A Survey of Buddhist Thought

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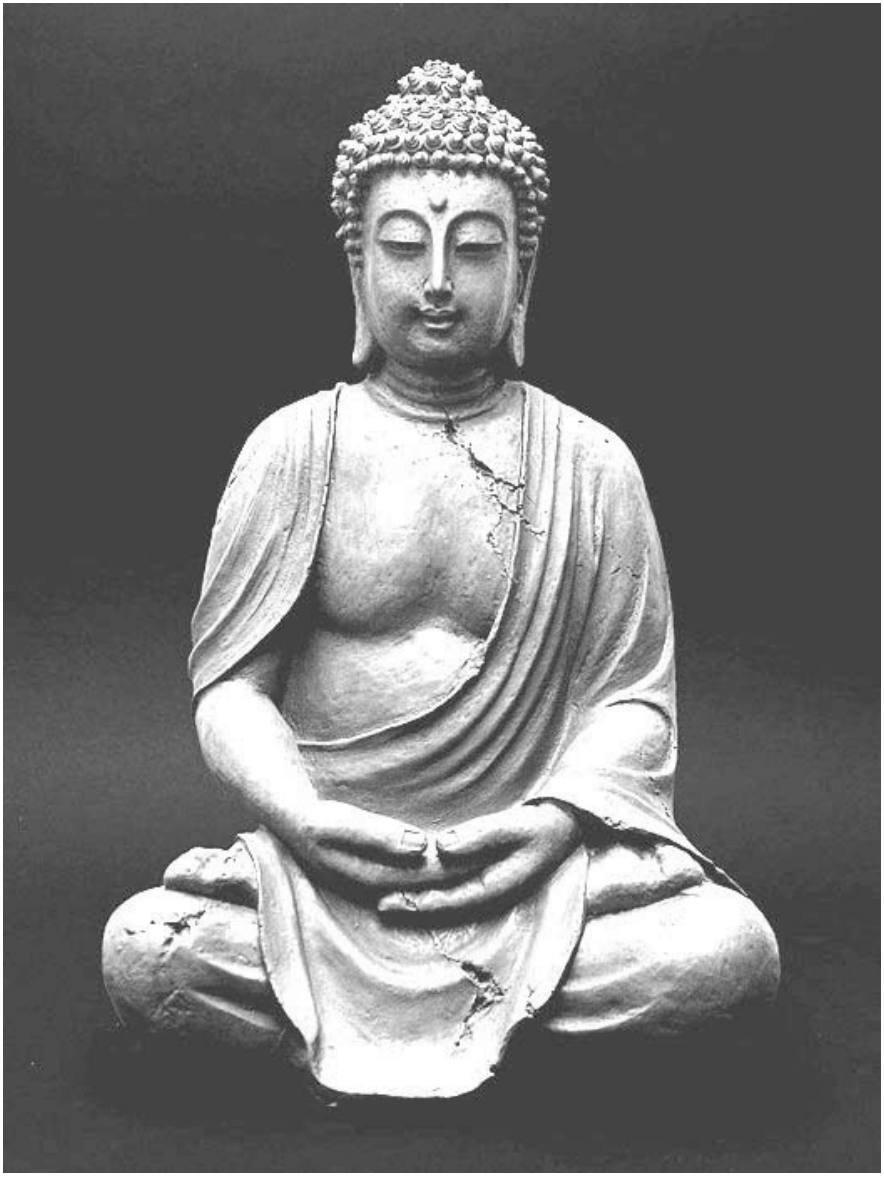
Transliteration of the Sanskrit Alphabhet

as in	as in
a – c*u*t	à – f*a*ther
u – p*u*t	ù – p*u*t
i – t*ea*t	ì – b*ee*r
e – l*a*te	o – fo*a*m
® – th*ir*st	
kh – *c*ow	g – *g*et
gh – *gh*ost	√ – thi*ng*
c – *ch*apter	ch – *ch*oke (aspiration)
j – *J*ohn	jh – *j*oke (aspiration)
ñ – a*ñ*gel	dh – *d*owry (aspiration)
≈ – *sh*anty	Ω – *ch*auffeur
y – *y*es	v – *W*asser (German)

The following sounds are retroflex: †, ∂, µ. They correspond with the normal English dentals. The same consonants, but without diacritical marks, are pronounced like their continental counterparts, e.g. as in Italian. ¬ is used as an abbreviation of n, √, ñ, µ, or m, or it represent a sound similar to 'm' in French 'faim'. Δ sounds as a soft aspiration.

Chinese is translated according to the Hanyu Pinyin system. For melodic pronunciation one should consult a dictionary or grammar.



Buddha, dhyāna mūdra

Contents

Preface

This book is not a detailed history of Buddhist thought, nor is it a history of Buddhism in general. A like work should yet be written. I focused on the philosophical aspects of Buddhism, omitting others. But even Buddhist philosophy covers so wide a field, that I only was able to select some highlights. In spite of these limitations, I believe, many readers may find in this book brought together things, that until now had to be gathered from a multitude of sources. I treated some subjects – such as Abhidharmic philosophy, or the epistemology of Dharmakīrti – carefully avoided by other general works, either because most authors don't know anything about it, or, because they think it to be too difficult for the general public. Moreover, I wrote this book from a philosophical understanding. Most authors specialized in Buddhism lack a thorough education in philosophy. That's why they render Buddhist concepts by fanciful terms that have no known connotation in the West, unaware of the fact that many terms may be rendered by means of standard European equivalents. For instance, the logical concept of *vyāpti* is often rendered through 'invariable concomitance,' but, in fact, in many Buddhist works it is just the term for what in the West is called 'logical implication' (If A is, then also B is, but the givenness of B does not necessarily imply A; A does not occur without B, but B may occur without A). Another example: a key-concept in Buddhist thought, *vijñāna*, is most often rendered through 'cognition,' while another key-concept, *saṁjnā*, is rendered through 'perception.' But internal evidence of Buddhist material shows, that it is *vijñāna*, that means 'perception,' since the concept is used in com-

posita combined with the names of the five senses, indicating visual, olfactory perception etc. *Saṁjñā*, on the contrary, literally translated means 'cognition,' which translation, moreover, is etymologically cognate. Up to now no translator has chosen this, maybe all too obvious, solution. I myself have chosen to render the concept also through 'apperception,' or 'apprehension'. To avoid further confusion. 'Understanding' also would not be far off the mark. With so much unclarity, even in the translation of key-concepts, how could it hitherto have been possible to understand Buddhist thought?
The reader of this book will find, that much of the old Buddhist philosophy has a modern ring. We are reminded of positivism and of phenomenology, but these thoughts have appeared in Buddhism already two thousand years ago. Yet we hear people like the German expert Lydia Brüll say in her book *Die Japanische Philosophie* that in the West philosophy is the object of a full grown scientific discipline, and that this is not the case in India, China, or Japan. Apart from the question whether it is fair to compare contemporaneous developments in Western philosophy with ancient Eastern thought, one may wonder what philosophy she is talking about: Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, or, God forbid, Derrida? Either all these thinkers were (or are) not philosophers, or the term 'scientific' is a meaningless concept, that may be applied to anything; but then, why not to Buddhistic philosophy?

As I believe it to be, the history of philosophy, in the East as well as in the West, is just the history of human ideas about reality and existence. There are flashes of insight, thought-structures, some persuasive, others less, but there never has been a system of philosophy that could claim absolute validity. If any philosopher ever claimed such a thing, he was already criticized for it by his immediate successors. But we need our illusions, don't we? Besides, if the concern for the validity of knowledge be a mark of science, then it must be pointed out that the Buddhist logicians had something to say about the subject.

This book is divided into three parts, one dealing with Buddhist thought in India, one dealing with its sojourn in China, and one coping with its reception in Japan. I omitted Tibet, and South-East Asia, for which omission only my own incompetence is the reason. The method I used in treating the subjects varies in those respective parts.

The basics of Buddhistic thought originated in India. Therefore, in the part dealing with India I treated these basics thoroughly, using my own philosophical understanding to penetrate the matter. While coming to China, I found good work was already done by Fung Yu-lan in his *History of Chinese Philosophy*. I closely followed his treatment of Buddhist thought in part two of that work. For Japanese Buddhist thought such structured prior study was not available. But philosophically Japanese thought takes over the ideas and concepts of the Indians and Chinese. For the sake of not falling into endless repetitions, it therefore seemed only necessary to state the typically Japanese character of Buddhism. I took some representative examples of japanese Buddhism, concentrating on Zen, only saying something about the thoughts of Dōgen (12th century) and Hakuin (17th century). The book is left with an open end. This indicates the fact that Buddhism in Japan is still in full development, and cannot be considered as a closed chapter, as it can be, to a certain extent, in India and China. I am not able to give a full exposition of it, also covering the present time. Therefore the reader must be content with my few sketchy remarks.

Introduction

What impels a man to undertake the study of history, and in particular, that of the history of ideas?

When I was beginning as a student in philosophy, there were two questions I thought that ought to be answered, one concerning the principle which forms the foundation of our life and the world or universe that it inhabits, the other concerning its destiny. Our established religions have had something to say, especially about the latter. But even if it be true what one or other religion preaches, the fact remains that as long as we merely believe in some religious doctrine, we can by that very fact never know whether it is true. And it is just that what we want. Thus religion, instead of providing us with answers to our fundamental questions, rather stimulates us to search for them. Otherwise we would never get to know what we really believe, since all religion cannot escape being interpreted within the context of a world-view that lacks the knowledge that may appease our restlessness. So we are caught in a vicious circle. Modern man has thought that science should fill the gap left open by religion. Objective knowledge might provide for the sound interpretation of our religious believes. But, alas, there has been no scientific knowledge in the past that is not modified by our present insights, and we may hardly expect that our present insights will not be changed by future investigation. Moreover, science is not a unity, the humanities and the physical sciences do not seem to stand on a common ground, and their respective viewpoints of freedom and determinism appear to be diametrically opposed. If such is the case we might almost give up hope to find in scientific

development, as it is, the ultimate answer to our questions. Even the methods of both groups of scientific culture have little in common; the one wants to understand, the other to explain.

As life is one, and cannot at one and the same time partake of two conflicting universes, it became my conviction that a third way of interpreting existence should be possible. Instead of the prevailing scientific model, shaped by geometry and not being able to include the facts of human life, I thought, there should be searched for a model based on a principle that can account for both, mental and physical phenomena. I have not been the first in search for this principle. The gigantic work of Russell and Whitehead, undertaken in their *Principia Mathematica,* to reduce mathematics to logical principles, was prompted by the same need. After partial failure of the endeavour, Russell relapsed into physicalism, but Whitehead continued in another way. He tried to find a common denominator of all phenomena, physical, biological and human. To that end he postulated feeling as the inner essence of whatever can be presented by outward appearance. In doing so, physical phenomena became principally at least – accessible to the hermeneutics of understanding. History showed that Whitehead's leap into metaphysics, and Russell's relapse into the mechanistic world-view, came out of unjustified discouragement. Although the development of quantum-physics issued in ideas which do not suggest Whitehead to be a complete fool, this branch of science did not force the desired breakthrough. It led to the discovery of many new facts, but at the same time it revealed fundamental contradictions within physical science itself, especially regarding the basic characteristics of its object. Here no unified interpretation of existence could be established.

In recent times, although scientists are frantically trying to make us believe the contrary, physical science has come to an impasse. Not being able to decide questions as to the fundamental characteristics of matter and the origin of the universe, leading physicists start re-stating the old philosophical problems, e.g. the question of time, hardly aware of the fact that they have left the domain of empirical research and have entered the field of the *a priori*.

The truly dynamic development was to emerge in the field of logic, resulting in cybernetics or computer science. Finally here was given a model that could simulate the workings of intelligence without de-

viating from the laws of physics. Slowly more and more people get convinced that, maybe, after all, the impossible – for being a contradiction in terms, viz. an intelligent machine – is possible. Now then, let intelligence and mechanics, understanding and explanation, coincide, what may then be the underlying principle of this unity? This principle was formulated already centuries ago by a man who kept fascinating me with his thought since I heard of him. He was the one who paved the way for modern symbolic logic, and for the computing machine, even for Whitehead's conception of being as essentially perceptive. His name was Leibniz, and he coined the idea behind it all; the *principle of sufficient reason*.

Whence did this principle come? Genius? The hint to search for it in Buddhism I got from Whitehead. It took a long time of severe mental trouble before circumstances made me take up that advice. But finally in Buddhism I rediscovered Leibniz's principle of *sufficient reason,* now called the 'principle of dependent origination' *(pratītya-samutpāda)*. I am still not sure whether the appearance of this principle in such different cultures and times is a coincidence. After all, Leibniz lived after the Portuguese and Dutch seafarers had found their way to the East. The painter Rembrandt had already copied Indian miniatures, and Leibniz knew enough of China to admire its culture and thought. I am in the dark as to the exact nature and extent of his knowledge, but it does not seem impossible that somehow he picked up from it the principle of sufficient reason. In short, the statement of the principle by Leibniz may itself be conditioned by it.

In recent years I have been studying the history of Buddhist thought. And I discovered how much my approach differs from that of the philologists who dominate this field of study for obvious linguistical reasons. While they are content establishing the meaning of words and to base on it an account of the ideas held in those days, this cannot offer me any satisfaction. The philologist often takes for granted the patent progress of science and technology that characterizes the Western world, and his interest in the other culture has something of romance, even of escapism. It also has something of the collector's mentality; one wants to collect the oddities of the human mind to put them into the museum of the modern age. In this endeavour philological correctness is the highest virtue. If our translations do not make sense, so

much the better. As long as they are based on established usage of the meaning of words, this only proves the advance of our logical thought in comparison to that of other cultures. And that confirmation of our own ego pleases us to the highest degree. How can you expect logical consistency in the realm of ignorance? Personally I find little satisfaction in this approach, bothered as I am by the inconsistencies of the intellectual frame of our own time and culture and desperately searching a medicine for the collective schizofrenia that upsets our whole intellectual life. I stick to the principle that things would not have been said if the people who said them, would not have had the feeling of expressing a consistency of meaning. It seems more probable that philosophers deviate from the daily usage of words in expressing the intricacies of the mind, than that they are talking nonsense. We should before all pose the question: 'What reality did they want to elucidate?' Here we find more profit in Wittgenstein's idea, that the meaning of words is derived from their usage, than in the postulate that words are used in accordance with an established meaning.

For al this, in interpreting the history of Buddhism, I do not content myself with just rendering so-called objective descriptions, no matter how awkward, but I try to find a standpoint from which the data seem to fit together into a coherent whole, even to the point of stretching the 'established' meaning of terms. But then, the history of Buddhism becomes more lucid than ever. We see that there never have been major differences of opinion, and that the basic ideas of early Buddhism have developed throughout history until the present time without ever having been abandoned. They have been elaborated, refined, slightly modified, and, above all, clothed in ever different terminology. But they always retained the same inner logic, that of the principle of sufficient reason, a principle that is now causing a major scientific revolution.

Destiny.

As regards the second question, that concerning the destiny of life, one can only approach it personally. I was young in the seventies of the 20th century. Whoever experienced these years in the sensitive age knows there was something in the air. Young people attacked the

prevailing, established, and often hypocritical morals and rejected a life of 'progress,' industrialization, and accumulation of wealth. They – for a part at least – returned to the simple values of love and peace, a life close to nature, and they searched in non-Western cultures for ideas and techniques that might realize this ideal. But on the whole there was a strong accent on experience at the expense of knowledge. Abandoning tradition and possession one tried to regain oneself after having been banished by one's parents to an alien world which seemed to offer nothing human.

The new movement was mainly expressed in a music characterized by a fresh, sometimes naive non-conformism. Listening to it, remote and slumbering recesses of the soul were brought to life and opened up a world, free, new, colourful, nourishing, never heard of before, but yet more intimate than anything until then familiar. One could – even without irony – believe in happy and 'beautiful people,' as Melanie (Safka) sang.

After those years I never have been able to see anything worthwhile in gaining a position in the world, procuring a good income, buying a house, or planning a family. My parents had a caravan on an island bordering the North Sea. I often stayed there from early spring and walked through the unpolluted stillness of the dunes. As summer approached, I saw the cars of the tourists occupying the hitherto deserted roads, damaging the whole scene with their noisy ugliness. Then it became clear to me that what we call progress is really destruction. Since then I go along searching to re-locate early spring, or the untrodden morning dew, or the beach from which the traces of human carelessness have been recently washed away by the flood or by heavy rains.

Back to the beginning before al complexity! What do I search for in the ungrazed meadow, or in the forgotten roadside studded with flowers in the moment in which it seems forgotten by everyone, forgotten to be spoiled? It is perhaps what I have come to call the moment of absolute birth, the birth that is not a development of something else, but that lies at the root of all growth, the mystery that lies between the mute silence of eternity and the peace of life's elixer, not yet fermented, but in which the yeast is on the verge of becoming active. Here we have the inconceivable, yet it is unavoidably there. In it we find

the calm preceding every free and creative act that is able to change our life from the root. Only standing in this calm we can decipher the meaning of life, which is always our life.

I think, that to stand in this calm, never more deviating from it, has been the sole aim of the Buddhist path, nothing more and nothing less. From this calm one acts without any coercion, one understands without any distortion, one feels without any depression. One is clearly conscious of the beauty around, as things are when one is not shaped or conditioned, when one is not part of, and not incorporated in anything. We should not call it 'autonomy.' For in that there is still a will commanding and coercing a human frame. In that there is not the unharmed freedom of this spontaneity. If we are not like this, if we do not stand in that calm, and act in the love that wells from it, cognize in the wisdom surrounding it, feel the joy of conciliation, atonement, of home-coming, that accompanies it, then we are maimed in our humanness, the son of man – with empty hands, without pretention, without claims, with nothing to call his own, because he does not have, but lives, is all this – is not yet there. For the more one has, the more one maintains, the more one is imprisoned, the more constricted, the less one *is* – that is, *is free*.

Thus destiny is a beginning, but a beginning starting from an ever different whole, from a perpetually changing context.

From origin to destiny.

If you have lost your way in the forest and cannot find your way home, you may start crying until somebody finds you. If you're lucky some helpful guide takes care of you, if you're not, you keep on crying, or some robber comes to take your money and maybe also your life. If you want to depend on yourself there are some rules to cope with the situation. Descartes advised to advance always straight ahead, then sooner or later you emerge out of the wood. From there it is easy to proceed further safely. But there are other methods: one can climb a hill or a tree for orientation, or look upon the sky, the sun, moon, and stars, to choose a safe direction; the type of vegetation may reveal your position, or, if the soil is soft, you may return on your own footprints. In any way, don't panic, and don't start running hither and thither

or in circles: you will exhaust yourself and diminish your chance of rescue.

The rules for coming where you want if you don't know the way have been called laws. The most important of them can be used in any situation. For the lost soul there have been made some rules of conduct, also called morals, which in all main religions of the world have been formulated more or less the same: do not kill, do not lie, do not steal, and, mind your appetites! For those who do not want to leave anything to chance, different religions have prescribed more refined rules, which, if practised conscientiously, bring you straight away home. In Judaism and Christianity such a rule is e.g. to have unremitting faith in the Lord, in Buddhism the proper practice of meditation is prescribed.

Rules are to be followed if you don't know the way, but not necessarily if you know what you do and why so. This explains the paradox that the same God of the Jews who forbids the killing of men, is enraged against the one who left someone alive. For they who are not lost travellers on the road, but are fulfilling a divine plan, do not live under the guiding rules but under direct command. Similarly, the *Yogācāras* of Buddhism thought it was permissible to kill one man-slaughtering tyrant to save many lives. As already Machiavelli remarked: being too absolute in goodness may cause more damage than the amount of wickedness required in curbing evil. But caution! This insight has too often been used as an easy excuse for violence. Generally speaking, the one who lives out of spontaneity, love, and wisdom, does not need fixed guiding rules, but this does not mean that he usually transgresses them. He only does so in extremities, if in any other way he would betray himself, if by not transgressing he would lose his freedom and his stand in the primordial calm.

Thus we have enumerated the few principles of Buddhism: nature of reality, destiny, and the right path. We shall now see how the Buddhist mind coped with these throughout its history.

Part 1
Buddhism in India

Buddhism does not want to catch the world in a system; it makes no effort to explain the origin and constitution of the world as a whole. It rather addresses itself to the human condition, and concludes that life is suffering. As suffering is highly undesirable, man should be freed from it. Buddhism has contrived methods to achieve this aim; all its ideas, thoughts, and analyses are ultimately subservient to this goal. Buddhism, accordingly, is a way of salvation, it has a soteriological character. All attention is directed at man's bondage in the circle of rebirth, and at how this bondage can be overcome. That is why Buddhism did not start as a philosophy. We might better describe it as a psychotherapy. The method used is derived from medicine: first one makes a diagnosis, then one searches for the cause of the disease, and finally its cure is prescribed. The early Buddhists saw their teaching as a method of spiritual healing in analogy to the bodily healing practised by the physician. Their intention was not the finding of theoretical truth, but the healing of the suffering of mankind. They even taught, that an overdose of scientific inquisitiveness might obstruct the healing process they had in mind. That we consider the thinking of the Buddha here in the context of a history of philosophy, is, because of his thinking having – in the course of its development through the ages – many philosophical repercussions. On the one hand it developed into an institutional religion, on the other hand it gave rise to sophisticated philosophic systems in the fields of the theory of knowledge (episte-

mology), and that of metaphysics. But these never were considered worthy to be striven after for their own sake.

Chapter 1
The Buddha and his Teaching

In the following we will try to give a survey of the life, method, and thoughts of the historical Buddha. Much of it is tentative, since we must base ourselves on scriptures recorded not before 200 years after his death. The scriptures that we actually possess are based on versions that are dated even between 200 and 400 years later. We cannot know for sure what of it presents the genuine word of the teacher, and what is later addition, or a restatement of earlier, even perhaps pre-Buddhistic thought.

THE SCRIPTURES IN THREE BASKETS. Traditionally the canonical scriptures of Buddhism are divided into three 'baskets' *(piṭakas)*. That's why the collection of it is called *tripiṭaka*. These are: the basket of *sūtras*, consisting mainly of sermons believed to be spoken by the Buddha in person, the basket of order rules, and the 'metaphysical' basket or Abhidharma. Of these three baskets the last one is of considerably later origin. Its content is coloured by the convictions of different schools, and it does not give reliable information about the historical thought of the Buddha. Therefore we let the discussion of it rest a moment, and confine ourselves to the first two baskets.

The basket of order rules gives much information about the way of life in the early Buddhist community. The rules themselves were considered a matter of convention, time-bound and not of absolute truth. Such absolute truth was to be found in the sermons of the Buddha, which were written down in scriptures called *sūtras*. In these the Doc-

trine or Law was expounded, which forms the heart of all Buddhistic teaching. For an understanding of the Buddha's thought, it is therefore necessary to scrutinize this basket of *sūtras*. This basket – as the other baskets – is in whole or in part preserved in many recensions, of which the Pali-recension used in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma is the most complete and best known.

The baskets of rules and of sermons may well date back in their origin to the earliest Buddhist community, and may give a fair account of what the Buddha preached. They probably were originally written in Ardhamagadhi, the lingua franca of the Maurya-empire (3d century BCE). Afterwards they were translated in many local and foreign languages. Of these the Sanskrit and Pāli are the most important, since these are the languages in which most is preserved. For Buddhism the Pāli-language is of special importance, since in this language of the sacred scriptures of Sri Lanka, the old canon is, as far as we know, preserved completely. There is much debate about the origin of this language. It is certainly not an archaic form of Singhalese (the language of a large part of the population of Sri Lanka), and it is also not a language of the Magadha-region where the Buddha himself preached. It is an archaic language, akin to the Vedic, but it is characterized by a strong agglutination of consonants. Most scholars search the cradle of this language in Central India. The estimations range from Kaliṅga in the east (Orissa) to Avanti (near Ujjain) in the west. The regions of Sarnāth and Kauśāmbi also are mentioned.[1] If these scholars are right, the Sri Lanka scriptures may not be so ancient as to guarantee complete authenticity. They seem to have been written down in the first century BCE. On the other hand, most of the Pāli scriptures are confirmed by canons in other languages, such as Sanskrit or Chinese. This pleads for their trustworthiness, and their being rooted in more ancient tradition.

The basket of sermons.

The basket of sermons or *sūtras* is, in Pāli as well as in Sanskrit, divided over five collections, called *āgamas* in Sanskrit and *nikāyas* in

1 Avanti is mentioned by Étienne Lamotte in his *L'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, p. 626, Kauśāmbi and Sāñci by Erich Frauwallner in his *Geschichte der indische Philosophie,* 1st volume, p. 150.

Pāli: that of the long sermons, that of the middle ones, the mixed, the ascending, and small ones. The first two groups of sermons (and other anecdotes) are classified according to their length, the 'ascending' collection gives an enumeration of truths in order of importance, and the small collection is a compilation of heterogeneous material. The heart of it is constituted by verse *(stanzas)*, which may partly even be older than the Buddha himself. He heard it singing and approved of it. This collection also contains the stories of former births of the Buddha, the so-called *Jātakas.* In the table on the next page we give an enumeration of the contents of the baskets of sermons and of order rules, to which is added the Pāli content of the 'small' collection.

T*HE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA*. A commonly accepted date concerning the life of the Buddha is the year 486 BCE for his death. In some traditions there is also accepted a date some hundred years later. Depending on these different dates, different chronologies are used, the so-called long and short ones. Most Western scholars have adopted the long one, but recent evidence seems to indicate that, after all, the short chronology, accepting the later date, is the correct one.[2]

It is believed that the Buddha was born around the year 560 (or 442) BCE in a town named Kapilavastu at the feet of the Himalayas in present day Nepal. This region seems at the time to have had a busy city life with much trade, a developed bourgeoisie and a vivid intellectual life. The Buddha was a member of the nobility and belonged to the clan of the Śākyas. That's why he was later called Śākyamuni (sage of the Śākyas). His proper name was Siddhārtha, and his father was a king or better, clan head. As a youth he lived the life befitting his status. He married a girl named Yaśodhara. With her he had a son named Rahula. Siddhārtha was destined to follow a similar career as his father. But something came in between.

In the flowering of his youth he decided to abandon the world and

2 Hajime Nakamura mentions Hakuju Ui as the first modern scholar accepting the short chronology. According to him the Buddha lived from 466-386 BCE (*Indo tetsugaku Kenkyū*, vol 2, pp. 1-112, Tokyo Kōnisha 1926). Nakamura follows him, putting both dates, of birth and death three years later (*Indian Buddhism*, p.14. In Europe H. Bechert has recently come to similar conclusions in *Die Lebenszeit des Buddha*, Göttingen 1986.

Scriptures

Vinaya

Bhikṣu-pratimokṣa & Vibhaṅga – *Rules for monks and commentary*
Bhikṣuni-pratomokṣa & Vibhaṅga – *Rules for nuns and commentary*
Skandhaka – *Rules on regulation of certain details*
Mahāvagga & Cullavagga – *Large and small collections*
Parivārapāṭha – *Summary in Pāli*

Sūtras – Sermons

Dīrghāgama (Skr.), Dīgha-nikāya (Pāli) – *Long sermons*
Madhyāmāgama (Skr) Majjhima-nikāya – *Middle length sermons*
Saṁyuktāgama (Skr), Saṁyutta-nikāya (Pāli) – *Mixed sermons*
Ekottarāgama (Skr), Aṅguttara-nikāya (Pāli) – *Ascending Enumeration*
Kṣudrāgama (Skr), Khuddaka-nikāya)Pāli) – *Small writings*

Khuddaka-nikāya, Small writings

Khuddaka-pāṭha – *The small rehearsal*
Dhammapāda – *Verse on the Dharma*
Udāna – *Elated utterances*
Itivuttaka – *Things thus said*
Suttanipāta – *The emergence of the sūtras*
Vimānavatthu – *Story about heavenly mansions*
Pethavatthu – *Ghost stories*
Theragātha – *Stanzas of the monks*
Therigātha – *Stanzas of the nuns*
Jātaka – *Birth stories*
Niddesa – *Index*
Paṭisambhidāmagga – *The path of discrimination*
Apadāna – *Legends*
Buddhavaṁsa – *The Buddha familiy*
Cariyapiṭaka – *The basket on conduct*

become an ascetic. Seeing the reality of old age, sickness and death he became despondent, and forsook all the material advantages he enjoyed. He started now as a homeless wanderer to study Yoga under two teachers, Arāḍa Kalāma and Udraka Rāmaputra. They wanted to bring their pupils by way of meditation to higher levels of consciousness, the first to the level of nothingness and the second to that beyond consciousness and unconsciousness. The gifted pupil Siddhārtha quickly achieved these states, but without being freed from his unrest. He decided to find by himself the way to liberation, and he started to practice asceticism *(tapas)* to the extreme, but without result. So he rejected it. Not long after, one night, at the foot of a tree in the land of Magadha, he found for himself the liberating knowledge. He was then thirty six years of age. He doubted whether he should make this liberating knowledge known to the world, but finally he went to Benares to preach in the park of the gazelles, to his old companions in asceticism, what he had found. Then followed the life of a preacher. His preaching was not class-oriented; he preached to kings, artisans, Brahmins, merchants and prostitutes. He called himself (or was called) the Buddha, the enlightened one, or the one who has come to awakening, and also was he called the *tathāgata*, the one who has thus become or the perfected one. He died at the age of about eighty years in the town of Kuśinagari. During his life an order of monks and nuns had come into existence.

T*HE PATH TO FREEDOM* It seems that the Buddha had already since his youth an aversion of speculation. He felt a closer affinity with the practical approach to the problem of life as found in Yoga and asceticism. His attitude towards speculation is even clearer revealed by his negative characterization of liberation; it is the escape from the circle of rebirth *(saṁsāra)*. There is no speculation on the nature of some ultimate entity, but simply the promise of the end of suffering. The only positive thing that can be said about it, is that it is constituted by some kind of liberating knowledge.

Ethical rules.

Two tenets lay at the base of the Buddha's insights: one that man is trapped in the rebirth circle, the other that he can be freed from this trap. But this can only be achieved by those who can fully devote themselves to the liberation job, the monks and nuns who live in celibacy. Those living in this world as a householder can prepare for future liberation in a next life by supporting the community of monks and observing the lay rules: it is forbidden to destroy life, to steal, to commit illicit sexual behaviour, to lie, and to drink intoxicating liquor. For the community of monks and nuns *(saṁgha)* count the same rules, only here sexual behaviour is forbidden at all, and some rules on verbal behaviour are added. Monks should refrain from slander, brute language, and talking nonsense.

Meditation.

The monk carries all he has on his body and keeps his senses under control. Being thus without distraction he must practice wakefulness and attentiveness. Such behaviour is a prerequisite for a liberating meditation. Further preparations are the disposing of the hindrances. These are: avarice, angriness, anger, inflexibility, weakness, excitement, remorse, doubt, and unclarity concerning what is wholesome. One should practice these preparations in a remote and quiet spot, e.g. under a tree, in a cave, or on a graveyard. The best time is during the night. It cleans the mind, which is brought to a clear awareness. This abandoning of all unwholesome phenomena is the beginning of the sinking in a first of four stages of meditation. Guided by reflection and deliberation one reaches the contentment and pleasure that are the characteristics of this first meditation-state. This meditation is accompanied by breathing exercises.

When reflection or thinking and deliberation come to rest, the second stage of meditation is obtained. It consists in the finding of an inner tranquillity and concentration. The novice stays in it; and again from it emerge contentment and pleasure. In the third stage there is a turning away from this contentment in an equanimous perseverance, and again there returns a physical experience of pleasure. Fi-

nally, in the fourth stage, the aspirant does away with both pleasure and pain or suffering, and he finds pure equanimity and wakefulness. He is now ready to accept the liberating knowledge. This knowledge is introduced by paranormal phenomena, such as the appearances of gods and many other miraculous things, amongst which the coming free of a mental body from the material body. The aspirant starts to see clearly his former births and lives, periods of world-creation and world-destruction. Then he contemplates the birth and decay of the creatures on a more general level, and he sees how they return to a new life in accordance with their works *(karma)* in previous lives; those having accomplished good works going to heaven, and those having committed bad deeds going to hell.

Liberating insight.

Then the monk directs his attention to the causes of his bondage in the world, and he understands, that these are both subjective and objective. The subjective causes are suffering and its origin: desire. For without suffering there can be no (experience of) bondage. The objective causes are the defiling 'influences' *(āsravas)*, viz. those of attraction *(kāma),* making you desirous to have and to enjoy, of becoming *(bhava)* [personality formation], making you desirous to be someone important, and of ignorance *(avidyā)*. When the monk becomes clearly aware of them, by contemplating them with a detached mind, and without personal interest, he becomes free from these influences and from the suffering they cause, and there arises the following insight:

> 'This is suffering, he acknowledges according to truth. This is the origin of suffering; this the abandoning of suffering, and this the road that leads to the termination of suffering. These are the defiling influences, he acknowledges, this their origin, this their abandonment, and this the road leading to their termination.'

When he has acquired such insight, he is freed from the influence of attraction, from the influence of becoming, and from the influence of ignorance. The knowledge of liberation breaks through: 'Destroyed is rebirth, accomplished the noble path, fulfilled the duty. There is

no more return into this world.[3] The aspirant is now an arhat, a holy one, and when he dies he enters into *nirvāṇa*, the final extinction of all activity and craving.[4] In all this, the liberation method of the Buddha has much in common with that of Yoga, save that nothing positive about the content of the liberating knowledge is stated.

T*HOUGHTS BEHIND THE METHOD*. The way of liberation as described above is an instruction of the mature Buddha to an already developed community of monks. Three important thoughts lay behind it. The first is that of the *four noble truths*. This thought was conceived by the Buddha as a direct result of his experience of enlightenment. It was expressed in his first sermon, addressed to his former companions in asceticism in the Park of the gazelles near Benares. The second thought was that of the influence of ignorance, which is the condition for the forming of a mundane personality (with its status and worldly importance), which alone can be the subject of suffering. This idea may have arisen in the Buddha's mind as a result of discussions with other schools of thought. The third thought is that of dependent origination. This thought represents the final synthesis of the previous thoughts.

The four noble truths

First we discuss the thought of the four noble truths. This thought is a development of the medical method: making a diagnosis of the hu-

3 E. Frauwallner, *Indische Philosophie*, vol. 1, pp. 161-170, based on *Dīgha-nikāya* 2.3 etc. and *Majjhīma-nikāya* 27-38.

4 Ibid., The present chapter relies heavily on the exposition of Frauwallner. He has been followed in all sections except that of *Ethical causation*, for which much information was derived from E.J. Thomas's *The History of Buddhist Thought*. However Frauwallner notes a lack of coherence in the doctrine of dependent origination, notably he finds a tension between the concepts of thirst and ignorance (p, 196 ff) In my opinion the two cencepts can easily be harmonized. Therefore in this respect I have departed from Frauwallner. Also in my rendering of the liberating experience. I have simply given my own understanding of the matter, based on various reading. This understanding, I found afterwards, comes close to that of T. Vetter in *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, pp. 3-4.

man condition, seeking the causes of the disease, and prescribing the cure.

> 'These monks are the four noble truths. Which four? Suffering *(duḥkha)*, the origin of suffering, the termination of suffering, and the path that leads to the termination of suffering.
> What, again, is suffering? Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering, to be united with what is not loved is suffering, to be separated from what is loved is suffering; not to obtain what you desire and strive for, that also is suffering. In short, the five groups of attachments: bodily forms, feelings, cognitions, inclinations, perceptions are suffering. This is called suffering.
> What is the origin of suffering? It is thirst *(tṛṣṇā)* that leads to rebirth and that is accompanied by desire and pleasure and finds enjoyment in this or in that. That is called the origin of suffering.
> What is the termination of suffering? It is the rejection without remainder of this thirst leading to rebirth, accompanied by pleasure and desire, and finding enjoyment in this or in that. Its abandonment and suppression; that is the termination of suffering.
> And what is the road that leads to the termination of suffering? It is the noble eightfold path: correct faith, correct thinking, correct speech, correct action, correct livelihood, correct striving, correct attention, and correct concentration. That is called the path leading to the termination of suffering. That, monks, are the four noble truths.'[5]

These four noble truths correspond fairly well with the first four insights that constitute the liberating knowledge in the liberation path described above, viz: 'This is suffering, he acknowledges according to truth. This is the origin of suffering; this the abandoning of suffering, and this the road that leads to the termination of suffering.' The message is clear: life is suffering, and this suffering has its subjective condition in 'thirst.' This, primarily, may be conceived as an inexplicable craving, causing attachments to things in this world of various kinds. It is considered as a sickness, and its remedy is the eightfold path.

The first truth, the characterization of life as suffering, does not deny the existence of the good things in life. It means that life brings

5 Frauwallner, *Indische Philosophie*, vol 1, pp. 183-84, based on *Mahāvagga* 1,6 ff.

either suffering or pleasure, but since all pleasure is by its nature temporal, it necessarily leads to suffering when it is over, for, above all, the transiency of the good things hurts. This makes that life as a whole is nevertheless justifiably characterized as suffering.

The second truth, concerning the origin of suffering, is, that the root of all pain is 'thirst,' and this is taken in the sense of 'longing' or 'desire.' This is not a new concept; already in the old epical literature desire was considered as the cause of the suffering in the circle of rebirth. Only the use of the word 'thirst' is new. But what causes 'thirst'? The answer is, that it comes to be by reason of the contact between the senses and its objects; between the eye and visible forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and smells etc. The contacts are not merely made through the outer senses; Buddhism accepts the thinking organ *(manas)* as a sixth sense, which contacts all objects, whether object of the outer or the inner sense. It is therefore also this contact on a deeper level, that must be considered as the root of 'thirst.' It gives rise to sensory perceptions and feelings, which, in turn, give rise to desires or 'thirst.' Accordingly, when one wants to conquer 'thirst' by means of the eightfold path, one must begin by guarding the senses. When they touch their objects, take heed not to let them nurture any desires.

The third truth merely concerns the eradication of the 'thirst' by means of the *eightfold path*, which is the subject of the fourth truth: *correct faith, correct thinking, correct speech, correct action, correct livelihood, correct striving, correct attention, and correct concentration*. Closer examination reveals, that this eightfold path is nothing else but the liberation path, which we have described above. 'Correct concentration' points to the meditation-stages described; 'correct wakefulness' reminds of the stress on wakefulness characterizing the meditation-path in its first and last stages. 'Correct striving' is the trying to avoid unwholesome phenomena, resulting in contentment and pleasure. 'Correct livelihood' is the begging-life of the wandering monk, taken as a condition for liberation. 'Correct action,' 'speech,' and 'thinking' stand for the ethical attitude that is the prerequisite for the path of meditation; however, 'thinking' also may point to the 'reflection' and 'deliberation' that form the beginning of the first meditation-stage. 'Correct