

# A History of Zen Buddhism



Heinrich Dumoulin, S.J.

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# A History of Zen Buddhism

READERS interested in Zen Buddhism have too often been offered a religion torn from its context, neither Western nor Eastern, living in a limbo of its own. Professor Dumoulin introduces us to the real Zen Buddhism, the force which was formed in the matrix of Asian civilization, evolved through the different phases of Oriental culture, and only later became a factor in Western thinking. Starting with the mystical elements in the Indian religions, he traces the development of Zen from its origins in China through its transplantation to Japan, where it reached its highest development. This historical survey leads the reader to Zen's meeting with the West and to its influence on modern Asia. The seriousness of genuine scholarship is matched by an easy clarity of style, and enlivened by the many delightful illustrations from Zen folklore and poetry.

Heinrich Dumoulin's career makes him an ideal interpreter of Zen to the West. For many years a resident and teacher in Japan, he has gained an exceptional understanding of his subject and its implications. Neither partisan nor polemicist, Professor Dumoulin writes with a serene objectivity, explaining Zen in its own terms and relating it as well to current Western psychological and theological writings. The result is a definitive study of Zen's history and essence, useful equally to the beginning reader and to the advanced student of Zen.

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A HISTORY OF  
ZEN BUDDHISM

*Heinrich Dumoulin, S. J.*

Translated from the German by Paul Peachey



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# 1 *The Mystical Element in Early Buddhism and Hīnayāna*

## *Buddhism and Mysticism*

When, in the nineteenth century, Buddhism for the first time was disclosed to the West, the rationalist scholars of Europe thought they had found in it the coveted credo of reason, without God and revelation, without heaven and hell, or soul and immortality. Further research, however, soon taught them otherwise. Not only did the later Buddhism of the Great Vehicle (*mahāyāna*) exhibit all the despised "irrational" phenomena of religiosity such as miracles, saints, the cult and veneration of images and relics, and superstition and magic as well, but also the Buddhism of the canonical writings showed itself, on closer study, to be a religion which transcended the worlds of sense and reason. Everything that the sutras relate of the life and work of Shākyamuni—his words to his disciples, his profound contemplation, his sayings and demeanor—all bear witness to a man mightily stirred by religion, who, with a high sense of mission, opened a new way to knowledge and final release. Thus Buddhism could not be fitted into the mold of a religion of pure reason.

But Christian scholars likewise had to concede to the force of the facts and recognize the religious character of Buddhism. Up until that time the term "religion" had designated the re-

lationship of man to a transcendent personal God or to a Divine Being. Now the concept had to be broadened to embrace the phenomenon of Buddhism. Today Buddhism is generally recognized by scholars as a religion, and, because of its historical and contemporary significance, it ranks among the world's great religions. The basic trait of Buddhism is its striving for otherworldly salvation.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, the concept of mysticism has been considerably enlarged. Since the definition of mysticism developed within Christianity, which calls for the immediate experience of the personal God through the knowing and loving soul, does not apply to many unmistakably mystical phenomena in non-Christian religions, it has become necessary to place alongside the supernatural mysticism of grace the concept of natural mysticism. Admittedly this concept entails certain difficulties, and frequently it is not sharply enough defined and differentiated. For the moment we shall content ourselves with a general description, and designate as mysticism all efforts of man to elevate himself to a supercosmic, supersensory sphere which he experiences immediately. The supercosmic domain stands in necessary relationship to the Absolute with which man in mystical experience establishes some kind of contact. Where these three essential elements are manifest—namely, where man transcends the sense realm, breaks through the limits of normal psychic experience, and reaches the Absolute—there we can speak of mysticism. The respective strength of each of these three elements varies greatly from case to case, but none must be missing entirely. The sphere of mysticism is thus clearly differentiated from phenomena such as sorcery, magic, and even speculative metaphysics. Since contact with the Absolute becomes, in mystical experience, a means of salvation, Buddhism, precisely because of its mystical element, must be regarded as a religion. Buddha, and those who followed him, saw in mystical

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enlightenment the "vehicle of salvation" that carried them beyond this world to the "other shore."

The mystical element is an essential part of Buddhism. The multiplicity of phenomena in the religion of Buddha has often amazed scholars and laymen. There is hardly a religious motif or manifestation which has not been used down through the centuries by one Buddhist sect or another. In vain does one seek a bond that would embrace all these numerous contradictory forms. And yet, despite the absence of a common denominator, Buddhism constitutes a whole. The specific essence of Buddhism is nowhere so clearly apparent as in the mysticism that pervades the whole of this religion. The manifold Buddhist manifestations—the rigorous moral code of the early monastic communities, the daring metaphysical speculations of the Great Vehicle, the intimately confident prayer of the believers in Amida, the magic rites of Shingon and Tendai—all these are immersed in the mystic twilight that envelops the disciples of the Buddha, each in his own way.

### *Shākyamuni, the Enlightened One*

The nature of Buddhist sources does not permit us to distinguish clearly between history and legend in the life of Shākyamuni.<sup>2</sup> According to the majority of Buddhologists, those incidents which are transmitted alike in the Pali Canon and the Sanskrit sources can be regarded as containing a historical core. All records tell us that the decisive turn in the Buddha's career was brought about by a mystical experience. As the early sutras relate, Prince Siddhartha of the house of Shākya chose a life of wandering to learn the meaning of suffering, and became the Wise (*muni*) and Enlightened One (*buddha*), who teaches the path of redeeming knowledge. The accounts all stress that only after long ascetic exertions was Shākyamuni able to enter the

lion: "This, Lord, is my faith in the Holy One: that there never has been nor will be, nor is there at this time any other ascetic or Brahman greater or wiser than he, the Enlightened One."<sup>5</sup> Artists have hit upon his essence when they have presented the Buddha of the house of Shākya as the great contemplative who has entered *nirvāna*.

### *Hinayanist Meditative Exercises*

Buddhology for some time has devoted its best energies to probing the original character of Buddhist doctrine, but though achieving valuable results it has not succeeded in reaching its major objective. Critical textual studies of both the Pali Canon and the Sanskrit works do not permit definite or final conclusions regarding Buddha's life and teaching in precanonical Buddhism. Usually the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path are regarded as the primitive Buddhist credo. Undoubtedly certain Yogic elements also belong to the primitive substance of the Buddhist religion. Even in the earliest times the Four Truths were practiced and experienced in meditation.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the exercises of Buddhism are to be distinguished from Yoga chiefly in that the Buddhists, remaining true to the Middle Way, reject violent exertions and bodily chastisements.

The sutras of the Pali Canon present a wealth of descriptive accounts of mystic stages and states which are to be achieved by systematic exercises. This textual material, though engulfed in repetition and accretion, has been examined and put into order by Buddhist research.<sup>7</sup> By placing the four *dhyāna* stages at the center and grouping all other phenomena about them, Heiler sketches a logical over-all figure that far outdoes reality. For the impartial reader of Buddhist literature, many disharmonies, tangles, and contradictions remain. Thus, for example, the thirty-seven elements which, according to the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, the Buddha is said to have explained to his disciples



mystic practices in Hīnayāna Buddhism. After the conquest of the five hindrances (*nīvarana*)—desire, hatred, slothfulness, fear, and doubt—begins the ascent through the four stages of *dhyāna*. In the first stage, that of inner composure and cessation of desire, there still remains the image of objects, and a feeling of delight arises. In the second stage, the release from the outer world is accomplished and the consideration of objects has disappeared, but joy permeates the body. In the third stage, this feeling of joy gives way to equanimity, and spiritual contemplation becomes consummate. The fourth and highest of the *dhyāna* stages is the world-removed state of equanimity (*upekhā*), free of joy and suffering alike. Meditating on infinity, the monk strides successively through the realms of the infinity of space, of the infinity of consciousness, of nothingness, and of the sphere beyond consciousness and unconsciousness. The subsequent “destruction of consciousness and sensibility” signifies, not the final liberation in *nirvāna*, but an ecstatic state.

Among the various ways of meditation the four stages of *dhyāna* take priority. According to tradition, the Buddha passed from the fourth *dhyāna* stage into *nirvāna*. This stage opens the door to all the higher spiritual powers which, in the manner of Yoga, play an important role in Hīnayāna Buddhism. Among the magic powers (*iddhi*) acquired in meditation are included extraordinary states of consciousness and unusual bodily capacities, such as levitation, self-duplication, bodily penetration, invisibility, touching of sun and moon, clairaudience, and others.<sup>14</sup> A further miraculous fruit of the *dhyāna* states is threefold knowledge (*tevijjā*), namely, the recollection of previous existences, a knowledge of the destiny of all beings in the cycle of rebirths, and the knowledge of suffering and its conquest. This supreme knowledge, which is the point of departure in Buddhist doctrine, is now perfectly comprehended on the higher mystical level; thus the state of the saint (*arhat*) is reached.

In this connection mention must still be made of two aids to contemplation which survive in Zen, though all other practices of Hīnayāna have disappeared completely. The schematic objects of consideration (*kammatthāna*), detailed especially in the *Mahāsattipatthāna Sutta*, are directives to psychic technique rather than to spiritual reflection. And yet they place the monk in that grave mood, engendered by contact with the fundamental truths of the transitoriness of life (*anicca*), the unreality of existence (*anattā*), and universal suffering (*dukkham*), which is a prerequisite to success in all Buddhist meditation. Zen knows no thematic considerations similar to the Hinayanist approach. However, the beginner is taken through exercises which, in a fashion similar to the recommendations of the sutras to fix the attention on the impurities and ugliness of the body, are designed exclusively to unmask beauty and to lead to an experience of human frailty. The Zen masters speak much of death and renunciation to their disciples, so that through their grasp of these basic truths illumination may come the more easily. The Zen monastery is as much pervaded by an awareness of transitoriness as are the meeting places of the *bhikkhu*.

The *kasina* exercise, likewise, leads to the state of contemplation. In this exercise an extreme degree of concentration is achieved through fixing the attention on a physical object. The monk gazes steadfastly at a circle or disk of clay or earth, or into a vessel of water, or into a fire, or at a treetop waving in the breeze (*kasina* of the four elements). Or he fastens on a spot of color, space, or light. He gazes until the "sign" has been impressed so deeply into his consciousness that he can see it as an afterimage with closed eyes as clearly as he had seen it with his eyes open.

In the meditation of Tantric Buddhism the *mandala*, which may have developed from the *kasina*, plays a similar role.<sup>15</sup> Zen also makes use of symbolic representations of spiritual realities



which are appropriated through concentration by sensory means. Among the masters of the Wei-yang sect of Chinese Zen we encounter the exercise of the "circular figures," which is related to early Buddhist *kasina* practice. Elsewhere in Zen, symbolic representations of metaphysical truths likewise occur frequently. Often the signs serve not merely to illustrate abstract truth but also as a means of concentration.

A survey of the kinds of meditative life in Hīnayāna Buddhism reveals the extent to which mystical elements pervade the whole. Indeed, it has been maintained that "all Buddhism is permeated throughout with Yoga."<sup>16</sup> For every individual phenomenon in the early Buddhist meditative practice, one can find parallels in the old Indian Yoga tradition.<sup>17</sup> If, then, this historical setting gives rise to the conjecture that in the exercises of Hīnayāna Buddhism we are dealing chiefly with psychic techniques, so in the stages and systems of meditation we can readily recognize descriptions of mental states. Nowhere does a way open into transcendence. Hīnayāna Buddhism achieves a spiritualizing of Yoga by uniting its psychic exercises to a moral and religious quest for salvation, but it is unable to introduce any element of metaphysical knowledge. The knowledge acquired by meditation is of a practical nature and pertains to the way of salvation, namely, the cycle of rebirth and the conquest of suffering. We therefore cannot recognize the Hinayanist meditative exercises as genuine mysticism, since true mysticism, whether natural or supernatural, signifies an immediate relationship to absolute spiritual reality. In Hīnayāna Buddhism the question of the Absolute arises first in connection with the doctrine of *nirvāna*, which is of decisive significance for the whole system as well as for a possible Hīnayāna mysticism.



*Nirvāna as the Goal of the Mystic Way*

Etymologically, *nirvāna* signifies something negative. Derived from the verb *va*, "to blow as the wind," with the negative prefix *nir*, it denotes motionless rest, where no wind blows, the fire is quenched, the light is extinguished, the stars have set, and the saint has died.<sup>18</sup> "The extinction of desire, of hate, and of delusion—that, O friend, is called *nirvāna*."<sup>19</sup> "The body is broken, consciousness has ceased, sensibility has vanished, the forces of imagination have come to rest, and cognition has ended."<sup>20</sup> The saint vanishes into *nirvāna*, to use the Buddha's famous simile, as the flame of an oil lamp sinks in upon itself and expires when its fuel has been consumed. Such words and images evoke the concept of complete annihilation.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, it is certain that Buddhists persistently regarded *nirvāna* as the supreme goal for which they yearned as for heaven. In the ancient collections of hymns composed by Buddhist monks and nuns, the state of final deliverance is lauded with enthusiasm. *Nirvāna* is regarded as consummate salvation, supreme blessedness, the haven of peace and isle of deliverance. Could such figures be veils without substance, enshrouding nothingness? Or do they not rather conceal a positive core? Attention was called to this contradiction in the teaching of Buddha, and he was asked whether the Perfected One would or would not exist beyond death. Buddha declined to answer this question, apparently because it is theoretical in nature and its solution is irrelevant to the one thing required, namely, the achievement of salvation. He was therefore accused of philosophical agnosticism.<sup>22</sup> It is possible, however, that Buddha did not wish to express himself regarding life in the beyond, since our conceptual language is not adequate to that purpose. Regarding the "other shore," the immortal sphere removed from death, nothing can be expressed with certainty in human words. That realm is accessible only in mystic ascent.

He who seeks to resolve the paradox in the Buddhist doctrine of *nirvāna* logically must resort to either a nihilistic or a realistic explanation. Both, however, are refuted by Buddha. Shākyamuni rejected as heresy both the materialistic-nihilistic ideology (*uccheda-vāda*), which knows nothing of *karma* or of deliverance, and the metaphysical doctrine of substantiality (*sassata-vāda*), which accepts the view of indestructible bodies. Perhaps the final word in Buddha's philosophy is that same Middle Way which Mahāyāna metaphysics was later to teach as the supreme wisdom. According to the Japanese Buddhologist Ui, the twelve-linked causal chain (*patīccasamuppāda*), which became transparent to Buddha in his liberating knowledge, does not signify a causal sequence in the origin of things, but rather the general law of becoming and dissolving in reciprocal dependency.<sup>23</sup> Like Heraclitus and Nietzsche, Buddha may have become intoxicated with "the innocence of becoming," but with this difference—that Buddha saw by mystic insight what these philosophers believed themselves to grasp by metaphysical intuition. Significantly, Buddha, just before leaving this world, comforted his followers, not with the prospect of *nirvāna*, but by pointing to the immutable law that all who are born must die and that all compounded things are subject to dissolution.<sup>24</sup> If, however, the usual Hinayanist view is valid, which regards the twelve-linked causal chain in the doctrine of *karma* and *samsāra* as the explanation of a continuous engendering influence working through past, present, and future, then *nirvāna* signifies liberation from the round of birth and death and hence the way out of the suffering of existence subject to *karma*. In Buddhist terminology, existence falls within the categories of the Five Elements (*skandha*),<sup>25</sup> which occur only in the cycle of reincarnations (*samsāra*). The land of freedom, the opposite shore, is beyond our intellectual comprehension.

The philosophy of early Buddhism, inclined as it is to skepticism and pessimism, makes no attempt at a higher ascent. The



exalted words that we find in Hīnayāna Buddhism come from the lips of religiously inspired monks and nuns. Here we are in the domain of mysticism. We read: "There is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded. If there were not this unborn, unbecome, unmade, uncompounded, there would be no escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded."<sup>26</sup> "The great ocean is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable. . . . So also is the Perfected One; he is profound, immeasurable, unfathomable."<sup>27</sup> Negations here signify complete transcendence of human thought and speech.

Similarly, the Upanishads speak of the All and the Nothing of the eternal Brahma. In the following verses, likewise cited by Oldenberg, we observe the same mystic note:

He who has gone to rest, no measure can fathom him.  
 There is no word with which to speak of him.  
 What thought could grasp has been blown away,  
 And thus every path to speech is barred.<sup>28</sup>

So too, in Hīnayāna Buddhism, the meditative techniques and the psychic training of the Yoga exercises are vitalized by the mystic *élan* nourished in the best Indian tradition. *Nirvāna* is not a remote state in the distant beyond, but can be attained now, on this side, in "the visible order" (*ditthe dhamme*). The this-worldly *nirvāna* is to be distinguished from the other-worldly one only by the persistence of the bodily substratum (*upādhi*), which no longer inhibits the Perfected One.<sup>29</sup>

Hīnayāna Buddhism is indebted for much of its vitality and its resilient power to the mystical element striving within it toward the Absolute, despite its theoretical negation of the Absolute. All mysticism, in keeping with its nature, maintains a relationship to ethics and metaphysics. Ample provision is made in Hīnayāna for ethical preparation. The wise control of sense and sensual desire, which the Middle Way between pleasure and mortification demands of its disciples, lays the



foundation for the higher ascent of the spirit. The absence of a genuine metaphysics must have been felt as a real deficiency until the keen philosophical speculations of the Great Vehicle, vibrant with mystic spirit, appeared on the scene. In Mahayanist metaphysics a new element breaks forth, but the coherence with original Buddhism persists.

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## 2 *Mysticism Within Mahāyāna*

### *Perception of Life and Mysticism*

The peculiarly Buddhist perception of life tends toward mysticism, for it appears that the two sorrowful convictions upon which it rests can be resolved only in a higher knowledge. In the first place, the Buddhist believes that by the nature of things, true reality is hidden from man, and that the senses as well as ordinary understanding lead him astray and entangle him in insoluble confusion. Man lives in ignorance and deception, and only with the greatest effort and the exertion of the hidden power of his inner being can he break through the veil of illusions which his greed weaves ever more thickly about him. True reality is accessible only to the mystic view. In the second place, the common human awareness of the frailty of earthly things, so powerful in the Oriental search for truth, impels one to mysticism. The Hīnayāna Buddhist reaches the other shore, beyond desire and pain, in that he sees through the causal chain of sorrowful human existence and thus destroys ignorance. In Mahāyāna the insubstantiality of human suffering is comprehended in transcendent knowledge. Not philosophical insight but salvation is mediated through the intuitive view.

The experiences at the root of the Buddhist Way give rise to awareness of the sorrowful character of human existence, of the

deceptive appearance of things, and of the ignorance of the selfish ego. The extreme human need of salvation thus becomes evident. For all Buddhists, salvation lies in the absolute knowledge which is prepared for by meditation and comprehended in mystical experience. Without this saving knowledge man is inescapably set adrift on the sea of inconstancy, which the Indian imagination has stretched to infinity. Neither logic nor piety nor asceticism, but only a higher, hidden, mystic vision, difficult to attain, can carry man to the shore of eternal liberation.

How did this view of life express itself in the new forms of Mahāyāna? What stamp did the Buddhist mysticism of the Great Vehicle receive in its peregrinations through the countries of Asia?

### *The Beginnings of Mahāyāna*

For a long time Buddhology has struggled to distinguish between the several phases of Buddhism and to classify them in terms of their historical succession. The customary division according to the two Vehicles has had to yield more recently to a threefold division, namely, primitive Buddhism, Hīnayāna, and Mahāyāna;<sup>1</sup> the designation "Hīnayāna" proved to be ill suited to include the earliest Buddhist development. It was also recognized that its origins went further back than had generally been assumed. Obviously, the claims of the Mahāyāna sutras to stem directly from Shākyamuni, the founder of the Buddhist religion, cannot be upheld. Apparently the Pali Canon contains the oldest extant writings by which primitive Buddhism is to be evaluated, while the beginnings of Mahāyāna go back to the time of the early formation of the Buddhist schools.<sup>2</sup>

Out of bias for Pali Buddhism, the first generation of Buddhologists saw all other developments as defections from the sober and ethical spirituality of their origin. Mahāyāna was re-



i.e., that it arose directly out of the Hinayanist schools. From the sources it can be seen that for a long period of time the followers of both Vehicles lived peaceably side by side in the same monasteries of the Hīnayāna observance. Intellectual-historical examination of the philosophic schools of Mahāyāna reveals that the new movement received important influences from without.

Early tendencies toward Mahāyāna teachings are to be found in the philosophically inclined Hīnayāna schools whose writings are composed in Sanskrit. The major work of Hinayanist philosophy as set forth by the Sarvāstivādins is the *Abhidharma-kośa* of Vasubandhu, a dishearteningly lifeless product without metaphysical *élan*. This *Summa* of Hīnayāna dryly catalogues all the constituent parts of reality. The materialism of the pluralistic *dharma* theory is mitigated to some extent only by the moral law of *karma*. For if even *nirvāna*, which is listed as one of the constituent elements of reality, is conceived materialistically as a lifeless residue of the processes of living, nothing is left in the end but sheer materialism. Some expositors, indeed, regard this as the real substance of Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> The process of salvation is divested of its metaphysical character and is pressed into a mechanistic scheme.

This materialistic-pluralistic philosophy, however, exhausting itself in a maze of innumerable hairsplitting definitions and classifications, can hardly do justice to the religious experience of Hīnayāna. Both the meditative practices and the striving toward the absolute state of *nirvāna* give evidence of the genuine religious vitality in Hīnayāna, without which the development of Mahāyāna obviously could not be explained.<sup>6</sup>

The gradual growth of Mahāyāna thought brings about a complete change which touches practically all the basic Buddhist concepts. In philosophy, the theory of *dharma*s, shattered by criticism, gives way to an exclusive monist doctrine. The new doctrine of virtue (*pāramitā*) with the contemplative summit

of knowledge, is placed in the service of a higher wisdom. *Nirvāna* is coupled to the cosmic Buddha-vision and, as the goal of salvation, is equated with achieving Buddhahood. Buddha, *nirvāna*, and enlightenment express the absolute side of reality, whose manifestation is the phenomenal world of *samsāra*, in which all sentient beings go astray in their search for salvation. The Bodhisattva is presented as the embodiment of enlightenment. All these thoughts and motifs converge. And yet Mahāyāna proper comes into existence only when the Great Vehicle is proclaimed in conscious opposition to the less valuable Small Vehicle. It is significant that this should occur in the sutras, which claim religious authority. The power unleashing the movement stems, not from philosophical speculation, but from the inspiration of spiritual men. The sutras as the expression of the new religious consciousness are the directing force.<sup>7</sup> The predominant position of the mystical element becomes markedly apparent.

### *The Bodhisattva Ideal*

As the religious way of salvation for all sentient beings, Buddhism possesses the appropriate vehicle (*yāna*) which ever carries man from this sorrowful earthly existence to the opposite shore. The first means of salvation is provided by the vehicle of the hearer (*śrāvaka*). The hearer who comprehends the Buddhist teaching, and follows it, acquires in contemplation (*samādhi*) his own salvation and becomes a saint (*arhat*). All the early disciples of Buddha followed Shākyamuni and entered *nirvāna*. In the Pali Canon, self-enlightened Buddhas (*pratyekabuddha*) are mentioned occasionally who, through their own power, achieved perfect Buddhahood independently of the teaching of Buddha. The third vehicle, that of the Bodhisattva, is far superior to the two preceding ones; it alone is great and assures all sentient beings perfect salvation. With the highest authority



the Mahāyāna sutras disclose the absolute perfection of the Bodhisattva vehicle.

Mahāyāna doctrine is developed, religiously and philosophically, with the Bodhisattva ideal as its center. The term "Bodhisattva" signifies a being "attached [*sakta*] to enlightenment" or, simply, a "being [*sattva*] of enlightenment."<sup>8</sup> Though perfectly enlightened and in possession of the omniscience of a Buddha, the Bodhisattva forgoes final entrance into *nirvāna* in order to aid sentient beings on their path to enlightenment. For indeed all beings participate in the Buddha-nature and can achieve total enlightenment. The Bodhisattva ideal receives its significance from the basic Mahayanist doctrine of the innate Buddha-nature of all beings.

The way of the Bodhisattva to final enlightenment, the so-called "Bodhisattva career" (*bodhisattvacarya*), could be said to correspond to the Christian way of perfection, if the Bodhisattva were nothing but the image of the perfect disciple of Buddha. But in Mahāyāna Buddhism the Bodhisattva also performs a dogmatic function, without which the salvation of sentient beings could not be realized. Therefore the Bodhisattva is accorded a religious veneration second only to Buddha himself. Removed to the realm of the miraculous and magic, his contours are often effaced and are lost in cosmic dimensions. The mystical element is thus clearly discernible, both in the way of achievement and in the final state of the Bodhisattva.

A Bodhisattva is totally dedicated to the Law of Buddha. The Bodhisattva career begins with the awakening of the thought of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*) and the taking of the vow (*pranidhāna*) to ascend tirelessly through the perfections of all the stages until supreme enlightenment is attained in order to assist all sentient beings to obtain salvation. Various Mahāyāna scriptures explain the ten stages of the Bodhisattva's career.<sup>9</sup> According to the *Daśabhūmika Sutra*, the first six stages consist in the mastering of the different degrees of contempla-

tion aimed at in Hīnayāna mysticism, and especially of the four *dhyāna* stages. A meditation in ten stages on the twelve-linked causal chain is also mentioned. Having reached the seventh stage, the Bodhisattva now moves on (*dūramgamā*).

The peculiarity of the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva career in distinction to Hīnayāna is revealed in the practice of the Ten Perfect Virtues (*pāramitā*).<sup>10</sup> Originally, only six were named. In Mahāyāna the first five of these—namely, giving (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*), energy (*vīrya*), and meditation (*dhyāna*)—are directed toward the sixth, wisdom (*prajñā*), as the goal and fruit of all endeavor. Later, four further perfect virtues were added. Again the goal is excellence of knowledge (*jñāna*). *Jñāna* appears to connote primarily intellectual cognition, while *prajñā* points more to intuitive insight.<sup>11</sup> Evidently in the Mahayanist scheme of virtues the intellectual proficiencies occupy the key positions. With the practice of these perfections, the Bodhisattva in the seventh stage has entered the ocean of omniscience. He strides on, in his comprehension of the emptiness and unbornness of all things, to the tenth stage (*dharmameghā*), where he achieves “all forms of contemplation.” Seated on a vast lotus, he possesses the concentration called the “knowledge of the Omniscient One.” The sutra describes the magnificent scene of his consecration (*abhisheka*) in which he becomes manifest as the fully enlightened Buddha. But great compassion compels him to descend by skillful means from the Tushita heaven to earth, and without entering *nirvāna*, he sets out to save all sentient beings.

The Bodhisattva state is characterized by the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*). Without wisdom, the other five virtues, as well as skill in expedients, are worthless. *The Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom* says: “Though a Bodhisattva should bestow gifts through aeons as numerous as the sands of the Ganges, and should observe morality, practice patience, apply energy, and persist in meditation . . . if he were not embraced



by the Perfection of Wisdom and emptied by skill in expedients, he would fall to the level of a hearer (*śrāvaka*) or a *pratyeka-buddha*. . . ." <sup>12</sup> The Perfection of Wisdom is not to be realized without emptiness of the spirit. The unenlightened person hears the word "emptiness" and expresses his concept in signs. "The Way of the Bodhisattva is emptiness, or the way of that which is without sign." <sup>13</sup> The Perfection of Wisdom is beyond all concepts and words. But above all, the Bodhisattvas, who "find rest in one thought" (*eka-citta-prasādam*), are freed from the concept of self. "In these Bodhisattvas no perception of a self takes place, no perception of a being, no perception of a soul, no perception of a person." <sup>14</sup> Nor is their spirit hampered by the concept of Dharma or of the nonconcept. The Bodhisattva does not grasp at any concept; he clings to nothing. His Perfect Wisdom is void. This is the essence of highest wisdom: "A Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva should abide himself in the Perfection of *Prajñā* by abiding in emptiness." <sup>15</sup>

But though the Bodhisattva in possession of Perfect Wisdom sees through the emptiness of all things, he does not consummate his insights. For the sake of the salvation of sentient beings, he forgoes entrance into the eternal rest of *nirvāna*. He keeps close to the "borderline of reality" (*bhūtakoti*), never taking the step into *nirvāna* nor yet clinging to the unenlightened restlessness of *samsāra*. Though aware of the nothingness of all things and of the ultimate irrelevance of all exertions of the spirit, he never ceases to work for the benefit of sentient beings. "This logic of contradiction is what may be called the dialectics of *prajñā*." <sup>16</sup>

Suzuki sees in the psychology of the Bodhisattva one of the greatest achievements in the life of the spirit. He describes this curiously suspended attitude by comparisons approximating the paradox of Zen. The Bodhisattva holds "a spade in his hands and yet the tilling of the ground is done by him empty-handed. He is riding on the back of a horse and yet there is no rider in

the saddle and no horse under it. He passes over the bridge, and it is not the water that flows, but the bridge.”<sup>17</sup> The interconnection of illuminative knowledge (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karunā*) in the Bodhisattva is logically inexplicable. It remains an unsolved riddle. In vain does one seek an ontological basis. “It is again like the shooting of one arrow after another into the air by a man whose mastery of archery has attained a very high degree. He is able to keep all the arrows in the air making each arrow support the one immediately preceding. He does this as long as he wishes.”<sup>18</sup>

In his description of Bodhisattvahood, Suzuki emphasizes the kinship of *prajñā* with Zen. At the same time, the difference between Oriental and Western mysticism becomes evident. The Bodhisattva riddle is not solved in a *coincidentia oppositorum*, a unity of opposites, nor is it resolved by the shifting to a higher level. The contradiction remains, unsolved and insoluble, but enshrouded in a veil of unreality.

The ideal of Bodhisattvahood is engendered by the spirit of India, which is indifferent as to whether or not its concepts correspond to reality. Or rather, concepts, desires, wishes, and vows are considered to be realities as fully as are men and their deeds. In the face of Buddhist negativism and idealism all things vanish into the Void. What does it matter whether a Bodhisattva ever existed or whether he can exist? In the climate of *māyā*, creative fancy generated the Bodhisattva figure, something between Buddha and man, neither male nor female, the embodiment alike of illuminated knowledge and of great compassion (*mahākarunā*). The attraction of this concept for the people proved enormous. In Mahāyāna Buddhism the Bodhisattvas became the highly praised gods of salvation for all of erring mankind. Their compassion and miraculous power were soon esteemed more highly than their illuminated knowledge, though this was the root of their acts of salvation.<sup>19</sup>

The unreality of the Bodhisattva ideal impairs considerably



the value of the great compassion. The admirable heroism of these enlightened beings shows itself primarily in wishes and vows. Their deeds, which achieve the salvation of sentient beings, are magic wonders performed by fantastic powers. While the Bodhisattva saves all beings, no form of a sentient being enters his mind since his knowledge abides in emptiness. As an embodiment of the cosmic Wisdom, he is, at least theoretically, an impersonal being. For the same reason, the suspended attitude of the Bodhisattva is basically different from the detached love of the Christian saint. For the saint who remains unattached to his acts of charity, looking alone to God, whose right hand knows not what his left hand does (Matt. 6:3), realizes within himself full personal freedom. He recognizes and loves his fellow man as a person, in the God to whom his spirit ascends in untrammelled flight. The act of love which he performs for the sake of God is not for that reason any less real. The recipient is indeed enriched. Something actually happens; and that it should happen, and the manner in which it happens, are important.

The Bodhisattva ideal exercised a persistent influence on the whole of Buddhism, and particularly in Zen did it bear rich fruit. Up to the present day, the Bodhisattva's vows play an important role in the life of the Zen disciple. These vows are pronounced with fervor at the very outset of the spiritual career and are constantly repeated throughout the long years of practice:

However innumerable the sentient beings, I vow to save them all.  
However inexhaustible the passions, I vow to extinguish them all.  
However immeasurable the *dharma*s, I vow to master them all.  
However incomparable the truth of Buddha, I vow to attain it.

In the last of these four sentences the initiate binds himself to supreme enlightenment. Through his omniscient knowledge the Bodhisattva abides constantly in the realm of the Absolute.

The mystical character of intuitive insight is proper also to the enlightenment to which the Zen disciple aspires as he proceeds on the path to Bodhisattvahood.

### *Buddhology and Nirvāna*

The Bodhisattva ideal is the new creative force motivating Mahāyāna. The Mahāyāna development, which first proceeds without break from Hīnayāna, ends by transforming all basic Buddhist concepts. Japanese scholars regard the evolution of Buddhist dogma as the chief characteristic of Mahāyāna. For this reason they place the beginning of the new movement in the Docetic tendencies of the Mahāsāṃghikas.<sup>20</sup> The various embellishments of the Buddha figure, an early outgrowth of a natural impulse of veneration, at the outset scarcely touched the substance of his teaching.

The dogmatic concepts of Western Docetism are remote from Buddhist thought. Buddhism draws no boundary between man and God.<sup>21</sup> The divine beings who appear in the sutras, in cult, and in art stem mostly from mythology and are classified with the sentient beings who move in the birth-and-death cycles. The elevation of Buddha into the superhuman realm takes on significance when it gives rise to metaphysical speculations about the Absolute. Emerging originally from the multitude of errant beings in need of salvation, the Buddha transcends the boundary so definitively as to belong to absolute reality. He ceases to belong to the merely human side. His earthly origin, though not forgotten, is nonetheless reduced to an insignificant phase in the endless history of his acts of grace. Essentially, he *is* the Absolute.

This is the potent new discovery of Mahāyāna, which was anticipated religiously by the growing tendency toward ritual worship, and philosophically through an influx of Indian monistic pantheism. In the Mahayanist view, the Buddha is pri-



marily and essentially a transcendent being. But since Buddhism permits no logical categories for the description of otherworldly reality, and since it denies substantiality and limits causality to the realm of becoming in *samsāra*, the Mahayanists could not regard Buddha as God and Creator. His being lies beyond all conceptual expression and is ineffably mysterious. The identification of the final absolute mystic state of *nirvāna* with the Buddha arose consistently out of Mahāyāna Buddhology. But the world of becoming also is veiled in the mystery of Buddha. The enlightened eye of *prajñā* beholds the universal reality of Buddha, namely, the unity of *samsāra* and *nirvāna*.

The consummate expression of the new Buddhology is to be found in the doctrine of the Three Buddha-Bodies, which belongs to the central dogma of Mahāyāna and is accepted by all schools.<sup>22</sup> The diverse and contradictory aspects of Buddhist doctrine were systematized and brought into final form only at a late date in the philosophical school of the Yogācāra. As a rule the three Buddha-bodies are designated as (1) "the Transformation Body" (*nirmanakāya*)—later sects here distinguish the complete manifestation of the Perfected One (e.g., that of Shākyamuni) and the partial manifestations (as the appearance of the great Buddhist teachers); (2) "the Body of Enjoyment" (*sambhogakāya*)—the idealized figure of Buddha, which invites personification (e.g., the famous Buddha Amitābha [Jap.: Amida]); and (3) "the Cosmic Body" of the Dharma (*dharmakāya*)—which is none other than the ultimate reality of Buddhahood itself.

Obviously, in this Buddhist view the most diverse concepts can be satisfied. The infinite phenomenal possibilities invented by fantasy provide the substance for a pantheon of numerous Buddhas, which nonetheless possesses its unity in the single Buddha-nature of the *dharmakāya*. The urge to virtual worship was enabled to clothe the blessed body of Buddha in an ineffable splendor of light and beauty, to endow it with infinite

wisdom, power, and compassion, and to depict the Pure Buddha-Land as the home of all human yearning. The basic metaphysics of this Buddhology is pantheistic or, as the Buddhists prefer to say, cosmotheistic. The corresponding anthropology is mystical. The deepest concern of man must be the attainment of the enlightened view, for only the illumined one can grasp the perfect Buddha-reality. Enlightenment signifies at the same time the realization of man's own deepest self, namely, the Buddha-nature inherent in all life.

The superiority of Mahāyāna to Hīnayāna derives chiefly from its teaching of a mystic, monistic vision which promises to satisfy to a large extent the fundamental yearning of the human spirit for unity.<sup>23</sup> The concept of a double truth, one exoteric and involved in the plurality of things, the other esoteric, in which All and Nothing coincide, permeates the whole of Indian thought, and is especially pronounced in Mahāyāna. This problem is most advanced philosophically in the dialectics of Nāgārjuna, whose radical, logical, and ontological criticism pushes Buddhist philosophy close to the borders of nihilism. Significantly, it is saved from this conclusion, not by philosophical speculation, but through mystical intuition alone. Here lies the difference from the genuine philosophical position of Shankara. The philosophy of Nāgārjuna rejoins the Buddhist mystic way of salvation.

Among the religious practices of Mahāyāna, meditation stands out, since it alone can lead to the realization of the monistic vision. The personal veneration as an outgrowth of popular piety, no matter how preponderant in terms of the essence of Mahāyāna, remains on a secondary plane. In all the Mahayanist schools, the meditative element plays a more or less important role. This is also true in Amidism, where the endless repetition of the Buddha's name lulls the soul into a state of complete rest.<sup>24</sup> Tantrism and Zen in different ways pursue the



same objective, namely, the breakthrough to a higher, hidden truth, the knowledge of which transfers the illuminated one into the sphere of the Absolute, where All is One and Buddha is the One.

### 3 *The Mahāyāna Sutras and Zen*

#### *The Position of Zen in Intellectual History*

Ever since Zen was introduced to the Western world, it has aroused increasing interest and esteem, not merely among a few Orientalists but among wide circles of the intellectually alert who are concerned with the inner renewal and spiritual growth of man. In their promotion of Zen, its admirers fall into differing groups in accordance with their viewpoints.

The Buddhist societies working in America and Europe seek to adapt themselves to Western understanding. Nonetheless the tie with Buddhism seems to them to be disadvantageous to the Zen movement. Therefore some advocates of Zen in the West seek to extract its true kernel from the Buddhist shell.

The representatives of modern psychology, who detect a relationship between Zen and depth psychology, believe that the introduction of Zen methods will help in the guidance of men, both the healthy and the psychopathic, toward true individuation. The question arises, of course, whether Zen can be separated from Buddhism without harm to its real substance, and whether without religious bonds it will remain meaningful and effective. In other words, can Zen be used simply as a method toward man's self-realization, in the same way as Yoga is employed?



A comparison between Zen and Yoga forces us to notice the substantial differences in their historical settings. Admittedly, in its origin Yoga was bound up with the religion of India, but it allied itself readily with varied philosophical and religious systems, such as Sāmkhyā, Bhakti Yoga, and Hīnayāna Buddhism. Since it lacked a sharply defined religious character, it could easily be secularized by a psychology which sought to enhance its own "doctrine of salvation" by the assimilation of ancient Oriental wisdom. In any event there remain some unclarified problems in the relationship of Yoga to religion and psychotherapy.

With regard to Zen, however, the historical situation is different. Sprung out of Buddhist soil and cultivated as a school in its own right, with a hierarchical organization and an established temple system as it flourishes today in Japan, Zen is completely Buddhist. Suzuki, who knows the real situation and rightly maintains the unity of all Buddhism, regards Zen, whose "main ideas are derived from Buddhism," as "a legitimate development of the latter."<sup>1</sup> His books, however, being distinguished by lively suggestiveness, abundance of material, and absorbing exposition but not by clear order and transparent logic, have contributed to conceptual confusion. Over and over Suzuki stresses the independence and incomparability of Zen as nothing other than personal experience which, in its pure subjectivity, forgoes all sub- and superstructures, appears spontaneously without cause, and is inexpressible in words. Indeed, this experience is so far beyond words that it transcends and embraces all philosophy and theology. All clear delineations vanish in Suzuki's expositions for his European-American audience. For him, Zen is an absolute, and one cannot define its place in intellectual history.

Suzuki's scholarly works contain much valuable material regarding the relationship of Zen to Mahāyāna Buddhism. These works have proved helpful in the attempt to trace the roots of

Zen to the early Mahāyāna sūtras, out of which soil it arose under the influence of Chinese thought. For, to comprehend the formative forces of Zen, one must consider equally its origin in Mahāyāna and the peculiar impulse of the Chinese spirit.

We set forth first the mystic utterances in the Mahāyāna sūtras which later crystallized in Zen. This inquiry is important, not merely historically, but also for our understanding and evaluation of Zen. All mysticism is conditioned in character by the spiritual setting in which it originated and flourished. Thus Zen is stamped with the Chinese and Japanese religiosity of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

#### Prajñāpāramitā—*Transcendental Wisdom*

All the schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism are based on a group of sūtras known by the name of *Prajñāpāramitā*—the *Sūtras of Transcendental Wisdom*—the oldest portions of which apparently go back to the first century B.C.<sup>2</sup> These sūtras are not philosophical treatises but a religious message. The new doctrine is proclaimed authoritatively and is couched in fanciful and magical images and symbols, but lacks a metaphysical basis. The very word is the “Void” (*śūnya*), and its assertion goes far beyond the Hinayanist negation of substantial reality and the doctrine of Nonego and the inconstancy of all things. All phenomena as such, including the external, visible world as well as the subjective inner world with its rational knowledge, are declared “void.”<sup>3</sup> This emptiness of all reality is beheld by the enlightened eye of wisdom (*prajñā*), the organ of intuitive knowledge, which brings about all-knowing (*sarvajñatā*). The psychic process is designated as enlightenment (*bodhi*), and enlightenment brings with it omniscience as its fruit. Thus wisdom, enlightenment, and omniscience are regarded as coordinate and inseparable. When the Bodhisattva, in the possession of supreme enlightenment, nonetheless forgoes its fruit,



omniscience, he does so out of compassion for errant sentient beings to whose salvation from the cycle of rebirths he has dedicated himself.

Negativism and paradox are the striking characteristics of the proclamation of the supreme transcendental wisdom. With incomparable emphasis and countless repetition, the sutras inculcate the paradox of "the Void." In the *Diamond Sutra* we read:

The Lord continued: "What do you think, Subhuti, can the Tathāgata be seen by the possession of his marks?"—Subhuti replied: "No indeed, O Lord. And why? What has been taught by the Tathāgata as the possession of marks, that is truly a no-possession of no-marks."

The Tathāgata spoke of the "heap of merit" as a non-heap. That is how the Tathāgata speaks of "heap of merit" . . .

The Tathāgata has taught that the dharmas special to the Buddhas are just as not a Buddha's special dharmas . . .

Just that which the Tathāgata has taught as the wisdom which has gone beyond, just that He has taught as not gone beyond . . .

The Tathāgata has taught this as the highest (*paramā*) perfection (*pāramitā*). And what the Tathāgata teaches as the highest perfection, that also innumerable Blessed Buddhas do teach . . .<sup>4</sup>

No effort is too great to grasp the emptiness of all things, for "deep is the designation of the empty, the markless, the inclinationless, the nonachieving, the nonoriginating, the non-being, the passionless, the annihilation, the extinction, the expiration."<sup>5</sup>

In the "Religion of the *Prajñāpāramitā*,"<sup>6</sup> negativism and paradox are not to be understood relativistically or nihilistically, nor yet dialectically; rather, they stand in the service of the mystical intuition of truth. After the eye of wisdom has comprehended the Void, has unmasked all false appearance, and has destroyed attachment to illusory concepts, it beholds, in enlightenment, things as they are, and also the human spirit, in the simple *thusness* of being. "Thusness" (*tathatā*), in

the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, is the only positive expression regarding reality. All other assertions are stated negatively. And even regarding thusness, the sūtra is able to say that it "has not come, not gone," is "not past, not future, not present," "without change and without distinction," "a thusness without duality . . . a nondualistic thusness."<sup>7</sup>

The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* lead to the religious experience in which both the emptiness of things and their thusness are comprehended, simultaneously and in one, as the passing darkness and the coming light. The Void is unutterable and unfathomable, without growth or diminution. "Thusness is this matchless, perfect enlightenment. And this thusness neither increases nor decreases."<sup>8</sup> In the same way the sūtra speaks of enlightenment: "The perfection of knowledge is empty; it neither increases nor decreases."<sup>9</sup> Emptiness, thusness, and the wisdom of perfect knowledge all stand on the same plane, exalted above the fluctuation of change, and thus compose the absolute state attained in mystical experience.

Zen regards itself rightly as the legitimate heir of the wisdom of those deep and mystically dark sūtras which, according to the legend, could not be comprehended by contemporaries and were preserved in the Serpent Palace until the time when they were brought forth by Nāgārjuna, the bold thinker and enlightened saint.<sup>10</sup> Nāgārjuna, probably in the second century A.D., built up his philosophy of the Middle Way (*mādh-yamika*) on the *Sūtras of Transcendental Wisdom*, which have as their apex intuitive enlightenment. Revered as a Bodhisattva throughout all Mahāyāna Buddhism, Nāgārjuna is reckoned among the patriarchs by both mystical schools, the Tantrist Shingon and Zen, and is regarded as the most important Indian link in the long chain of witnesses since Shākyamuni. The chief elements in the doctrine of Transcendental Wisdom—negativism, paradox, religious experience in intuitive cognition, the comprehension of things in their thusness—all flowed



from the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* through Nāgārjuna into Zen, embedding themselves deeply in its substance.

Paradox could unfold with virtuosity in the peculiar spiritual climate of Zen. The comprehension of things in their thusness is what the Chinese Zen masters were to call enlightenment in daily life. The stating of a simple fact in ordinary life as the answer to the profound inquiry of a *kōan* frequently leads to sudden insight.

A monk once asked Chao-chou, "Master, I am still a novice. Show me the way!" Chao-chou said, "Have you finished your breakfast?" "I have," replied the monk. "Then go wash your bowl!" Thereupon the monk was enlightened.<sup>11</sup>

Suzuki cites as illustrations of "*prajñā* as handled by Zen masters" a number of similar instances, among them the following pregnant pronouncement of a Chinese Zen master from the early Ming period (fourteenth century):

Yün-mên one day produced his staff before an assembly of monks and said: "Common people naïvely take it for a reality; the two Yānas analyze it and declare it to be non-existent; the Pratyekabuddhas declare it to be a Māyā-like existence; and the Bodhisattvas accept it as it is, declaring it empty. As regards Zen followers, when they see a staff, they simply call it a staff. If they want to walk, they just walk; if they want to sit, they just sit. They should not in any circumstances be ruffled and distracted."<sup>12</sup>

Here metaphysical insight into the thusness of things has been made into a concrete way of life, which derives its validity from the Mahayanist doctrine of Transcendental Wisdom. Hui-nêng, the Sixth Patriarch and one of the greatest figures in Chinese Zen, was awakened to the great enlightenment by this verse from the *Diamond Sūtra*: "Let your mind take its rise without fixing it anywhere."<sup>13</sup>

The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* are eagerly studied and recited in Zen monasteries even today, especially the brief *Prajñāpāramitā-hridaya Sūtra*. The magic formula at the end, which seems

to contradict the metaphysical spirit of the sūtra, is regarded by Suzuki as a *kōan*.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, he regards the whole sūtra as an introduction to religious experience in accordance with the *kōan*. By means of negation and paradox, the inadequacy of rational understanding as a cognitive channel for the realization of actual reality and ultimate truth is driven home. The negations are the indispensable prerequisite for a breakthrough to the affirmation which arises in the comprehension of thusness. Thus sūtra and *kōan*, each in its own way, arouse the same psychic process of enlightenment.

#### *Religious Cosmotheism in the Avatamsaka Sūtras*

European literature gives scant information regarding the content of the many volumes in the group of the *Avatamsaka Sūtras*, which in China gave rise to the school of Hua-yen. This school, transplanted to Japan as the Kegon school, played an important role in the Buddhism of the Nara era. Even down to the present, none of the *Avatamsaka Sūtras* has as yet been fully translated into a European language. Isolated quotations alone cannot convey the full religious impact of these sūtras.

Here again the essays of Suzuki offer the European reader considerable insight.<sup>15</sup> Couched in light, paraphrastic form, they not merely set forth the basic ideas of the *Avatamsaka Sūtras* but also make the poetic texture of this religiously inspired work vividly evident. The connection between Zen and the *Avatamsaka Sūtras* thereby becomes clear. To Suzuki, Zen "is the practical consummation of Buddhist thought in China and the Kegon (*Avatamsaka*) philosophy is its theoretical culmination." The two are related in this manner so that "the philosophy of Zen is Kegon and the teaching of Kegon bears its fruit in the life of Zen."<sup>16</sup>



The basic core of the religious proclamation of the *Avatamsaka Sutras* is the central Mahayanist doctrine, i.e., the Buddhahood of all sentient beings, the identity of the absolute state in *nirvāna* and the relative phenomenal world in *samsāra*, and the enlightened way of the Bodhisattva, who is endowed with wisdom (*prajñā*) and compassion (*karunā*) in order to guide errant beings, caught in the cycle of rebirths, to Buddhahood. The *Avatamsaka Sutras* also prefer the negative mode of expression, the *theologia negativa* of the school of Transcendental Wisdom, which stems from the knowledge of the emptiness of all things.

The conviction that the supreme liberating knowledge is attained by intuitive insight is likewise common to all Mahāyāna. The *Avatamsaka Sutras* state impressively the reciprocal relationship and interpenetration of the absolute Buddha-nature and the world of individual phenomena. The Buddha is all, and all is the Buddha. But this inclusive unity does not rob the phenomena of their individual character. Certainly things do not possess a self-nature, for all self-nature is swallowed up in identity with the Buddha. And yet each individual thing has its special meaning in the universe.

Examples help to make clear this interpenetration. There is the analogy of Indra's net, made of precious gems, hanging over Indra's palace. "In each of these gems are found reflected all the other gems composing the net; therefore, when it is picked up, we see in it not only the entirety of the net, but every one of the gems therein."<sup>17</sup> Or, here is a burning candle, surrounded on all sides by mirrors which reflect in a perfect interplay of lights the central light of the candle and the light as reflected by the other mirrors.<sup>18</sup> The *Avatamsaka Sutras* do not weary of depicting the interrelatedness and interpenetration of all things. In every particle of dust the whole universe is contained, and every particle of dust engenders all the powers of

the cosmos. For every particle of dust is the Buddha, who in a single pore of his skin can reveal the history of all the worlds from their beginning until their destruction.

The *Avatamsaka Sūtras* depict the universal reality of the Buddha under the figure of the Tower of Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, who represents the absolute Dharma-world (*dharmadhātu*), or the cosmic Buddha-body. According to the explanation of the sūtra, in this tower "the objects are arrayed in such a way that their mutual separateness no more exists, as they are all fused, but each object thereby never loses its individuality, for the image of the Maitreya devotee is reflected in each one of the objects, and this not only in specific quarters, but everywhere all over the Tower, so that there is a thoroughgoing mutual interreflection of images."<sup>19</sup> The final goal of the efforts of all sentient beings is entrance into the Tower of Maitreya, which signifies the attainment of perfect enlightenment, or entrance into the light of the Dharma-world, in which there will be no more spatial juxtaposition, since all things, illumined by one light, interpenetrate one another in the unity of Buddha. The enlightened one abides nowhere and everywhere; he is infinite light. As he possesses Buddha in every particle of dust, he grasps eternity in every moment. The boundaries of space and time have melted away. The Buddha-reality is pure spirit.

The doctrine of the *Avatamsaka* is a religious cosmotheism. The sūtra which tells of the pilgrimage of Sudana to the Tower of Maitreya, and of the glories of this miraculous tower, brings home to the believer, in trembling awe, the total reality and unlimited power of Buddha. But the supreme mystery revealed to him is that this world of appearances, and every manifestation in it, as well as the Tower of Maitreya itself, are nothing other than the Buddha.

While the *Avatamsaka Sūtras* proclaim the oneness of the Buddha-reality as a religious revelation, the Chinese school of



- rather provides the Buddhist with a pure ascetic discipline for his daily religious life (1), pp. 99 f.
9. Also in the Upanishads and the *Yoga Sutra* (II, p. 38), *brahmacarya* is commended as conducive to meditation. Regarding the meaning of the term, see Thomas (2), p. 44.
  10. Beckh interprets the Four Immeasurables as the mental state corresponding to the first commandment (*śīla*) in Yoga, namely, the commandment to protect life (*ahimsā*) (2), pp. 27-29. According to Heiler these four (stages), which appear also in the *Yoga Sutra* (I, p. 33), present "an independent and parallel scale of concentration, equal in value" (p. 81). However, Anesaki-Takakusu and Beckh take the Four Immeasurables as the exercise preliminary to *dhyāna*. Likewise Kern (p. 471) regards them as the first and introductory meditations. In the *Visuddhi Magga*, Buddhaghosa includes them among the forty subjects of meditation (*kammatthāna*) (Eng. tr.: Nānamoli, pp. 354-71; Ger. tr.: Nyanatiloka, pp. 372-89). Against Heiler's view it can be said that in the Four Immeasurables we have to do with ascetic practices devoid of real mystical character.
  11. P. 9.
  12. See Glasenapp (3), pp. 44, 46. The seat (*āsana*) is the third stage (*anga*) in the *Yoga Sutra*. The seat (Pali: *pallanka*; Skt.: *pariyanka*) is also the prerequisite of Buddhist meditation. The *Samaññaphala Sutta* presents the monk seated in meditation. See Rhys-Davids, pp. 82, 86.
  13. Heiler, p. 9. Likewise Beckh regards consciousness as the primary element in the Buddhist breathing technique (2), p. 42.
  14. The superhuman capacities which in Yoga are called *vibhuti* are also mentioned in the Buddhist formula for purification from sin (*pāti-mokha*), a fact which Thomas takes as evidence that "Yoga is an essential part of the primitive doctrine" (2), p. 17.
  15. See Glasenapp (2), p. 108.
  16. Beckh (2), p. 11.
  17. For detailed evidence, see Heiler, pp. 44-47. Heiler believes that both traditions, namely Buddhism and Yoga, "go back to a common older root." In the same way Hauer concludes that "the two ways, Yoga and Buddhism, are different expressions of one and the same movement" (1), p. 39. Vallée-Poussin assesses the "predominantly psychic and hypnotic Yoga" (Heiler speaks similarly of the "mystic psychotechnique" of Yoga [p. 44]) and terms early Buddhism "a branch of Yoga" (1), p. 12. In comparing Buddhism and Yoga, see also Keith, pp. 143 ff.
  18. Regarding the history and meaning of the term *nirvāna*, cf. Thomas (2), pp. 121 ff.; Ui (3), pp. 37 ff.; Vallée-Poussin (1), p. 54.
  19. Quoted by Oldenberg, p. 305.
  20. *Udāna* VIII, p. 9; in Oldenberg, pp. 307 f.
  21. The chief exponents of the nihilist *nirvāna* interpretation are Childers, J. D. Alwis, J. A. Eklund, J. Dahlmann, and H. Oldenberg in the early edition of Oldenberg's work *Buddha*. Later Oldenberg came to the conclusion that *nirvāna* signifies something absolute, not in the sense of the cause of the universe but as an absolute final goal. Glasenapp writes: "*Nirvāna* is a relative, not an absolute nothingness" (3), p. 235.

- Ui does not give a nihilistic interpretation to primitive Buddhism nor does he ascribe to it a mystic state. Rather he explains *nirvāna* (in the sense of the formula for dependent origination [*paṭiccasamuppāda*]) as the realization of the relativity of being. It is noteworthy that he, with many other exponents of Mahāyāna, finds a nihilistic version of *nirvāna* in Hīnayāna Buddhism (3), pp. 44 f. There is a strong note of negativism in the thirteen explanations of the word *nirvāna* in the *Vibhāshā* (28, 18), which Vallée-Poussin cites (1), p. 54.
22. Thus Keith, p. 63; Vallée-Poussin (2).
  23. Ui (3), p. 40. The twelve-linked chain has been variously interpreted by Buddhists themselves. While the Mahāyāna Buddhologists such as Ūi see in this formula the earliest Buddhist expression for the relativity of being, Hīnayāna Buddhists interpret it as the rise in causal dependence through the three times of past, present, and future. Which interpretation corresponds to the original meaning cannot be determined with certainty. The first explanation is more metaphysical, while the second corresponds to the Indian notion of the cycle of rebirths in *samsāra*.
  24. *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, Chaps. 3, 5.
  25. See Glaserapp (3), p. 224, and Rosenberg and Stcherbatsky (1), who present the Hīnayanist philosophy in detail.
  26. *Udana* VIII, p. 3; in Oldenberg, p. 326.
  27. *Samyutta-Nikāya* IV, pp. 374 ff.; quoted by Oldenberg, p. 321.
  28. *Sutta-Nipāta*, pp. 1074 ff.; quoted by Oldenberg, p. 325.
  29. Regarding the two *nirvāna*, see Thomas (2), pp. 131 f. The distinction between a this-worldly and an other-worldly *nirvāna*, which is common in Hīnayanist literature, does not go back to primitive Buddhism, according to Ūi, but belongs rather to the later Hīnayanist thought. According to Ūi, the true concept of *nirvāna* signifies the attainment of Buddhahood, which has no relationship to physical death. Since the attainment of Buddhahood in this life was beyond the understanding of later Buddhists, and they nonetheless demanded results from their ascetic exertions, Ūi thinks that they distinguished between the perfect *nirvāna* without a remainder or substrate and the imperfect *nirvāna* in which a substrate remains. This distinction was combined with the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, which likewise did not belong to original Buddhism.

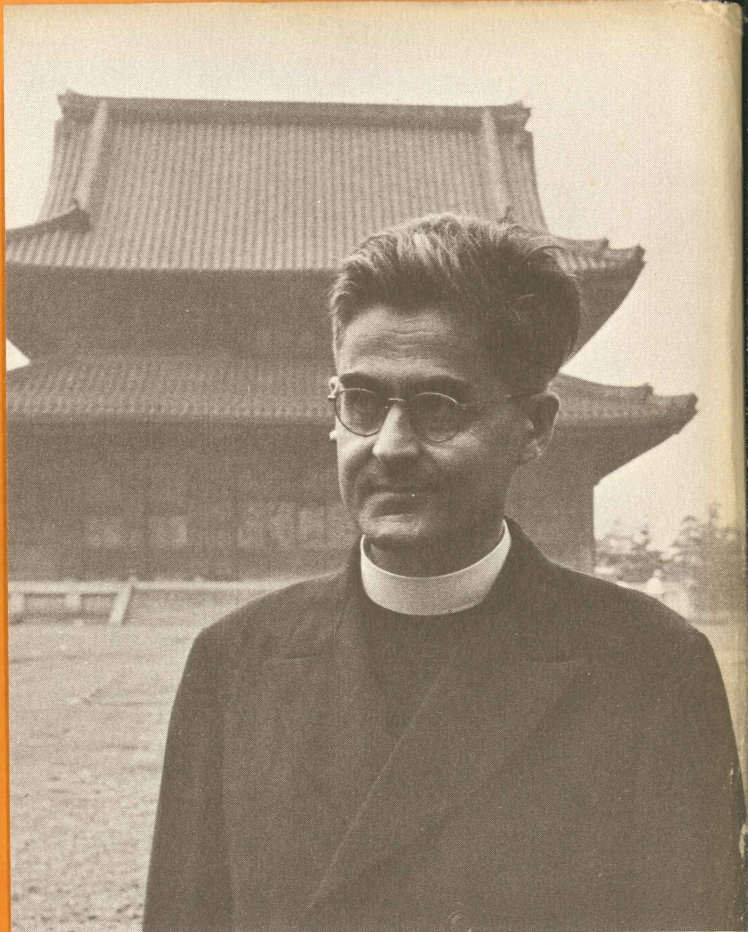
### Mysticism Within Mahāyāna

1. Practically all recent treatments of Buddhism distinguish between the original doctrine of Shākyamuni and the later development of Hīnayāna. Regamey traces the development successively through precanonical Buddhism, the Lesser Vehicle, and the Great Vehicle. Conze includes in his book on Buddhism (2) an informative "Table of Dates." The first entry in this table under the heading "Hīnayāna" is put at 246 B.C., nearly three hundred years after Buddha. In the small edition of



the highest stage of monastic asceticism. While in the Theravādin teachings the term "Bodhisattva" signifies only a preliminary stage on the way to Buddhahood and is applied especially to Śhākyamuni, the Sarvāstivādins combine with the Bodhisattva ideal new ideas, which are pregnant with the future, especially the two concepts of the inherent Buddhahood of all living beings and the helping of living beings on their way to deliverance. As an offshoot of the Sarvāstivādins, the Sautrāntikas, whose further development prepared the way for the doctrine of Mahāyāna, arose. A strong Mahayanist tendency is to be found also in the Lokottaravādins, who arose as an offshoot of the Mahāsāṃghikas. Among these is to be found the Mahāvastu school which, in the *Daśabhūmika* chapter (not to be confused with the Mahayanist *Daśabhūmika Sutra*), deals with the ten stages (*bhūmi*) of the Bodhisattva career.

7. Thus D. T. Suzuki remarks appropriately: "It is to be remembered that the spiritual vitality of Buddhism lies in its sutras and not in its shastras so-called, which are philosophical treatises, and this is what we naturally expect of religious literature. Whoever the compilers of the Mahāyāna sutras may be, they are genuine expressions of the deepest spiritual experiences gone through by humanity as typified in this case by Indian minds." (Introduction to B. L. Suzuki, p. xxx)
8. Thomas (2), p. 167.
9. A detailed description of the ten Bodhisattva stages is to be found in the *Daśabhūmika Sutra*, quoted by Thomas (2), pp. 205-10. Filliozat presents the same stages according to the *Mahāyāna Sūtralankāra* (pp. 571 f).
10. The list of the Ten Perfect Virtues in the Pali Canon differs from the ten Mahayanist *pāramitā*. See Filliozat, p. 555.
11. See B. L. Suzuki, p. 60. The Chinese characters used in the translation point in the direction of this distinction.
12. German translation of Walleser (2), p. 99.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
14. Conze (4), p. 33.
15. In Suzuki (4), p. 95.
16. Suzuki (3), p. 314.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 31 f.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
19. In Mahāyāna Buddhism the concept of the Bodhisattva was broadened. In addition to the heavenly Beings of Enlightenment, great historical personalities such as Nāgārjuna, Asanga, and others were venerated as Bodhisattvas. Finally, every enlightened and saintly person, whether bonze or layman, came to be called a Bodhisattva because of his great knowledge and virtue. Nonetheless the distinction between the three named kinds of Bodhisattvas remains alive in the religious consciousness. The heavenly Beings of Enlightenment and the historical personalities are not placed on the same level of veneration.
20. See Ui (1), pp. 160 f.; cf. B. L. Suzuki, pp. 36 f.
21. Thomas calls attention in his depiction of the Bodhisattva career to the fundamental difference between the standpoint of Buddhism and that



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