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THE BUDDHA: THE ENLIGHTENED ONE

c. 563 B.C.	Born
c. 547 B.C.	Married to Princess Yasodhara
c. 534 B.C.	Renounced princely life and began his religious mission
c. 528 B.C.	Received the enlightenment
c. 483 B.C.	Died

Almost no fact about the Buddha's is indisputably true, except that he did live and that he founded Buddhism, one of the world's great religions. What we know about him as a person is hopelessly lost in the tangle of pious legends that began to surround him during his lifetime and continued for centuries.

The following approaches as nearly as possible a coherent account of the Buddha's life. He was probably born about 563 B.C. in Sakaya in northeast India, near the border of Nepal, in the capital city of Kapilavastua. His given name was Siddartha Gautama. He was a prince, the son of the Sakaya king Suddhodana and his queen Mahamaya, who died a few days after her son was born. In midlife, after a long spiritual journey, he passed through the ultimate transcendental experience of self-awakening that made him the Buddha or "enlightened one."

The Buddha: Who Was He?

THE BUDDHA-KARITA OF ASVAGHOSHA

The traditional account of the Buddha's life, like those of other early religious leaders, is a blend of the historical and the legendary. Moreover, the biography of the Buddha became part of an enormous, pious accretion surrounding his teachings. These teachings, or "sayings," of the Buddha were supposed to have been put together in five collections or "baskets" by Ananda, a cousin and devoted early disciple, shortly after the Buddha's death. This is doubtful, however, since the opening words of the canon, "Thus have I heard," form a timeworn, formulaic phrase for reporting the Buddha's words within the framework of a long tradition of oral transmission. In fact, there is no trace of any authentic contemporary text; the texts all appear in later languages and dialects, and all bear the marks of an oral tradition.

The text from which the following selection is taken is one of several canonical or "official" biographical accounts, some written in Pali and some in Sanskrit. This one, the *Buddha-Karita,* was written in Sanskrit by a Buddhist scholar named Asvaghosha, who probably lived in the first century of the Christian era. It takes the form of a long epic poem, thirteen books of which survive. The poem itself bears many of the marks of long oral transmission typical of epic literature: it repeats titles and epithets; it makes lavish use of omens and supernatural foreshadowing of events; and it endows its central figure with a range of divine and heroic attributes that virtually conceal the historic personality. It is, nevertheless, the best ancient version we have.

The account begins by describing the Buddha's parents and his miraculous birth.

There was a city, the dwelling-place of the great saint Kapila, having its sides surrounded by the beauty of a lofty broad table-land as by a line of clouds, and itself, with its high-soaring palaces, immersed in the sky. . . .

A king, by name Suddhodana, of the kindred of the sun, anointed to stand at the head of earth's monarchs,—ruling over the city, adorned it, as a bee-inmate a full-blown lotus.

The very best of kings with his train ever near him,—intent on liberality yet devoid of pride; a sovereign, yet with an ever equal eye thrown on all,—of gentle nature and yet with wide-reaching majesty. . . .

To him there was a queen, named Mâyâ, as if free from all deceit (mâyâ)—an effulgence proceeding from his effulgence, like the splendour of the sun when it is free from all the influence of darkness,—a chief queen in the united assembly of all queens. . . .

Then falling from the host of beings in the Tushita heaven, and illumining the three worlds, the most excellent of Bodhisattvas suddenly entered at a thought into her womb, like the Nâga-king entering the cave of Nandâ.[1]

Assuming the form of a huge elephant white like Himâlaya, armed with six tusks, with his face perfumed with flowing ichor, he entered the womb of the queen of king Suddhodana, to destroy the evils of the world. . . .

Then one day by the king's permission the queen, having a great longing in her mind, went with the inmates of the gynaeceum[2] into the garden Lumbinî.

As the queen supported herself by a bough which hung laden with a weight of flowers, the Bodhisattva suddenly came forth, cleaving open her womb. . . .

Having thus in due time issued from the womb, he shone as if he had come down from heaven, he who had not been born in the natural way,—he who was born full of wisdom, not foolish,—as if his mind had been purified by countless aeons of contemplation. . . .

The wandering sage Asita appears and is entertained by the king.

Then the king, having duly honoured the sage, who was seated in his seat, with water for the feet and an arghya offering, invited him (to speak) with all ceremonies of respect. . . .

The sage, being thus invited by the king, filled with intense feeling as was due, uttered his deep and solemn words, having his large eyes opened wide with wonder: . . .

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[1]The term *Bodhisattva* means "Buddha to be." It later came to mean all the previous lives of the Buddha. The other terms—*Tushita heaven, the three worlds,* and *the Nâga-king*—are later Hindu terms and concepts that came to permeate Buddhist literature.—ED.

[2]*Gynaeceum* is a term for women's quarters or harem.—ED.

'But hear now the motive for my coming and rejoice thereat; a heavenly voice has been heard by me in the heavenly path, that thy son has been born for the sake of supreme knowledge. . . .'

'Having forsaken his kingdom, indifferent to all worldly objects, and having attained the highest truth by strenuous efforts, he will shine forth as a sun of knowledge to destroy the darkness of illusion in the world.'

'He will deliver by the boat of knowledge the distressed world, borne helplessly along, from the ocean of misery which throws up sickness as its foam, tossing with the waves of old age, and rushing with the dreadful onflow of death. . . .'

Having heard these words, the king with his queen and his friends abandoned sorrow and rejoiced; thinking, 'such is this son of mine,' he considered that his excellence was his own.

But he let his heart be influenced by the thought, 'he will travel by the noble path,'—he was not in truth averse to religion, yet still he saw alarm at the prospect of losing his child. . . .

When he had passed the period of childhood and reached that of middle youth, the young prince learned in a few days the various sciences suitable to his race, which generally took many years to master.

But having heard before from the great seer Asita his destined future which was to embrace transcendental happiness, the anxious care of the king of the present Sâkya race turned the prince to sensual pleasures.

Then he sought for him from a family of unblemished moral excellence a bride possessed of beauty, modesty, and gentle bearing, of wide-spread glory, Yasodharâ by name, having a name well worthy of her, a very goddess of good fortune. . . .

In course of time to the fair-bosomed Yasodharâ,—who was truly glorious in accordance with her name,—there was born from the son of Suddhodana a son named Râhula, with a face like the enemy of Râhu.

Then the king who from regard to the welfare of his race had longed for a son and been exceedingly delighted [at his coming],—as he had rejoiced at the birth of his son, so did he now rejoice at the birth of his grandson. . . .

Having heard of the delightful appearance of the city groves beloved by the women, [the prince] resolved to go out of doors, like an elephant long shut up in a house.

The king, having learned the character of the wish thus expressed by his son, ordered a pleasure-party to be prepared, worthy of his own affection and his son's beauty and youth.

He prohibited the encounter of any afflicted common person in the highroad; 'heaven forbid that the prince with his tender nature should even imagine himself to be distressed.'

Then having removed out of the way with the greatest gentleness all those who had mutilated limbs or maimed senses, the decrepit and the sick and all squalid beggars, they made the highway assume its perfect beauty. . . .

But then the gods, dwelling in pure abodes, having beheld that city thus rejoicing like heaven itself, created an old man to walk along on purpose to stir the heart of the king's son.

The prince having beheld him thus overcome with decrepitude and different in form from other men, with his gaze intently fixed on him, thus addressed his driver with simple confidence:

'Who is this man that has come here, O charioteer, with white hair and his hand resting on a staff, his eyes hidden beneath his brows, his limbs bent down and hanging loose,—is this a change produced in him or his natural state or an accident?'

Thus addressed, the charioteer revealed to the king's son the secret that should have been kept so carefully, thinking no harm in his simplicity, for those same gods had bewildered his mind:

'That is old age by which he is broken down,—the ravisher of beauty, the ruin of vigour, the cause of sorrow, the destruction of delights, the bane of memories, the enemy of the senses.

'He too once drank milk in his childhood, and in course of time he learned to grope on the ground; having step by step become a vigorous youth, he has step by step in the same way reached old age.'

Being thus addressed, the prince, starting a little, spoke these words to the charioteer, 'What! will this evil come to me also?' and to him again spoke the charioteer:

'It will come without doubt by the force of time through multitude of years even to my long-lived lord; all the world knows thus that old age will destroy their comeliness and they are content to have it so.' . . .

Then the same deities created another man with his body all afflicted by disease; and on seeing him the son of Suddhodana addressed the charioteer, having his gaze fixed on the man:

'Yonder man with a swollen belly, his whole frame shaking as he pants, his arms and shoulders hanging loose, his body all pale and thin, uttering plaintively the word "mother," when he embraces a stranger,—who, pray, is this?'

Then his charioteer answered, 'Gentle Sir, it is a very great affliction called sickness, that has grown up, caused by the inflammation of the (three) humours, which has made even this strong man no longer master of himself.'

Then the prince again addressed him, looking upon the man com-

passionately, 'Is this evil peculiar to him or are all beings alike threatened by sickness?'

Then the charioteer answered, 'O prince, this evil is common to all; thus pressed round by diseases men run to pleasure, though racked with pain.' . . .

But as the king's son was thus going on his way, the very same deities created a dead man, and only the charioteer and the prince, and none else, beheld him as he was carried dead along the road.

Then spoke the prince to the charioteer, 'Who is this borne by four men, followed by mournful companions, who is bewailed, adorned but no longer breathing?'

Then the driver,—having his mind overpowered by the gods who possess pure minds and pure dwellings,—himself knowing the truth, uttered to his lord this truth also which was not to be told:

'This is some poor man who, bereft of his intellect, senses, vital airs and qualities, lying asleep and unconscious, like mere wood or straw, is abandoned alike by friends and enemies after they have carefully swathed and guarded him.'

Having heard these words of the charioteer he was somewhat startled and said to him, 'Is this an accident peculiar to him alone, or is such the end of all living creatures?'

Then the charioteer replied to him, 'This is the final end of all living creatures; be it a mean man, a man of middle state, or a noble, destruction is fixed to all in this world.'

Then the king's son, sedate though he was, as soon as he heard of death, immediately sank down overwhelmed, and pressing the end of the chariot-pole with his shoulder spoke with a loud voice,

'Is this end appointed to all creatures, and yet the world throws off all fear and is infatuated! Hard indeed, I think, must the hearts of men be, who can be self-composed in such a road.

'Therefore, O charioteer, turn back our chariot, this is no time or place for a pleasure-excursion; how can a rational being, who knows what destruction is, stay heedless here, in the hour of calamity?' . . .

Later that same night

Having awakened his horse's attendant, the swift *Kham*daka, he thus addressed him: 'Bring me quickly my horse Ka*m*thaka, I wish to-day to go hence to attain immortality.

'Since such is the firm content which to-day is produced in my heart, and since my determination is settled in calm resolve, and since even in loneliness I seem to possess a guide,—verily the end which I desire is now before me.'. . .

The city-roads which were closed with heavy gates and bars, and which could be with difficulty opened even by elephants, flew open of their own accord without noise, as the prince went through.

Firm in his resolve and leaving behind without hesitation his father who turned ever towards him, and his young son, his affectionate people and his unparalleled magnificence, he then went forth out of his father's city.

Then he with his eyes long and like a full-blown lotus, looking back on the city, uttered a sound like a lion, 'Till I have seen the further shore of birth and death I will never again enter the city called after Kapila.' . . .

For six years, vainly trying to attain merit, he practised self-mortification, performing many rules of abstinence, hard for a man to carry out. . . .

'Wearied with hunger, thirst, and fatigue, with his mind no longer self-possessed through fatigue, how should one who is not absolutely calm reach the end which is to be attained by his mind?

'True calm is properly obtained by the constant satisfaction of the senses; the mind's self-possession is only obtained by the senses being perfectly satisfied.

'True meditation is produced in him whose mind is self-possessed and at rest,—to him whose thoughts are engaged in meditation the exercise of perfect contemplation begins at once.

'By contemplation are obtained those conditions through which is eventually gained that supreme calm, undecaying, immortal state, which is so hard to be reached.' . . .

Then he sat down on his hams in a posture, immovably firm and with his limbs gathered into a mass like a sleeping serpent's hood, exclaiming, 'I will not rise from this position on the earth until I have obtained my utmost aim.'

Then the dwellers in heaven burst into unequalled joy; the herds of beasts and the birds uttered no cry; the trees moved by the wind made no sound, when the holy one took his seat firm in his resolve.

When the great sage, sprung from a line of royal sages, sat down there with his soul fully resolved to obtain the highest knowledge, the whole world rejoiced; but Mâra,[3] the enemy of the good law, was afraid.

Then, having conquered the hosts of Mâra by his firmness and

[3]Mâra was the Hindu god of evil. He brought an assortment of threats and temptations to the Buddha at this time.—ED.

calmness, he the great master of meditation set himself to meditate, longing to know the supreme end.

And having attained the highest mastery in all kinds of meditation, he remembered in the first watch the continuous series of all his former births. . . .

And having remembered each birth and each death in all those various transmigrations, the compassionate one then felt compassion for all living beings. . . .

When the second watch came, he, possessed of unequalled energy, received a pre-eminent divine sight, he the highest of all sight-gifted beings.

Then by that divine perfectly pure sight he beheld the whole world as in a spotless mirror.

As he saw the various transmigrations and rebirths of the various beings with their several lower or higher merits from their actions, compassion grew up more within him. . . .

The all-knowing Bodhisattva, the illuminated one, having thus determined, after again pondering and meditating thus came to his conclusion:

'This is pain, this also is the origin of pain in the world of living beings; this also is the stopping of pain; this is that course which leads to its stopping.' So having determined he knew all as it really was.

Thus he, the holy one, sitting there on his seat of grass at the root of the tree, pondering by his own efforts attained at last perfect knowledge.

The Buddha: What Did He Teach?

H. SADDHATISSA

Having thus attained "perfect knowledge," the Buddha had two choices. He could devote himself to contemplation or to teaching others how to attain the perfection he had achieved. While he pondered these choices the Brahman (Hindu) gods Indra and Brahma, according to legend, appeared to him and pleaded that he go out into the world and teach his doctrine. That was the decision he made, and the result was the creation of Buddhism.

Buddhism has been variously described as a form of meditation or yoga, a profound ethical system, a full-scale philosophy, and a salvationist religion. It is all these. Its origin, however, was relatively simple. It was a nontheistic religion, having no central god figure, although in later times the Buddha himself came to be worshipped as a god, Nor did it recognize the existence of an immortal soul. Rather, human beings as substantive creatures were seen as being caught up in an endless, miserable cycle of birth and death, re-birth and re-death. To free them from this cycle the Buddha formulated the Four Noble Truths: the truth of misery; the truth that misery comes from the desire for pleasure; the truth that this desire can be eliminated; and the truth that this elimination is the result of an Eightfold Path that people may follow to attain the ultimate goal of Nibbana, or Nirvana—an obscure condition that has been described by various terms such as enlightenment, non-being, and forgetfulness, although the Buddha himself never fully explained what he meant by it.

The following selection is a discussion of the Eightfold Path by a learned Indian Buddhist scholar, H. Saddhatissa, who is especially concerned to explain his religion in a way that westerners can understand. Saddhatissa's book has become a kind of standard "primer" of Buddhism.

The path leading to the release from suffering is said to be eight-fold. These are not consecutive steps. The eight factors are interdependent and must be perfected simultaneously, the fulfillment of one factor being unlikely without at least the partial development of the others. These eight factors are:

1. *sammā diṭṭhi*	right understanding or views
2. *sammā saṅkappa*	right thought or motives
3. *sammā vācā*	right speech
4. *sammā kammanta*	right action
5. *sammā ājīva*	right means of livelihood
6. *sammā vāyāma*	right effort
7. *sammā sati*	right mindfulness
8. *sammā samādhi*	right concentration.

It is important to realize that the word *sammā* prefixing each of the eight factors has a wide range of meaning. In this context it can mean right as opposed to wrong, or it can, in the developed follower of the path, come to mean completed or perfected.

The initial task of one wishing to follow the eight-fold path is to observe oneself carefully and see which factors have already been developed to a certain extent and which are still in a very rudimentary condition. (Some people, for example, have developed their thinking faculty but their ability to communicate with other people is almost non-existent. Others, on the contrary, find it easy to form relationships but have an undeveloped reflective faculty.) The weak aspects of character or of life will then have to be brought into balance and harmony with the strong.

We shall proceed now to consider each factor of the path in turn.

1. *Sammā diṭṭhi* (right understanding or views) in the initial stages of one's practice of the path need mean little more than a vague recognition that 'all is not what it seems'. Right understanding implies in the first instance having seen through the delusion that material security automatically brings peace of mind, or that ceremonies and ritual can wipe out the effects of a past act. Gradually, as the path is perfected, right views, based on knowledge, replace the previous delusions or superstitions that were based on ignorance and lack of insight. . . .

2. *Sammā saṅkappa,* usually translated as right thought or right motives, seems to apply to the emotional basis of thought rather than to thinking itself. As the first factor of the path is concerned with the content and direction of thought, the second factor is concerned with the quality of the drive behind the thinking. . . .

This means that one's mind should be pure, free from carnal 'thirst' (*rāga*), malevolence (*vyāpāda*), cruelty (*vihiṃsā*) and the like. At the same time, one should be willing to relinquish anything that obstructs one's onward march.

3. *Sammā vācā* (right speech). By not indulging in, or listening to, lying, back-biting, harsh talk and idle gossip, we can establish a connecting link between 'right thought' and 'right action'. *Sammā vācā* is free from dogmatic assertions and from hypnotic suggestions; it is an instrument whereby one can learn and teach, comfort and be comforted. We are practising right speech when we use conversation as a means of coming to know people, to understand them and ourselves. . . .

4. *Sammā kammanta* (right action). . . . Right action is any action that proceeds from an unobstructed mind. Whereas morality, in the usual sense of the word, can be practised by one who is blind to the motives behind this behaviour right action is impossible without a clear and deep understanding.

The *path* of right action involves abstaining from unwholesome *kamma* and performing only those actions which will lead to beneficial results. The *goal* of right action, however, is to transcend even *kusala* (wholesome) *kamma,* for once the enlightenment experience has arisen in life, actions will cease to produce any *kammic* results, harmful or beneficial. . . .

5. *Sammā ājīva* (right means of livelihood). The simplest interpretation of this factor of the path is based on the five precepts. Conscientious observance of the five precepts automatically vetos certain trades and professions. The first precept—not to harm living things—requires that we do not earn our living by means of butchering cattle, dealing in flesh, fishing, hunting and so forth. Neither may one make or use weapons, nor engage in any form of warfare. Similarly the fifth precept—not to indulge in drinks or drugs that tend to cloud the mind—prevents us not only from trafficking in drugs, but also from engaging in the manufacture or distribution of alcohol. . . .

Even if one manages more or less to avoid the wrong means of livelihood, the problems are not yet over. *Sammā ājīva* implies much more than the mere avoiding of wrong means of livelihood. It implies a careful weighing up of our attributes and potentialities, and the selecting of a job that will use the talents we have and at the same time help to develop our weak points. . . .

6. *Sammā vāyāma* (right effort). Although the canonical division of right effort into four categories seems at first sight to be rather pedantic and meaningless it has, if one studies it more closely, a sound practical and psychological validity. The four-fold division of right effort consists of:

1. the effort to cut off unwholesome states that have already arisen;
2. the effort to prevent the arising of unwholesome states that have not yet arisen;
3. the effort to preserve wholesome states that have already arisen;
4. the effort to encourage wholesome states that have not yet arisen.

Right effort requires the development of insight, intuition and will power. We need to develop insight in order to perceive which of the states of mind habitually present are to be preserved and which are to be weeded out. We need to develop intuition so that we can gauge when we are sailing close to a hitherto unknown state of mind and whether we should go ahead or withdraw from it. . . .

7. *Sammā sati* (right mindfulness) is the pivotal factor of the path. Without it none of the other factors can be brought to completion. Right mindfulness serves too as a control over the other factors, preventing the excessive development of one at the expense of the others. In Christian terminology *sammā sati* might be translated as 'the practice of the presence of God'; it implies gradually extending one's

awareness until every action, thought and word is performed in the full light of consciousness. . . .

8. *Sammā samādhi.* Right concentration or meditation is the last factor of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Meditation and its counterpart in daily life—mindfulness (*sati*)—form together the essence of the Buddha's teaching. . . .

It has been said of the mind that it is like a pool. Too often that pool is agitated and muddy, reflecting nothing but its own turbidity. Buddhist meditation is designed to quieten the mind until it becomes perfectly still. Then the deep recesses of the pool can be seen clearly, and it will reflect a true picture of whatever is presented to it. There are many hindrances in the way of one who seeks to quieten the mind in this way: violent emotions of desire or of hatred, restlessness and discontent, hesitation and doubt, laziness, weariness and sloth.

The Buddha in History

SIR PERCIVAL SPEAR

Neither the Buddha himself nor his followers thought very deeply about history. Buddhism is transcendental and hence oriented to the eternal rather than the historical. Nevertheless, the Buddha lived in historical time and acted upon historical events. Further, the Buddha and Buddhism are invariably treated in any history of India because of their immense historical importance.

The following selection is taken from probably the best one-volume survey of Indian history, *India: A Modern History,* by Sir Percival Spear, an established scholar who spent most of his life and professional career in India. This survey, unlike many others of its kind, gives thorough coverage to the earlier history of "classical India." The selection deals with the setting of the Age of Buddha and with the revolutionary impact of the man and his ideas upon that age.

Buddhism was one of several movements which arose in a period of unrest and ferment from about the year 600 B.C. Three causes may be hazarded for this ferment, one material, one moral, and one racial. On the material side there was the transition from a pastoral to an

agricultural economy. The Indo-Aryan tribes were settling down, becoming tillers of the soil instead of shepherds of flocks. They were developing cities and becoming attached to the soil. Tribal groups were becoming territorial kingdoms. With crop-raising there began to be a surplus production which led to the development of arts and crafts, to exchange in the form of trade and commerce. Such a transition inevitably meant social tension. The merchant or *vaishya* class rose in importance and resented the privileges claimed by the upper two orders. To put it in modern terms, here was a situation which provided material for middle-class discontent with aristocratic privilege and priestly domination. Bourgeois aggressiveness bred anticlerical feelings.

The second force at work (in what proportions the two combined we cannot say at this distance of time) was a religious and intellectual ferment comparable with that of contemporary Greece. There was a striving after spiritual truth in a ferment of minds and much dissatisfaction with the current Brahminical order. In the thousand years or so since the Indo-Aryans had arrived the Brahmins or hereditary priests (worshipers of Brahma the creator) had seized the leadership of society from the nobles and had already established the most subtle and powerful domination of all, that of the mind. They had progressed, it is true, from the Vedic religion of hymns to the powers of nature and spells to secure boons and ward off dangers. They had developed the doctrine of *karma* or the law of consequences and the complementary doctrine of transmigration of souls from life to life. But the conditions governing the working of these laws were non-moral and ritualistic. Reliance was placed on *mantras* or spells, on sacrifice, and on priestly ritual. The law of consequences was not yet a law of *moral* consequences. The developing conscience of the age revolted against this mechanistic religiosity. There grew up a longing for *moksha* or freedom or release from rebirth, the conscience demanding something more than ritual and the mind something more than formulae. With these gropings schools of asceticism and moral discipline and schools of philosophy or intellectual apprehension developed. From the former came movements like Buddhism. . . .

Another element should be added to this ferment. It was the tension between the non-Aryans admitted to the Hindu fold, and the Brahmins. For example, the tribe in the Nepal hills from which the Buddha came is thought to have been of Mongolian stock. The nobles of such groups had little relish for the Brahmin superiority which they found established in the new society. To sum up, we may say that a period of heart-searching and change was introduced by class tension caused by the economic transition and the rise of a mercantile

class, by intellectual and spiritual tension caused by the mechanistic character of the Brahmin ascendancy, and by race tension caused by the expansion of Hindu society to include non-Aryan groups. . . .

Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha or Enlightened One, also known as Sakyamuni or Savior of the Sakyas, was born into a noble family of the Sakya tribe at Kapilavastu on the borders of Nepal. The date now most generally accepted is about 567 B.C., though the Buddhists of Ceylon put it as early as 623 B.C. He died around 487 B.C. at the age of eighty. Around his life there has grown a tangle of pious legend, through which it is very difficult to penetrate to the flowers of historic truth. On the main outline of the story, however, there is general agreement. Gautama grew up in an atmosphere of ease and luxury, married within his class, and had a son. In some way he became aware of the sorrow and suffering of the world and of the transitoriness of life. In his twenty-ninth year he left his palace and family, donned the yellow robe, and commenced to wander, a homeless ascetic. For six years he wandered, seeking wisdom and the secret of sorrow. He trod the well-worn path of asceticism and austerities without achieving his goal. He then gave up these practices, so that his disciples deserted him saying "the ascetic Gautama has become luxurious; he has ceased from striving and turned to a life of comfort." It was then that, sitting under a *bodhi* tree under a full moon at Gaya, he attained enlightenment or Buddhahood. The meaning of sorrow, the arising of sorrow, and the conquest of sorrow became clear to him. From Gaya he went to Sarnath near Banaras where, sitting in a deer park, he gave his first sermon. From that time he moved up and down north India, preaching the Path and organizing his followers.

The Buddha's teaching concerned the nature of sorrow, which for him was the manifestation of evil in the world. Sorrow arose from desire, and desire from attachment to the transitory features of an illusive world. Desire or attachment was the cause of rebirth in successive lives. Desire in its turn was fostered by illusion, the belief that the material, changing world was real. For the Buddha it was a dancing fantasm, tempting men with its glitter and movement to bind themselves to the ever-revolving wheel of life. Desire meant sorrow in life after life. The way of escape was to conquer desire. This would bring freedom from rebirth and absorption into the All, a state called Nirvana. Whether, in the Buddha's mind, this meant extinction or conscious bliss is uncertain; what is certain is that he considered this enlightenment infinitely preferable to the only alternative of enduring sorrow. It can thus be said that the doctrine of the Buddha amounted to a spiritual and mental discipline for the attainment of right views about life. About ultimates he was agnostic. There was no personal God in the original system. It would be a mistake, however,

to picture the Buddha as a late-nineteenth-century rationalist, founding an Ethical Society and lecturing in rationalist halls. The accounts of his enlightenment have in them the marks of universal mystical experience, the feeling of oneness with the universe. It was this experience toward which the Buddha's doctrine and discipline led, and it was this experience which attracted his followers and dispensed with the need for theistic worship. Meditation took the place of prayer and inner peace of divine worship.

For a time the Buddha thought that his doctrine was "too profound and subtle" for "this race of mankind, who only seek and revel in pleasure." But he repented and persevered with his teaching. There developed during his life a double way. The first was the way of renunciation for those who aspired to Buddhahood and freedom or release from the wheel of life. These disciples were organized in the *Sangha* or order, containing both men and women. They renounced the world and donned the saffron robe, lived in communities of monks and nuns, and had no possessions but their robes, their staves, and begging bowls. The modern state name of Behar derives from the word *vihara,* a Buddhist monastery, for it was once famous for these establishments.

The second way was for the householder, who, while continuing to live in the world, sought, as it were, to improve his ultimate prospects by right living. This was the Middle Way of historic Buddhism, eschewing all extremes, whose code was the "noble eightfold path." This is the ethic of popular Buddhism, and consists of right views, right resolves, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right recollectedness, and right meditation. Without going further into these rules we may note the spirit which underlay them. One thread was that of ahimsa or nonviolence. The spirit of life was in all creatures and all creatures were therefore akin. While the Christian prays for all men, the Buddhist prays for all sentient beings. There follow such practices as vegetarianism and the refusal to take life. Another thread was compassion, which may be called the characteristic and pervasive virtue of the original system. It is this feeling, together with that of abstraction, which irradiates the countenance of the Buddha in his Indian statues. It marked a distinction from the Brahmins of the time, for whom knowledge was the supreme gift. In the personality and message of the Buddha there is a serenity and spiritual calm which charms and subdues the student after two and a half millennia. Like the silver rays of a full moon on a calm night, the Buddha's words still shed their gentle light on the face of troubled humanity. "Now monks, I have nothing more to tell you than this; decay is inherent in all compounded things. Work out your salvation energetically." . . . The Buddha, on the other hand,

while accepting some basic Hindu ideas such as *karma,* separated himself from current Hinduism in a number of ways. He discountenanced caste, the keystone of the Hindu social arch. He had no place for Brahmins, replacing them in his system with monks. Agnostic in ultimate belief, he could not support the gods of the populace. Like a later Protestant, he believed that the scriptures should be understood by the people. He taught in the current speech of the Gangetic plain, a dialect akin to the Pali which later became the Buddhist sacred language. He was an opponent of the priesthood, of magic and sacrifice, of privileges, and of hiding truth in the mystery of a strange language and unintelligible books. His message was for all equally. The Middle Path provided a way of life for all, the Discourses of the Buddha a holy book for all, and the life of renunciation a way of release for all. In some respects, Buddhism was a democratic protest against Brahmin supremacy. It had therefore to separate itself from Brahminism or perish. When and where it later reunited with Brahminism it did perish.

Review and Study Questions

1. In the account from the *Buddha-Karita of Asvaghosha* what elements suggest that Buddha was a supernatural being?
2. Do you consider the teachings of the Buddha primarily to be a salvationist religion or a moral philosophy? Why?
3. Why do you suppose Buddhism never gained a wide following in the Buddha's native India?
4. How reliable are essentially religious writings as historical sources?

Suggestions for Further Reading

As with most religions, there is an enormous literature of Buddhism, including a considerable amount of biographical material—though much of it legendary and unhistorical—on the Buddha himself. The rest of the *Buddha-Karita,* excerpted for this chapter, can be read with considerable profit. The version used here is the *Buddha-Karita of Asvaghosha,* tr. B. B. Cowell in *Buddhist Mahayara Texts,* "The Sacred Books of the East," vol. 49 (New York: Dover, 1969 [1894]). Also useful are such canonical works as the "Discourse on the Aryan Quest," the "Greater Discourse to Saccaka," the "Great Discourse on the Lion's Roar," and "The Book of the Discipline," all in *Sacred Books of the Buddhists Series,* ed. F. Max Müller, 3 vols. (London: Luzac and Co., 1969 [1899]). Other useful works include *Buddhist Wisdom Books, Containing the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra,* tr. and ed. Edward Conze (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958), *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary,* tr. Edward Conze (Berkeley: Bolinas, 1973), *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom,* tr. Edward Conze (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975), and H. Saddhatissa, *The Buddha's Way* (New York: Braziller, 1971), excerpted for this chapter. There are also a number of excellent anthologies: one of the best is *Buddhist Texts through the Ages,* ed. Edward Conze, in the Harper Torchbooks series (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). See also *Buddhism, a Religion of Infinite Compassion: Selections from Buddhist Literature,* ed. Clarence H. Hamilton (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952), and *The Buddhist Philosophy of Man: Early Indian Buddhist Dialogues,* ed. Trevor Ling (London et al.: Everyman's Library, 1981). An excellent interpretive guide to Buddhist sacred literature is Edward Conze, *Buddhist Thought in India* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962), and a basic interpretive work is Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Buddhism: A Non-theistic Religion,* tr. Irmgard Schloegl (New York: Braziller, 1966). Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (New York and Evanston: Harper, 1959) is a readable, understandable analysis.

Of the many biographies of the Buddha, most are conventional and pietistic, written by "true believers" such as H. Saddhatissa, *The Life of Buddha* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Of the more recent and critical, two brief biographies can be recommended: Betty Kelen, *Gautama Buddha: In Life and Legend* (New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shepart, 1967), simple, charming, and reliable, and Michael Carrithers, *The Buddha* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), in the "Past Masters" series.

Of the interpretive studies of Buddhism the most important is probably Govind Chandra Pende, *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism* (Allahabad: University Allahabad, 1957). An old standard work is Edward J. Thomas, *The History of Buddhist Thought* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971 [1933]). A more recent and authoritative work is Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction,* 3rd ed., in "The Religious Life of Man Series" (Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth, 1982). Two brief standard treatments are Edward Conze, *A Short History of Buddhism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980) and Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969).

On the history of India the massive old standard *Cambridge History of India,* 6 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1919–69), even with its supplementary volume on the Indus Civilization, is now

seriously outdated. An essential work, though difficult and demanding, is A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims* (New York: Grove Press, 1954). Of the briefer works that devote some attention to the age of the Buddha, one can recommend Percival Spear, *India: A Modern History,* excerpted for this chapter; the classic and still useful W. H. Moreland and Atul Chandra Chatterjee, *A Short History of India,* 4th ed. (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1969 [1936]); and the excellent recent book by Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India,* 3rd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).