



Chapter 4

THE EXPANSION OF BUDDHISM IN INDIA

The religious world into which the Buddha was born was one characterized by an unprecedented philosophical effervescence. The Buddha responded to this changing climate and was also a significant cause of change. The period after the Buddha's death was also one of tremendous change; just as the intellectual and religious world was rapidly shifting, so too was the socioeconomic world. This chapter explores the social and political conditions that facilitated not only the survival of this new religion, but also its rapid expansion within India and, eventually, beyond its borders.

An Urban Explosion

Buddhism arose in an environment of competing ascetic movements. The majority of these movements seem to have faded away almost as soon as they emerged; indeed, only Buddhism, various schools of Hinduism, and Jainism continued to attract significant numbers of followers after the death of their founders. One group of ascetics who achieved a degree of prominence in this milieu, the Ajivakas, are known only through Buddhist and Jain texts. Although this sect seems to have survived until the thirteenth century, the Ajivakas never gained a substantial following, owing in no small part to the extreme nature of their religious message. The Ajivakas

were, at least from the Buddhist perspective, rigidly fatalistic, adopting a strictly determinist understanding of the religious path. According to them, essentially, no human effort could have any effect against fate, or *niyati*. Salvation, which was understood simply as an end to all human existence, could be reached only after living through an immense number of lives, which proceeded automatically like the unwinding of a ball of thread, the last life being as an Ajivaka monk. And the life of these monks was one of extreme deprivation. No human effort could have any effect on the process. It was, therefore, extremely difficult for the Ajivakas not only to attract followers and converts, but also to attract lay supporters, since no act of giving to the Ajivaka monks would have any positive effect on the donor.

This, then, points to an extremely important aspect of Buddhism that was fundamental to its survival and expansion in India, namely, its appeal to lay supporters. One element that seems to have enabled Buddhism to survive and prosper as a new religious movement was the dynamics of *dana*, religious giving. Through giving to the monks, the layperson could accumulate positive *karma*, which, in turn, would enable him or her to ascend the karmic scale; the monks, in turn, not only served as a fertile karmic field in which the layperson's gift would bear positive karmic fruit, but also received the material support—the layperson's gift—that enabled them to survive. There was more to the equation than this, though, for one of the factors that facilitated Buddhist expansion in India seems to be

that Buddhism was particularly well suited to the changing social and political environment of early India. It may also be the case, however, that as much as Buddhism provided an antidote to this changing social climate and the anxieties such change gave rise to, it also contributed to it.

The centuries immediately before and after the Buddha's birth saw the rapid growth of cities in northern India, which brought with it a whole range of major changes. One historian of India has characterized the broad effect of urbanization as a "spiritual malaise" (Richard Gombrich, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988, 57). First, the shift from a rural, agricultural life to an urban, trade-based life—a shift that took place in India from about the sixth to the third centuries B.C.E.—would have necessitated a complex division of labor and the development of specialized professional groups. This change in economic organization, in turn, would have led to a shift in social organization, such that the familial organization of the rural village would gradually have given way to trade- and labor-based social grouping. This may, indeed, be reflected in the emergent caste system, which is, after all, a social order based fundamentally on occupation.

Urbanization also led to greater social freedom and mobility, which, in turn, would have necessitated the emergence of an increasingly complex bureaucracy to keep the population in check. Indeed, it is precisely this changing social structure that one Buddhist text, the

Aganna Sutta, seems to reflect: it is, on one level, a myth of the origin of the world, but a number of scholars have seen in it a social and political commentary reflective of a changing, and sometimes chaotic, society.

Although some Buddhist texts do decry city life as too crowded and chaotic to be conducive to religious progress, and Buddhism is fundamentally an ascetically oriented religious tradition that favors a life outside of society, in significant respects Buddhism was at least implicitly more accepting of some of the specific challenges of urban life than the Brahmanism that preceded it. For instance, within the confines of the city, there would have been communal eating places—in part to facilitate the influx of workers without families from the outlying rural areas. The Brahmanical social structure, as embodied in the caste system, with its elaborate rules regarding diet and intercaste contact, would not have permitted such communal dining. Buddhism, in contrast, does not adhere to these social distinctions, and so, communal dining would have posed no religious hurdles. Likewise, communal religious gatherings in the urban setting would not, for the Buddhists, have posed a problem, whereas for the Brahmanical religious adherents they would have been fraught with potential pollution. We could add to this list a whole range of urban social conditions to which Buddhism was well adapted, from the use of money in trade to the existence of brothels.

It would certainly be an overstatement to claim that laypersons converted to Buddhism only because it better suited the social condi-

tions of the newly emergent urban world. The issue is far more complex than this. But it does seem likely that Buddhism thrived in these new cities in part because it was better suited than Brahmanism, Jainism, or any of the other religious traditions of the period to the particular demands of urban life. It allowed for the intermingling of disparate social groups; it provided a religious orientation that permitted, if not actually encourage, social mobility; and it embraced, quite explicitly, persons from what would have been the lower echelons of the Brahmanical social order—laborers, traders, merchants, and kings.

Buddhism and Trade

Another important factor in the establishment and growth of Buddhism in India was the emergence of important trade routes across northern India, for instance, the famous Silk Route, but also lesser-known roads as well as river travel. The traders who traveled along these routes brought with them every manner of material goods, and this influx of goods—and the ability to transport goods to other regions—was instrumental in the growth of cities. Another important dimension of this growth in trade, however, was that it enabled Buddhists and Buddhism to spread first within India, and then, rapidly, outside of the Indian subcontinent.

There are frequent references in early Buddhist literature to trade and traders, caravans, guilds of merchants, and the market towns that sprung up along major

trade routes. In the *Vinaya*, for instance, the Buddha encounters and interacts with a caravan leader named Blattha Kaccana, who was going along with five hundred wagons filled with jars of sugar; likewise, caravans are mentioned in several of the *Jatakas*. Although it is impossible to determine exactly why these and other texts so frequently make mention of traders, they seem to be reflective of a close tie between Buddhism and trade. Monks certainly traveled with these caravans and seem to have occasionally spent the rainy season with these traders, as evinced by the fact that the Buddha explicitly gives a monk permission to do so. On the surface, this makes sense, since Buddhism, with its rejection of the caste system, would have welcomed traders and merchants as converts. Furthermore, as we have already seen, because Buddhism espoused that there was a karmic benefit to giving, especially giving of wealth to monks, there may have been a particular incentive on the part of merchants and traders to support Buddhism.

Furthermore, travel was very dangerous, and lone monks would have faced the perils of weather, disease, wilderness, and bandits. In the company of a caravan, however, a monk would have been afforded a degree of safety and physical comfort. There is significant textual and archaeological evidence that monks who set off to spread the *dharma* after the Buddha's death followed established trade routes. In the *Sutta Nipata*, for instance, a monk and his disciples journey from northern India to the Deccan plains and into the Krishna River valley (which is in the modern

state of Andhra Pradesh) following an itinerary that is clearly a trade route. And the great temple at Amaravati in southern India, as well as other significant monasteries and temples throughout India, was obviously located along an important trade route (the Krishna River). This was in part because river travel would have allowed for the transportation of building material, and also because river trade would have allowed for an influx of pilgrims and patrons.

The Rise of the Monasteries

The earliest Buddhist monks were, as we have seen, wanderers, living in no fixed location. Indeed, this was an essential component of the life of the monk: to live with no attachments, material or emotional. However, it soon became clear that these wandering monks would need shelter, particularly during the monsoon season. The earliest versions of monasteries were simple cave dwellings. Such dwellings, however simple, had to have been donated and maintained by lay and royal patrons. Thus, from the very beginning, monasteries involved a symbiosis between the monk and the layperson: monks needed the layperson's material support and shelter; the layperson needed the monk to share the Buddha's teachings and to provide a field of merit.

Significantly, monasteries also were a place of shelter for traders and merchants, and many of the earliest monasteries sprang up along trade routes. These merchants and



FIGURE 4.1 *Buddhist cave monastery at Ajanta. These early monastic dwellings were created between the first and fifth centuries C.E.*

traders provided, as noted above, the money and goods to sustain monastic life, while the merchants received in return not only the Buddhist *dharma*, but also physical haven. Thus, as cities rapidly grew along the Ganges Valley and elsewhere, the merchants who populated these cities invited monks to establish monasteries there, thus allowing the merchants opportunities for merit making.

Relatively soon after the Buddha's death, two distinct forms of monastic establishments emerged—village monasteries and forest hermitages. In the village monasteries—which were typically located on the fringes of cities, despite the name—the monks had a great deal

of contact with their lay supporters. Monks in these monasteries were intimately involved in the daily life of the town, functioning as teachers, preachers of the *dharma*, and even doctors. In this way, the monks could effectively spread the teachings and practices of Buddhism by at once involving the laity in the life of the monastery and, at the same time, themselves becoming involved in the life of the village or town. However, there were inherent dangers in this symbiosis.

Monks were not prohibited from the possession of property. They took no vow of poverty. However, the *Vinaya* and other texts make it abundantly clear that the monk was to keep

his or her possessions to a minimum, to those objects—begging bowl, robes, toothbrush, and so on—that were necessary for comfortable, but not lavish, living. The dynamics of giving, *dana*, however are such that giving more can seem to be karmically beneficial. Because wealthier laypersons wished to earn more merit by giving more, monks and monasteries were sometimes given large tracts of land, servants, lavish personal goods, and so on. All of these were considered to be hindrances to the monk's individual progress on the Buddhist path, in that they represented precisely the material trappings and attachments that the monastic life was, after all, intended to avoid.

The solution to this dilemma proved to be rather simple: such gifts were to be treated as the communal property of the monastery. However, although this may have solved the immediate problem of the individual monk becoming too attached to material possessions, it also led to another, larger problem, namely, the monastery as large landholder. Indeed, monasteries were sometimes extremely wealthy institutions, and their maintenance involved the employment of hundreds of workers and the development of an increasingly large and complex internal bureaucracy.

Furthermore, one of the paradoxes of the increasing wealth of these monasteries—a wealth that came about, after all, because of the gifts from laypersons wishing to earn positive *karma*—was the perception that the monks had become corrupted by such lavish living, and that the field of merit was no longer pure. An important ritual thus developed, the *Pratimoksha* (in Pali, *Patimokkha*), ceremony, which served to maintain the internal purity of the monastery while at the same time assuring the laity that the monks were not becoming corrupted.

As recorded in the *Vinaya*, the Buddha is said to have prescribed that on each full moon and new moon days all the monks in residence in a single monastery must come together in a formal meeting. If at least four *bhikshus* can be assembled, then they should listen to the full list of 227 *Pratimoksha* rules contained within the *Vinaya*. Before the ritual recitation begins, however, each *bhikshu* should formally and openly admit to any offences that he (or, in the case of a female monastic order she) knows he has committed. Once this free admittance of a transgression has been made the monk is considered "pure" and can listen to the recitation of the rules.

FROM A CLASSIC TEXT ❖ 4.1

The following passage outlines one of the most fundamental monastic rituals in Buddhism, the regular voluntary admission of any transgression in front of the entire sangha. This is called the patimokkha (pratimoksha in Sanskrit), and is intended to foster discipline and order in the community of monks and to demonstrate to the laity—upon whom the monks are dependent for their physical sustenance—that the monastery is pure. The outward discipline of the monk is intended to be a reflection of his or her inner discipline; the abandonment of worldly possessions and responsibilities is a reflection of his or her detachment, and the serious and sober demeanor a reflection of his or her concentration on enlightenment. The admission of transgressions must be voluntary, since the monk must individually decide to let go, to renounce, any attachment to the transgression.

Now at that time The Buddha, The Blessed One, was dwelling at Rajagaha on Vulture Peak. And at that time the heretical sect of wandering ascetics met together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month, and recited their doctrine. And the people drew near to listen to their doctrine, and conceived a liking for the heretical sect of wandering ascetics, and put faith in their teachings; and the heretical sect of wandering ascetics gained adherents.

Now it happened to Seniya Bimbisara, king of Magadha, being in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a consideration presented itself to his mind, as follows:

“Here the heretical sect of wandering ascetics meet together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month, and recite their doctrine. And the people draw near to listen to their doctrine, and conceive a liking for the heretical sect of wandering ascetics, and put faith in them; and the heretical sect of wandering ascetics gain adherents. What if now the reverend ones also were to meet together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month.”

Then drew near Seniya Bimbisara, king of Magadha, to where The Blessed One was; and having drawn near and greeted The Blessed One, he sat down respectfully at one side. And seated respectfully at one side, Seniya Bimbisara, king of Magadha, spoke to The Blessed One as follows:

“Reverend Sir, it happened to me, as I was just now seated in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a consideration presented itself to my mind, as follows: ‘Here the heretical sect of wandering ascetics meet together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month, and recite their doctrine. And the people draw near to listen to their doctrine, and conceive a liking for the heretical sect of wandering ascetics, and put faith in them; and the heretical sect of wandering ascetics gain adherents. What if now the reverend ones also were to meet together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month?’ ”

Then The Blessed One enlightened, incited, quickened, and gladdened Seniya Bimbisara, king of Magadha, with a doctrinal discourse. And Seniya Bimbisara, king of Magadha, enlightened, incited, quickened, and gladdened by The Blessed One with a doctrinal discourse, rose from his seat and saluted The Blessed One; and keeping his right side toward him, he departed.

Then The Blessed One, on this occasion and in this connection, after he had delivered a doctrinal discourse, addressed the priests: "I prescribe, O priests, that ye meet together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month."

Now at that time the priests, having understood that The Blessed One had prescribed that they should meet together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month, met together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month, and sat in silence. And the people drew near to listen to the Doctrine, and were angered, annoyed, and spoke indignantly:

"How is it, pray, that the Sakyaputta monks, when they meet together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month, sit in silence like dumb hogs? Why should they meet together, if not to recite the Doctrine?"

And the priests heard that the people were angered, annoyed, and spoke indignantly. And the priests announced the matter to The Blessed One.

Then The Blessed One, on this occasion and in this connection, after he had delivered a doctrinal discourse, addressed the priests:

"I prescribe, O priests, that when ye have met together on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month, ye recite the Doctrine."

Now it happened to The Blessed One, being in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a consideration presented itself to his mind, as follows:

"What if now I prescribe that the priests recite a confession [*patimokkha*] of all those precepts which have been laid down by me; and this shall be for them a fast-day duty?"

Then The Blessed One, in the evening of the day, rose from his meditation, and on this occasion and in this connection, after he had delivered a doctrinal discourse, addressed the priests:

"O priests, it happened to me, as I was just now seated in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a consideration presented itself to my mind, as follows: 'What if now I prescribe that the priests recite a confession of all those precepts which have been laid down by me; and this shall be for them a fast-day duty?' I prescribe, O priests, that ye recite a confession. And after this manner, O priests, is it to be recited:

"Let a learned and competent priest make announcement to the congregation, saying, 'Let the reverend congregation hear me. To-day is the fast-day of the fifteenth day of the half-month. If the congregation be ready, let the congregation keep fast-day, and recite the confession. What is the first business before the congregation? Venerable sirs, the proclaiming of your innocence. I will recite the confession and let as many of us as are here present listen

carefully and pay strict attention. If anyone have sinned, let him reveal the fact; if he have not sinned, let him remain silent; by your silence I shall know that your reverences are innocent. But now, in assemblages like this, proclamation is made up to the third time, and each one must make confession as if individually asked. But if, when proclamation up to the third time has been made, any priest shall remember a sin and not reveal it, it will be a conscious falsehood. But a conscious falsehood, reverend sirs, has been declared by The Blessed One to be a deadly sin. Therefore, if a priest remember having committed a sin, and desire again to be pure, let him reveal the sin he committed, and when it has been revealed, it shall be well for him.’”

(Henry Clarke Warren. *Buddhism in Translations*. Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 3. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1896, 402–405. Translated from the *Mahavagga* of the *Vinayapitaka* of the Pali Canon.)

Forest monks led a markedly different life than those of their village counterparts. Because they were removed from virtually all contact with the lay community, they did not serve either as fields of merit for the laity’s gifts or as teachers of the *dharma*. Rather, they were much freer to spend their time in meditation and ascetic practices.

Early Buddhist texts do not discuss these two varieties of monastic life as standing in opposition to one another, although occasional conflicts did seem to arise, such as that which prompted the second Buddhist council, discussed in Chapter 3. Indeed, it seems that any given monk would have passed back and forth between forest and village monastic life. And, although it may seem on the surface that it was the village or town monks who were most responsible for the spread of Buddhism after the Buddha’s death, the forest monks were also instrumental in the expansion of Buddhism, in that they not only cultivated advanced meditational techniques, but also shared the basics of meditational practice with both the village

monks and, indirectly, the laity. Furthermore, because the forest dweller tended to engage in more austere ascetic practices, and thus was in some sense a more pure object of giving, the presence of these monks in the village and town monasteries, upon their return from the forest, would have added a special degree of purity to the monastic community.

The ideal monk of the early Buddhist community, as reflected in several Buddhist texts, seems to have been one who combined the more socially active role of the village monk with that of the meditational and ascetic practices of the forest monk. Following the model of the Buddha, such a monk would have begun the day with a period of isolated meditation. Then he would have put on his robes, taken up his alms bowl, and gone out to ask for sustenance from the lay community. Having eaten, the monk would then have shared a *dharma* lesson with the laypeople. He would then have returned to the quiet of the monastery to meditate. Finally, toward the end of the day, the monks of the monastery

would have come together as a group, to hear *dharma* instructions from a senior monk. This lesson would then have been followed by a period of meditation before sleep.

Ashoka the Dharma King

Buddhist texts are full of references to kings and rulers. First, there are the images in the Buddha's own life story: he was destined, the sages said at his birth, to become either a great world ruler, a *cakravartin*, or a world-renouncer. Thus, from the outset, Buddhism had a special appeal to kings and others in the political realm, and there can be little doubt that without royal support, Buddhism would never have survived as a religious tradition. This may, in large part, be due to the simple fact that the status of the king was decidedly ambiguous in ancient India. The king obviously wielded tremendous political power, what we might call "real" power—commanding armies, gathering taxes, owning property, making and enforcing laws, and so on. He was, however, always lower in religious status than the brahmins, and in some ways subservient to the priestly caste. Because kings necessarily engaged in actions that harmed other living beings, such as waging war and quelling dissent, they were seen in brahmanical terms as karmically tainted.

The Buddha himself was from a royal family, and thus a kshatriya by birth. Although he rejected this caste identity when he renounced the world, it may be that he felt a special personal regard for kings and other political fig-

ures. One of his most important early patrons was the king of Magadha, Bimbisara, whose capitol was located at Rajagriha. According to the "Pabbaja Sutta" of the *Sutta Nipata* commentary, Bimbisara first saw the ascetic Siddhartha through his palace window and, curious as to his identity, went out to find him. He invited Siddhartha to visit his court, but Shakyamuni declined; however, he promised to return once he had attained enlightenment. When the Buddha and his disciples visited Rajagriha after the enlightenment, they were entertained as royal guests. In a famous scene, Bimbisara poured water from a golden jar onto the Buddha's hands to express his adherence to the Buddha's teachings, and gave him and the *sangha* the gift of Veluvana Park—or Vulture's Peak as it is more commonly known—and promised to continue to patronize Buddhism and promote its growth.

Another very important king in early Buddhist literature is Milinda (also known as Menander or Menandros), a Greco-Bactrian who reigned over what is now modern Afghanistan and northern India, in the latter half of the second century B.C.E. Milinda is best known for the series of discussions he had with the Buddhist monk Nagasena, which were compiled into the famous work entitled *Milindapanha* (See From a Classic Text 3.3). Although in many ways Milinda serves as a foil for Nagasena, providing an opportunity for an extended examination of the *dharma*, he is also portrayed as a wise and compassionate king and, importantly, as a supporter of Buddhism.

Personalities in Buddhism 4.1

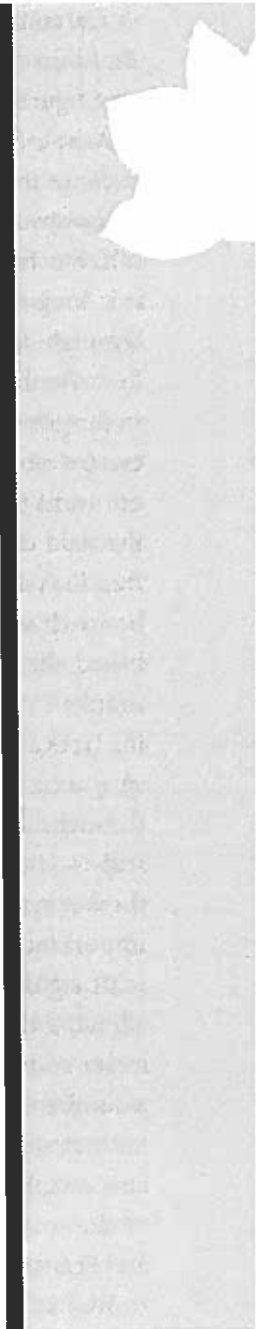
ASHOKA

An Indian emperor of the Mauryan dynasty (third century B.C.E.), Ashoka was one of the greatest rulers of ancient India; he brought nearly all of India, together with Baluchistan and Afghanistan, under one sway for the first time in history. He converted to Buddhism and set out to transform his kingdom into one governed by *dharma*, by kindness, compassion, tolerance, and nonviolence.

Knowledge of Ashoka's rule comes from a large corpus of mytho-historical sources, as well as from the many pillars that he placed throughout his kingdom. These pillars were inscribed with ethical exhortations, known generally as "Ashoka's edicts," which reflect a Buddhist-informed policy of nonviolence, compassion, and tolerance. Ashoka had also built numerous Buddhist monasteries, shelters for Buddhist pilgrims, hospitals, and roads, and had also erected thousands of *stupas* throughout the Indian subcontinent.

Ashoka was instrumental in the spread of Buddhism. Not only did he establish monasteries and build *stupas* in India, but he also sent out Buddhist missionaries throughout Asia, and as far away as Greece. His son, Mahinda, was sent to Sri Lanka and he established Buddhism there. Ashoka is also credited with calling the third Buddhist council, at his capital Pataliputra (modern Patna), during which the Pali Canon was formalized.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Ashoka's rule is the degree to which he still stands as the model Buddhist ruler. In Southeast Asia, in particular, Buddhist kings modeled themselves on Ashoka as the ultimate Dharmaraja, the righteous Buddhist king. Ashoka established the proper Buddhist king as one who gained his legitimacy from his support and adherence to Buddhism, and he laid out the close, symbiotic relationship between the king and the *sangha*: the king provided material goods, monasteries, and protection to the *sangha*; the *sangha*, in turn, provided the teachings and moral authority to the king. This close relationship between the ruler and Buddhism is still very much at play in many Southeast Asian countries, in which the king is considered not only a secular, but also a religious, leader.



Certainly, the most important king in the Buddhist world, and one of the most important figures in the entire history of Buddhism, is Ashoka (273–232 B.C.E.), the ruler of what became the largest empire in India's history. Not only did Ashoka become a Buddhist himself, but he also established a model of dharmaic kingship that would remain the standard template for all future Buddhist rulers to follow. Furthermore, Ashoka was instrumental in the growth and expansion of Buddhism. He erected numerous large stone pillars throughout India with edicts inscribed on them, edicts that laid out many of the basic aspects of the Buddha's teachings as well as guidelines for how to live a good Buddhist life. He also established the standard of royal support for the monks by building monastic shelters, planting trees and digging wells to aid travelers, and spreading the physical remains of the Buddha throughout India. Enshrined in *chaityas* and *stupas*—burial mounds of varying sizes—these remains became objects of devotion and important gathering places, often associated with significant events in the Buddha's life, allowing the monks to spread the *dharma* to larger and larger groups. Ashoka also sent out a number of missionaries, including one led by his own son, Mahinda, to introduce Buddhism and establish monastic orders in other parts of the world, including Sri Lanka, Southwest and Southeast Asia, and even Greece.

We know about Ashoka through two sources: the inscriptions that he left throughout India, and Buddhist mytho-history—semi-historical chronicles such as the *Dipavamsa*, *Mahavamsa*, and the *Ashoka Avadana*.

Ashoka's grandfather, Chandragupta, founded the Mauryan empire, the largest India had to that point ever known, covering northern India from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea. We know little about Ashoka's father, Bindusara, except that he further expanded Chandragupta's empire into southern India, as far south as the Deccan Plateau. Although there is some debate on the matter, Ashoka seems to have ascended the throne in 268 B.C.E.

By all accounts, Ashoka—or as he was called in his inscriptions, Devanampiya Piyadasi, “he who is looked on with affection, the beloved of the gods”—was a great warrior, brave, fearless, and mighty. According to later Buddhist sources, however, Ashoka was an ugly young man, and he is portrayed as being intensely disliked by his father. In these sources, the pre-Buddhist Ashoka is portrayed as a truly nasty fellow; indeed, he is called “chanda Ashoka,” which translates as “cruel Ashoka,” and sometimes “kama Ashoka,” or “Ashoka the lustful.” He is said to have had many brothers (sometimes as many as ninety-nine), and his desire to become the king was so strong, the texts say, that he had several of these brothers killed (sometimes all but one of them) in order to inherit his father's kingdom. These sources go to great lengths to emphasize the negative aspects of Ashoka's character prior to his conversion to Buddhism. For instance, one source recounts a story in which Ashoka was once playfully teased by some women in his harem and he had them burned at the stake for their offence. He is described as being a ruthless torturer of wrongdoers, quick and harsh to punish; he had a state prison built that came

to be known as “hell” by his subjects. He was also a man with a marked proclivity for war.

Although upon the death of his father Ashoka became the ruler of a kingdom that covered a huge expanse of land, almost the whole of India, he was not satisfied. According to the Buddhist chronicles, he wanted more land, more money, more power, and so, eight years after his coronation, he initiated a bloody siege against the neighboring Kalingans, who lived in what is now modern Orissa in the far northeast of India. It was a horrible, bloody war, a war in which thousands and thousands of lives were lost, in which brothers turned against brothers, sons against fathers, and for every atrocity committed there was a reprisal that took the carnage a step further. In the end, though, Devanampiya and his armies prevailed. But looking out at his newly conquered lands, at the bloody battlefields, the thousands of slaughtered soldiers from both sides, and the thousands of innocents killed, the king was filled not with a sense of gain and victory, but with a profound sense of loss, an unbearable remorse. This sense of grief is expressed in one of the inscriptions that Ashoka left behind:

Devanampiya feels sorrow at having conquered the Kalingans. Indeed, the conquest of a previously unconquered country, which involves killing, dying, and deportation, still impresses itself upon Devanampiya and weighs heavily on his mind. But this depresses him even more: Living in Kalinga, there were brahmins and recluses, adherents of other sects, and householders who practiced obedience to elders and to their par-

ents and teachers, who behaved courteously toward friends, acquaintances, companions, relatives, slaves, and servants, and who were devout. They were all injured or killed or separated from those who were dear to them. Even those who themselves were lucky enough to escape harm were affected by the afflictions of their friends, acquaintances, companions, and relatives. And this weighs heavily on the mind of Devanampiya: all people share in this suffering. For there is no country . . . where there are no brahmins or recluses, and there is no country where there are people who do not feel some sort of faith. Even if the number of people who were killed in Kalinga, who died, or were deported had been a hundred or a thousand times less, this would still weigh heavily on the mind of Devanampiya.

Ashoka responded to this event in a profound way—he converted to Buddhism.

According to the edicts, Ashoka first became a Buddhist layperson, an *upasaka*. It seems, however, that he did not make sufficient progress on the path as a casual Buddhist. Desiring more knowledge of the *dharma*, he then, according to one inscription, “went to the *Sangha*.” Although it is not entirely clear what this reference means, it would seem that he went to the monks directly and received extensive teaching from them in a monastic setting. This is an extremely important point, for it establishes a basic model of the king as a kind of pupil of the monk. Indeed, in order for the king to rule properly, dharmically, it was necessary for him to receive such teachings from the *sangha*. That said, however, it is

important to note that the *dharma* of Ashoka's edicts is in no way a detailed excursus on the Buddha's teachings. Rather, the *dharma* put forth is a kind of sweeping righteousness, a basic set of moral and ethical guidelines with which to live and, for the king, to govern. It is clear, however, that the Buddha's teachings fundamentally informed Ashoka and his radical reforms.

In the edicts, Ashoka lays out a sweeping set of ethical guidelines. He pledges his support for all religions and religious peoples in his realm, and pronounces religious tolerance to be the rule in his kingdom. He establishes monasteries and shelters for ascetics, digs wells for pilgrims, and plants trees for shade and shelter. He also extols the virtue of the simple ascetic life. He encourages his subjects to respect and care for the elderly and to treat their servants with dignity. He promotes an approach to life based on the principle of non-violence and puts severe limits on sacrifices.

This latter point, although on one level a simple advocacy of a kind of basic karmic harmony, is particularly important in terms of Ashoka's support of Buddhism. Although he does not outright state it, this limiting of what can be offered sacrificially seems to be intentionally targeted at the brahmin priests: without animals to offer up to the gods, they could not perform their basic religious duties. Thus, although he explicitly promotes tolerance of all religious groups, we can see in Ashoka's edicts a subtle but very real move to limit the influence of the brahmins. By advocating Buddhism, Ashoka would have subverted the basic brahmanical hierarchy—since

Buddhism does not recognize the spiritual superiority of any particular group of people based on birth—and in the process asserted the status of the righteous, dharmic king as not only a political leader, but also a religious leader.

The edicts talk of Ashoka going on a *Dharma Yatra*, a pilgrimage to the important sites associated with the life of the Buddha. He starts at Bodhgaya, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, and then proceeds to Lumbini. This, too, is an extremely important moment in the expansion of Buddhism because these physical places become, in later Buddhism, centers of the Buddha's teachings, pilgrimage destinations for Buddhists not just living in India, but also elsewhere in the rapidly expanding Buddhist world. Bodhgaya, for instance, in part because of Ashoka's early visit to the site, becomes a kind of Buddhist Jerusalem or Mecca, the birthplace of the religion, a physical reminder of the continued presence and relevance of the Buddha's salvific message and path.

Because he had his edicts inscribed on stone pillars and slabs throughout his realm, across the whole of India, Ashoka was able to very effectively spread the teachings of the Buddha, and at the same time establish the legitimacy of his own dharmic political rule across an incredibly large expanse of land. But perhaps his most lasting and far-reaching contributions to the history of Buddhism were the missions that he sent out from India, for it was they who allowed Buddhism to expand beyond its homeland and develop into the world religion that it is today.

The edicts make mention of missions only once, stating that emissaries were sent out to five other kings and to several other kingdoms; it is not clear, however, based on the inscriptions, whether these were truly religious missions or were primarily political in nature. It may well be that this distinction was not a meaningful one in the third century B.C.E. It is, however, in later Buddhist sources, particularly in the great chronicles from Sri Lanka—the *Dipavamsa* and the *Mahavamsa*—that Ashoka's missions are most celebrated and most elaborately discussed. Certainly, these sources are not completely accurate as historical documents, and tend toward exaggeration when discussing Ashoka's deeds, but they present, nonetheless, a great deal of information about the development and spread of Buddhism.

These chronicles describe a schism within the monastic community: unorthodox sects had taken up residence in the monasteries, which led to clashes on issues of monastic discipline and proper ascetic practices. According to some sources, these clashes turned violent, and some monks were actually killed. Ashoka intervened and purged the monasteries of the impure monks. He then held a council—the third Buddhist council, according to the sources—in his palace at Pataliputra, where the disciplinary issues were resolved and, according to the Buddhist chronicles, the Buddhist canon was completed. It was at this point, according to the later chronicles, that he sent out groups of monks to spread the Buddha's teachings.

The chronicles tell us that Ashoka sent his son off on the first Buddhist mission, to the

island of Sri Lanka, just off the southern tip of India. Mahinda took with him a layperson and four monks, the latter so that there would be a group of five monks (including Mahinda) who would be able, in accordance with *Vinaya* rules, to confer higher ordination on any young man who wished to become a monk. The accounts of Mahinda's mission in the chronicles—which contain many miraculous details—say that the first person the monks met was the king of the island, Devanampiyatissa. He was a king with whom Ashoka had already established a relationship, according to some later sources, and he immediately converted to Buddhism and then donated the land for the first monastery to be built on the island. Mahinda had also brought with him a branch of the Bodhi tree from Bodhgaya, the tree under which the Buddha had attained enlightenment, to plant in the monastery. Although the historical veracity of this story may be questionable, the event establishes the ubiquity of the Bodhi tree as a symbol of the Buddha and Buddhism—virtually all Buddhist monasteries and temples, throughout the world, have at their center a Bodhi tree.

Conclusion

Regardless of the specific historical accuracy of the chronicles' accounts of Ashoka's missions and his specifically Buddhist activities—it is important to remember that these texts were written either by or for Buddhist monks, and so are intended to emphasize the religious

significance of historical events—what is important is that Ashoka established the principle that Buddhism is a missionizing religious tradition, and that the king, as the model lay

Buddhist, supports and promotes the *sangha*'s missionizing activities. These texts thus stress the close relationship between the *sangha* and the king.

Personalities in Buddhism 4.2

MAHINDA

The son of the great Indian king Ashoka, Mahinda was, according to the Theravada chronicles, twenty when he was ordained as a monk. He became an arahant the day he was ordained. When the third Buddhist council was held, Mahinda was chosen to lead a mission to Sri Lanka to convert the inhabitants of the island. He went along with six other monks, and there performed a variety of miracles and preached the *dharma*. As such, he is particularly important to the Theravada tradition in Sri Lanka. He is said to have met the king, Devanampiyatissa, and converted him to Buddhism by preaching the *Culahatthipadopama Sutta*.

Mahinda then showed the king various places that would become important to the growth of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. He described the different visits the Buddha had made to the island, and then helped Devanampiyatissa lay out the boundaries for the Mahavihara, the first and the largest monastery in Sri Lanka. In addition to the monks and various texts, Mahinda had brought relics of the Buddha to be kept on the island. Among these was the Buddha's collarbone, which was placed in the Thuparama—a huge *stupa* built just for the purpose. Mahinda also urged the king to send a party back to India to Ashoka to ask for a cutting of the Bodhi tree, which eventually was planted at Anuradhapura, and which, according to Sri Lankan tradition, still thrives. According to the chronicles, Mahinda is also said to have translated the commentaries on the Pali Canon into Sinhalese, and then taught them to the converted Sri Lankan monks.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1 Why did Buddhism receive support in ancient India from merchants and traders?
- 2 Why did the first Buddhists not live in permanent monasteries?
- 3 In what ways was Ashoka instrumental in spreading Buddhism?



Chapter 5

THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF THE BUDDHA

Buddhism is most typically portrayed in the West as a religion of the mind, one that eschews ritual and physical worship. Certainly, it can be concluded that Buddhism took root in India and spread primarily because of the power of the Buddha's teachings. However, there was more to the equation than this: to emerge from the context of competing religious sects along the Ganges, and to spread throughout India and eventually into other parts of Asia, it was necessary that Buddhism was supported, by laypeople and by political rulers. It was not, however, only the words of the Buddha that spread—it was also his personality and his physical image. This chapter explores the ways in which Buddhists

preserved the presence of the Buddha in physical objects, such as relics and artistic images.

Be Your Own Light

One of the most basic elements of the Buddha's teachings, indeed the very basis of the *dharma*, is self-reliance for progress on the Path. The law of karmic cause and effect makes it clear that the only thing that can effect one's religious progress is one's own efforts at meditation and introspection. No gods are there to intercede. Although the monks do provide instructions and guidance, they cannot intervene in any way. Put simply, it is up to the

individual to follow the teachings and to live an ethical, compassionate life.

This is perhaps nowhere more poignantly expressed than in a famous episode from the very end of the Buddha's life. The Buddha was eighty at the time. He had been traveling with his most faithful disciple, Ananda, preaching the *dharma*, and the two of them had reached the small village of Kushinagara. The Buddha had just contracted food poisoning and was growing weak. He realized that the moment of his death was near, and because he had obtained the state of enlightenment, and was thus no longer generating any *karma*, this would be his last life—upon his death, he would obtain the state of *parinirvana*, beyond all future births and deaths.

When Ananda learned of the imminent death of his beloved teacher and companion, he was overcome with grief, and went off to a remote part of the monastery, where he was found weeping, in a state of utter despair. This is a moment of pure pathos. The Buddha, learning of the distress of his dear companion, called for him, and said:

Enough, Ananda, do not grieve, nor weep. Have I not already told you that the nature of things dictates that we must leave those dear to us? How is it possible, Ananda, that whatever has

been born, has come into being, is organized and perishable should not perish? That condition is not possible. For a long time, Ananda, have you waited on the Buddha with a kind, devoted, cheerful, single-hearted, unstinted service of body, with a kind, devoted, cheerful, single-hearted, unstinted service of voice, with a kind, devoted, cheerful, single-hearted, unstinted service of mind. You have acquired much merit, Ananda; exert yourself, and soon will you be free from all depravity. . . . It may be, Ananda, that some of you will think, "The word of The Teacher is a thing of the past; we have now no Teacher." But that, Ananda, is not the correct view. The Doctrine and Discipline, Ananda, which I have taught and enjoined upon you is to be your teacher when I am gone. (*Digha Nikaya* 6.29–6.80)

In short, then, after his death, the Buddha's followers are to find guidance in the teachings that he has left. Elsewhere, he makes this message quite explicit when he upbraids one of his followers for being too attached to the Buddha's physical body, for wishing to be in his actual presence. He says that the body is just a putrid container, an impermanent form, and not worthy of devotion. Rather, if one wishes to "see" the Buddha, one should learn and follow his teachings.

FROM A CLASSIC TEXT ❖ 5.1

The Visuddhimagga, which translates literally as “the path of purification,” is a vast compendium of Theravada Buddhist philosophy, meditation, and commentary on the Buddha’s teachings. It remains one of the most important and authoritative texts in the Theravada Buddhist world. Written by the great monk and scholar Buddhaghosa in the fifth century C.E., in Sri Lanka, the Visuddhimagga outlines, in meticulous detail, the path to nirvana. At times, Buddhaghosa writes with graphic detail, particularly when describing the human body; there are long passages in the text outlining funeral-ground meditation, which involves a monk meditating on a rotting body in order to fully understand the impermanence of the physical self. In the following passage, Buddhaghosa takes a somewhat less morbid, but no less graphic tack in his analysis of the body.

For as the body when dead is repulsive, so is it also when alive; but on account of the concealment afforded by an adventitious adornment, its repulsiveness escapes notice. The body is in reality a collection of over three hundred bones, and is framed into a whole by means of one hundred and eighty joints. It is held together by nine hundred tendons, and overlaid by nine hundred muscles, and has an outside envelope of moist cuticle covered by an epidermis full of pores, through which there is an incessant oozing and trickling, as if from a kettle of fat. It is a prey to vermin, the seat of disease, and subject to all manner of miseries. Through its nine apertures it is always discharging matter, like a ripe boil. Matter is secreted from the two eyes, wax from the ears, snot from the nostrils, and from the mouth issue food, bile, phlegm, and blood, and from the two lower orifices of the body faeces and urine, while from the ninety-nine thousand pores of the skin an unclean sweat exudes attracting black flies and other insects.

Were even a king in triumphal progress to neglect the use of tooth-sticks, mouth-rinses, anointings of the head, baths and inner and outside garments, and other means for beautifying the person, he would become as uncouth and unkempt as the moment he was born, and would in no wise differ in bodily offensiveness from the low-caste candāla whose occupation it is to remove dead flowers. Thus in respect of its uncleanness, malodor, and disgusting offensiveness, the person of a king does not differ from that of a candāla. However, when, with the help of tooth-sticks, mouth-rinses, and various ablutions, men have cleansed their teeth, and the rest of their persons, and with manifold garments have covered their nakedness, and have anointed themselves with many-colored and fragrant unguents, and adorned themselves with flowers and ornaments, they find themselves able to believe in an “I” and a “mine.” Accordingly, it is on account of the concealment afforded by this adventitious adornment that people fail to recognize the essential repulsiveness of their bodies, and that men find pleasure in women, and women in men. In reality, however, there is not the smallest just reason for being pleased.

A proof of this is the fact that when any part of the body becomes detached, as, for instance, the hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, phlegm, snot, faeces, or urine, people are unwilling so much as to touch it, and are distressed at, ashamed of, and loathe it. But in respect of what remains, though that is likewise repulsive, yet men are so wrapped in blindness and infatuated by a passionate fondness for their own selves, that they believe it to be something desirable, lovely, lasting, pleasant, and an Ego.

In this they resemble the old jackal of the forest, who supposes each flower on a kimsuka tree to be a piece of meat, until disconcerted by its falling from the tree. Therefore,

*Even as the jackal, when he sees
The flowers on a kimsuka tree,
Will hasten on, and vainly think,
"Lo, I have found a tree with meat!"*

*But when each several flower that falls
He bites with an exceeding greed,
"Not this is meat; that one is meat
Which in the tree remains," he says;*

*Even so the sage rejects and loathes
Each fallen particle as vile,
But thinks the same of all the rest
Which in the body still remain.*

*Yet fools the body pleasant find,
Become therewith infatuate,
And many evil works they do,
Nor find from misery their release.*

*Let, then, the wise reflect, and see
The body is of grace bereft;
Whether it living be or dead,
Its nature is putridity.*

For it has been said,

*"The body, loathsome and unclean,
Is carrion-like, resembles dung,
Despised by those whose eyes can see,
Though fools find in it their delight.*

*"This monstrous wound hath outlets nine,
A damp, wet skin doth clothe it o'er;
At every point the filthy thing
Exudeth nasty, stinking smells.*

*"If now this body stood revealed,
Were it but once turned inside out,
We sure should need to use a stick
To keep away the dogs and crows."*

Therefore the undisciplined priest must acquire the mental reflex wherever he can, wherever an impurity appears, be it in a living body or in one that is dead, and thus bring his meditation to the stage of attainment-concentration.

(Henry Clarke Warren. *Buddhism in Translations*. Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 3. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1896, 298–300. Translated from Chapter 6 of Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purity).

The Buddha, then, explicitly told his followers that they do not need his living presence in the world, because he has left them all they need. They must, he told them, be lights unto themselves. This, however, did not close the issue. Indeed, the Buddha seemed to recognize that his followers would continue to desire something of his presence on earth. At one point, considerably before his death, he had instructed his disciples on how to properly dispose of his body after his death, so as to eliminate the possibility that his remains would be worshipped and become the objects of attachment. He said that after his crema-

tion his bones should be gathered into eight portions, and that these portions should be distributed amongst the rulers of India, to be placed at prominent spots—crossroads, some texts stipulate. There they would continue long after his passing from the earth to serve as reminders of his teachings and provide an opportunity for reflection and meditation: "Those who offer there a garland, or scents, or paint, or make a salutation, or feel serene joy in their heart, for a long time that will be to their benefit and well being." Although this may work in theory, in practice, the Buddhists seem, immediately upon the Buddha's death,

to have regarded these physical remains as something more than reminders of the absent teacher.

Relics and Reliquaries

Relics—bones, and other objects the Buddha used or came into contact with—are thus ambiguous and rather problematic objects in Buddhism. On the one hand, relics have served as reminders of the Buddha's own human body and of the susceptibility of that body to the basic principle of *anitya*, impermanence. The Buddha, after all, was a human being, and like all humans was subject to physical decay. On the other hand, however, relics have from the very beginning been treated as objects of great value that have the ability to effect a sense of the continued physical presence of the Buddha. Thus, a relic is able to convey an essential Buddhist message, as at once a visceral reminder of the impermanence of all things—including the Buddha—and the need to conquer the thirst for existence. At the same time, however, a relic is also a physical object that gives rise to deep emotions—and sometimes attachments—that are in tension with that basic message; indeed, relics are frequently regarded as the living Buddha himself. By worshipping the relics, then, monks and laypersons were able to partake of the continued presence of the Buddha.

Importantly, Buddhists do not consider only body parts as relics; garments worn by the Buddha, his begging bowl, artistic images,

combs, toothpicks, to name only a few, are all, in various contexts, considered his relics. There are, however, traditionally three categories of relics in early Buddhism: corporeal relics, such as bones and teeth; relics of use, such as the Buddha's begging bowl or robes; and relics of commemoration, such as artistic images. The dominant emphasis in early Buddhist texts is on corporeal relics; this is evident in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the text that recounts the Buddha's last days, death, and contains the earliest mention of relics. After all the eight portions of the bodily relics have been distributed, a brahmin by the name of Dona, who has assisted in the cremation of the Buddha and the division of his bones, is left with no relic portion for himself. He is, however, given the pot in which the bones have been kept as a kind of de facto relic—not a bodily relic, but a relic of use or contact. Although it is not explicitly stated in the text, it would seem that this pot is given to Dona as at once a recognition of his service, but also as a mark of his inferior status (because he is a Hindu).

Relics quickly became extremely important objects in early Buddhism. First, they were objects used in ritual practices. Although the Buddha himself quite explicitly stated that he was not to be worshipped while alive, and certainly not after his death, a variety of early Buddhist sources—canonical texts, commentaries, and inscriptions—quite clearly indicate that Buddhists were doing more than simply remembering the qualities of their dead teacher when they beheld his physical

remains. Indeed, in many instances, relics are actually discussed as if they were the Buddha himself, as if they were living objects that con-

tained his purity and spiritual force and even something of his physical being.

FROM A CLASSIC TEXT ❖ 5.2

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta, which appears in the Digha Nikaya of the Pali Tipitaka, narrates the last days and death of the Buddha. It is notable for many things, including a long discussion about what to do with the Buddha's relics after he is dead. The passage quoted here narrates the scene just after Ananda, the Buddha's faithful disciple, has learned that his teacher and companion is soon to pass out of existence. The talk the Buddha delivers to Ananda emphasizes that the teachings the Buddha has left behind, the dharma, are to be the monks' guide in the future, equivalent to the Buddha himself.

Then The Blessed One addressed the priests:

"Where, O priests, is Ananda?"

"Reverend Sir, the venerable Ananda has entered the monastery, and leaning against the bolt of the door, he weeps, saying, 'Behold, I am but a learner, and not yet perfect, and my Teacher is on the point of passing into Nirvana, he who was so compassionate to me.' " Then The Blessed One addressed a certain priest, saying,—

"Go, O priest, and say to the venerable Ananda from me, 'The Teacher calleth thee, brother Ananda.' "

"Yes, Reverend Sir," said the priest to The Blessed One in assent, and drew near to where the venerable Ananda was; and having drawn near, he spoke to the venerable Ananda as follows:—

"The Teacher calleth thee, brother Ananda."

"Yes, brother," said the venerable Ananda to the priest in assent, and drew near to where The Blessed One was; and having drawn near and greeted The Blessed One, he sat down respectfully at one side. And the venerable Ananda being seated respectfully at one side, The Blessed One spoke to him as follows:—

"Enough, Ananda, do not grieve, nor weep. Have I not already told you, Ananda, that it is in the very nature of all things near and dear unto us that we must divide ourselves from them, leave them, sever ourselves from them? How is it possible, Ananda, that whatever has been born, has come into being, is organized and perishable, should not perish? That condition is not possible. For a long time, Ananda, have you waited on The Tathagata with a kind, devoted,

cheerful, single-hearted, unstinted service of body, with a kind, devoted, cheerful, single-hearted, unstinted service of voice, with a kind, devoted, cheerful, single-hearted, unstinted service of mind. You have acquired much merit, Ananda; exert yourself, and soon will you be free from all depravity."

Then The Blessed One addressed the priests:—

"Priests, of all those Blessed Ones who aforetime were saints and Supreme Buddhas, all had their favorite body-servants, just as I have now my Ananda. And, priests, of all those Blessed Ones who in the future shall be saints and Supreme Buddhas, all will have their favorite body-servants, just as I have now my Ananda. Wise, O priests, is Ananda—he knows when it is a fit time to draw near to see The Tathagata, whether for the priests, for the priestesses, for the lay disciples, for the female lay disciples, for the king, for the king's courtiers, for the leaders of heretical sects, or for their adherents.

"Ananda, O priests, has four wonderful and marvelous qualities. And what are the four? O priests, if an assembly of priests draw near to behold Ananda, it is delighted with beholding him; and if then Ananda hold a discourse on the Doctrine, it is also delighted with the discourse; and when Ananda, O priests, ceases to speak, the assembly of priests is still unsated. O priests, if an assembly of priestesses . . . an assembly of lay disciples . . . an assembly of female lay disciples draw near to behold Ananda, it is delighted with beholding him; and if then Ananda hold a discourse on the Doctrine, it is also delighted with the discourse; and when Ananda, O priests, ceases to speak, the assembly of female lay disciples is still unsated. . . ."

Then The Blessed One addressed the venerable Ananda:—

"It may be, Ananda, that some of you will think, 'The word of The Teacher is a thing of the past; we have now no Teacher.' But that, Ananda, is not the correct view. The Doctrine and Discipline, Ananda, which I have taught and enjoined upon you is to be your teacher when I am gone. But whereas now, Ananda, all the priests address each other with the title of 'brother,' not so must they address each other after I am gone. A senior priest, Ananda, is to address a junior priest either by his given name, or by his family name, or by the title of 'brother'; a junior priest is to address a senior priest with the title 'reverend sir,' or 'venerable.' . . ."

Then The Blessed One addressed the priests:—

"It may be, O priests, that some priest has a doubt or perplexity respecting either The Buddha or the Doctrine or the Order or the Path or the course of conduct. Ask any questions, O priests, and suffer not that afterwards ye feel remorse, saying, 'Our Teacher was present with us, but we failed to ask him all our questions.'"

When he had so spoken, the priests remained silent.

And a second time The Blessed One, and a third time The Blessed One addressed the priests:—

“It may be, O priests, that some priest has a doubt or perplexity respecting either The Buddha or the Doctrine or the Order or the Path or the course of conduct. Ask any question, O priests, and suffer not that afterwards ye feel remorse, saying, ‘Our Teacher was present with us, but we failed to ask him all our questions.’”

And a third time the priests remained silent.

Then The Blessed One addressed the priests:—

“It may be, O priests, that it is out of respect to The Teacher that ye ask no questions. Then let each one speak to his friend.”

And when he had thus spoken, the priests remained silent.

Then the venerable Ananda spoke to The Blessed One as follows:—

“It is wonderful, Reverend Sir! It is marvellous, Reverend Sir! Reverend Sir, I have faith to believe that in this congregation of priests not a single priest has a doubt or perplexity respecting either The Buddha or the Doctrine or the Order or the Path or the course of conduct.”

“With you, Ananda, it is a matter of faith, when you say that; but with The Tathagata, Ananda, it is a matter of knowledge that in this congregation of priests not a single priest has a doubt or perplexity respecting either The Buddha or the Doctrine or the Order or the Path or the course of conduct. For of all these five hundred priests, Ananda, the most backward one has become converted, and is not liable to pass into a lower state of existence, but is destined necessarily to attain supreme wisdom.”

Then The Blessed One addressed the priests:—

“And now, O priests, I take my leave of you; all the constituents of being are transitory; work out your salvation with diligence.”

And this was the last word of The Tathagata.

(Henry Clarke Warren. *Buddhism in Translations*. Harvard Oriental Series, vol. 3. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1896, 98–110.)

Ashoka is credited with spreading relics throughout India. Although the legends about his efforts—which typically state that he divided the original bodily relics into 84,000 portions and had them enshrined in 84,000 monuments spread throughout India—are no doubt exaggerations, it seems that he did, indeed, use the relics and the monuments that contained them as very effective tools in gaining converts to the religion. The Buddha

himself had instructed his followers to build *stupas* to house the relics.

A *stupa* is essentially a burial mound, a bell-shaped dome that can be anywhere from only a few inches to hundreds of feet in height. In India and Sri Lanka, remains of these huge *stupas* built as early as the end of the first millennium B.C.E., perhaps dating all the way back to Ashoka’s reign, have survived. These structures, simple as they were, became the

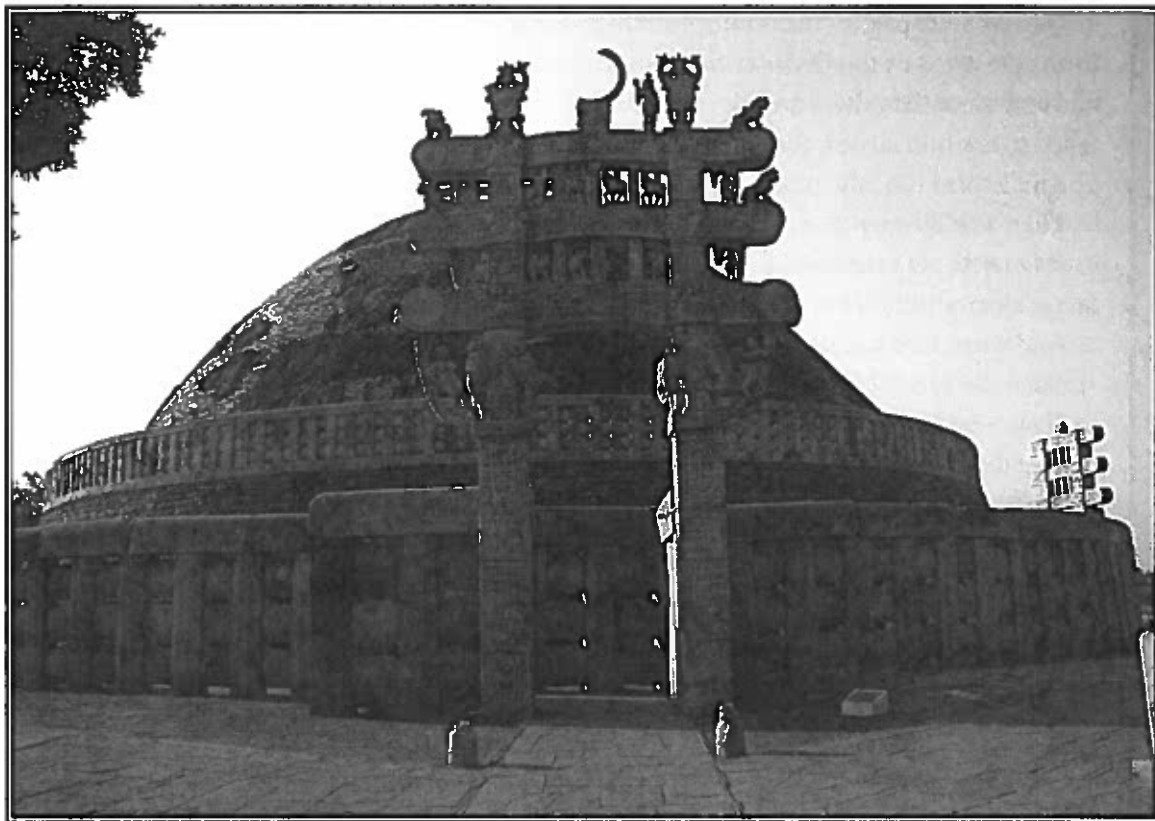


FIGURE 5.1 *The Great Stupa at Sanchi. This important monument was originally constructed under the patronage of the Buddhist king Ashoka in the third century B.C.E.*

focal points of Buddhist ritual practice, the centers of devotion for both the monks and the laity. Although, initially, they may have been intended to enshrine only the Buddha's corporeal relics, soon Buddhists were placing nonbodily relics within them, and relics associated not just with the Buddha himself, but also with important monks. This, then, was a crucial element in the spread of Buddhism, for it not only gave Buddhist monks and laypersons a physical gathering place, but it also provided a way to memorialize both the great

founder—and, in an important sense, to perpetuate his presence on earth—and later charismatic monks. Two of these *stupas*, one at Sanchi (in modern Madhya Pradesh) and one at Amaravati (in modern Andhra Pradesh), became the focal points of large monastic institutions and attracted pilgrims and monks from throughout India and, as time passed, other parts of Asia. These monuments will be discussed at greater length in a later section of this chapter.

Images of the Buddha

The very nature of a sculptural image in Buddhism is complex, and the conception and function of images vary not only over the long course of Buddhist history, but also according to the particular ritual, devotional, and decorative context in which any particular image was situated. Images of the Buddha were thought of, in some sense, as substitutes for the absent teacher. In a story with many different versions throughout Buddhist literature, the very first image is said to have been made, with the Buddha's permission, by a king named Prasenajit, who had a stone replica of the Buddha made while the Buddha was away preaching; in some versions of the story, the image actually preaches to the *sangha* in the master's absence. Images then functioned similarly to relics, and indeed are thought of as a class of relics.

The earliest surviving Buddhist sculpture dates to roughly the third century B.C.E., and the images produced contextually functioned as decorations and visual "texts" in monasteries. Significantly, however, the Buddha himself is absent from these very early images. Instead of the Buddha's physical form, early Buddhist artisans employed a range of visual symbols to communicate aspects of the Buddha's teachings and life story: the wheel of *dharma*, denoting his preaching ("turning") his first sermon, and also, with its eight spokes, the eightfold Buddhist path; the Bodhi tree, which represents the place of his enlightenment (under the tree at Bodhgaya) and comes to symbolize the enlightenment

experience itself; the throne, symbolizing his status as "ruler" of the religious realm, and also, through its emptiness, his passage into final *nirvana*; the deer, evoking both the place of his first sermon, the Deer Park at Sarnath, and the protective qualities of the *dharma*; the footprint, which denotes both his former physical presence on earth and his temporal absence; the lotus, symbolic of the individual's journey up through the "mud" of existence, to bloom, with the aid of the *dharma*, into pure enlightenment; and the *stupa*, the reliquary in which are contained the Buddha's physical remains, a powerful symbol of both his physical death and his continued presence in the world.

Much of the very early art produced in India is narrative in both form and function, presenting episodes from the Buddha's life and, particularly, scenes from his prior lives. At such sites as Bharhut and Sanchi in modern Madhya Pradesh, Bodhgaya in modern Bihar, and Amaravati in modern Andhra Pradesh, huge *stupas* were erected as part of the large monastic complexes that began to be built at these sites in the third century B.C.E. Elaborate carvings were made on and around these *stupas*, particularly on the railings that encircled the monuments themselves. Many of these were scenes from the Buddha's prior lives, which were also verbally recorded in the *Jataka* and *Avadana* literature. There were representations of prior buddhas; and there were also depictions of key events in the Buddha's life, such as his miraculous conception, his birth, and his departure from the palace in search of enlightenment.

It has typically been assumed that because the earliest Buddhist artistic images did not depict the Buddha, there must have been a doctrinally based prohibition against such depictions. First articulated by the French art historian Alfred Foucher in 1917, this idea—generally referred to as the “aniconic thesis”—has deeply influenced our understanding of early Buddhist art. The basic

assumption has been that there must have been a prohibition against representing the Buddha in the early centuries after his death, perhaps because the Buddha had, at the time of his *parinirvana*, passed forever out of existence, and therefore could only be represented by his absence. Recently, however, scholars have begun to rethink this basic assumption, and have argued that perhaps these early



FIGURE 5.2 *The Buddhapada. The Buddha's footprints, originally located in the Great Stupa at Amaravati, first century B.C.E., are venerated as an embodiment of the Buddha and also as a symbol of his absence from the world. At the center of each foot is a finely spoked dharmachakra (Wheel of the Law) which was set in motion when the Buddha gave his First Sermon.*

sculptures are not reflective of a theological position, but instead frequently represent scenes after the Buddha's death, scenes of worship at prominent places of pilgrimage linked to key events in his life—such as Bodhgaya, Lumbini, Rajagriha—and are thus intended to serve as ritual records and blueprints, visual prompters for correct veneration. What seems clear, at any rate, is that early Buddhists had a complex understanding of both the form and function of representations of the Buddha, and that any attempt to articulate a univocal theory of early Buddhist art is probably misguided, precisely because of the complex interactions of original intent, ritual and aesthetic context, and individual disposition.

Actual images of the historical Buddha began to appear prominently in two regions sometime around the turn of the first millennium of the Common Era: in Mathura, near modern Agra; and in Gandhara, in what is now modern Afghanistan. In Mathura, large standing images of the Buddha were made in red sandstone. The Buddha in these images is depicted as broad shouldered, wearing a robe, and marked by various *lakshanas*, the thirty-two auspicious marks with which he was born, and which are described in several early texts. These included the *ushnisha*, or protuberance atop the head, elongated earlobes, webbed fingers, *dharmacakra* (wheel of *dharma*) on the palms, and so on. In Gandhara, the Buddha was typically depicted in what appears to be a Greek style of representation, wearing a robe that resembles a chlamys, and with distinctly Western facial features, details that may be evidence that an iconographic exchange took

place with the Greeks who inhabited the region at the time of Alexander the Great (late fourth century B.C.E.). Many of the Gandharan Buddha images depict him as seated, forming the *dharmacakra mudra*—symbolizing the turning of the wheel of *dharma*—with his hands. In other images, he is presented in a meditational posture, his body withered by the years of extreme asceticism that preceded his enlightenment. These different iconic forms were employed by Buddhist artisans (and their royal, monastic, and lay patrons) both to emphasize the different moments in the Buddha's life story and to convey visually different aspects of the *dharma*.

Although from the moment they appeared in the Buddhist world visual images were intended to narrate aspects of the Buddha's life and teachings, and therefore function on the ground as visual texts to be read, they were also very much intended to be objects of ritual worship. A wide range of texts are available for making and consecrating Buddhist images, from locally produced manuals in the vernacular to pan-Buddhist iconographic manuals. Perhaps the most common form of worship in the Buddhist world is *buddha puja*, literally, "honoring the Buddha." This ritual typically involves making some sort of offering to a Buddha image (or to a relic or a *stupa*)—a flower, a small lamp, food, or even money. Many images, particularly the stelae that were abundantly produced in the medieval Indian milieu—although this is also an iconographic theme on some of the very earliest Buddhist images—actually depict such worship as part of the sculpture, usually along the base of the

image, at what would, in a ritual context, be eye-level for the worshipper. The iconography in such cases, then, serves as a kind of visual guide to proper ritual action.

Buddhist iconography is also frequently intended to focus the mind of the worshipper on the Buddha and his teachings, to serve as a visual aid, and to help the practitioner engage in *buddha anusmrti*, or “recollection of the Buddha.” This important form of meditation, which is described in several texts from as early as the first century B.C.E., involves contemplating the Buddha’s magnificent qualities and internalizing them, very often with the use of an image, either a sculpture or a painting. The iconography of such images, then, serve a mimetic function, in that the meditator is to emulate the iconographically presented Buddha, and in the process create a mental image; in short, the practitioner is to become like the image, and in the process, like the Buddha himself.

The Power and Presence of Place

Buddhism could never have established itself in India had it not, very early on, been intimately associated with specific sacred places. The places associated with the life of the Buddha took on a special significance, perhaps even during his lifetime. Indeed, in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, he actually tells Ananda that if someone were to die on a pilgrimage to the holy places associated with his life, that person would “be reborn in a realm of heavenly happiness.” Initially, there seem

to have been four of these sites: Lumbini, the place of Siddhartha’s birth; Bodhgaya, where Shakyamuni attained enlightenment and thus became the Buddha; Sarnath, where the newly enlightened Buddha delivered his first sermon; and Kushinagara, where he died. The Buddhist tradition credits Ashoka with marking these sites as particularly significant—he went on a pilgrimage to visit the actual sites, and also built monasteries and monuments there. Indeed, Ashoka is credited with having gone on the first pilgrimage in Buddhist history, the famous *Dharma Yatra*, shortly after his conversion to Buddhism. In the centuries after his reign, a larger set of sacred sites was developed, some of which were also associated with the Buddha’s life, while others gained prominence as monastic centers and places of worship, such as Sanchi and Amaravati.

Although Siddhartha was physically born in Lumbini, it has remained a rather small and minor place of pilgrimage. As the birthplace of the religion, the single most significant place in all of Buddhism is Bodhgaya, so much so that the first-century author Ashvaghosha, in his *Buddhacarita*, calls Bodhgaya “the navel of the universe.” It is not certain when Bodhgaya became a place of pilgrimage, but it may be that its significance dates to Ashoka’s visit in the third century B.C.E. In some later versions of the Ashoka story, he is said to have gone to Bodhgaya before his conversion to Buddhism and actually cut down the great Bodhi tree, under which the Buddha had attained enlightenment; the tree, however, miraculously grew back overnight. At any rate, after his conversion, he went to Bodhgaya and seems to have

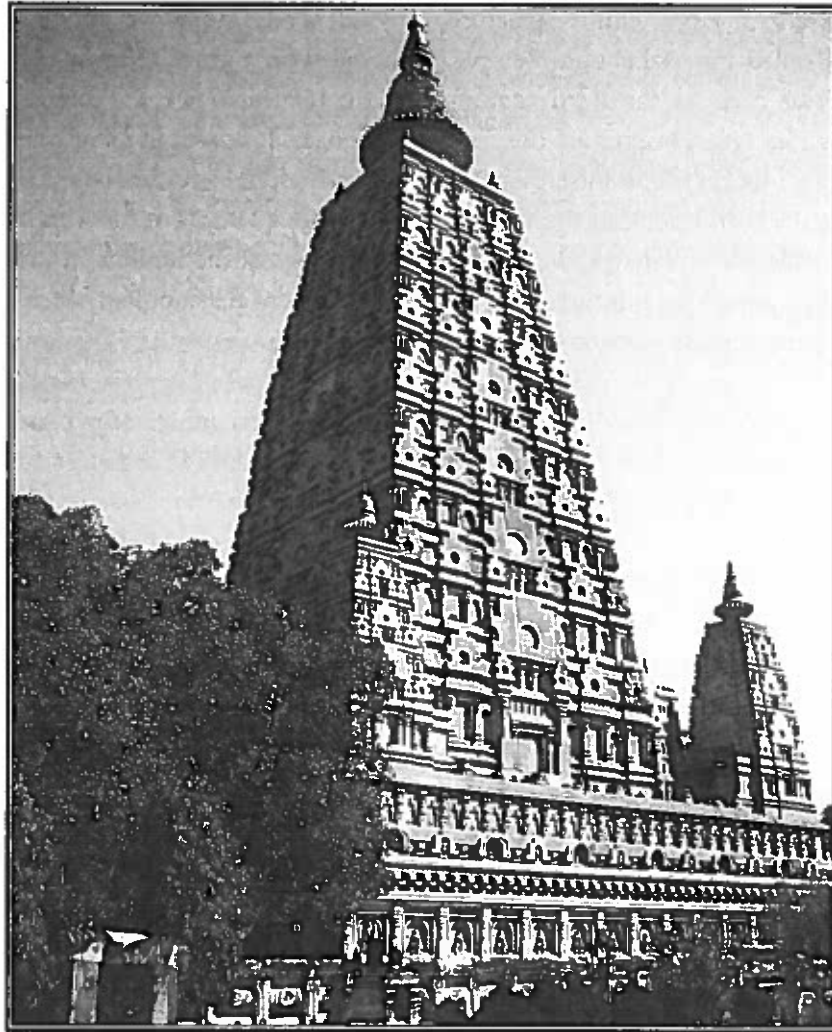


FIGURE 5.3 *The Mahabodhi Temple. This temple is built on the site of the Buddha's enlightenment at Bodhgaya, first constructed in the sixth century, with major renovations in the nineteenth century.*

erected at least one of his pillars there, and may also have established an early monastic community at the site. In the following centuries, Bodhgaya would become a lively monastic center and a significant pilgrimage place. In addition to the Bodhi tree, pilgrims were drawn to Bodhgaya because of the

presence there of the *Vajra Asana*, the seat on which the Buddha was said to have attained enlightenment. According to the accounts of the fourth-century Chinese pilgrim Faxian, there were also various *stupas* scattered about the site, enshrining the relics of significant monks.

There was also a large temple structure at Bodhgaya, called the Mahabodhi Temple, perhaps built as early as the third century B.C.E., although its actual origins are obscure. Certainly, contemporary Buddhist pilgrims from all over the world flock to the temple, and it may be that very early on, the temple was a significant reason for pilgrimage to the site. The current temple—which has been

rebuilt several times over the centuries, but is modeled on a much older structure—stands nearly 160 feet high and is some 48 feet square at its base. It houses in its upper stories relics of the Buddha, with various shrines occupying the lower floors. In the central shrine is a large image of the Buddha in the *bhūmisparśha* position, the moment when he defeated the evil Mara.

Personalities in Buddhism 5.1

FAXIAN

A Chinese monk of the Eastern Tsin dynasty, Faxian is said to have been born in 337 C.E. He was one of the first Chinese monks to travel to India as a pilgrim, travels that he recorded in great detail. He joined the *sangha* at the age of twenty, and became particularly focused on the *Vinaya* (the canon of monastic rules). He realized, however, that the texts available to him in China were incomplete, and set out to India in search of the full, authentic version of the *Vinaya*. He left his home in 399. Travel in ancient India was extremely difficult and dangerous, and it took Faxian some six years to reach India. Along the way, he visited the famous Dunhuang cave temples and many other important monuments. Faxian stayed in Khotan for three months, where he was especially impressed with the number of monasteries and the commitment of its Buddhist monks and laypeople. He then traveled to Gandhara, and then into northern India, which was at that time under Gupta rule. He arrived in Pataliputra in 405 and commenced studying Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist texts. He then traveled to eastern India, and eventually to Sri Lanka, finally returning home in 413.

He then settled in Nanking to begin translating the texts he had gathered, working on them until his death, sometime around 420. These texts helped establish Buddhism in China, providing a link between the Buddha's life in India (his homeland) and China, and served as authoritative transmissions of Buddhist doctrine. Of equal importance is the precedent that Faxian set for pilgrimage to India and to the places associated with important events in the Buddha's life. Faxian meticulously recorded his journeys in his *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, a text that became the inspiration for later gen-

erations of Chinese pilgrims to India, notably Xuanzang (in the seventh century) and Yijing (635–713). These later pilgrims continued to bring canonical texts, commentaries, and new philosophical works back to China from India.

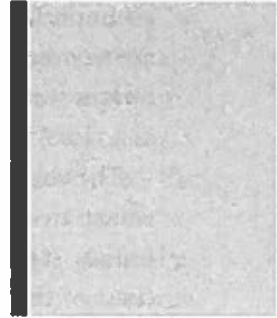
Faxian's accounts of his travels also provide a detailed description of early Buddhist practice in India (although his narrative is often interwoven with myth and fantastical hyperbole), and scholars of Buddhism have often relied upon them to provide insight into this period of Buddhist history in India.

In addition to the Bodhi tree, the *Vajra Asana*, and the Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya has a significant monastic center, known as the Mahabodhi Vihara, housing as many as 1,000 monks, with dozens of buildings—living quarters, lecture halls, study areas, kitchens, and dining halls. The monastery at Bodhgaya was particularly important to monks from Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma. Indeed, when the temple and the monastery fell into a state of disrepair in the twelfth century, after Buddhism had all but died out in India, it was the monks who kept the place alive and, eventually, led to its rebirth in the late nineteenth century.

Another very important place of pilgrimage in early Buddhism, and one that also figures prominently in Buddhist sculpture, was Sarnath, near the modern city of Banaras, where the Buddha delivered his first sermon in the Deer Park. Again, Ashoka seems to have visited Sarnath on his *dharma* tour. However, it is really in sculpture that Sarnath rose to prominence, since the scene of the Buddha preaching his first sermon was one of the most common forms of representing him from the very earliest period of Buddhist art.

The Buddha is typically seated in such images, forming the *dharmacakra mudra* (denoting his first teaching of the *dharma*), and he is often flanked by several smaller figures—the five monks who first heard the sermon, the laywoman Sujata who offered him the modest gift of food that gave him strength to attain enlightenment, two deer, as well as an image of the wheel.

As Buddhism spread south from the Gangetic plains, several important monastic complexes sprang up, among them the temples at Sanchi and Bharhut. These are some of the earliest and most magnificent of Buddhist structures. Sanchi and Bharhut seem to date to the time of Ashoka—he had an engraved pillar erected at Sanchi, for instance, and may have been responsible for the building of Sanchi's Great *Stupa*. Perhaps most magnificent about these places are the elaborately carved stone railings that encircle the *stupas*, for on these railings Buddhist artisans carved beautiful scenes from the *Jataka* tales as well as scenes from the Buddha's life. In an important sense, these carvings present a kind of visual narrative of not only the Buddha's life story, but also of Buddhism itself. They also present



an important record of Buddhist devotional activity, since, as we have already seen, these images seem to be as much a narrative device as a visual guide to proper ritual.

The Great *Stupa* at Amaravati, the ruins of which are located in what is now the South Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, near the coast of the Bay of Bengal and on the banks of the Krishna River, must have been one of the most spectacular monuments in the Buddhist world, with a large monastic complex connected to it housing hundreds of monks. The main *stupa* was some 140 feet in diameter and 100 feet tall, and may have been built as early as Ashoka's time; indeed, there is an inscription that attributes the structure to Ashoka himself, although this may well be apocryphal. Around the *stupa*'s base were carved hundreds of images, which, like those at Sanchi and Bharhut, presented scenes from the Buddha's life and from the *Jataka* stories.

One of the most important aspects of these great temples—and there were dozens more spread throughout India—was that they were instrumental in the emergence of Buddhism as a pan-Indian religion and essential in its continued vitality throughout the subcontinent. On one level, these temples continued to tell the story of the Buddha and Buddhism in stone. On another, the basic ritual forms expressed at Sanchi, Bharhut, and Amaravati continued for centuries to be replicated throughout the Buddhist world. Furthermore, not only did the artisans and patrons at Amaravati, as well as at Bharhut and Sanchi, establish a basic ritual lexicon, they also established, when they did actually

represent the Buddha, the basis of what would become a standard set of significant events in the Buddha's life. Thus, sites such as these, which were never visited by the Buddha, were significant as monastic centers and as devotional gathering places; at the same time, they all were instrumental in preserving the places associated with the life of the Buddha.

For instance, many of Amaravati's images depict multiple events in the Buddha's life, events linked to specific places. A very elaborate slab from the temple's railings is a good example here. The image depicts an elaborately detailed *stupa* with various scenes from the Buddha's life, including a standing Buddha in the center, displaying the *abhaya mudra*, flanked by several much smaller standing and kneeling worshippers; a scene that appears to be the dream of Mahamaya, as well as the birth of Shakyamuni; the Buddha seated in meditation; the Buddha delivering his first sermon; and other scenes of teaching and veneration. What is particularly significant about this image is the arrangement of multiple scenes around a single central image, scenes that, when taken together—as they would have been by the worshipper in the ritual context in which the slab was originally situated—can be seen to present the Buddha's entire life story in condensed form: birth, enlightenment, teaching, and death (as signified by the *stupa* form of the dome itself), plus various paradigmatically significant events.

This image allows the ritual participant to be, in an important sense, a part of these events, not just in his or her mind, but also in time and space—the image, in this sense, makes the

events and the people and the places present. And in presenting such scenes together, as part of a single image, the artisans have allowed the worshipper to be a part of the ongoing life of the Buddha and the *dharma*. Thus, although the Buddha himself is absent from the world, he continues to be made present, and thus available, through images and the devotional rituals associated with them. By the second or third century C.E., a standard iconographic form in Buddhism had emerged. Artisans presented the life of the Buddha on a single stone

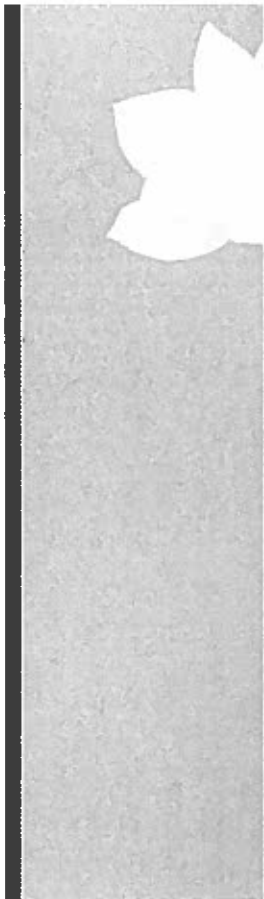
image—usually a single image surrounded by four or six scenes from his life, almost always including, at least, the enlightenment, the first sermon, and the *parinirvana*. Eventually, a standard set of eight scenes was developed, the iconographic form known as the *ashtamahapratiharya*, or “eight great events,” presenting not only a visual narrative, as it were, of the significant events in the Buddha’s life, but also a kind of map of his life, a place-specific narrative that presented both event and place.

Personalities in Buddhism 5.2

XUANZANG

Perhaps best known for his seventeen-year pilgrimage to India, Xuanzang, along with the earlier pilgrim Faxian, was instrumental in transmitting Buddhism from India to China. Born in 602, he was the youngest of four children, the son of a conservative Confucianist. According to traditional biographies, as a child, Xuanzang possessed a keen intellect in and dedication to Confucian principles. After the death of his father in 611, Xuanzang lived for five years in the Jingtu monastery in Luoyang, where he studied the various schools of Buddhism and the *Abhidharma* philosophical systems. He asked to be admitted to the *sangha* at thirteen, and although the monastic rules prohibited his ordination because of his age, the abbot Zheng Shanguo made an exception in his case because of his remarkable intellect and diligence.

In 629, Xuanzang embarked on his pilgrimage to India, which he meticulously recorded in *Records of the Western Regions of the Great T'ang Dynasty*. He began his journey by crossing the Gobi desert, and then traveling southwest into central Asia. He visited dozens of monasteries, including all of the major sites associated with the life story of the Buddha. He studied the scriptures of the Theravada and Mahayana schools at these monasteries with some of the India’s greatest intellects. In Taxila, a Mahayana kingdom in what is now modern Kashmir, he encountered 5,000 monks living in 100 monasteries. He stayed there for two years, from 631 to 633, studying



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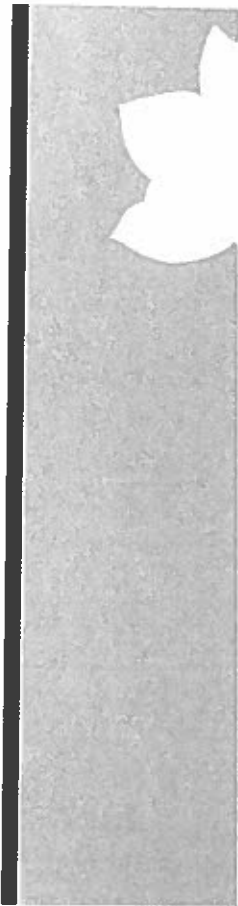
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various texts. While there, the fourth Buddhist council, called by King Kanishka of Kushana dynasty, took place, an event Xuanzang records in his writings.

He then traveled further in India, collecting texts and images to take back to China. In particular, he spent two years at the great Buddhist university Nalanda in north-eastern India, where he studied Sanskrit, logic, grammar, and Brahmana philosophy, and particularly the teachings of the Yogacara school. According to some accounts of his life, the great Buddhist scholar Silabhadra (529–645) was then the abbot of Nalanda, and was contemplating suicide after years of debilitating illness. However, in a dream he received instructions to endure suffering and await the arrival of a Chinese monk in order to guarantee the preservation of the Mahayana tradition abroad. Indeed, Xuanzang became Silabhadra's disciple and in 636 was initiated into the Yogacara. When he finally returned to China, he brought with him over 650 Sanskrit texts, and, with the support of the emperor, set up a large translation center, drawing students and scholars from all over East Asia. He is credited with translating over 1,300 scriptures into Chinese. Most closely aligned with the Yogacara philosophical tradition, Xuanzang founded the Faxiang school of Buddhism, which, although short lived, was influential in the development of later Chinese schools of Buddhism. Xuanzang's journey, and the legends that grew up around it, inspired one of the great classics of Chinese literature, the Ming-period novel *Journey to the West*.

These eight scenes all represented actual places that could be, and were, physically visited by Buddhist pilgrims—famously, by the Chinese pilgrims Faxian (in the fifth century C.E.) and Xuanzang (in the eighth), and also by countless other pilgrims over the centuries. The Buddha's life, and in important ways his person as well, were preserved by the artistic images and the pilgrimage places they depicted.

The devotional dynamics of such images—which are also expressed textually, in sometimes very complex philosophical discussion of images and ritual that are contained in the commentaries on the canonical texts—are

such that the believing viewer is made *past*. The image transports one into the past, the ideal time when the Buddha was alive, preaching the *dharma*, defeating Mara, and so on; the image transports the viewer into a time when these places were not merely shrines, but locales where the Buddha was present, and the Buddha was not merely a figurative presence, but a living being.

Conclusion

Buddhists responded to the physical absence of their beloved teacher in a variety of ways,

then. They continued to study and preach the *dharma* long after he had died, to keep him present, as he himself had said they should, by keeping his teachings alive. But they also kept him present by representing him in stone, by making images of him which were, very often, treated as living beings—they were seen not merely as representations, but as embodiments.

One way early Buddhism articulated the Buddha's continued presence in the world was by formulating a theory of the Buddha's two bodies, or *kayas*. The first body was called the *Rupakaya*, which literally means the "form body." This was the Buddha's physical body when he was alive. After he died—and again, it is important that it was his final death, his *parinirvana*—his form body would be replaced by his *Dharmakaya*, the body of his teachings,

a sometimes-complex metaphysical doctrine that seems to be based in the Buddha's admonishment of Ananda just before his death: "Do not become attached to my physical form," he said, "because my real form will continue in my teachings."

Although this understanding of the Buddha's continued presence in the world, despite his physical absence, was an extremely powerful and important element in the ongoing life of Buddhism in India and elsewhere in Asia, an important new school emerged sometime around 100 C.E. that presented a very different understanding of the Buddha's presence in the world, and a very different interpretation of his teachings. That school was called the Mahayana, the Great Vehicle, and it is the subject of the next chapter.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1 Why did the Buddha rebuke Ananda?
- 2 Why are relics so important in Buddhism?
- 3 How do visual images function in Buddhism?