will enjoy his next life. Inspired, Anathapindada enlarges the building.³⁸

These stories might give the impression that Buddhist acts of giving were motivated only by a crassly commercial calculation of interest on the part of the laity and monks alike. To counter such an impression, one could cite acts of truly disinterested gift exchange: for instance, the Burmese monk who has received numerous dwellings precisely because he refuses to occupy any of them. But rather than a superficial citation of examples and counterexamples, there is a more nuanced point to be taken from these various tales. As a domesticated institution, the *bhikshu-sangha* exists to satisfy mundane needs and transmundane aspirations equally. Certainly monasteries provide a stable place within which students can study the Four Noble Truths and cultivate the arduous discipline of mind and body necessary for their full realization. As such, monasteries have long served as schools, preservers of Buddhist lore and literature, logic, music, magic, and art. But at the same time, monasteries are established and supported by the laity out of their own quotidian concerns for health and wealth, bouncing babies and bountiful harvests. One poignant example takes place in the Indian city of Mathura. As the story goes, a *yaksha* (a superhuman being who lives in the earth or a tree) named Gardabha was eating the children of Mathura to satisfy his blood lust. (Think of this as a way of imagining a disease that preys upon infants.) The people of Mathura turned to Shakyamuni for assistance, telling him that they held no personal animosity against Gardabha, but they wanted the *yaksha* to leave their children in peace. Shakyamuni adjudicates their grievance: if these devotees will construct a monastery for the local community of monks and dedicate it in Gardabha's honor, the *yaksha* will cause their children no more harm.³⁹ In contemporary terms, we would say that building a monastery in Gardabha's honor is a form of ritual medicine. In fact, this story concludes by claiming that twenty-five hundred *yakshas* were tamed in Mathura through the building of twenty-five hundred monasteries. A range of activities might have transpired in Mathura's monas-

37. *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sayanāsanavastu*, p. 37.

38. *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sayanāsanavastu*, p. 24.

39. *Mūlasarvāstivādinayavastu*, 1:18.

teries: education, meditation, recitation of scripture, creation and worshiping of images, the composition of popular didactic stories; on occasion, monasteries even served secular functions as banks, pawnshops, mints, and armories. But at the same time, the very existence of these monasteries stood as a guarantor of welfare for the entire local society, as a palliative against disease, as security for the king, as a promise of a felicitous rebirth, as a gathering place for festivals, as a repository of wisdom. In short, the scholar who wrote that "in its essence and inner core, Buddhism was and is a movement of monastic ascetics" is mistaken.⁴⁰ As a *religion*, Buddhism is a social institution that mediates the relationship between human and superhuman realities. The lay folk who constructed Gardabha's monastery are just as "Buddhist" as the renunciants who inhabited that monastery; the concern of Mathura's laity to protect their children is a legitimately "Buddhist" concern. Domestication of the *sangha*, initiated by the buddha's first demarcation of a *sima*, promises an institutionalized social solidarity inclusive of, at least, monks, nuns, lay folk, and deities.

Acts 6 and 7: The Great Miracle and the Descent: Buddhism's "Rite of Passage"

It is *dharmata* that a living, breathing buddha will not attain nirvana until he demonstrates a great miracle near the town of Shravasti.

It is *dharmata* that a living, breathing buddha will not attain nirvana until he shows himself descending from heaven with the gods near the town of Samkashya.

The buddha is supposed to be perfect in wisdom, perfect in understanding, perfect in knowledge. And the buddha is supposed to be able to utilize these perfections in his personal interactions, making him the perfect teacher. One might imagine that so great a man could never have failed to make his mark on the minds of others. However, Shakyamuni's sacred biography records a curious incident, soon after his awakening, that suggests otherwise. According to this story, Shakyamuni spent the first seven weeks of his buddhahood in a state of blissful awareness, not yet ready to share his Dharma with the world. When these seven weeks came to an end, he then surveyed the world for somebody to teach. He perceived that the five renunciants who had attended him during his

40. Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1975), p. 70.

years as an ascetic were dwelling about 130 miles to the west, in a deer park near the town of Varanasi. The buddha set out to turn the Wheel of Dharma for the first time. But no sooner did Shakyamuni start on the road than he met a potential convert, a wanderer named Upagu who, like Shakyamuni himself, had left his home and family in search of ultimate liberation. It would seem that Upagu should easily have been won over to the buddha's way. But as the story goes, Upagu quickly left the buddha, possibly thinking him something of a madman. In the popular telling, Upagu himself initiated their conversation by remarking on the clarity of the buddha's visage and by asking about the buddha's teacher. In return, Shakyamuni declared (I paraphrase), "I have no teacher, for there is none other in the world like me. I, and I alone in all the world, have realized complete awakening. I am unequaled, the teacher of gods and men, the conqueror of death, the victor." Not knowing what to make of such a statement, Upagu responded with a shrug, "perhaps," and walked away, making certain to take a different path.

This incident has struck many as odd. Why would Buddhists preserve such a tale, in which Shakyamuni fails during his first encounter with a potential convert? Upagu was the ideal interlocutor. He had left his home and was seeking freedom. Shakyamuni, for his part, possessed the very Dharma that Upagu desired, and would have shared it had Upagu asked. What happened? The answer can be summed up in a Sanskrit term, the one word used to describe this wandering mendicant: Upagu is called an *Ajivika*. The *Ajivikas* were rivals of the Buddhists, whose contending claims for metaphysical knowledge are often the butt of jokes in Buddhist literature. Given the distance of twenty-five centuries, one might not see much difference between the *Ajivikas* and Buddhists. Both groups centered their teachings on the workings of karma (albeit with rather divergent interpretations); both groups championed the renunciation of worldly life; both groups claimed that their leaders possessed superhuman powers, immense spiritual merit, and insight without equal; both groups rejected the mainstream texts and rituals of India's brahmin priests. Both groups, in short, were closely related in their teachings, their truths, their methods, their goals, and their positions vis-à-vis the broader social sphere. Their competing claims to authority and legitimacy resulted in sectarian sniping from both camps. In other words, from the Buddhist point of view, Shakyamuni's inability to capture Upagu's mind did not indicate the buddha's shortcomings, but rather this *Ajivika's* own spiritual myopia.

This encounter with Upagu shows us a Buddhism concerned to belittle the intelligence of its competitors. Upagu was blind to the truth even when he saw it clearly with his own eyes. More generally the tale of this strange encounter points our gaze toward the broader historical context within which Buddhism originated and developed. The previous section discussed the premium

the Buddhist *sangha* placed on conforming to worldly expectations, and the internal mechanisms it developed to enforce this conformity: the ritual demarcation of a *sima* is the condition of possibility for the *sangha's* domestication, its institutionalized interaction with the laity. But Buddhist renunciants were certainly not the only renunciants to wander the byways of fifth, fourth, or third century B.C.E. India.

Our sources do not allow us to penetrate with any level of detail into the social history of India at the time of Shakyamuni or the following centuries. However, certain caricatures are possible. The period during which the buddha's teachings were first articulated, preserved, reformed, and redacted was a time of critical transformation within the Gangetic plain. More than one millennium earlier, waves of migrants, the Indo-Aryans, started to cross through the mountain passes of Afghanistan in approach to the Indian plains. We know little about these people, and what little we do know comes from their sacred books, the Vedas, collections of hymns and lore to be used in the performance of sacred ritual. The Indo-Aryans raised horses and cows; they were successful warriors, possessing swift two-wheeled chariots; they believed their Vedic literature was divinely inspired, and therefore had to be preserved with the utmost accuracy; they had a generalized understanding that society was composed of four classes of people, ranked hierarchically: (1) the brahmin priests; (2) the rulers and warriors; (3) the common people, especially farmers; and (4) at the bottom of the hierarchy, the servants and artisans. By the year 1000 B.C.E. the Indo-Aryans began to settle in the Gangetic valley, to wander less and farm more. A striking illustration of this transition is found in the development of the Sanskrit language. In the earlier period the word *grama* was used to indicate a nomadic group, including warriors and baggage trains. As the Indo-Aryans settled, *grama* became the word for "town." As farming techniques improved, greater surpluses became available, enabling towns to become cities. By the fifth century B.C.E. the plains of northern and central India had been divided into myriad tribal kingdoms and sixteen major kingdoms. These kingdoms were linked by both the necessities of trade and the animosities of war. But war and trade, farming and banking, the luxuries of the urban elite contrasted with the despair of the urban poor raised concerns that traditional Indo-Aryan priests, Vedas, and rituals could not address. Certain individuals, dissatisfied with the religious/ideological status quo, left their homes and families. They wandered out of the cities to become *shramanas*, literally "strivers," seeking liberation from relentless samsara. One can speak of a "*shramanic* movement" of the late fifth century. This movement was comprised of men who exerted themselves in the practice of austerities toward the realization of truth, and who often defined themselves in opposition to the established religious order of the brahmins, Vedas, and sacrifices. Thus an Indian grammarian presents the construc-

tion *shramana*-and-*brahmana*, ascetic-and-priest, as an example of ceaseless animosity, on a par with cat-and-mouse or snake-and-mongoose.

Shakyamuni and Upagu were both *shramanas*. The prominent memory of an encounter between the freshly awakened buddha and the obtuse Ajivika demonstrates that animosity did not divide only *shramanas* from brahmins, but *shramanas* from each other as well. They were competitors for religious legitimacy and for social legitimacy. They contended with each other for members, each group seeking to inspire young men to adopt a *shramanic* path, as well as to attract converts from other established *shramanic* groups. They also contended with each other for material support, each group striving to represent itself as the most fecund "field of merit."

No story from the buddha's life demonstrates the stakes of this competition more than that surrounding the sixth act required of a living, breathing buddha, his demonstration of a great miracle. In fact, this "great miracle" (which Shakyamuni performed in the north Indian town of Shravasti sixteen years after his attainment of buddhahood) is the first part in a long narrative cycle that concludes with the seventh act required of a living, breathing buddha, i.e., his descent from heaven accompanied by the gods near the town of Samkashya. For Buddhists these two events mark crucial moments in the buddha's life and project as a religious founder. This story cycle represents Buddhism's own myth of its formation as a religion, as a thoroughly domesticated source for social and spiritual legitimacy. These tales do not offer a myth of origins, of birth, but a myth of adulthood, of Buddhism coming into its own as a full-fledged socioreligious order. I use "myth" here in the sense given it by the French critic Roland Barthes, who wrote that "myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal."⁴¹ In other words, these stories are "mythological" in the sense that they seek to exhibit the buddha, his Dharma, and his *sangha* as the ideal person, the ideal teaching, the ideal community, naturally and eternally superior to all others in history. In Shravasti and Samkashya, Shakyamuni revealed his great power, his supreme power, his supernatural power: power that could transcend and transfigure the *dharmata*, the natural order to which buddha himself is supposed to be subject. The patterned action by which this power was first revealed and then modulated provides a native Buddhist model for the founding and institutionalization of a Buddhist community and cosmos.

The stories associated with the great miracle at Shravasti and the descent at Samkashya revolve around a set of themes one often finds linked in Buddhist literature: giving, worship, and spiritual power. These concerns are expressed in

the first paragraph of the particular account I will follow, located in the Indian collection of *Divine Stories*.⁴² The tale begins in the city of Rajagriha. Shakyamuni dwells in a park on the outskirts of town while a group of six Ajivika teachers live nearby. The contrast between the religious figures could not be more stark. Shakyamuni is presented as receiving a steady stream of visitors, human and divine, who eagerly elevate him in veneration and load him down with material goods. The Ajivikas, by contrast, had been the toast of the town before Shakyamuni arrived, but now they were completely ignored. The Ajivikas received nothing from anybody, and so began to hatch a nefarious plan. While scheming among themselves, one said: "We possess superhuman powers. The *shramana* Gotama also represents himself as possessing superhuman powers. Let us challenge him to a magic contest! If he performs one miracle, we'll perform two; if he performs sixteen, we'll perform thirty-two."

It goes without saying that this Buddhist text would not admit that these Ajivikas really did possess such powers. Indeed, each is shown as knowing in his heart that he lacks magical ability. Nevertheless, through a device of *deus ex machina* the god Mara decides he will use these foolish Ajivikas for his own purposes. Mara had long wanted to embarrass Shakyamuni, to make him a less sought-after teacher and to undermine his acceptance as a field of merit. So Mara takes on the form of an Ajivika and performs a superhuman feat (no problem for a god), convincing all the other Ajivikas that they do, finally, have Shakyamuni right where they want him; for the Ajivikas believe that Shakyamuni, like themselves, is a fraud. Anticipating victory, the Ajivika teachers propose to the local king, Bimbisara, that he host a contest of magical abilities between themselves and Shakyamuni. Bimbisara refuses to countenance the contest, and, to make a long story short, the Ajivikas decide to lie in wait for the buddha in the city of Shravasti, whose ruler, King Prasenajit, is willing to host such a contest.

The scene now shifts to Shravasti. As part of the buildup to the big event, the *Divine Stories* relates a series of tales demonstrating the true breadth of Shakyamuni's majesty. In one tale a *shramana* named Subhadra tells the Ajivikas to forget their folly. He has seen gods wash the dirty robe of a student of Shariputra, one of Shakyamuni's own students, yet those same gods did not even offer Subhadra a glass of water. "We are not even the equal of the student of Shakyamuni's student," Subhadra concludes. A second story tells of an act, performed by Shakyamuni's good friend Ananda, whereby a prince whose hands and feet had been cut off was made whole again. But after these and many other marvels, and after still further twists and turns to the plot, Shakyamuni finally performed his great miracle:

41. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. A. Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), p. 142.

42. *The Divyāvadāna*, pp. 143-66.



Shakyamuni miracle
(Lahore Museum, Pakistan; photo by Richard S. Cohen)

At the buddha's command, two snake-deities conjured a lotus flower, whose thousand petals were as large as wagon wheels, entirely golden, and studded with jewels. They placed it before the buddha, who sat on the lotus's center. Sitting in the lotus-position, his body erect, and his awareness full-front, the buddha then conjured a lotus above the first lotus. There, too, sat a second buddha, legs crossed. The same thing happened in front of the buddha, behind him, and to his sides. In this way, the buddha conjured a mass of buddhas reaching as high as the highest heaven. These buddhas formed an assembly. Some of the conjured buddhas walked, some stood, some sat, some reclined. Additionally, some burst into flame, and some performed the miracles of fire, light, rain, and lightning. Some asked questions; others replied. Thus, empowered by the buddha, the entire world, from the gods in the highest heaven even to young children, beheld this panoply of buddhas without any obstruction.

Lacking all superhuman power, the Ajivikas could not match this display.

The place to begin our consideration of this event at Shravasti is the setting for the day's events: a challenge by the buddha's opponents who are distressed that his popularity was growing at their expense. More specifically, and rather explicitly, this is a fight over resources. Gods and men shower the *sangha* with gifts while they ignore the Ajivikas' needs. This contrast is intensified and put into higher relief by the time of year in which this competition is set. The great miracle at Shravasti took place in the inferno of the Indian summer. But this season is not only notable for its increased incidence of heatstroke. This season also marks a crucial moment in the Buddhist liturgical calendar. The full moon of the Indian month Asalha (June/July) is the beginning of the annual monsoon rains' retreat. This retreat is a three-month period during which Buddhist monks (as well as other *shramanic* groups) are required to stay put where they are, in a single locale, to interact with a single community of local patrons. Generally a monk is not supposed to leave the area enclosed by the *sima* even for a day during these three months. Moreover, in some contemporary Buddhist countries, it is not unusual for laymen to take ordination as monks temporarily during this period. Lay devotees visit their local monasteries with greater frequency during the rains as well. In brief, the rains' retreat provides the paradigmatic occasion for the development of specific, lasting contacts between the *sangha* and lay society. Whereas the great miracle took place at the beginning of the rains' retreat, the buddha's descent from heaven at Samkashya marks the rainy season's finale, bringing this annual cycle to a close. The sixth and seventh actions required of a buddha, in his capacity as religious founder, bracket the single most important period in the Buddhist liturgical year.

In the previous discussion of the *sima*, we saw that Buddhist cultures, societies, and civilizations emerge out of the union between the *sangha* and laity in the ritual of gift exchange. Buddhist societies form in the process of ritual giving. In fact, such ritual giving creates two species of relationship, both of which are necessary for domestication. First, there are the direct interpersonal relationships, a corollary of the exchange partners' shared presence. To put this point more plainly, for Buddhist societies to form, monks and lay donors must necessarily be personally accessible to one another. However, such direct, interpersonal relationships are limited in scope, involving only the individuals on either side of the exchange. For full socialization these restricted transactions must coalesce into a generalized network of exchange that redounds to the broader social good. In the words of Ivan Strenski: "We have a circle of giving, beginning with the lay donor, passing to the *sangha*, then from the *sangha* to other recipients, and ultimately . . . either in this or the next life to the initial giver." The *sangha* and its lay supporters are "linked in a theoretically open system of indebtedness, the momentum of which tends to build up systems of social solidarity."⁴³ To return to Shakyamuni's bodily display at Shravasti, the question is: How did this performance contribute to the localization and domestication of the Buddhist *sangha*, the institutionalization of specific patterns of exchange relationships across the many sectors of a Buddhist society?

The answer: Domestication begins with the valorization of presence. And the buddha's success in Shravasti demonstrated, quite simply, that Shakyamuni and his disciples were good people to have around. The stakes of this contest were clear and unambiguous. Which *shramana* teacher could claim supremacy on earth? Which would be able to gain the highest social standing for his order at this crucial time when local communities were formed and established? Shakyamuni's great miracle confirmed that the buddha (and by extension his followers) had the highest "potential energy" and greatest spiritual efficacy of all *shramana* groups. In fact, the scope of Shakyamuni's accomplishment is signaled by the exact phrase used to describe his miracle: "While in a superhuman state, the buddha displayed a miracle of power." Nothing in the human world is beyond the power of a being who can perform this act, and so anybody who does not take refuge in that being is a fool. The *Divine Stories* forcefully underscores this latter point. After the buddha concluded his display, a god named Panchika became enraged at the Ajivikas because they had harassed the buddha and *sangha* for so long. Using his own superhuman powers, Panchika created a great storm, with wind, rain, and lightning. Whoever ran to Shakyamuni and asked for refuge (both literally and figuratively) remained completely dry; whoever sought refuge under trees, behind walls, or in groves was beaten down by

43. Strenski, pp. 146, 143.

Panchika's tempest. Finally, the Ajivikas' leader panicked in the realization that he had lost his followers to Shakyamuni. He drowned himself, after being mocked by a eunuch. Thus the *Divine Stories* ends this tale by explicitly representing the buddha's display of power as a basis for increasing the ranks of Buddhists.

The title buddha is often conceptualized in terms of cognitive abilities, wisdom, teaching. But the Shravasti miracle had little to do with the buddha's superior wisdom or the quality of the doctrines and practices he taught. It was a matter of sheer power, and by extension the benefits resulting from superior power. In fact, although this so-called great miracle is the supreme use of the buddha's magical powers, Buddhist scholastics identify two other "miracles" performed by a buddha: telepathy and teaching. The word I am translating here as "miracle" is *prātihārya*. Given this broadened context, in which magical power is listed with telepathy and teaching, it may be better to set aside the conventional English gloss for *pratiharya*, "miracle," and instead adopt the more literal translation, namely, "means of conversion." Shakyamuni's performance in Shravasti was the greatest use of thaumaturgic power as a means for converting human beings. This latter translation tallies with the etymology of *pratiharya*, which in its most basic sense signifies something that immediately and forcibly carries something else away; in this case, that latter something, the something carried away, was the minds of Shakyamuni's audience.

I imagine it must be captivating to witness a multiplication of buddhas on lotus blossoms, whereby the universe is filled with a solid mass of buddhas from top to bottom and side to side. But Buddhist literature remembers Shakyamuni as performing many stunning marvels throughout his life. And moreover, although the Ajivikas were phonies, Buddhism allows that buddhas are *not* the only human beings possessed of superhuman powers. So why do Buddhists deem this display in particular as the epitome of Shakyamuni's performance as an "evangelist"? The literature I am using reserves the designation "great miracle" or "great means of conversion" solely for this multiplication of buddhas. To understand why this particular display provides an unparalleled basis of support for the Buddhist *sangha*, one must note how Shakyamuni presented himself bodily to his audience. According to the story, every one of the Shravasti buddhas acted, spoke, and taught as if it was the "real," "original" buddha. Each of the conjured buddhas adopted a personal posture (e.g., walking, standing, sitting, and reclining); each performed lesser miracles by bursting into flame or shooting fire and water out of its body; and each taught by asking and answering questions. Each, for the duration of its existence, was animate and present, performing actions independent of those of the "original" Shakyamuni. The *Divine Stories* is careful to explain that this power is special to a buddha. Shakyamuni's superhuman powers exceeded those of every other

magical adept in that his “creations” are able to act independently of himself — he can converse with them or they can converse with one another — whereas the creations of lesser magicians must always directly mimic the actions of their creator. The simulacra of a lesser adept speak only when he speaks; they stand only when he stands. In fact, a second telling of this tale adds an additional layer of complexity to the event. According to this second text, the so-called “created” buddhas could, themselves, create additional buddhas.⁴⁴ In other words, each and every buddha present could potentially perform his own great miracle. If one takes doctrine seriously, the implications are startling: Buddhists could have believed (some did believe!) that Shakyamuni, the “historical” buddha, was actually the magical creation of a still more primordial buddha figure. In light of this latter doctrine, any talk of a *real* or *original* buddha becomes moot. For all these reasons, Shravasti’s great miracle is *the* performance that is special and unique to a buddha.

Not only does the buddha display the unsurpassed range of his abilities through this performance, but at a doctrinal level, too, the great miracle reveals a buddha’s supremacy even over the laws of nature. As I have tried to suggest, each buddha in the mass of buddhas did not merely resemble Shakyamuni: each was a bodily equivalent for Shakyamuni in every existentially significant way. However, the existential equality of these multiple buddhas contravenes a fundamental Buddhist doctrine, namely, that two buddhas cannot exist in the same world at the same time. Thus, if each Shravasti buddha was imagined by his audience to be a full and perfect buddha, and was revered as such, Shakyamuni’s performance would be truly a miracle in the Humean sense. The Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-76) defined the miracle as “a violation of the laws of nature.”⁴⁵ And the performance at Shravasti thus conceived would violate a principal canon of Buddhist “natural law.” In Shravasti Shakyamuni demonstrated that two buddhas *could* simultaneously exist in some way, and not merely as two buddhas one on top of the other: the universe appeared to be filled in its entirety with the mass of buddhas Shakyamuni conjured. In this light Shakyamuni’s great miracle blurred the line between his status as a mundane, bodily being and as supermundane being, beyond all natural laws.

For Shravasti’s masses this was a unique, unheard-of, miraculous performance wherein the cosmos was revealed in its entirety, and shown to be filled with living buddhas. Moreover, this bodily display had an explicit social impact.

44. *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra)*, trans. Étienne Lamotte (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1944-80), 1:469.

45. David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902), p. 114.

The contest between the buddha and rival Ajivikas took place directly before the rains’ retreat. Shakyamuni’s successful great miracle immediately and forcibly carried away the minds of his audience. Whatever social risk the buddha’s *sangha* had been under by the challenge of the six Ajivikas was utterly removed. The buddha revealed the highest social worth of his buddhahood.

In Shravasti, during the rains’ retreat, monks and lay folk developed an accommodation with one another, forming a local Buddhist community. Such local communities are often designated using a collective noun, the “four assemblies,” i.e., monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The buddha’s descent from heaven accompanied by gods occurred three months later, at the formal end of the rains’ retreat period. By contrast with Shravasti’s emphasis on conversion and community formation, the details told of Shakyamuni’s actions at Samkashya reveal that the social context had changed. The display of a miracle at Shravasti gained converts for Shakyamuni and enabled his monks to claim spiritual priority over competing *shramanas*. In Shravasti Shakyamuni’s cosmic revelation confirmed that he and his *sangha* were desirable neighbors indeed, worthy of high privilege within a network of exchange. In Samkashya, by contrast, Shakyamuni’s descent clarified the proper organization for exchange relationships and established the hierarchy of individuals and groups within the Buddhist *sangha*. In Samkashya Shakyamuni displayed a cosmological tableau in which buddha, gods, and humans were all set in their proper places as he descended on a jeweled staircase flanked by such supreme divinities as Indra and Brahma.

The story continues. The people of Shravasti rejoiced at the Ajivikas’ humiliation, and redoubled their donations to the buddha and his disciples. But Shakyamuni became concerned that it would seem as if he had performed his miracle solely for the sake of wealth and honor. In order to prevent such gossip, he left the earth and flew to heaven. He spent the three months of the rains’ retreat in Trayastimsha Heaven, the divine realm into which his mother had been reborn after her young death. The buddha passed the rainy season teaching the Dharma to his mother and her fellow gods. (During this three-month period he completed one of his ten acts, since his father had been converted already, ten years earlier.)

Thus, while the so-called four assemblies came together on earth, in heaven a second Buddhist community was being formed. In fact, Shakyamuni did not remain only among the gods of Trayastimsha Heaven. Buddhists conceive of “heaven” in the plural; the divine realms have many levels, many divisions. Before Shakyamuni returned to earth, he journeyed to all the diverse realms of divinity, meeting many groups of gods, teaching and converting them all.

The descent at Samkashya was the occasion upon which these two

sanghas — human and divine — came together as one. According to the traditional telling, the human community was dismayed by Shakyamuni's extended absence. The monks, the nuns, the laymen, and the laywomen had not seen him for three long months; they were distressed; they desired his presence; they thirsted to see him again. So the members of these four assemblies approached a monk named Maudgalyayana, one of Shakyamuni's chief disciples, renowned for his magical abilities. The four assemblies implored Maudgalyayana to use his magical abilities to fly to heaven and beg the buddha to return. After all, these humans argued, whenever a god desires to worship the buddha in the buddha's own presence, that god can easily descend to earth, but most humans cannot ascend to heaven at will. Maudgalyayana acceded to this request and flew to heaven. The buddha agreed to return. The text then focuses with close precision on the details of Shakyamuni's descent:

Indra, the Lord over Trayastrimsha Heaven, asked the buddha how he would go to Earth.

The buddha replied, "I will descend."

"Will you descend using magical powers or your own feet?"

"With my feet."

Indra then instructed Vishvakarman, the divine craftsman: "Vishvakarman, fashion three staircases: one of gold, one of cat's-eye, and one of crystal." Vishvakarman fashioned three staircases according to Indra's instructions.

Then the buddha went to the cat's-eye staircase. To the right, Brahma, Chief Among All Gods, descended from the golden staircase accompanied by the gods of the Form Realm, carrying one hundred thousand jeweled fly-whisks. To the buddha's left, Indra, Lord of Trayastrimsha Heaven, descended from the crystal staircase accompanied by the gods of the Desire Realm, carrying parasols of one hundred spokes.

Then the buddha considered, "If I descend on foot my rivals will claim, 'The *shramana* Gotama went to heaven through magic. But because he saw the goddesses' beautiful bodies, his magical powers have weakened. Now he descends on foot.' If I descend through magic, then the preparations of this host of divine beings will bear no fruit. Perhaps I should descend partially by foot and partially by using magical powers."

The buddha descended in stages by foot, in stages through his magical powers.⁴⁶

46. *The Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition*, ed. Daisetz T. Suzuki (Kyoto: Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute, 1955-61), 44:157-4-3 to 157-5-2.

Here one sees that even the most banal detail of Shakyamuni's activity as a founder — his means of locomotion to earth — is a matter of social and religious negotiation. The many constituencies that participate in the performative enactment of Shakyamuni's buddhahood have a stake in these details. The gods prepare a majestic, albeit mundane, means for the buddha's descent: if he does not go on foot, their actions lose their efficacy and he would fail his divine *sangha*. The Ajivika rivals still seek some way to disgrace the buddha. In order to maintain the coherence of his human *sangha*, he must again demonstrate his superhuman power.

Indeed, Shakyamuni's bodily performance at Samkashya reveals his humanity and superhumanity as equally fundamental to his role as buddha. Shakyamuni is both human and superhuman; his society includes humans and gods alike. Buddhist literature traditionally calls the event at Samkashya "descending with the gods" rather than "the descent of buddha," precisely because Shakyamuni is himself only a single player in a much grander drama. One of the greatest works of Sanskrit literature, Ashvaghosha's *Life of the Buddha*, captures this moment with characteristic grace. As Shakyamuni descends, "the gods . . . follow him with their eyes, as if they are falling to earth, and the various kings on earth, raising their faces to the sky, receive him."⁴⁷ Beholding buddha, gods and men meet face-to-face on the staircase from heaven.

The narration in the text I am following is less idealized than that of Ashvaghosha. This text reflects the more practical difficulties this cosmic encounter would occasion for gods and humans alike if Shakyamuni were not present to mediate:

Smelling the filth 50 miles below, the gods could not bear the stench, so the buddha created the perfume of sandalwood, which the humans smelled as well. Then the buddha considered, "Suppose men see the daughters of gods, or women see the sons of gods: they will vomit hot blood and die. Certainly, this would happen. I should therefore present a miraculous vision in which men see only the sons of gods and women see only the daughters of gods." The buddha then fashioned a miraculous vision such that men only saw the sons of gods and women saw only the daughters of gods.⁴⁸

Here even the humans' vision of the gods and the gods' perception of the humans are part of Shakyamuni's own performance. Shakyamuni controls every

47. *The Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*, trans. E. H. Johnston (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984 [1936]), 3:56.

48. *The Tibetan Tripitaka*, 44:157-5-3 to 157-5-6.

aspect of the bodily display in the interest of developing a stable social structure, inclusive of humans and gods.

This story is richer yet. Not only does the buddha bring humans and gods together, but this event also serves as an occasion for fixing hierarchies within the Buddhist community. This latter theme is treated in almost every textual version of the descent story. The most explicit statement of it is found in the *Book of Zambasta*, from Khotan in Central Asia: "The monks, the nuns, all the laymen, all the laywomen then made an agreement with one another: 'When the buddha descends here, whoever can worship him first will be chief of all among us.'⁴⁹ That is to say, whoever greeted buddha first was to be considered his foremost disciple, and the assembly of which that disciple was a part — monk, nun, layman, laywoman — was to be considered foremost among the four assemblies. The actions and reactions of the buddha's human disciples to what they saw in Samkashya hold fundamental importance for this event's institutional meaning.

The text treats this theme by describing the actions of two of Shakyamuni's disciples at this time. First we learn that while the buddha was descending, a monk named Subhuti sat beside a tree to meditate. Looking up, Subhuti witnessed Shakyamuni's great bliss as he descended. Having seen Shakyamuni's bliss, Subhuti decided that such bliss outstripped any joy one might attain through a favorable rebirth as a human, or even as a god. Inspired, he intensified his meditation, attending to the following verse: "All conditioned things are impermanent, unstable, unreliable, and characterized by changeability. Have done with all conditioned things! Their legacy is sadness! Their legacy is undesirable! Hold fast to liberation!" At this moment Subhuti realized the truth of no-Self, *anatman*. In gratitude he quickly knelt and offered reverence to the buddha.

The second disciple to be discussed is a nun named Utpalavarna. Her name translates as "smells like a lotus." In brief, Utpalavarna conceived a desire to be the first of Shakyamuni's human disciples to pay him honor at the base of the divine staircase. To realize this goal, she uses her own magic. She transforms herself into a glorious king surrounded by sons and ministers. Fooled, the common people made way for Utpalavarna, allowing her to stand at the bottom of the staircase. Unfortunately for her, another of Shakyamuni's followers recognized her by her smell. Utpalavarna accomplished her goal of being the first at the staircase's foot, but she paid a stiff price for this honor. According to the text, Shakyamuni castigated her for using her spiritual powers in his presence and sent her away.

Utpalavarna's use of her own magical abilities thwarted Shakyamuni's at-

tempt to control all physical, bodily representations in this encounter between the humans and gods. Her use of her body could have had dire consequences for the society Shakyamuni was creating through his performance. One can imagine the problems that would have arisen had Utpalavarna's preeminence received canonical sanction. During Shakyamuni's sojourn in heaven, the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen coalesced into a local community; the four assemblies became a corporate body. But a society headed by nuns would have been inconceivable. Had Utpalavarna been considered successful, the community of Buddhist renunciants would have become as socially repugnant as the Ajivikas that Shakyamuni defeated in Shravasti. The *Divine Stories* emphasizes that Shakyamuni's rivals were unworthy to receive offerings, not only because they lacked superhuman powers, but more importantly because they were fundamentally antisocial. Remember, before the Ajivikas' leader killed himself, he was insulted by a eunuch, a social outcast. The details and entailments of the buddha's bodily display in Samkashya promised a *sangha* whose institution would not only *not* violate fundamental social canons, but would actively legitimate and conserve those canons.

The reentry of Shakyamuni into the lives of his disciples was a definitive moment at which a social cosmos that had lost its linchpin was formed anew. The physical location of individuals and groups in this tableau at Samkashya defined their proper positions within the Buddhist social hierarchy. Indeed, as members of the Buddhist community were jockeying for position at the foot of the triple staircase, so the events on the stairs were a graphic performance of the cosmological hierarchy. The symbolism is unambiguous and in need of little clarification. For three months in the heavens, Buddha sat on a throne while the many gods sat on the ground at his feet. And as the terrestrial relationships established during the rains' retreat culminated, so the buddha's relationship with divine beings came to its fullest expression in this act of descent. Both human and superhuman, the buddha displayed himself to all the world at the center of his community, one that included gods and men and women. The event at Shravasti established the buddha's spiritual authority; his descent at Samkashya transformed that personal power into active social authority, ordering the generalized network of exchange relationships that constitutes a Buddhist society.

Act 8: Schismatic Disciples and the Ironies of Early Buddhist History

It is *dharmata* that a living, breathing buddha will not attain nirvana until he appoints two chief disciples.

49. *The Book of Zambasta*, p. 357.

If the great miracle that Shakyamuni performed in Shravasti reveals anything about this religious founder, it is that when he chose to be everywhere at once, he could be. However, notwithstanding the grand dramas of Shravasti and Samkashya, Buddhist literature typically represents Shakyamuni as withdrawn from the day-to-day toils of administering a group of occasionally fractious renunciants. The Pali author Buddhaghosa describes the buddha's daily routine as centered around his dwelling, known as the *gandhakuti*, or "perfumed chamber." In the morning Shakyamuni would leave his *gandhakuti* for a round of begging and a communal breakfast. Then, as he reentered his chamber, he would exhort the monks to practice. He would retire inside the *gandhakuti* for most of the day. Late afternoon and evening brought lay and monastic visitors to his doorstep. Heavenly visitors came later in the night. There is no doubt that Shakyamuni was his *sangha's* leader. The buddha's word was final in any dispute over proper conduct, proper doctrine, or proper practice. But when it came to the mundane responsibilities of educating monks and administering a monastic organization, Shakyamuni often relied on the two men he appointed as his chief disciples: Shariputra and Maudgalyayana.

We have encountered both Shariputra and Maudgalyayana earlier in this chapter. Among the individual achievements we have seen are these: Shariputra stood on the shore of Lake Anavatapta, and associated his good fortune in meeting Shakyamuni with his worship of holy men in lives past; Maudgalyayana requested the heaven-dwelling Shakyamuni to return to earth. But as a pair of disciples, these two are recollected as the two members of the *sangha* who were most capable of leading the *sangha* in the buddha's stead. Shariputra was known by a military nickname, General of the Dharma, in part because he was second only to Shakyamuni in the attainment of wisdom. Maudgalyayana gained renown as Master of Superhuman Powers, because only Shakyamuni was more powerful. Shariputra's superior wisdom enabled him to lead disciples to the edge of insight, to show them the empty vanity of desire and the futility of *samsara*. Maudgalyayana's control over the workings of mind (for Buddhism, superhuman powers are fundamentally psychic in nature) enabled him to take disciples the rest of the way toward awakening, to extirpate all remaining moral impediments and mental defilements. According to one of the more interesting sets of traditional metaphors, Shariputra is likened to a "mother" who brings a disciple into the world of Dharma, while Maudgalyayana is likened to a "wet nurse" who nourishes the disciple through his formative development.

There are many stories to tell about Shariputra and Maudgalyayana and their central role in the life of the Buddhist *sangha*. But one tale above all explains why these two chief disciples were so crucial to the buddha's success as a religious founder. This incident takes place late in Shakyamuni's life, though it

has its roots early in his youth. As a child, Siddhartha, the buddha-to-be, was jealously scorned by his cousin Devadatta. Everything Devadatta did well, Siddhartha did better; everything Devadatta wanted, Siddhartha already had. In middle age Devadatta schemed to become leader of the Shakra clan. When his plan was thwarted, he was forced to become a Buddhist monk. Devadatta's hatred of his cousin became a disruptive force within the *sangha*. There are stories of Devadatta trying to kill Shakyamuni by loosing a mad elephant upon the buddha, by putting poison beneath his fingernails and trying to scratch the buddha, by catapulting a boulder at the buddha. But the most disastrous event in Devadatta's saga occurred when he made an effort to depose the buddha and have himself named the *sangha's* head. In fact, Devadatta did manage to attract a cadre of monks away from Shakyamuni, thus threatening an irrevocable split in the *sangha*. This is where Shariputra and Maudgalyayana enter the story. For the buddha did not go himself to retrieve the errant monks. He sent the two chief disciples in his stead. Shariputra, through his skillful teaching, reminded Devadatta's followers of the profundity of Shakyamuni's Dharma. Maudgalyayana reawakened their faith in Shakyamuni through his performance of amazing, miraculous feats. Together, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana thwarted Devadatta's coup, brought his schism to an end, and returned orthodoxy and orthopraxy to Shakyamuni's united *sangha*.

It was so important that a buddha appoint two chief disciples before he entered nirvana precisely because he was bound to enter nirvana. The presence of two figures, whose excellence had been sanctioned by the buddha, guaranteed that transcendent wisdom, practical knowledge, and the power to utilize that knowledge toward ultimate ends would continue in the buddha's absence. Shariputra's and Maudgalyayana's success against Devadatta was a dress rehearsal for the tasks they would face after Shakyamuni's nirvana, when the *sangha* would have to continue without the daily exhortations and charismatic teachings of its founder.

But, as fate would have it, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana both died several years before Shakyamuni. Shariputra is said to have attained nirvana peacefully at the break of dawn. Maudgalyayana met his end one fortnight later, beaten to death by the followers of a rival religious teacher; it is said that as Maudgalyayana's bones were ground to dust, his mind remained tranquil and focused. Thus, once again we see the ironic encounter between the theological imagination and historical happenstance. The tradition makes it *dharmata* for a buddha to appoint two chief disciples, calling attention to the fact that even a buddha cannot run the *sangha* alone. Yet those two disciples predeceased the buddha, leaving the *sangha* without a universally acknowledged chain of leadership after Shakyamuni's final nirvana.

Indeed, the problem goes even further. For although Buddhist traditions

valorize consensus and unanimity within the *sangha*, they are also highly ambivalent about institutionalizing an authority with the power to enforce such consensus. Shariputra and Maudgalyayana died before Shakyamuni. Without these two chief disciples to succeed him, Shakyamuni stated that the rules of monastic conduct should be considered the master in his place, after his final nirvana. This rule is given in the *Mahaparinirvana Sutra*, the story of the buddha's last days. But immediately after Shakyamuni proclaims the abiding importance of the rules of conduct, he then issues an order permitting monks to suspend petty rules and minor precepts as they see fit. Talk about ambivalence! The sutra does not explain what is meant by "petty rules and minor precepts." Thus the *sangha* is left: (1) without a central leader; (2) with a notion that certain teachings/practices must be maintained; (3) with permission to change certain teachings/practices; and (4) without specific guidelines as to how to distinguish an essential teaching/practice from one that is petty or minor.

The difficulties of telling the *sangha's* early history after Shakyamuni's death are no different from the difficulties of telling the buddha's life. In both cases we possess stories and legends that were compiled and edited *after* the *sangha* had split along sectarian lines. Indeed, the institutional history of Buddhism after Shakyamuni's nirvana is punctuated by a series of increasingly divisive splits over wisdom, practice, conduct, and religious goals. The continuing history of the Buddhist *sangha* can be read as the fascinating account of a tug-of-war between, on the one hand, individuals or groups seeking to conserve what they considered the core of Shakyamuni's religion and, on the other hand, the forces of social, cultural, political, and economic change, the simple fact of time.

This anxiety to conserve finds its way into Buddhist legend in stories of a so-called First Council. Most Buddhist traditions hold that Shakyamuni's remaining great disciples held a convocation in the town of Rajagriha during the very first rains' retreat after his nirvana. The purpose of this First Council was to fix a corpus of teachings, monastic rules, and formal doctrines that could provide the core for a unified *sangha*. As the story goes, this council was comprised of 500 monks, all arhats (recollect that an arhat is an individual who has freed himself from hatred, desire, and ignorance, and will attain nirvana upon death). It was presided over by Mahakashyapa, an early convert and the most accomplished monk still alive. As president of the council, Mahakashyapa invited Ananda to mount the pulpit and recite the sutras. The conceit is that Ananda, the buddha's personal attendant, possessed a perfect memory and had been present at Shakyamuni's every Dharma discourse. Ananda was thus able to remember every word the buddha had spoken on the Truth; he was able to note the city, village, or grove in which the Dharma was articulated; he was able to recollect the buddha's interlocutors, their questions and reactions. This is

why Buddhist sutras typically begin with the statement "Thus have I heard"; the "I" is supposed to guarantee the first-person witness of Ananda himself to the sutra's veracity. Once Ananda had finished repeating all the buddha's sutras, and his words were approved by the gathered arhats, it was held that the canon of sutras (in Sanskrit, the *sūtra-piṭaka*, "basket of sutras") was established. Following Ananda's performance, Upali, the foremost scholar of monastic rules, was called upon to restate every rule of conduct, to describe where and why the buddha established each rule, and to enumerate particular penalties for violating rules. In this way Upali articulated a canon of conduct (in Sanskrit, *vinaya-piṭaka*, "basket of *vinaya*"), which was accepted by all 500 arhats as the single basis for communal life. The monks decided to forgo the buddha's permission to cancel petty rules and minor precepts as they saw fit. Then, finally, Mahakashyapa himself articulated the canon of lists (*mātrkā-piṭaka* or *abhidharma-piṭaka*), scholastic summaries of the doctrine.

The historicity of this First Council is not taken for granted by contemporary scholarship. Nevertheless, one can certainly see the council's rhetorical value. It could be claimed that within a year of buddha's complete and final nirvana, every one of his teachings and rules was recited, affirmed by 500 perfect men, and set in its appropriate canonical "basket," sutra, *vinaya*, or *matrika/abhidharma*. And yet the same institutional memory that lauds this "orthodox" meeting also tells us of a "dissident" monk who rejected the council's authority. Thus one reads of a Buddhist monk named Purana, himself the leader of 500 disciples, who was in the south when the meeting was called and did not participate. When the members of the First Council ordered Purana to "submit" to the teachings and precepts they had established, Purana demurred: "I am sure that this council has done a good job. But I will follow the teachings and precepts as I received them from the buddha, and as I remember them."⁵⁰ The council's 500 had no response, for they held no direct authority over Purana. In short, the historicity of the First Council is open to question. But even if we could be sure that a council of 500 arhats really did convene in the year after Shakyamuni's death, we would still not know how many figures like Purana there might also have been: important leaders of subgroups within the *sangha* who followed a Dharma and *vinaya* that owed nothing to the grand convocation.

Again, even if we were to accept the historicity of the First Council, we still would not have any certainty as to the precise texts that were included therein. The great French Buddhologist Étienne Lamotte put this point best:

50. This is a paraphrase of the story as told in the Pali *vinaya*. See *The Book of the Discipline*, vol. 5: *Cullavagga*, trans. I. B. Horner (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1988), pp. 401-2.

“The sources disagree over the extent of the canonical texts recited in Rājagrha, and each school claims that it was its own canon which was compiled by the elders of the [first] council. . . . It would be absurd to claim that all those canons were fixed at the very beginnings of Buddhism, in a period when the schools had not yet been formed. Furthermore, those canons were not fixed until quite late [e.g., fifth century C.E.], if at all.”⁵¹ Indeed, it could not have been otherwise. For unlike Islam, which claims that the Qur’an must be in Arabic to be considered the word of Allah, Buddhism seems to have always permitted the translation of Shakyamuni’s words into local dialects. The story chartering this practice goes as follows: Once upon a time, two monks from priestly families suggested that the buddha stop using the vernacular of common folk and teach only in the high-culture cadences of Vedic Sanskrit. Shakyamuni rejected this suggestion. He severely reprimanded the monks, explaining that, although priests would still understand his teachings, most listeners would not. This story ends with the buddha permitting each of his monks to learn and recite the buddha’s words in his own regional language. To the extent that an original canon might ever have existed, it did not survive the incremental spread of Buddhism from dialectal region to dialectal region. Eventually several canons were fixed in several languages. The differences among these canons are as numerous as the commonalities.

The difficulties the Buddhists faced in the maintenance of a unified *sangha*, and the difficulties contemporary scholars face in reconstructing this early period of Buddhist history, come to a head in the set of stories telling of a Second Council. Following the First Council there was a Second Council, dated to 116 years after the buddha’s nirvana. Whereas the First Council is presented as establishing a basis for the *sangha*’s orthodoxy and orthopraxy, stories surrounding this Second Council concern the attempt to reunify a fractured *sangha*. This council was initiated by a wandering monk named Yashas. One day Yashas arrived in the town of Vaishali, where he saw the local monks engaging in practices that he considered violations of the *vinaya*. For instance, the Vaishalian monks solicited donations of gold and silver from the laity; they farmed the land; they drank young palm wine. Yashas ordered Vaishali’s monks to stop. They refused. In response, Yashas initiated a legal proceeding to discipline the members of Vaishali’s *sangha*, or failing that, to excommunicate them.

This is a fascinating event for what it reveals about the sectarian representations of religious history. Many, varied accounts of this Second Council have come down to us, but they can be put in two camps. There are those accounts which present Yashas as a guardian of orthoprax tradition. As represented by

51. Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin (Louvain: Peeters Press, 1988), pp. 129-30.

these texts, Yashas discovered lax, corrupt monks who had fallen away from the *vinaya* established in the First Council. Yashas was righteous in his attempt to reform the order. But a second set of texts pertaining to this story gives the perspective of the Vaishali monks themselves. According to this second view, Yashas exceeded his authority. In prosecuting the monks of Vaishali, he sought to expand the ancient *vinaya* beyond the text as established in Mahakashyapa’s First Council. Here is an account of the Second Council from the *Questions of Shariputra Sutra*, a text that gives the Vaishalians’ side of the story.

At that moment, there was an old monk who was avid for glory and prone to disputing. He copied and arranged our Vinaya, developing and increasing what Mahākāśyapa had codified and which is called “The Vinaya of the Great Assembly” (*Mahāsāṃghavinaya*). He collected from outside some materials which had been neglected [until then], with the aim of deceiving beginners. He thus formed a separate party which quarreled with [the Great Assembly]. There were some monks who asked the king to pass judgement. The king brought the two schools together and set about taking a vote with black and white slips of wood, proclaiming that those who approved of the old Vinaya could take the black slips, and those who favored for the new Vinaya, the white slips. Then those who took the black slips were more than ten thousand, while those who took the white slips were a mere hundred or so. The king considered that [the doctrines of the two schools] both [represented] the word of the Buddha and that since their preferences were not the same, [the monks of both groups] should not live together. Since those who studied the old [Vinaya] were in the majority, they were called the *Mahāsāṃghikas* (“members of the majority”) for that reason; those who studied the new [Vinaya] formed the minority, but they were all *Sthaviras* (“elders”): hence they were called *Sthaviras*.⁵²

Here is a brief account of the same events as told by the group that called itself the *Sthavira-vada*, the School of the Elders, who look upon Yashas as a champion:

In order to subdue the wicked monks, many Sthaviras came to Vaiśālī. . . . After having annihilated the wicked monks [in debate], and after having crushed the sinful doctrine, the Sthaviras selected 700 arhats, choosing the best ones, in order to purify their own doctrine, and held a council. . . . The wicked monks [of Vaishali], who had been excommunicated by the Sthaviras, gained another party; and many people, holding the wrong doctrine, ten

52. Cited in Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism*, p. 172.

thousand, assembled and (also) held a council. Therefore this Dharma council is called the "Great Assembly."⁵³

Both accounts agree that a dispute over monastic conduct ended in an irrevocable split within the *sangha* between one group that called itself the Sthavira-vada — this can be translated as "the Way of the Elders," or more loosely, "the Orthodox Way" — and a second group that called itself the Mahasamghika — "the Great Assembly," or simply, "the Majority." Both accounts agree that the avowed Mahasamghikas far outnumbered the avowed Sthaviras.

Which account is correct? Until recently the second telling, that of the Sthavira school, was accepted as more accurate. The fact that this group's rules are more rigorous than those of the Mahasamghikas, combined with the Sthavira school's primary self-definition as the preserver of orthodoxy, held powerful sway over the scholarly imagination and gave its texts priority in the reconstruction of Buddhist history. Recent additional research, however, has tilted opinion away from the Sthavira account, toward that of the Mahasamghikas, the group sympathetic to Vaishali's *sangha*. In the words of Jan Nattier and Charles Prebish: "The sole cause of the initial schism in Buddhism history pertained to matters of Vinaya, but rather than representing a reaction of orthodox Buddhists to Mahāsāmghika laxity, . . . [this schism] represents a reaction on the part of the future Mahāsāmghika to unwarranted expansion of the root Vinaya text on the part of the future Sthaviras (who, in so doing, ultimately provoked the schism they were so diligently seeking to avert)."⁵⁴

In the name of tradition, the new Sthaviras initiated a period of radical change in the history of Buddhism. Yashas's suit against the monks of Vaishali resulted in the *sangha's* division into two *nikayas* (lit. "groupings," usually translated "schools" or "sects"): the Sthavira-vada *nikaya* and the Mahasamghika *nikaya*. But even had Yashas not instigated this break, there had long been centrifugal forces acting on the *sangha*. Above I noted the example of the monk Purana, the leader of a proto-sect who was unwilling to acknowledge the First Council or the canon it is purported to have established. Certainly Purana would not have been the only monk to have asserted his right to teach disciples on his own authoritative knowledge of Shakyamuni's truths. Beyond the issue of multiple claims to authority, differences of language, of location, and of monastic rules, as well as burgeoning differences over doctrine and religious practice, all contributed to the further division of the *sangha* into numerous

53. *The Dīpavaṃsa*, trans. Hermann Oldenberg (New Delhi: Asian Education Services, 1982 [1879]), p. 140.

54. Janice J. Nattier and Charles S. Prebish, "Mahāsāmghika Origins: The Beginnings of Buddhist Sectarianism," *History of Religions* 16 (1977): 238-39.

nikayas. Though the absolute number of *nikayas* is not known, it is popularly held that within three centuries of Shakyamuni's nirvana the *sangha* had split into at least eighteen separate *nikayas*. Some of these were distinguished by little more than geography. For instance, there was an "Eastern Mountain *nikaya*" and a "Western Mountain *nikaya*"; these two professed similar doctrines and practices but had their monastic centers built on neighboring mountains. Other *nikayas* were distinguished by unique doctrines. The name of the Sarvastivada *nikaya*, for instance, translates as "the School which Professes that Everything Exists"; this means that according to Sarvastivada doctrine, the past, the present, and the future all exist simultaneously. Members of the Pudgala-vada *nikaya* held that there was a real, ineffable Soul that persists from life to life; because this doctrine seems to contradict the fundamental teaching of *anatman*, members of the Pudgala-vada are often castigated as heretics.

It is the rule: a buddha cannot attain nirvana until he appoints two chief disciples. Shakyamuni named Shariputra and Maudgalyayana to these posts early in his career. The complexities entailed by this act foreground the ironies of Buddhism's early history. Shariputra was a chief disciple because he approximated Shakyamuni in wisdom; Maudgalyayana gained his position through his psychic abilities. The naming of these two as chief disciples highlighted Shakyamuni's own complete perfection at the same time that it demonstrated that others could, at least, approach his ideal. But Shariputra and Maudgalyayana were not merely symbolic epitomes; they held functional roles, running the *sangha's* day-to-day operations on Shakyamuni's behalf. Shakyamuni could not attain nirvana until he named them. But the fact that they attained nirvana before he did undermined all expectations that they would follow him as the *sangha's* recognized leaders. In lieu of such human authorities, it would seem that the Dharma and *vinaya* were named as Shakyamuni's successors. But which Dharma and *vinaya*? Which canon? Early Buddhism was a religion in which wanderers settled and settlers wandered. The Dharma and the *vinaya* were brought to every corner of the Indian subcontinent. As these teachings spread, linguistic differences, as well as localized cultural differences, brought about the development of distinct buddhisms, each of which made its own claims to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Indeed, scholarship on the Second Council suggests that the invention of stricter new rules for the monastic life may have been as revolutionary a force in Buddhist history as the lax ignorance of old rules. And the story of the Second Council demonstrates that no authority could fix a canon for all Buddhists. In the *Questions of Shariputra Sutra's* telling of these events, the disputing sides go to the king to adjudicate their dispute. But how does the king respond? He throws up his hands in dismay. As far as he can tell, both groups are Buddhists. He orders that, since these fractious monks cannot live together in harmony, they should just live apart.

Act 9: The Bodhisattva's Vow

It is *dharmata* that a living, breathing buddha will not attain nirvana until he inspires another member of his retinue to aspire for the unexcelled, complete, and perfect awakening of a buddha.

The literature of the Mulasarvastivada *nikaya* — the *nikaya* responsible for the doctrine that a buddha must perform ten acts before he can win nirvana — does not specify a uniquely “first time” a follower of Shakyamuni aspired for the unexcelled, complete, and perfect awakening of a buddha. This theme is repeated throughout the literature. One noteworthy instance reads as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a poor washerwoman who offered a small lamp to the buddha. As she presented this gift, the washerwoman also spoke a vow:

By the merit I obtain as a result of this offering, may I become a buddha just like this blessed lord Shakyamuni in every way. Just as Shakyamuni came into the world as a teacher of students when human beings lived for one hundred years, so too may I become teacher of students when human beings live for one hundred years. Just as the excellent pair Shariputra and Maudgalyayana are his chief disciples, so may I have chief disciples, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. As Ananda is his attendant, so may I have an attendant, Ananda. As Shuddhodana and Mahamaya are his father and mother, so may my parents be Shuddhodana and Mahamaya. As Kapilavastu was the city of his youth, so may I have a Kapilavastu. As Rahulabhadra is his son, thus too may I have a son, Rahulabhadra. And, as his relics will be distributed after his final nirvana, so too may I obtain final nirvana and have my relics distributed.

Very soon thereafter Shakyamuni predicted that all would come to pass just as the washerwoman requested, from the fact that she would become a fully awakened buddha named Shakyamuni when the human life span is one hundred years, to the fact that her relics would be distributed after her final nirvana.

There is quite a lot to wonder about here. But before delving into the significance of this story, let us also note its epilogue. The local king, Prasenajit Kosala, heard that Shakyamuni prophesied that a mere washerwoman would become a buddha. He was astonished at how her trifling gift could bring so great a reward. Prasenajit complained: “I have performed long and costly rituals in your honor. I have fed your sangha for months on end. But never have you said that I will become an unexcelled, complete, and perfect buddha! Please, lord, announce that I too will become a perfect buddha!”

Shakyamuni responded:

Complete and perfect awakening is profound, great king. It is profound. Its traces are difficult to see and difficult to perceive. It is incomprehensible. Nor can one comprehend its scope. It is fine and subtle and can only be recognized when one has the discretion of a sage. It isn't easy to attain. You cannot attain it by a single act of giving. Ten gifts will not win you awakening, nor one hundred gifts, nor even one hundred thousand gifts. Rather, great king, when you give, you must give with the express intention of attaining unexcelled, complete and perfect awakening. You must make donations with this aim. You must visit holy men with this aim. You must revere and serve religious teachers with this very aim: to attain unexcelled, complete and perfect awakening.⁵⁵

This story is quite a bit like several others presented throughout this chapter. The idea that merit from a mere act of giving could enable one to attain a supreme spiritual goal was the substance of the story Vagisha told on the shore of Lake Anavatapta. The fact that Buddhist doctrine equates action with intention — it places greater emphasis on the aim toward which an act is performed than on the details of the physical deed — has also been discussed at some length, especially in relation to the Second Noble Truth, the cause of *dukkha*. We have met the cast of characters named by the washerwoman as well, and we have seen their roles in the grand drama of Shakyamuni's life as buddha.

What is unique and striking within this present story is the content of the washerwoman's mental deed. Her vow brings a specific theory of karmic action together with a specific conception of the most exalted aspiration toward which karmic action can be applied. She wants to be a religious founder on the exact model of Shakyamuni. Certainly her vow in this regard is somewhat unimaginative; the author could have used different names, at least. (I will return to this point at the beginning of the next section.) But this story serves as a useful introduction to the ninth act required of Shakyamuni as a founder precisely because it is so mechanistic, its characterizations so stark. A poor low-caste woman possesses insight that a powerful male king lacks. The readers of this story are shown that somebody who has the wisdom to voice an exalted wish can make Shakyamuni's life her own, down to names of her future family and companions. Complete and perfect awakening is profound; its traces are subtle and difficult to recognize. But somebody who even glimpses the nature of real-

55. This is a paraphrase of the events recounted in the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya-vastu*, 1:57-58.

ity can set out to attain the unexcelled, complete, and perfect awakening of a buddha, teach the Dharma, and found a *sangha* in *exactly* the same way as Shakyamuni. To use more specific terminology, such a person can set out on the *bodhisattva* path.

In fact, the set of doctrinal and institutional assumptions comprehended within this story have been central to the present chapter's representation of Shakyamuni as founder. The chapter began with the claim that, for Buddhists, Shakyamuni's value as a religious founder cannot be disentangled from the expectation that he is only one of countless buddhas. The chapter has been structured by a more refined version of this same doctrine, namely, that all the buddhas born on this earth necessarily live lives of great similitude. The washerwoman's vow is unusual only in that it tries to substitute "exactitude" for "great similitude" in creating a parallel life. Nevertheless, before any terrestrial buddha can perform his ten requisite deeds, earning him the right to attain final nirvana, before he can awaken, and even before he can reincarnate a final time, he must take a first step toward buddhahood by making a vow and entering the *bodhisattva* path. The washerwoman's dedication of merit was one form of what would be called a "bodhisattva vow." The *bodhisattva* figure has been one of the Buddhists' most important objects of conjecture, conceptualization, and contemplation. The path of the *bodhisattva* has been measured for length and metered for time, its every step explained in detail. Accomplishments of the *bodhisattvas* are the subjects of songs and prayers, and have even affected the very notion of what it means to be a buddha. Indeed, disparate doctrines and practices surrounding the *bodhisattva* figure have led to important institutional divisions within the *sangha*. In order to accommodate the important range of developments that arise out of the Buddhists' prolonged interest in the *bodhisattva*, I will split my discussion into two halves. Here, under consideration of the ninth act — i.e., at least one of Shakyamuni's followers must become a *bodhisattva* — I will treat formative conceptualizations of this figure as a model of the religious practitioner. In the context of the tenth necessary act, I will treat the broad doctrinal and institutional ramifications of an increasing importance placed on the taking of the *bodhisattva* vow as a model for religious practice.

Examination of the *bodhisattva* might begin with some of our earliest tangible evidence for Buddhist doctrines and practices, an inscription composed during the reign of Emperor Ashoka in the mid-third century B.C.E. According to this record, Ashoka doubled the size of a brick memorial stupa dedicated to Konakamana, a buddha who was believed to have taught the Dharma and established a *sangha* millions of years in the past. This inscription shows us that within two centuries of Shakyamuni's death a cult had arisen for buddhas other than Shakyamuni, and that this cult was so prominent it was supported

by the greatest ruler of the day. Although we know little else about the third century B.C.E. cult of Konakamana, we can be relatively certain that such worship would not have arisen had there not been a more general speculative interest in the figure of the buddha as a religious type, a speculation that was closely connected with the imagination of buddha as a focus of devotion. Buddhahood, as the epitome of spiritual perfection, had to be a generalized state that could be attained by religious virtuosi who ardently perfected themselves throughout the course of myriad lifetimes. Such aspirants were called "bodhisattvas": literally people "attached to awakening," or idiomatically buddhas-in-training. Indeed, just as numerous speculative systems developed to explain the nature of buddhahood, so the *bodhisattva* as a religious type also came under scrutiny. What did one have to do to become a *bodhisattva*? What were the stages in the *bodhisattva*'s progress? How long did it take?

Early speculation on the *bodhisattva* was especially fostered by the *jataka* tales, a genre of literature that was not directly included in the three canonical baskets (*sutra*, *vinaya*, and *matrika*) but has nevertheless held foundational importance for Buddhism. *Jataka* is a generic term for the stories of Shakyamuni's births while he was a *bodhisattva*. As we saw on the shore of Lake Anavatapta, Shakyamuni is remembered as sometimes speaking of births in which he committed great evils against his friends and teachers. But far more commonly, *jakatas* represent Shakyamuni's forward momentum as a *bodhisattva*. Once the buddha was an elephant who saved a party of lost travelers from starvation by throwing himself off a cliff so they could survive on his massive corpse; once the buddha was a young quail who saved an entire forest from destruction by convincing a wildfire to turn back and leave the animals in peace; once the buddha was a monkey who taught a human king the principles of legal justice. Sometimes the *bodhisattva* was a hare, sometimes a beggar, and sometimes a child prodigy. In every one of these triumphant *jakatas*, the *bodhisattva* shows himself to be the greatest of beings; he also possesses the wisdom to use his greatness for others' benefit as well as his own. Many *jakatas* fit into the category of "fable"; many are common Indian folktales, overlaid with the Buddhist conceit that the tale's hero is the *bodhisattva*, Shakyamuni-to-be. Indeed, the fundamental importance of the *jakatas* is revealed not only by the sheer number of such tales and their broad diffusion throughout the Buddhist world, but also by the fact that stone illustrations of these birth stories are found in the very earliest stratum of Buddhist archaeological remains. Probably from the time of Shakyamuni himself, *jataka* stories have provided monks and lay folk alike with an imaginative basis for conceiving what it means to train for buddhahood.

Whereas most *jataka* tales simply represent the *bodhisattva* as generous, patient, moral, or valorous in some way, several are concerned with bodhi-

sattvahood itself and comment directly on Shakyamuni-to-be's progress along the path to buddhahood. One such *jataka* tells of an encounter between the bodhisattva when he was a young brahmin named Megha and a buddha named Dipankara. Just as the washerwoman at the beginning of this section made an offering to Shakyamuni and stated her desire to become a buddha, so in this *jataka* tale the bodhisattva Megha makes an offering of flowers and vows to become a buddha in the future. The version of this story preserved in the Mulasarvastivada canon is rather abbreviated. Here is a translation of the vow taken from the literature of the Mahasamghika *nikaya*, a text entitled *The Great Subject (Mahāvastu)*:

Ah! May I too in some future time become a *tathāgata*, an *arhat*, a perfect buddha, gifted with knowledge and conduct, a *sugata*, an unsurpassed knower of the world, a driver of tameable men, a teacher of gods and men, as this exalted Dīpaṅkara now is. So may I become endowed with the thirty-two marks of a great man, with his minor characteristics, and with his radiant body. May I become endowed with the eighteen special attributes of a buddha, strong with a buddha's ten powers, and confident with the four grounds of self-confidence as this exalted Dīpaṅkara now is. So may I set rolling the incomparable wheel of Dharma as does now the exalted Dīpaṅkara. So may I preserve a body of disciples in harmony. So may gods and men deem me worthy to be heard and believed. Having thus crossed, may I lead others across; emancipated, may I emancipate others; comforted, may I comfort others, as this exalted Dīpaṅkara now does. May I become this for the happiness and welfare of mankind, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of the great multitude, for the happiness and welfare of gods and men.⁵⁶

Just as Shakyamuni predicted that everything the washerwoman requested would come to pass, here too Dipankara declares that young Megha is a valid bodhisattva who, in some future time, will become a buddha named Shakyamuni.

The importance of this telling lies in its detailed, mature theory of buddhahood, and hence of bodhisattvahood. For Megha to achieve his end, he must train in such a way as to transform his body, his mind, and his range of abilities; he must develop special powers and attributes. Yet throughout this period of training Megha must not imagine that he is working for his own benefit alone. As a bodhisattva, Megha sets out on the road to final nirvana, his own highest good, as a way of expressing his concern for others' welfare and happiness. Thus, in its most generalized formulation, this bodhisattva vow is articu-

lated as follows: "May I become a buddha for the sake of other living beings." The bodhisattva's spiritual progress, and the buddha's spiritual perfection, cannot be realized without his or her altruistic participation in the world. Inspired in part by the spiritual heroism of the *jataka* tales, Buddhists came to imagine the bodhisattva path as the progressive accomplishment of a fixed set of perfections. The precise numbers and names of the requisite perfections differ from *nikaya* to *nikaya*. For instance, the Sthavira-vada *nikaya* stipulates that the bodhisattva perfect himself in ten ways, each one of which reveals the fiber of his moral character (e.g., generosity, morality, renunciation, resolution). The Sarvastivada *nikaya*, by contrast, came up with a list of six perfections: generosity, morality, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom.

Let us look somewhat more closely at how these six perfections are integrated into the actual practice of the bodhisattva. The Sarvastivada holds that Shakyamuni took his first step on the bodhisattva path in the virtually infinite past, over 300,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 years ago. (This number is known to Buddhist literature as "three incalculable aeons.") At that time, born a merchant, he encountered a buddha named Shakyamuni and uttered a vow: "May I become a buddha just like you in every way." In fact, the vow associated with this ancient merchant was almost word for word the same as the vow put in the mouth of the poor washerwoman. According to the literature, the merchant requested that his future name be Shakyamuni, that he become a buddha when humans live for a brief span, and so on. The karmic ramifications of the merchant's vow were enormous. For, from the moment he spoke these words, the merchant's every act of virtue and wisdom was not merely a random act of kindness but moved him farther along the grand concourse of spiritual progress toward buddhahood.

When this ancient merchant first encountered the ancient Shakyamuni, he became aware of a superior goal for which to strive, buddhahood. But he was not yet familiar with a means for attaining that result. Over the ensuing time span, known as an "incalculable aeon" (equal to 10⁹⁹ years), this now-bodhisattva met and worshiped 75,000 more buddhas, being guided by each one on the practices of morality, meditation, and wisdom. By the end of this first incalculable aeon of his training as a bodhisattva, he was well on his way to buddhahood, and yet was not certain that he would actually realize his goal. The first aeon of training was followed by a second period of 10⁹⁹ years, during which the bodhisattva encountered tens of thousands of additional buddhas. The last buddha Shakyamuni-to-be met during this second incalculably long period was Dipankara. In fact, the encounter with Dipankara is a milestone in this bodhisattva's progress, because Dipankara was the first buddha to prophesy that the bodhisattva would *definitely* be successful in his

56. *The Mahāvastu*, trans. J. J. Jones (London: Pali Text Society, 1987), 1:194.

quest. This prediction marks the division between the second and third segments of the bodhisattva path. The bodhisattva begins a third incalculable aeon of training with the knowledge that he *will* become a buddha. Technically, such a bodhisattva is called *avaivartika*, meaning that he cannot desist from his practice or regress from his aim. This prediction marks a turning point in the bodhisattva's social self-representation as well. Though Shakyamuni-to-be was a bodhisattva in deed before his meeting with Dipankara, it was felt that one deserves to be called bodhisattva publicly only after one attains the *avaivartika* stage.

After the third period of 10⁵⁹ years has been completed, the bodhisattva has very nearly accomplished his aim. But to become a full and perfect buddha he must then set out actively to accomplish each of the six perfections. He does this over the course of a mere one hundred aeons. *Generosity*: he sacrifices his body again and again for the sake of others; *morality*: he forsakes his life rather than violate a moral code; *patience*: he bears all punishments and ridicule with equanimity, no matter how undeserved; *energy*: he shows inexhaustible energy, as when he stood on one leg for seven days and nights, without closing his eyes, while singing praises of a buddha named Pushya; *meditation*: he learns and explores all possible states of trance; *wisdom*: he sees the truths of no-Self and codependent origination.

Throughout the course of his training in the six perfections, the bodhisattva was born in many different regions of samsara. (In fact, adherents to the Mahasamghika *nikaya* even held that he took birth in the hells, albeit of his own free will, in order to assist beings' escape from their horrendous sufferings.) The tale told of his penultimate life as a human being is one of the most popular in all of Buddhist lore. This life found the bodhisattva born as a prince named Vishvantara, who was unstinting in generosity. Vishvantara was beloved by all his subjects: nobody in his kingdom lacked anything, for whenever a supplicant came to him with a request, he fulfilled it. Once a legate from a rival kingdom requested Vishvantara's white elephant, a magical animal believed by all to be the source of the kingdom's prosperity. He presented the elephant without a second thought. Though the people of the kingdom were ready to praise his largesse when it benefited them, they were horrified when he gave away the elephant. Fearing that his generosity was getting out of control, the people had him banished to the forest, along with his wife and two children. While in the forest (to make a long story short), an evil brahmin requested his two children, making no secret that he intended to work them as servants. Vishvantara was simultaneously overjoyed and saddened by the request, with which he complied. Then the god Indra, intrigued by the fact that Vishvantara would give away his own children so freely, took on a human form and requested Vishvantara's wife. Perfect in generosity, he again complied. The story



Maitreya

(photo by Richard S. Cohen)

ends on a happy note for all, however: Vishvantara's children and wife were returned to him, and he was accepted back among his subjects.

Following the bodhisattva's penultimate human life as Vishvantara, he was reborn as a god, the divine king of Tushita Heaven. As the time approached for the great being's final life, he surveyed the earth for the best

couple belonging to the best family living in the best place, just as other incipient buddhas did prior to their final births. He espied Shuddhodana, the leader of the noble Shakya clan, and his wife, Mahamaya, who was beautiful, moral, and had once vowed to become the mother of a buddha. Shakyamuni-to-be would make her wish come true. The bodhisattva then handed his crown to another bodhisattva, named Maitreya, who will himself come to earth as a buddha millions of years hence. Just as countless buddhas preceded Shakyamuni, so will countless buddhas follow him, Maitreya being the very next in line. And just as past buddhas, such as Konakamana, received reverence and honor, so there is a long tradition of worship directed toward the bodhisattva Maitreya.

The Buddhist conceptualization of the bodhisattva is certainly one of the grand moments in the history of human imagination. The predicates of true perfection, the duration of the bodhisattva's training and profundity of his practice, combine to present buddhahood as an accomplishment that, though attainable by all in theory, is the province of only a select few in reality. In fact, one should be clear that the term "bodhisattva," as discussed in the literature of the *nikayas*, refers quite specifically to Shakyamuni (or less often, Maitreya) during the period of his training before he was a buddha. When members of these *nikayas* speculated about bodhisattvahood, the theories they developed were almost exclusively retrospective — i.e., explaining how Shakyamuni perfected himself — rather than prospective — i.e., instructing living Buddhists how to travel on the bodhisattva path. Although the list of the buddha's necessary deeds stipulates that he must inspire a follower to aspire for the complete and perfect awakening of a buddha, *nowhere* in the literature of the *nikayas* does one find a prescriptive expectation that Buddhists should, or must, conceive such a desire. However, beginning in the second or first century B.C.E., it seems that a small cadre of Buddhists, owing allegiance to a number of *nikayas* and living in various locales around the Indian subcontinent, did begin to look upon the bodhisattva vow as something they themselves might utter; the bodhisattva path became a course of action they themselves chose to follow. Let us now move on to a discussion of the tenth and final act required of a buddha, in which we will investigate the important doctrinal and institutional ramifications of this radical development.

Act 10: From the Bodhisattva Vehicle to the Great Vehicle

It is *dharmata* that a living, breathing buddha will not attain nirvana until he predicts that somebody within his retinue will become a buddha in the future.

At the beginning of the previous section we saw King Prasenajit Kosala complain bitterly that his largesse to Shakyamuni and the *sangha* reaped little reward when compared with the great prophecy the washerwoman received in return for a single, small flame. We also saw Shakyamuni's response: a buddha will predict the future buddhahood of a donor only if that donor makes his offerings as a bodhisattva, with the express intention of attaining unexcelled, complete, and perfect awakening. Indeed, reading this story in light of the theories of the bodhisattva path just presented, we can surmise that the old poor woman was rather advanced on her journey. The fact that she received a prophecy portends that she had come to the end of her second incalculable aeon of bodhisattva practice — at least. She had met with hundreds of thousands of buddhas over millions of years. Despite her current low social status, she was a spiritual giant. How could a mere king compete?

Apropos our present inquiry, however, this story is less interesting for the competition between the old woman and the king than for the precise formulation of the washerwoman's bodhisattva vow. When one considers her words in light of Shakyamuni's *jatakas*, one finds that this vow is not unique. A Buddhist hearing the washerwoman's tale would know that her vow was modeled on that spoken by Shakyamuni himself when, as an ancient merchant, he met a buddha for the first time and began traveling the path to buddhahood. A Buddhist hearing this tale would take away the message that entry onto the bodhisattva path was not simply a matter of making gifts or practicing morality and meditation: one could become a bodhisattva only when one was willing to emulate Shakyamuni in full. For this old washerwoman, a character in a story, the ancient merchant's statement to the ancient Shakyamuni — "May I become a buddha just like you in every way" — was not only a *model* of religious practice but served as a *model for* that practice as well. The events of Shakyamuni's former lives were not just tales to remember and retell in laudatory verse, they were privileged models for how to act as a bodhisattva.

The washerwoman of this story is an advanced bodhisattva, despite her humble appearance. But although she is modeled on Shakyamuni-the-bodhisattva, the Buddhists who wrote her story — members of the *Mulasarvastivada nikaya* — would not have expected many in their group to follow her example. For the earliest *sangha*, the bodhisattva ideal was strictly retrospective in nature. For the first two centuries of Buddhism's development, a monk who sought religious perfection would not have imagined that he should emulate Shakyamuni in full. Rather, he would have pursued liberation as an arhat. He would have striven to eliminate all moral defilements (i.e., craving, hatred, and ignorance). He would have expected that as an arhat he would be free of all desires, create no additional karma, and attain nirvana once his current store of karma was emptied; he would "go out," like a flame whose fuel was completely

used up. Indeed, from the little glimpses we have had of the bodhisattva path, we can see just how different the arhat ideal is from the bodhisattva. The arhat seeks nirvana, which he must necessarily accomplish alone; the bodhisattva seeks *bodhi*, awakening, for the sake of living beings. The arhat's path and goal both entail the elimination of karmic attachments to samsara through the accumulation of insight; the bodhisattva actively cultivates such attachments, for his pursuit of wisdom is not privileged over his pursuit of compassion. The arhat strives for the quickest possible liberation; the bodhisattva's liberation is deferred to the almost infinite future. The differences can be so great that a later text, *The Questions of Upali Sutra*, states: "A pure precept observed by disciples [striving for arhatship] may be a great breach of discipline for bodhisattvas, while a pure precept observed by bodhisattvas may be a great breach of discipline for disciples [striving for arhatship]."⁵⁷

Yet, at some time around the second or first century B.C.E., developing theories about Shakyamuni's former lives as a bodhisattva began to inspire living Buddhists to pursue the inconceivably long training required for a buddha's complete perfection. This was a revolutionary development in the history of Buddhism that can only be explained in relation to a complex range of doctrinal and social factors.

An investigation of the doctrinal factors that account for the increasing importance of the bodhisattva as an active religious ideal must begin with the Second Council, and the first lasting split within the *sangha*. Earlier we saw that the division between the Sthavira *nikaya* and the Mahasamghika *nikaya* centered on a dispute over monastic rules. It seems that the so-called Elders had attempted to create a stricter definition of monastic practice by formulating rules not found in other versions of the shared *vinaya*. Separated institutionally, members of the various *nikayas* also developed contrasting doctrines about the arhat, the buddha, and the bodhisattva. When representing the arhat as a religious figure, I have so far followed the model of the Sthavira-vada and Sarvastivada *nikayas*: schools that teach that a disciple who realizes the Four Noble Truths in full is the buddha's equal vis-à-vis fundamental liberating knowledge. These two schools certainly acknowledge the buddha's superiority to the arhat in terms of the scope of his powers and virtues, but not in terms of his ultimate goal. Thus for these two schools, the attainment of arhatship is sufficient for complete liberation. Members of the Mahasamghika *nikaya*, by contrast, came to regard the arhat as imperfect. Mahadeva, an early teacher of the Mahasamghika *nikaya*, is said to have presented the arhat as fallible in four ways: (1) an arhat can have nocturnal emissions; (2) an arhat might still be ig-

57. *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūṭa Sūtra*, ed. Garma C. C. Chang (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), p. 268.

norant with respect to worldly matters; (3) an arhat may have doubts; and (4) an arhat relies on others for teachings, rather than realizing the truth through his own efforts. Whereas none of these four theses represents the arhat as a false saint — i.e., that arhats do not really attain nirvana — these four theses do point to a potential for fallibility on the part of the arhat. They lower the status of the arhat, creating doubt as to whether his liberation is assured.

For the members of the Mahasamghika *nikaya*, these uncertainties over the arhat's perfection were interwoven with a *docetic* doctrine of buddhahood. All Buddhists hold that buddhas possess superhuman powers and abilities beyond imagining. But the Mahasamghikas took this belief to the next level by proposing that the Shakyamuni who wandered the byways of India for forty-five years was not a real, flesh-and-blood being at all. The members of this school taught that the human being people imagined to be Shakyamuni was in truth a magical creation sent to earth by the real Shakyamuni, who was permanently engaged in meditation while dwelling in transcendent nirvana. The birth of young Siddhartha was just a deception created by the real buddha; the prince's renunciation was a deception; the bodhisattva's awakening was a sham, for he was already a buddha when he pretended to awaken; he ate food offered to him, although he did not need material nourishment; he showed himself as wracked by aging, though he is ageless; even the buddha's attainment of final nirvana was an illusion: not being born, he did not have to die. For the Mahasamghika *nikaya*, the buddha, Shakyamuni, was an omniscient, transcendental being who strategically adapted himself to worldly conventions in order to make himself available as a teacher.

Even if the Mahasamghika *nikaya* had not problematized arhatship as an ultimate religious aim, this apotheosis of the buddha raises additional questions about that goal. The Sthavira-vada and Sarvastivada *nikayas* taught that the arhat's nirvana was equal to the nirvana of the buddha: both were definitively free of samsara. By contrast, this Mahasamghika representation of buddhahood renders the nirvana of the buddha as a state qualitatively superior to the nirvana of the arhat. Relying on these doctrinal differences, some Buddhists became convinced that even if the arhat were assured of liberation, that liberation would so pale by comparison with the state of buddhahood as to be undesirable. Inspired by this doctrine of transcendental buddhahood, not interested in the limited accomplishments of the arhat, these Buddhists began to take their own first steps toward becoming bodhisattvas on the path to supreme perfection. Borrowing a metaphor from the realm of transportation, they characterized themselves as riding the vehicle of bodhisattvas (*bodhisattva-yāna*); those who did not strive for buddhahood were characterized as riding on an alternate vehicle, that of the disciples (*śrāvaka-yāna*).

The doctrinal developments that inspired interest in the bodhisattva as a

model for religious action were complemented by several social factors, perhaps chief among which was the increased prominence the *bodhisattva-yana* gave to the laity. According to Étienne Lamotte, the bodhisattva ideal directly expressed the religious aspirations of Buddhism's laity. Lamotte's version of this theory is strong. As he puts it, Buddhist lay folk became increasingly unwilling to allow monks and nuns to arrogate spiritual privileges to themselves; the laity demanded equal religious rights. (Doctrinal literature from the *nikayas* generally holds, for instance, that a layman cannot attain arhatship; a layman with advanced spiritual aspirations must join the monastic *sangha*.) In Lamotte's analysis, the bodhisattva path gave characteristically lay practices (e.g., generosity) the same overall importance as characteristically monastic practices (e.g., meditation), thereby eliminating the religious hierarchy, which privileged the life of the renunciant over that of the layman.⁵⁸ The bodhisattva could be married, hold a job, raise a family, and be no less accomplished a bodhisattva. There are several problems with Lamotte's thesis in its very strong form. It is incorrect to propose that the burgeoning importance of bodhisattvahood had an "anti-clerical" bias or was essentially caused by lay religious aspirations. Indeed, the distinctions between the laity and the monks were not as clear-cut as Lamotte supposes. For instance, epigraphic evidence reveals that religious generosity was not the sole province of the laity; Buddhist monks and nuns also actively participated in the practice of giving. Yet, even if lay religious aspirations cannot be privileged as the single reason for the *bodhisattva-yana's* success, this vehicle did certainly offer the laity greater religious prestige than that offered by the vehicle of disciples.

The development of interest in the bodhisattva as a model for religious action is a complex phenomenon. The layman's desire to be regarded as a religious actor in his own right — not merely as a member of the monks' "support staff" — is one factor. But an equally important development directs us to the opposite pole of social values. A second social factor that lent early impetus toward bodhisattvahood can be found within Buddhist monastic communities, among groups of renunciants who considered themselves reformers of monastic practice. These bodhisattvas saw their fellow monks as having fallen away from the original ideals of the renunciant's life. The monastic bodhisattvas accused their brethren of being hypocrites, materialists, hedonists, and sloppy accountants; they said they were lazy, unstudied in the rules of conduct, and ignorant of the joys of the true ascetic's simple life. These renunciant bodhisattvas seem to have favored the practice of living in forests, an ascetic practice that is optional for all Buddhist monks. For these bodhisattva monks, the monastic

58. Étienne Lamotte, "Sur la formation du Mahāyāna," in *Asiatica: Festschrift F. Weller*, ed. Johannes Schubert (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1954), pp. 377-96.

vows and the bodhisattva's vows are not in conflict. To the contrary, articulation of the intention to become a buddha for the sake of all living beings is a marker of just how seriously one takes one's life as a monk.

Since our time line here is somewhat muddy, let me attempt to clear the water. *Jataka* stories recounting Shakyamuni's former births as a bodhisattva were probably told by the buddha himself. These stories could not have served as more than mere fables without the existence of some theoretical apparatus for explaining bodhisattvahood as a religious state, and some incipient notion of the course by which a bodhisattva becomes a buddha. In the centuries following Shakyamuni's nirvana, a variety of historical factors allowed for the competitive coexistence of numerous buddhisms. (If the near success of Devadatta's schism is any indication, even during the buddha's life Shakyamuni's buddhism was only one of several.) Within 150 years of Shakyamuni's nirvana, these various groups institutionalized their divisions in line with the *vinaya's* rules for forming separate *sanghas*. Numerous formal *nikayas* began to take shape; these *nikayas* were divided in part by practice, but also by doctrine. Maybe 250 years after Shakyamuni's nirvana, a few renunciants associated with these *nikayas*, as well as some members of the *nikayas'* local lay communities, began to turn their eyes toward a new religious goal, to speak a new vow: "May I become a buddha for the sake of living beings." They even began to conceive of themselves as riding a new vehicle. This *bodhisattva-yana* had a diffuse origin; it cannot be tied to a single doctrinal development, a single sociological group, a single *nikaya*, a single location, or a single founder. Its members were not federated through an institutional form: these bodhisattvas did *not* form a new *nikaya* unto themselves. Rather, while conserving the characteristically divided institutions of traditional Buddhist social life, these bodhisattvas became united by a common vision, for which *nikaya* membership was beside the point. They held, as one, that bodhisattvahood, and ultimately buddhahood, was the most legitimate aspiration for a follower of Shakyamuni.

The fact that the *bodhisattva-yana* developed diffusely, simultaneously in many centers, makes it difficult to speak of an "origin" per se or even of a single *bodhisattva-yana*. However, there is one aspect of religious life that these scattered bodhisattvas did share in common: a desire to learn more about how they should live, practice, and think as bodhisattvas. The old canons had little to say about the bodhisattva figure, and what information those canons did provide was overly general and retrospective. What were the bodhisattvas to do?

To understand the answer, let us recall the First Council. The rhetorical force of this quasi-historical meeting is to be found in the Buddhist's expectation that institutions that share a single orthodoxy and orthopraxy are more stable than institutions in which everybody can think and do as they please. Yet, even if such a council did take place, we know that the unity it attempted to un-

dergird did not last long, for the earliest historical data available to us reveal the presence of competing claims to authority. Recall Lamotte's words previously quoted: "Each [*nikaya*] claims that it was its own canon which was compiled by the elders of the [first] council. [But] it would be absurd to claim that all those canons were fixed at the very beginnings of Buddhism, in a period when the [*nikayas*] had not yet been formed." To put the point bluntly, in the centuries after Shakyamuni's nirvana, members of the many *nikayas* composed new sutras and freely edited sutras already in their possession, but they presented their work as "original." The bodhisattvas were no exception to this practice. By the first century B.C.E., a new corpus of Buddhist literature was being written, a new genre that focused directly on the path of the bodhisattva, the practices of the bodhisattva, and the attainments of the bodhisattva.

The very earliest stratum of works specifically related to a *bodhisattva-yana* is lost. However, we possess texts from perhaps the second stratum, circa first century C.E. At this time the bodhisattva movement was still diffuse and numerically insignificant. But it had given itself a distinctive name: the Mahayana (the Great Vehicle). Its literary works were called Mahayana sutras, the term "sutra" implying a claim to canonical validity. The Mahayana began as a minor reform movement within the constraints of *nikaya* Buddhism. It soon developed into a new, unique, and separate form of Buddhism. One cannot overemphasize how important the rise of the Mahayana is within the history of Buddhism throughout the world. Regrettably, this chapter's treatment of the Mahayana will be too brief.

The wide range of subjects one finds in the body of early Mahayana sutras is suggestive of the diverse origins out of which the Mahayana arose. These sutras show that Mahayanists were concerned to re-form Buddhism on a number of fronts: doctrinal, sociological, soteriological, cultic, mythological. Andrew Rawlinson has given probably the best characterization of this phenomenon. He states that the Mahayana had a "multi-origin." The Mahayana began with the secret, oral transmission of the texts that came to be called Mahayana sutras. A Buddhist who wished to join a group that transmitted these teachings did not have to foreswear other formal institutional affiliations; anybody who was genuinely moved by a particular Mahayana sutra, and therefore believed it to be the valid teaching of the buddha, was welcome to join.⁵⁹ This model can accommodate the fact that certain Mahayana sutras severely criticize Buddhists who have not taken the bodhisattva vow, while other sutras contain no such polemic. This model can allow for the clearly monastic milieu

59. Andrew Rawlinson, "The Problem of the Origin of the Mahāyāna," in *Traditions in Contact and Change*, ed. Peter Slater and Donald Wiebe (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), p. 169.

of some Mahayana sutras, while not being troubled by the fact that other sutras champion lay bodhisattvas. This model can allow us to accept that early Mahayanists might have engaged in a variety of competing devotional practices (e.g., worship of memorial stupas, worship of Mahayana sutras, worship of the sutras' public reciters). This model can enable us to embrace a vision of the early Mahayana as heterogeneous, with bodhisattvas even disputing other bodhisattvas in an open-ended process of decentralized change.

It is important to note that the Mahayana should not be considered a *nikaya*. The individual *nikayas* are parallel institutions within Buddhism, in that each *nikaya* possesses a unique canon and each claims its canon was originally set by the First Council. The Mahayana does not possess a canon as such, nor does it claim that its sutras were spoken by (or even known by) the arhats at the First Council. Rather the Mahayana claimed that any Buddhist whose religious life remained wholly encompassed by teachings and practices found in the *nikaya*'s canons — and especially, any Buddhist who did not take the bodhisattva vow — was practicing a lesser form of Buddhism. The Mahayanists sometimes denigrated forms of Buddhism that did not center on the bodhisattva path by stigmatizing them as belonging to a Lesser Vehicle, the Hinayana. But even so, the Mahayana did not reject the *nikayas*' canons *in toto*. An example: Tibetan Buddhists are avid champions of Mahayana ideals, and yet their monks follow the *vinaya* of the Mulasarvastivada *nikaya*.

In fact, several early Mahayana sutras have their roots in the canons of specific *nikayas*. For instance, the Eastern Mountain *nikaya* had a text called "The Perfection of Wisdom," and there is an entire subgenre of Mahayana literature called the "Perfection of Wisdom sutras." However, as the Mahayana developed its distinctive practices, doctrines, and mythologies, Mahayanists severed explicit links between their sutra literature and that of the *nikayas*. The Mahayanists claimed their sutras *came* directly from the mouth of buddha, as Mahayana sutras. Thus the Mahayanists did not consider their form of Buddhism to be "later" or "invented." But this put them in a difficult hermeneutical position, for the Mahayanists also acknowledged (as they had to) that their sutras were unknown to the majority of Buddhists and had no place in the canonical recitations of early Buddhism. To solve this dilemma, Mahayana sutras reveal a range of doctrinal strategies for explaining how Shakyamuni could have spoken the Mahayana sutras and yet nobody but Mahayanists ever heard them. Some sutras were revealed only to advanced bodhisattvas while Shakyamuni was dwelling in heaven (remember that all Buddhists believe Shakyamuni spent time in heaven teaching Dharma). Some sutras claim to have been taught in a general assembly. It is explained that members of those assemblies who had not taken bodhisattva vows ignored these teachings, and so did not recall the discourse. Some sutras were suppos-

edly hidden under the oceans, in the lairs of snake deities, until they were recovered. Some sutras acknowledged that they were composed by latter-day Dharma reciters. This did not invalidate those sutras, however, because Mahayana doctrine holds that Shakyamuni's birth and death were both fictive acts; the buddha remains accessible to those who can hear him. Though composed long after Shakyamuni's illusory death, these sutras were nevertheless the words of buddha.

Mahayana Buddhism's intellectual and social histories are far too rich to fit within the brief space allotted for them by this chapter. However, before concluding, I would like to offer a brief glimpse at how Mahayana sutras offered a conception of Shakyamuni-as-founder that differed radically from what I have unpacked through consideration of the ten necessary acts. Recall the formula that begins the list of ten acts: "It is the rule (*dharmata*) that living, breathing buddhas have ten essential duties. A buddha will not attain nirvana until . . ." Nirvana, here, is the buddha's goal. He must participate in samsara as a founder to attain this goal, but once a buddha has realized nirvana, he is utterly abstracted from samsara. This formula's use of the term *dharmata* indicates that every individual buddha's career is subordinated to a natural and necessary order. A "buddha" whose life does not conform to this order is not truly a buddha, and will not truly gain nirvana.

For the Mahayana, a buddha trains over an immeasurably long career because buddhahood is immeasurable in scope. Every buddha's grandeur is unbounded in its infinitude. It is impossible that any buddha could actually be subject to an abstract, external principle of order like *dharmata*. To the contrary, the buddhas invent the very notion that there is a natural and proper way for a buddha to live his life. Thus the Mahayana reenvisions Shakyamuni's earthly career. His every action, from birth to death, is said to have been a scripted fiction intended to inspire the unenlightened to pursue the religious path. Shakyamuni's life followed certain patterns, not because it had to, but because the buddha created the expectation that a buddha would live a certain paradigmatic life. In fact, Shakyamuni gained awakening in the unimaginable past. The Mahayana's *Lotus Sutra* puts this point very plainly: "If this universe was reduced to atoms, and if each atom was a cosmic age, the time since my achievement of buddhahood would exceed even this. . . . My life span is an innumerable number of incalculable aeons, ever enduring, never perishing."⁶⁰ Although Shakyamuni takes the explicit form of a buddha only sometimes, he is perpetually engaged in striving to demonstrate the Dharma. This same sutra explains that Shakyamuni strategically refrains

60. *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra)*, trans. Leon Hurvitz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), pp. 238-39.

from taking an overt form as buddha too often or for too long: if people were aware that he is both immortal and omnipresent, they would lose the impetus to practice themselves. Knowing that an infinitely wise, infinitely powerful, and infinitely compassionate buddha was always available to satisfy their wants, beings would allow themselves to become spiritual infants. On this view, Shakyamuni's actions as a terrestrial religious founder are only a very small part of his everlasting involvement in the work of training beings toward perfection.

Given the infinitude of buddhahood, the Mahayana found it necessary to explain how there could be more than one buddha. The answer is brilliant, simple, and consonant with the Mahayana's rhetoric of apotheosis. We have seen that the Buddhist imagination is highly spatial. Living beings inhabit a cosmological universe in which karma determines the environment within which an individual lives and acts; the Wheel of Becoming (discussed above, in relation to the first act) offers a generalized map of the universe at the same time that it demonstrates the benefits of good karma and the horrors of bad. This cosmological imagination became an important factor in the Mahayanist conception of buddhahood. The bodhisattva's training, in its evolved Mahayana formulation, is not to be looked upon simply as an incredibly long period during which a bodhisattva develops wisdom and compassion. Rather, this path became conceptualized in terms of world creation. Over the course of countless aeons, the bodhisattva creates a "buddha-field," a particular universe within which he will be the sole buddha and over which he will wield absolute control. Thus the Mahayana's cosmology envisions a multiverse filled with an ever expanding number of buddha-fields. Every time a bodhisattva becomes a buddha, a new buddha-field pops into existence. In an important sense the Mahayana's buddha is not merely immortal and omnipresent within his buddha-field, he is also the creator "god" of his very own universe.

Some buddhas (e.g., Amitabha, presented at this chapter's beginning) create buddha-fields in which only the spiritual elite are born. Every being in Amitabha's buddha-field, named Sukhavati (the Land of Bliss), is close to complete perfection. According to the *Longer Land of Bliss Sutra*, when Amitabha Buddha was still just a bodhisattva, he set out to create the most perfect buddha-field that any buddha had ever created. He "assembled . . . a perfect buddha-field that was by far much superior to, nobler, more exalted, and more immeasurable than all the perfect arrays of wondrous qualities and ornaments from the buddha-fields of eighty-one hundred thousand million trillion buddhas."⁶¹ Among the perfections of Amitabha's Land of Bliss: "All the living

61. Luis O. Gómez, *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), p. 68.

beings who are reborn in [his] buddha-field [are] only one more birth away from unsurpassable, perfect, full awakening,"⁶² unless they consciously postpone their full awakening out of compassion for others.

The buddha-field is the cosmological materialization of its creator's perfection. Amitabha wanted his buddha-field to directly reflect his own perfection to the highest degree. Does this mean that Amitabha is a more perfect buddha than Shakyamuni? Just look around you: Shakyamuni's buddha-field, our world, seems so very imperfect. How do Buddhists explain this imperfection? What is their theodicy? Buddha-fields are categorized as either pure, impure, or mixed. While Amitabha's Land of Bliss is the epitome of a pure buddha-field, Shakyamuni's world (called the Saha-loka) is a prime example of an impure buddha-field. Paradoxically, the Saha-loka's seeming imperfection was taken to illustrate Shakyamuni's personal greatness rather than his failings. It is easy to run a universe (like that of Amitabha) in which all the beings are dedicated to Dharma. But Shakyamuni created a buddha-field dedicated to the training of imperfect beings, many of whom have no interest in Dharma. Don't we have greater regard for the teacher who inspires a room of D students to earn A's than for the teacher of an honors class whose students eagerly meet their teacher's already high expectations? The seeming imperfections of our world are signs of the exceeding perfection of Shakyamuni's compassion. This is explained by the *White Lotus of Compassion Sutra*: "Bodhisattvas bring forth a pure buddha-field through the power of their vows; bodhisattvas bring forth an impure buddha-field through the power of their vows. A bodhisattva, a great being, brings forth an imperfect buddha-field because he possesses great compassion."⁶³ And still other Mahayana sutras describe Shakyamuni as being praised by other buddhas precisely because he dedicated his buddhahood to training the spiritually deficient. In the *Shorter Land of Bliss Sutra*, Shakyamuni says,

Just as I at present here extol the inconceivable wondrous qualities of other buddhas, blessed ones, so in the same manner, all those other buddhas, blessed ones, extol these inconceivable wondrous qualities of mine, saying: "A most difficult task has been accomplished by the blessed one, Śākyamuni, the sage of the Śākyas, the monarch of the Śākyas. After he awakened to unsurpassable, perfect, and full awakening in this Saha world, he taught a Dharma that the whole world was reluctant to accept, at a time when the cosmic age was in a period of decay, when living beings were in a period of decay,

62. Gómez, pp. 71-72.

63. *Karuṇāpūṇḍarīka: The White Lotus of Compassion*, ed. Isshi Yamada (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1989), 2:51-52.

when views and opinions corrupted human beings, when the length of human life had declined, when the afflictions vitiated human beings."⁶⁴

This description of Shakyamuni brings us full circle back to the washerwoman-bodhisattva. Like the ancient merchant Shakyamuni once was, the washerwoman too vowed to become a buddha at a time in which human beings live for a mere one hundred years. This is simply shorthand for characterizing that world, and ours, as one of decay, corruption, and affliction. Taken together, the ninth and tenth acts required of a living buddha — that he inspire one member of his congregation to take a bodhisattva vow, and that he predict the future buddhahood of one member of his congregation — point to the high value all Buddhists placed on the bodhisattva as a religious figure. For all Buddhists the bodhisattva is the spiritual hero par excellence. We have also seen, however, that whereas the Buddhism of the *nikayas* regarded bodhisattvahood as one of numerous possible modalities within which to be a Buddhist, the Mahayana developed a distinct set of doctrines, myths, and practices based on the expectation that bodhisattvahood was the only truly legitimate course for a Buddhist to follow. It is not proper, however, to speak of Mahayana Buddhism as a radical transformation of Buddhism away from its "original" roots. I hope that, throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated the intellectual fallacies involved in any attempt to reconstruct the history of Buddhism along such essentialist lines. One can neither posit an essentially pure Buddhism to be found at this religion's origin nor examine its historical development in light of a teleological model. The Mahayana was neither a "necessary" development nor a faulty "corruption." Certainly the rise of the Mahayana represents a radical reform within Buddhism, but one that the scholar can see as having strong roots in a multiplicity of the parallel traditions that hearken to Shakyamuni as their founder.

Glossary of Sanskrit Terms, Names, and Titles

<i>abhidharma</i>	the higher teaching; systematic recapitulation of doctrine included as one of the three baskets of the Dharma
<i>abhijñā</i>	superhuman powers attained through meditative techniques
<i>ahiṃsā</i>	nonharm; the central principle of Buddhist ethics is to harm neither oneself nor others

64. Gómez, p. 21.

Ājīvika	a type of <i>śramana</i> that would have competed with the Buddhists for disciples, alms, and renown
Amitābha	a buddha best known for his vow to create a perfect buddha-field, named Sukhavati, the Land of Bliss; Amitabha is especially popular in East Asia
Ānanda	the buddha's personal attendant and closest friend
Anāthapiṇḍada <i>anātman</i>	the most renowned of Shakyamuni's lay followers no-Self; the doctrine that there is no aspect of a person that is permanent or unchanging
Anavatapta	a mythological lake located in the Himalaya Mountains
<i>anitya</i>	impermanence
arhat	a Buddhist saint; one who has escaped from desire
Aśoka	a king who ruled much of the Indian subcontinent circa 268-233 B.C.E. Ashoka was a great patron of Buddhism, and used his royal power to help spread the Dharma
Aśvagoṣa	second century C.E. author of the <i>Acts of the Buddha</i> , an epic retelling of Shakyamuni's early life
ātman	self or soul
<i>avaivartika</i>	the stage in a bodhisattva's training in which it will be impossible for him to ever again regress from progress toward buddhahood; an <i>avaivartika</i> bodhisattva is <i>certain</i> that he will become a buddha
<i>avidyā</i>	ignorance
<i>bhāvanā</i>	mental cultivation or meditation
<i>bhikṣu</i>	a Buddhist monk
<i>bhikṣu-saṅgha</i>	the community of Buddhist monks
Bodh Gaya	the place in which Shakyamuni Buddha achieved enlightenment
<i>bodhi</i>	enlightenment
bodhisattva	a being who is attached to <i>bodhi</i> ; a buddha in training
<i>bodhisattva-yāna</i>	the vehicle of the bodhisattvas; a form of Buddhism that focuses on development of the special practices and insights of bodhisattvas, with buddhahood as the ultimate goal
Brahmā	a class of powerful gods
brahmin	a Hindu priest
buddha-field	a universe created by a buddha during his training as a bodhisattva; a buddha is responsible for the spiritual progress of all the beings within his buddha-field

Devadatta	Shakyamuni's cousin and occasional nemesis
Dharma	fundamental reality; the basic orderliness of the cosmos; the religion taught by a buddha
<i>Dharmacakrapravartana Sūtra</i>	The <i>Sutra Which Turns the Wheel of Law</i> , Shakyamuni's first sutra
<i>dharmatā</i>	the way things really are; the natural order
<i>dhyāna</i>	a meditative concentration
Dīpaṅkara	the former buddha who first prophesied that the bodhisattva Megha would become a buddha named Shakyamuni
<i>Divyāvadāna</i>	<i>Divine Stories</i> ; a collection of stories associated with Shakyamuni's life, compiled by Buddhists belonging to the Mulasarvastivada <i>nikaya</i>
<i>duḥkha</i>	unsatisfactoriness and the associated suffering; the First Noble Truth
Eight-Limbed Path	the Fourth Noble Truth: correct view, correct intention, correct speech, correct action, correct livelihood, correct effort, correct mindfulness, correct concentration
First Council	a legendary meeting held soon after Shakyamuni's final nirvana in which his words were recalled, repeated, and arranged into three baskets: the sutras, <i>vinaya</i> , and <i>abhidharma</i>
four assemblies	monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen
<i>gandhakuṭī</i>	the "perfumed chamber" in which Shakyamuni dwelled
Gotama	the patronym of Shakyamuni Buddha's clan
Hīnayāna	the "Lesser Vehicle," a pejorative epithet used by members of the Mahayana for those Buddhists who do not identify their religious values with the bodhisattva ideal
incalculable aeon	10 ⁹⁹ years
<i>jātaka</i>	tales told of past lives, especially those of the buddha
Kālachakra	a buddha worshiped within Tibetan Buddhism
Kapilavastu	Shakyamuni Buddha's birthplace
karma	action
Kāśyapa	a buddha who is believed to have lived and taught on earth millions of years in the past
Konākamana	a buddha who is believed to have lived and taught on earth millions of years in the past
Kuśinagara	the site of Shakyamuni's attainment of complete and final nirvana

Mahākāśyapa	one of Shakyamuni's important disciples; the leader of the First Council and speaker of the <i>abhidharma-pitaka</i>
Mahāmāyā <i>mahāparinirvāṇa</i>	Shakyamuni's mother nirvana that is complete in all its parts and finally attained at "death"; also known as "nirvana without any residue"
Mahāsāṃghika	"the Great Assembly," the majority faction at the Second Council
<i>Mahāvastu</i>	<i>The Great Subject</i> , a text dedicated to Shakyamuni's sacred biography
Mahāyāna	the Great Vehicle
Maitreya	the next buddha to be born on earth
Māra	the personification of death; the lord over the realm of desire
Maudgalyāyana	one of Shakyamuni's two chief disciples, known for his magical abilities
Mūlasarvāstivāda	the <i>nikaya</i> responsible for the doctrine that a buddha must perform ten actions before he can attain final nirvana; we know of this <i>nikaya's</i> stories through two Sanskrit works: the Mulasarvastivada <i>vinaya</i> and the <i>Divyavadana</i>
<i>nikāya</i>	a sect of early Buddhism
<i>nirodha</i>	cessation; the Third Noble Truth
<i>pañcaśīla</i>	the five moral precepts typically followed by the Buddhist laity: not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to perform sexual misconduct, not to use intoxicants
<i>prātihārya</i>	miracle, especially used for miracles performed in order to attract people to the Buddhist religion
<i>prātimokṣa</i>	an abbreviation of the Buddhist monastic rule, recited fortnightly
<i>pratītyasamutpāda</i>	codependent origination
Rāhula	Shakyamuni Buddha's son
Sahā-loka	the name of Shakyamuni's buddha-field
Śākyamuni	"the sage of the Shakyas," the buddha of the current age
Sāṃkāśya	the town near which Shakyamuni is reputed to have descended from heaven, accompanied by a retinue of gods
samsāra	the realm of rebirth
<i>saṅgha</i>	the community of Buddhist monks and nuns

Śāriputra	one of Shakyamuni's two chief disciples; nicknamed the General of the Dharma, he was known for his wisdom
Sarnath	the village near which Shakyamuni gave the teaching in which he turned the Wheel of Law for the first time
Sarvāstivāda	one of the <i>nikayas</i> ; its hallmark teaching is that the past, present, and future all exist simultaneously
Second Council	a council that was held approximately one hundred years after Shakyamuni's death; the reasons for this council are unclear, but this gathering led to a split within the <i>saṅgha</i> between the Mahasamghika and Sthavira-vada <i>nikayas</i>
Siddhārtha	Shakyamuni's given name, sometimes rendered Sarvarthasiddha
<i>sīmā</i>	the boundary line that demarcates a monastic "parish"
six perfections	the principal values associated with a bodhisattva's training: generosity, morality, patience, energy, concentration, wisdom
<i>skandha</i>	aggregate; Buddhist doctrine analyzes the "I" into five <i>skandhas</i> : matter, sensations, perceptions, karmic constituents, consciousness, each of which is thought to be in a constant state of flux
<i>śramaṇa</i>	a "striver"; somebody who leaves his home and family in pursuit of liberative truth
<i>śrāvakayāna</i>	the vehicle of the disciples; a form of Buddhism that focuses on direct teachings from Shakyamuni, with arhatship as its highest goal
Śrāvasti	the town near which Shakyamuni defeated six rivals in a magic contest
Sthavira-vāda	the School of the Elders; also known as Theravada
stūpa	a memorial to a holy man, often containing a bodily relic
Śuddhodana	Shakyamuni Buddha's father
Sugata	the "Well-Gone One," an epithet of buddha
Sukhāvātī	the "Land of Bliss"; the perfect buddha-field created by Amitabha during his training as a bodhisattva
sūtra	a sermon or speech given by a buddha
<i>sūtra-piṭaka</i>	the basket of sutras within a Buddhist canon
<i>tathāgata</i>	the "Thus-Come One," an epithet of buddha

Trāyastriṃśa	heaven of the thirty-three gods; Indra is the king over this heaven, in which Shakyamuni's mother Mahamaya was born after her early death
tr̥ṣṇa	thirst, especially the thirst for continuing existence
Tuṣita	the heaven ruled over by Maitreya, the bodhisattva who is destined to be the next terrestrial buddha
Upagu	an Ajivika; a renunciant Shakyamuni met soon after he attained buddhahood, who demonstrated no interest in Shakyamuni's Dharma
Upāli	a disciple of Shakyamuni, particularly renowned for his practice of the <i>vinaya</i> ; he is reputed to have recited the basket of <i>vinaya</i> at the First Council
upāya-kauśalya	skill-in-means; the technique a buddha uses to bring others to a realization of Dharma
Vasubandhu	fifth century C.E. author of the <i>Compendium of Metaphysics</i>
<i>vinaya</i>	the rules of monastic life
<i>vinaya-piṭaka</i>	the collection of <i>vinaya</i> texts within a Buddhist canon
Vipaśyin	a buddha who is believed to have lived and taught on earth millions of years in the past
Viśvaṃtara	Shakyamuni's name during his penultimate life as a human being; as Vishvantara, the bodhisattva was renowned for his generosity