



# An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHIST ETHICS

*Foundations, Values and Issues*

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

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First published 2000

Fourth printing 2004

Typeface Monotype Baskerville 11/12½ pt. System QuarkXPress™ [SE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*

Harvey, Peter (Brian Peter)

An introduction to Buddhist ethics: foundations, values and  
issues / Peter Harvey.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 55394 6 (hb)

1. Buddhist ethics. I. Title.

BJ1289.H37 2000

294.3'5-dc21 99-27718 CIP

ISBN 0 521 55394 6 hardback

ISBN 0 521 55640 6 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2004

## CHAPTER 3

### *Mahāyāna emphases and adaptations*

May the pain of every living creature be completely cleared away

*Bodhi-caryāvatāra* III.7

#### THE PATH OF THE *BODHISATTVA*

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

## Compassion and wisdom in the Mahāyāna

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

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

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

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

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

(*Bca.* III.7-9, 18)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>1</sup> See Mitomo, 1991; Williams, 1998: 104-77 gives a critique.

<sup>2</sup> *Bca.* VII.16, VIII.120. See also Wayman, 1991: 59-61.

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

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

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

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

#### The arising of the thought of enlightenment

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

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

Next, the meditator develops lovingkindness by reflecting on the

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

Such practices are seen as building an outlook in which it is natural for the *bodhi-citta* to arise. The initial arising of this 'thought of enlightenment', as a resolve, is known as the 'aspiration-thought' (*praṇidhī-citta*); when it is put into practice, it is known as the 'implementation-thought' (*prasthāna-citta*) (*Bca.* 1.15). Even the resolve alone, without implementation, is seen as generating much karmic fruitfulness and as wearing out much past bad karma. Even one such thought 'bears in itself the accumulation of boundless, countless good' (*Ss.* 11). The *bodhi-citta* is seen as the seed of all the qualities of Buddhahood: 'It is the supreme medicine that quells the world's disease' (*Bca.* III.30).

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

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

### Developing the Bodhisattva perfections

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

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

May the blind see forms, may the deaf hear sounds, and . . . may pregnant women give birth without any pain.  
May the naked find clothing, the hungry find food . . .  
May all beings . . . be endowed with faith, wisdom and kindness.  
(verses 18–19, 27)

<sup>3</sup> See e.g., Tatz, 1994: 24, equivalent to Chang, 1983: 428.  
<sup>4</sup> *Ss.* 205–6, citing the *Vajradhvaṅga-pariṇāmanā Sūtra*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### THE ETHICS OF THE BODHISATTVA

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> Tatz, 1986: 15-17, 480. See also Guenther, 1959: 165-7.



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

### The Bodhisattva precepts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>8</sup> Tatz, 1986: 66–83; Keown, 1992: 142–5.

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

#### SKILFUL MEANS AND OVERRIDING THE PRECEPTS

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Stop here

#### Compassionate killing

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

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

<sup>11</sup> Translated from Tibetan (*Upāya-kausālyā-nāma Mahāyāna Sūtra*) by Tatz, 1994; and from Chinese (*Jiānottara-bodhisattva-pariprechā*) by Chang, 1983: 427–68 (Taishō 345). Tatz claims that the Indian original dates from the first century BCE (1994: 1).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'If I take the life of this sentient being, I myself may be reborn as one of the creatures of hell. Better that I be reborn a creature of hell than that this living being, having committed a deed of immediate retribution, should go straight to hell.' With such an attitude, the *bodhisattva* ascertains that the thought is virtuous or indeterminate<sup>15</sup> and then, feeling constrained,<sup>16</sup> with only a thought of mercy for the consequence, he takes the life of that living being. There is no fault, but a spread of much merit. (Tatz, 1986: 70–1)

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>17</sup> Information supplied by John Dunne, 'Buddha-L' Internet forum, posting on 'Just War', 21 March 1996.

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>19</sup> Taishō 12, 434c; quoted in Yampolsky, 1990: 32.

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

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

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

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

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

*Compassionate stealing, non-celibacy, and lying*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Who may perform such acts, and are they obligatory?*

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

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

#### SPECIFIC STRANDS OF MAHĀYĀNA THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

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

#### Tantra

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Pure Land Buddhism

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

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

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

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

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

#### Zen

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

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

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

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

To study the self is to forget the self.

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

(Aitken, 1984: 152)

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

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

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

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

### Nichiren Buddhism

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### MAHĀYĀNA REASSESSMENT OF MONASTICISM

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Though he is but a simple layman, yet observing the pure monastic discipline;  
Though living at home, yet never desirous of anything;  
Though possessing a wife and children, always exercising pure virtues;  
Though surrounded by his family, holding aloof from worldly pleasures . . .  
Though frequenting the gambling house, yet leading gamblers into the right path . . .

Manifesting to all the error of passions when in the house of debauchery;  
persuading all to seek higher things when at the shop of the wine dealer  
...<sup>29</sup>

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

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

#### CONCLUSION

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

<sup>29</sup> Tsunoda, de Bary and Keene, 1964: 99.

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