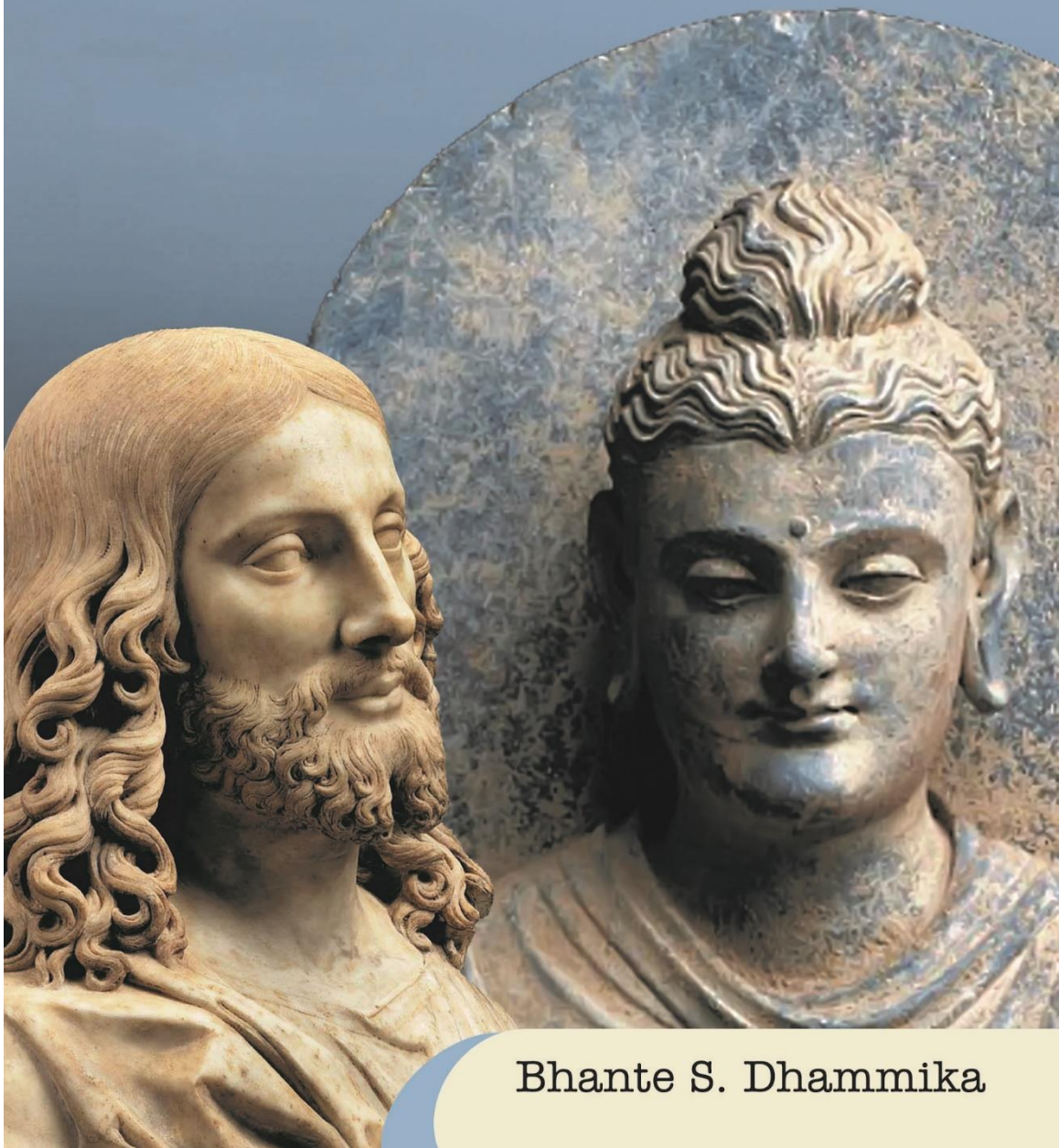


JESUS AND THE BUDDHA

A Study of Their Commonalities
and Contrasts



Bhante S. Dhammika

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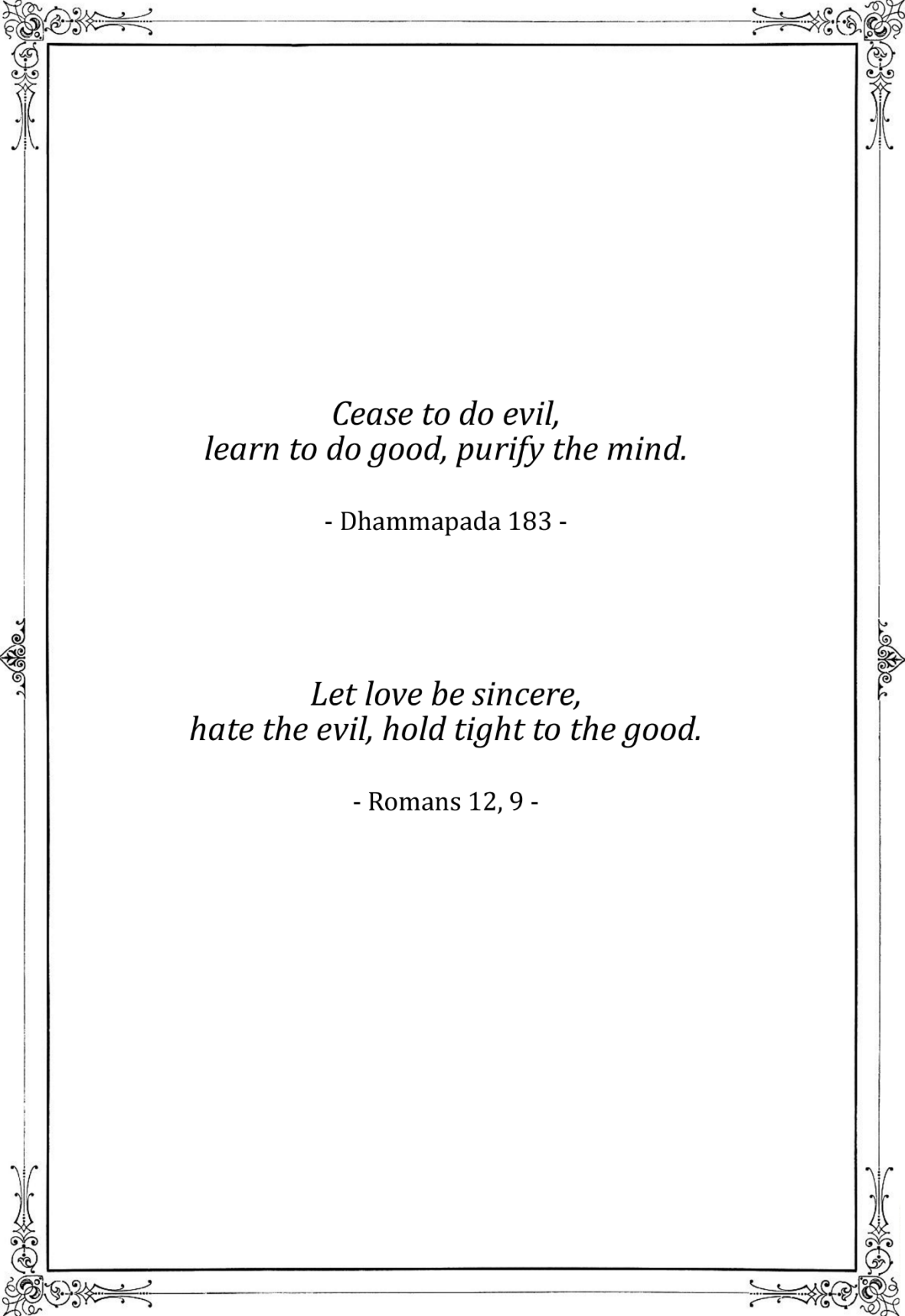
Bhante S. Dhammika

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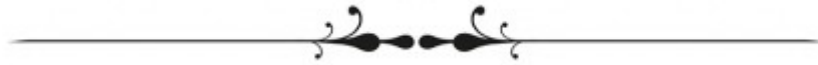
*Cease to do evil,
learn to do good, purify the mind.*

- Dhammapada 183 -

*Let love be sincere,
hate the evil, hold tight to the good.*

- Romans 12, 9 -

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Foreword



Reflection on great personalities, those with sublime virtues, is a skillful act according to Buddhism. This book on Jesus and the Buddha is one such reflection by a Buddhist monk, teacher and writer, known across the Buddhist world particularly for his writings on various aspects of the teachings, history and culture of Buddhism, Bhante Shravasti Dhammika.

In the present work Bhante Dhammika explores the challenging and sensitive theme of a comparative study of two great religious leaders, Jesus and the Buddha. Typical studies in this genre are undertaken by people who know one religion better than the other. Here we have the exception of a writer who is familiar with both religions, one he inherited from his birth and the other he adopted subsequently. The work is testimony to the fact that he has studied both with care. Among its many virtues the most impressive is the impartiality and objectivity with which he treats his subject.

The book is meant for a wide readership, including both Christians and Buddhists, not just for the academics whose study of religion does not always form a part of their existential needs. Even though the book is for the ordinary reader this does not mean that it relies on vague generalizations, superficial research, unchecked quotes or unverified popular beliefs. The author substantiates what he says with textual and other evidence, and carefully sorts out facts from fiction. In other words, Bhante Dhammika takes the ordinary reader very seriously and helps him/her to develop a more realistic view of the two religions.

The underlying assumption of the book seems to be that one should know not only one's own religion but also those of others. One may wonder why an ordinary believer should know other religions at all. Although it appears true that anyone who is content with their own religion does not need to care about other religions, in the globalized world of today in which physical proximity is a fact of life, one cannot ignore the other or pretend it does not exist. A knowledge of the other religions can be the starting point of understanding the other. At the same time, there can be many things different religions can share, and also there may be things one can learn from them even though the fundamentals of one's own religion need not be open for negotiation.

It is important that one is convinced of one's own religion. This state of being convinced of one's own religion amounts to considering other religions different and even untrue in some specific sense. What should one do about what one considers to be different and false? Looking at the history of Christianity, the

answer to this question has always been to replace (in this case) Buddhism with Christianity. Sustained proselytization in many parts of the traditional Buddhist world (and elsewhere), particularly by new evangelical organizations continues to be the means to achieve this end. As Bhante Dhammika says: “proselytizing is not just an unspoken way of saying ‘I cannot accept your belief’, it is a demonstration of it as well.” This does not mean that religious people should not share their faith with others. The point is that it has to be done with right attitudes and right motivations, compassionately and openly. Another response has been to underplay the differences and maintain that all religions are at heart the same. The concept of “anonymous Christians” developed in 1960s by the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner is one example of this attitude. Another is the more recent development of ‘dual belonging’ or ‘multiple belonging’ in which some Christians claim that they are simultaneously both Christian and Buddhist.

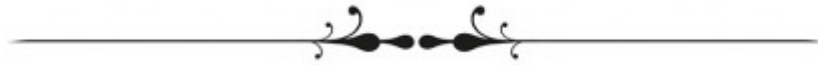
The policy of replacement is not acceptable because it is based on the unhealthy assumption that what is different from my beliefs should not exist or does not have a right to exist. This can only lead to insensitivity and arrogance. The other attitude of underplaying the differences, apart from being intellectually naïve, seems to be rooted in the mistaken view that to assert and admit differences is to offend the other. Bhante Dhammika’s question: “Is it not possible for people to disagree about even questions of great moment and still be friendly, accepting and respectful towards each other?” should prompt us to consider that people can still be courteous and kind to those of different beliefs and work for their well-being without any hidden motives. Finally, Bhante Dhammika gives us in summary form what may be considered the basics of genuine inter-religious co-existence: To hold and be true to one’s own faith, to openly and humbly learn from other faiths, to respect other faiths by not trying to replace them with one’s own.

I believe that Bhante Dhammika’s monograph, in addition to being a mine of interesting information and insights, gives a positive message and much needed guidance on how to combine religiosity with humility, humanity and mutual respect. I enjoyed reading this work while learning from it. I hope you will do the same.

Asanga Tilakaratne

Senior Chair Professor of Pali and Buddhist Studies
Department of Buddhist Studies
University of Colombo, Colombo

Introduction



The Buddha Gotama and Jesus of Nazareth are two of the most significant individuals in history. A hundred civilizations and countless millions of lives have been shaped by their ideas. Until recently, the meeting of Buddhism and Christianity was not a happy one. Christianity arrived in several traditional Buddhist lands in the wake of colonial armies and with a highly developed sense of superiority, and Buddhism was generally dismissed as empty idol worship. With a better understanding of Buddhism by Westerners in the second half of the 19th and the early 20th centuries, this stance became more difficult to maintain and the Buddha came to be regarded as a great teacher and his ethics were acknowledged to be as lofty as those of Christianity, at least by the more open-minded Westerners. Nonetheless, the overall assessment of Buddhism remained; it was inferior to Christianity. Today, amongst main-line and liberal churches, there is a willingness to engage with Buddhism in an open and respectful manner and on equal terms. This new openness has led to a desire for studies comparing the lives and teachings of the two great masters. However, there are several obstacles which make an in-depth comparison between the two challenging, so few of the attempts done so far are of much value.

The first problem is that the Buddha lived at least 500 years before Jesus, when writing had not come into use in India. There are no contemporary written records of him or anyone else or of any events connected to him. There is a plethora of histories, letters, inscriptions and other texts from Jesus' time although none of them mention him, which is curious given the Bible's claim that he was very well-known. Nonetheless, the documents that are available amply fill out the background of Jesus' career and sometimes even mention persons and events connected with him.

Then there is the problem of archaeology. This discipline actually began as a Christian endeavour in the 1830s, with Edward Robinson trying to find evidence for the Bible in the Levant. Since then, biblical archaeology has been a major and on-going project. As a result, a huge amount of artefacts, inscriptions and even ancient manuscripts supplementing and in some cases verifying the information in the Bible have come to light, giving insight into the milieu of Jesus. In the second half of the 19th century, British archaeologists, such as Alexander Cunningham, C.L. Carlleyle, Vincent Smith and others identified and excavated sites mentioned in the Buddhist scriptures and since then other important discoveries have been made. However, there have been far fewer of these and some have not been conducted or documented properly. particularly unfortunate

examples of this is K. M. Srivastava's excavation of Kapilavatthu, the Buddha's hometown and A. K. Prasad's excavations of Bodh Gaya.

Another stumbling block to a balanced and in-depth comparison between Jesus and the Buddha is the texts preserving the latter's words. The New Testament is relatively small, easy to read, and available in almost any bookstore or library and in almost every language. The Buddhist scriptures by contrast are huge and in a form and style awkwardly unfamiliar to the Western reader. Further, whereas Jesus characteristically spoke in easily quotable epigrams, often punctuated with striking parables and similes, the Buddha's talks and dialogues are more like long philosophical treatises. As a result, those who write comparisons between the two great teachers are typically intimately acquainted with the New Testament while lacking an equally deep knowledge (often no knowledge at all) of the Buddhist scriptures. As a result, they rely more on secondary literature about Buddhism, which in turn is commonly based on secondary sources, usually written by academics rather than Buddhist insiders.

Related to this last problem is that many authors who write comparative studies of Buddhism and Christianity or of their founders, are unfamiliar with the school affiliations and ages of the Buddhist texts they use. There are studies explaining Buddhism or particular Buddhist doctrines using Pāli text (6th-4th cent. BCE), the *Divyāvadāna*, (3th cent. CE?), the *Caryapada* (12th cent. CE), the sayings of Japanese Zen masters and the pronouncements of Tibet's current Dalai Lama, without explaining that Buddhism has evolved during its 2500-year history. This would be equivalent to writing an account of Christianity using the Bible, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Legenda sanctorum*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, the *Book of Mormon* and the *Divine Principles* of the Unification Church, and presenting it as representative of standard, mainline Christianity.

Another difficulty is social and cultural. Even when a more accurate and complete knowledge of Buddhism became available in the West, it was generally still disparaged as of little worth. The 1912 *Catholic Encyclopaedia* for example, acknowledged that the Buddha "may be credited with the qualities of a great and good man" but that "the fundamental tenets of Buddhism are marked by grave defects that not only betray its inadequacy to become a religion of enlightened humanity, but also bring into bold relief its inferiority to the religion of Jesus Christ." Now the general tenor in Western society towards religions has changed from this traditional exclusiveness to a new and almost celebratory inclusiveness. Now the emphasis is on "shared values" and "common ground", almost to the degree that even a polite suggestion that different religions might be at odds on some matters is considered "unhelpful" or even "intolerant".

The number of books now available claiming that Buddhism and Christianity are both pointing to the same truths is impressive. These range from popular titles such as *Living Buddha Living Christ*, *A Good Heart: A Buddhist Perspective on the Teachings of Jesus* and *Two Masters One Message*; to more scholarly works such as *Compassion and Meditation: the Spiritual Dynamic*

between Buddhism and Christianity, Jesus and Buddha: Friends in Conversation and Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging. Such works are usually sincere and well-meaning but just as often try too hard to see similarities and downplay differences, and the result is inauthenticity.

An unhappy example of such efforts is *Jesus & Buddha, The Parallel Sayings*, edited by New Testament scholar and theologian Marcus Borg. Borg presents a large number of passages from the New Testament and from a range of Buddhist texts which he sees as parallel. A few of the sayings are undoubtedly similar but most are not. In some cases, the only shared feature is the similes used, the meaning and purpose of the simile being ignored. So on page 105, the account of Jesus walking on the water, which was taken as proof of his divinity, is paired with a brief extract of a long passage in which the Buddha describes some of the psychic powers a monk, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, could develop as a result of his meditation, including walking on the water. Apart from the mention of walking on water, these two passages have nothing in common.

Again, while Borg uses only the New Testament for the Christian examples, he sometimes parallels these with Buddhist texts from very disparate traditions and ages. Thus on more than 10 occasions he juxtaposes verses from the Gospels with Buddhist texts composed centuries after others he quotes. The passages he quotes on pages 45 and 49 are from a literary work called *Jātakamāla*, composed more than 1000 years after the Buddha. He mistakenly thinks the passage he quotes on page 36 is about the Buddha when it is actually about the layman Vimalakīrti. More perplexing are other texts which do not seem to have any connection with each other at all, or which even contradict each other. On page 56, a warning against false prophets from Matthew 7.15, is paired with a saying by the Buddha disparaging rigorous asceticism rather than inner transformation. Another example can be found on page 101 where Jesus says that after his death his disciples will see him because he will actually still be alive. The Buddhist passage supposedly similar to this says almost the exact opposite, that although the Buddha will no longer be accessible, his disciples will have his Dhamma to guide and inspire them.

When Borg discusses parallels between the lives of the Buddha and Jesus we encounter the same problem. He says that they “both had life-transforming experiences at around the age of 30”. Jesus was perhaps 29 or 30 when he was baptised and the Buddha attained awakening when he was 35, which would hardly qualify as an “impressive” similarity. Did the Buddha encounter “trouble with the ruling aristocracy” as Borg claims? He was on good terms with the four most powerful monarchs of the time, and while some brahmins were hostile towards him, others had considerable respect for him and a good number became his disciples and even ordained as monks. Jesus by contrast, provoked such strong reactions from the religious and political authorities that they had him executed. The Buddha’s single brief meeting with the courtesan Ambapāli and another with the murderer Angulimāla are, in Borg’s estimation, equivalent to Jesus’ frequent

consorting with sinners and tax collectors. The Buddha accepted a meal from the Ambapāli as he would have done for anyone else who had asked him; Jesus consorted with sinners because he believed they were more in need of salvation. Almost all parallels between the lives of Jesus and the Buddha presented by Borg are tenuous or inconsequential at best. But because Borg is committed to the idea that Buddhism and Christianity share important features he has to ignore all the evidence that does not fit this narrative. Had he given himself the task of finding dissimilarities, he would have discovered many more and more cogent ones than those he has culled for this book.

In the 1960s, the eminent theologian Karl Rahner made the startling claim that Buddhists were actually Christians without realising it, what he called “anonymous Christians”. Few Buddhists agreed with this – many Christians dismissed it as nonsense – some thought it belittled non-Christians. According to theologian Hans Kung: “It would be impossible to find anywhere in the world a sincere Jew, Muslim, [Buddhist] or atheist who would not regard the assertion that he is an ‘anonymous Christian’ as presumptuous.”

Today, some people are claiming that they are fully conscious of being ‘Buddhist Christians’ or ‘Christian Buddhists’, presumably meaning that they live by and intellectually accept the tenets of both religions without any discordance. For example, Ross Thompson in his book *Buddhist Christianity: A Passionate Openness*, describes himself as a Buddhist Christian although curiously, his other books make it clear that he is very much a Christian, albeit an open and liberal one. One also wonders why he would ordain as and remain an Anglican priest. The Catholic theologian Raimon Panikkar claimed that he was actually an adherent of three religions. He wrote: “I left Europe [for India] as a Christian, I discovered I was a Hindu and returned as a Buddhist, without ever having ceased to be a Christian.” However, when I read Panikkar’s explanation of Buddhism, much of it is unfamiliar to me despite my 45 years as a Buddhist monk. Taking all these notions and claims to their logical conclusion, other theologians such as Lynn de Silva (*The Problem of Self in Buddhism and Christianity*), John Cobb (*Beyond Dialogue; Towards Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*), and Hans Waldenfels (*Absolute Nothingness. Foundations of Christian-Buddhist Dialogue*), have advocated a kind of fusing of the two religions, supposedly for the mutual enrichment of both. And of course, by bowdlerising Buddhism and asserting a Christianity completely divorced from its scriptural foundations and millennia of orthodoxy, it is possible to do this.

My book takes a different approach. It accepts that Buddhism does indeed have some interesting similarities with Christianity, particularly with its ethics, as it does with Jainism, some schools of Hinduism, Gnosticism and the writings of Schopenhauer, Freud, Maslow and many others. One could compare virtually any system of thought with another and find meeting points. However, to do this while papering over, ignoring or reinterpreting fundamental differences, is to rob each of their distinct features and their unique contributions to the richness and

diversity of human spirituality. It may be well-meaning but it is also misleading.

One book that does not do this is Keith Yandell and Harold Netland's *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal*, a respectful and generally well-informed look at Buddhism from a Christian perspective. Even though the authors have serious misunderstandings of certain aspects of Buddhism, I concur with their general approach and intentions.

“Christianity and Buddhism have some similarities, and there is much to be gained by both Christians and Buddhists from listening carefully to the other. In a fragmented world in which – all too often – religion is used to sanction injustice and violence, it is crucial to find ways to bridge differences and work for peace. Surely Jesus and the Buddha would expect no less from their followers... Thus, even as we acknowledge areas of common ground and the need for respectful cooperation, honesty demands that we recognize the basic differences between the two visions of reality and how we are to live. Christianity affirms the reality of an eternal, omnipotent creator God. Buddhism denies this. Christianity maintains that in Jesus of Nazareth God became incarnate, and thus that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. There is nothing like this in Buddhism. Christian metaphysics entails the reality of individual souls and selves. Buddhism has traditionally denied this. Buddhism locates the source of suffering and the problems in our world in desire/craving and ignorance. Christian faith claims that it is not ignorance but sin against a holy and righteous God that is the root of all our problems. And so on.”

My goal with this book is to be honest – looking at the similarities, the differences and the contradictions too. And I respect Jesus and the Buddha enough to let them speak for themselves, that is, their words as presented in the respective sacred scriptures. After all, it is the words of each that are or are supposed to be, the foundations of the two religions, more so than the pronouncements of the Pope or the Dalai Lama, Matthew Fox or Steven Batchelor. For Christianity, I will use the New Testament, mainly the 1994 revised edition of the *Good News Bible*; and for Buddhism the Pali Text Society's edition of the Pāli Tipitaka, with mostly my own translations. As the Pāli discourses often contain numerous repetitions, I have abbreviated some passages. Throughout, I will refer to Jesus by his given name rather than the title Christ, but because we do not actually know what the Buddha's given name was, I will refer to him either by his clan name Gotama or by his title, Buddha. As there is considerable disagreement between scholars and even among Christians themselves, concerning what Jesus meant by “the Kingdom of God”, “the Son of Man” and “Son of God”, I have avoided commenting on these subjects. For the same reason I have left others to decide whether Jesus really thought of himself as the Messiah and if so what he meant by it, and whether or not he was

divine. Besides, there are enough other ideas and beliefs to compare and examine.

The reader will notice that I have given considerably more space to the Buddha's life than to that of Jesus. This is not simply because there is far less information about the former than the latter. The life of the Buddha, at least the earliest account of it, is so little known and so often conflated with legends that evolved sometimes centuries after his time, that it deserves more detail. I have also given more space to explaining the Buddha's teaching and for the same reasons. Throughout the book I refer to "the Tipitaka", "the earliest texts" and "the Buddhist scriptures" by which is meant the Pāli Tipitaka, sometimes also known as the Pāli Canon.

Sources

The Earliest Texts

Writing did not come into widespread use in India until at least 150 years after the Buddha. Knowledge, especially religious knowledge, was preserved and transmitted orally. This is why the Pāli word for study or learning is *suta* meaning ‘to hear’. A monk would join a congregation, listen to the discourses being chanted and gradually learn them by heart. Centuries before the Buddha, brahmins, the hereditary priests of Brahmanism, had perfected mnemonic techniques which accurately committed the Vedic hymns to memory with extraordinary fidelity. It is commonly assumed that writing down information transmits it with greater accuracy than memory but this is not necessarily the case. Before printing, books had to be copied by hand and scribes often made mistakes as they wrote. Over time, as one book was copied from another, mistakes accumulated to the degree that sometimes it became difficult to work out what parts of the original meant. More seriously, a scribe could delete or add passages to the book he was copying which would be included in the next copy, creating confusion when compared with manuscripts without the changes. There are several examples of this in the Bible, the best-known being the story of the woman accused of adultery and the long passage Mark 16, 9 to 20, neither of which are found in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts. Someone added them at a later date.

Human memory on the other hand, particularly if trained from childhood and in a world devoid of all the distractions we are bombarded with, can be highly accurate. This is exactly what brahmins did. A brahmin boy was trained to repeat the Vedic hymns over and over again until they were imprinted in his memory. During various ceremonies, congregations of brahmins chanted the hymns together so that even if one of them forgot a part or mispronounced it, his memory would be jogged or his mistake corrected by the others. This also made it almost impossible for an individual to add or delete anything without a widespread conspiracy. A significant number of the Buddha’s disciples were from the brahmin caste and they brought these skills to their new religion.

To help preserve the Buddha’s sermons, they were edited in ways that made them even more amenable to memory. They are replete with repetitions, numbered lists, stereotyped passages, standardised terminology, rhyming verses, etc. – one of the reasons that today’s Buddhists find them rather tiresome reading. Thus there is no reason to doubt that the Pāli Tipitaka represents a reasonably accurate record of what the Buddha taught, and most scholars acquainted with the facts agree that this is the case.

It is often said that the Tipitaka was first committed to writing in the 1st century BCE at Aloka Vihara in Sri Lanka, information that comes from the *Dīpavaṃsa*, one of the ancient chronicles of Sri Lanka. However, the *Dīpavaṃsa* only records the first time the Tipitaka was written down in Sri Lanka. It was almost certainly committed to writing before this in India, possibly during the reign of King Asoka (268-232 BCE). Asoka was a devout Buddhist and very concerned to preserve and disseminate the Buddha's teachings. Most significantly, he made wide use of writing in his public policy. Everything we know about Asoka suggests that committing the Tipitaka to writing would be the very thing he would have done. If this is correct, it would mean that about 200 years passed between the Buddha's death and the writing of the Tipitaka. However, another ancient text, the *Mañjusrimūlakalpa*, says the Tipitaka was actually written down during the reign of Udāyibhadda, the son of King Ajātasattu, a contemporary of the Buddha (*tadetat pravacanam śastu likhāpayi śyativistaram*). If this is correct, it would mean that the Tipitaka was first written only about 30 years after the Buddha's death, when people who had actually met him were still alive. Whatever the case, even centuries after the Tipitaka was widely available in written form, the tradition of committing it to memory continued because it was considered more reliable and the discipline involved in learning it by heart was thought to be salutary.

The Buddhist sacred scriptures are called Tipitaka, 'the Three Baskets'. *Ti*, means 'three' and refers to the three divisions of the scriptures. *Piṭaka* means 'basket' and was used because ancient Indian workers moved earth, grain or building materials with a relay of large, round, shallow baskets. Each worker would put the filled basket on his head, walk to the next worker, pass it to him, and he would repeat the process. So in the minds of the early Buddhists, the passing of material in baskets from the head of one person to another was analogous to passing the scriptures from the memory of one person to another. The three 'baskets' of the Tipitaka are the Sutta Piṭaka, the Vinaya Piṭaka and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka. The first and most important of these contains the talks, sermons and dialogues of the Buddha, plus a few by his male and female disciples. The second part contains the rules for monks and nuns and for the ordering of the monastic community. The Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the third part, is a stripped-down commentary on the major doctrinal themes in the Sutta Piṭaka. It was not chanted during the First Council convened several months after the Buddha died, and is not attributed to the Buddha in the text itself, although later tradition did so. The material in the Tipitaka is difficult to date, but the core material in the Sutta Piṭaka probably comes from the time of the Buddha to perhaps 50 or 100 years after his passing. Even the later parts usually reflect the Buddha's meaning, if not his actual words.

Jesus' teachings are found in the New Testament, the second and most recent part of the Bible. The name Bible comes from the ancient Greek *ta biblia* which simply means 'the books'. The New Testament is made up of four sections;

the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the 21 Epistles and the Apocalypse. Almost everything attributed to Jesus and concerning his life and mission is found in the four Gospels. Tradition attributes each Gospel to Jesus' direct disciples – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, although they are not mentioned as the authors in the Gospels themselves and no scholars accept them as such.

While writing was widely used in ancient Palestine, Jesus was probably illiterate or at most marginally literate, and his direct disciples except perhaps one, were illiterate, as were most ordinary people at the time. Jesus delivered his teachings to individuals or during informal gatherings and nothing he said was ever directly written down during his life. The earliest existing documents mentioning Jesus are the letters of St. Paul, who never met Jesus, although he claimed to have had a vision of him after his death. The earliest of Paul's letters is 1 Thessalonians which dates from about 20 years after Jesus, but curiously, it does not contain a single quotation from him. As extraordinary as it may seem, in all Paul's 13 letters he only quotes Jesus' actual words twice (1 Cor.11,24-5; 2 Cor12,9), and these two quotes are not found in the Gospels. The only conclusion that can be drawn from this is that Jesus' words had still not been written down and that Paul was unfamiliar with Jesus' words as remembered by his direct disciples. Despite never having heard Jesus speak, Paul's letters make up nearly 30% of the New Testament. The earliest document containing the words of Jesus is the Gospel of Mark which scholars estimate was written sometime between about 65 and 75 CE, at least 30 years after Jesus' death. The Gospel of Matthew was written between about 80 and 90 CE, Luke between 85 and 100 CE and the Gospel of John sometime between 100 and 110 CE.

Later Texts

Religions are not static; they are living entities and like all living things they grow and develop, mature and even sometimes become extinct. Buddhism began with the Buddha's awakening experience (*bodhi*) and his subsequent 45-year mission. His teaching was committed to memory and transmitted to subsequent generations and as it was explored more deeply, thought about and commented on, disagreements inevitably arouse about how it should be understood. As a result, more discourses (Pāli *sutta*, Sanskrit *sūtra*) presenting new interpretations were composed and often attributed to the Buddha himself to lend them authority and prestige. This process of composing new discourses continued for centuries. The Mahāyāna discourses, mainly written in Sanskrit, are examples of this, the earliest such work probably being the *Saddharmapundrika Sūtra* composed in about the 1st century BCE, although with parts being added later. While this and most other Mahāyāna texts claim to have been spoken by the Buddha and present many ideas that he did teach, they also contain many doctrinal innovations. As time went on, these innovations became bolder and more distant from the earlier teachings. The biography of the Buddha also grew,

with more and more incidents being added to it. An early example of this is the *Lalitavistara* (circa 150 BCE to 100 CE) which depicts the Buddha as a semi-divine being performing one astonishing miracle after another.

Just as the Buddha's teachings were expanded and elaborated over the centuries, so were those of Jesus. Today's standard Bible contains four Gospels, only a small selection of the many that once existed. Writing sometime between 85 and 100 CE Luke says at the beginning of his Gospel: "Many people have done their best to write a report of the things that have taken place among us... And so because I have carefully studied all these matters from their beginning I thought it would be good to write an orderly account for you" (Lk.I,1-3). It is not known what happened to the "many" other accounts of Jesus that Luke knew and studied or the many that were composed after him because only a few have survived. The *Gospel of Peter*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Marcion*, the *Dialogue of the Saviour*, the *Gospel of the Nazarenes*, the *Gospel of Philip*, the *Prayer of the Apostle Paul*, and the *Gospel Bartholomew* are but some of these other accounts of Jesus' life and teachings. All these works contain things Jesus taught, although including many that are radically different from those attributed to him in what became the Bible. Some of these and other Gospels were popular and influential for centuries but most either gradually lost their appeal or more usually were suppressed by the church.

Jesus' biography grew over the centuries just as the Buddha's did. The Gospel of Matthew says Jesus' parents took him to Egypt after he was born, but gives no details of what he did or what happened to him while there (Matt.2,13-23). However, within a few decades of Jesus' death the first so-called infancy Gospels started to appear, recounting his Egyptian sojourn. Some of the miracles they claim he did or which took place in his presence are as implausible and fatuous as those attributed to the Buddha in to the *Lalitavistara* and other Mahāyāna texts. There are many of these infancy gospels, including the *Infancy Gospel of James*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, and the *Syriac Infancy Gospel*. Biographies of people associated with Jesus also circulated. There are several accounts of Jesus' mother Mary as well as the *Acts of Barnabas*, the *Acts of Peter and Andrew*, the *Acts of Timothy*, and the *Acts of the Martyrs*. There is even an account of the lives of the three wise men who visited Jesus when he was born – the *Revelation of the Magi*. Most Christians today have never heard of these sacred texts but in the early centuries of Christianity they were considered authentic by the early Christian community and widely read.

The question of the authenticity of all these later Buddhist and Christian texts is best left to scholars and historians. Whatever the case, nearly all Christians today accept that the four Gospels of the Bible represent a true account of the life and teachings of Jesus, and all Buddhists consider the Pāli Tipitaka to be an actual record of the life and teachings of the Buddha. Consequently, this book will

restrict itself to the life and teaching of Jesus as given in the New Testament and the life and teaching of the Buddha as presented in the Pāli Tipitaka.

Their Lives

The Christian scholar G.W. Houston has written: “With Buddhism...the historical Buddha is not important. What is important is that there is a system to overcome suffering. If the Buddha had not discovered it, any yoga [sic] could have. The primary focus is not the Buddha, but what the Buddha taught. With Christianity... what is really important is not what Jesus taught, but what He did, at least to those who follow Christianity, and that is to die and be resurrected for all men. Buddhism points to a doctrine; Christianity points to a saviour. This is the real difference between the two religions in its most dramatic and condensed form.” Like Yandell and Netland’s comments quoted in the introduction, this goes to the heart of the distinctions between the two religions – except for one thing. Although the Buddha does not have the same role or importance in Buddhism as Jesus does in Christianity, he does have a vital one nonetheless. The veracity of what he taught is independent of the man himself, just as the law of gravity is independent of Newton and the theory of relativity is independent of Einstein. Each man discovered a particular phenomenon, formulated and explained it and presented it to the world. The Buddha put it like this: “Whether Tathāgatas appear in the world or not, this order exists; the fixed nature of phenomena, their regular pattern and their general conditionality. This the Tathāgata discovers and comprehends and having done so he points it out and teaches it, explains and establishes it, reveals, analyses and clarifies it and says, ‘Look’.” (S.II,25)

Nevertheless, the Buddha’s life and example are important guideposts for Buddhists to follow and be inspired by. They add a human dimension to the truths the Buddha proclaimed and demonstrate the transformational effect of the Dhamma. This is why a person commences his or her journey on the Noble Eightfold Path by reciting and committing themselves to the Three Refuges, the first of which is: I take refuge in the Buddha (*Buddham saranam gacchāmi*). To do this means that one accepts the human potential for awakening and at the same time is inspired by the historical Buddha’s achievements and example and wishes to replicate them within oneself. The Buddha said that when one starts to be transformed by the Dhamma, “He is near me and I am near him. And why? Because he sees the Dhamma and seeing the Dhamma he sees me” (It.90).

Real People

Although there is wide agreement amongst scholars that both the Buddha and Jesus were real people, there is almost no direct evidence for the existence of either of them. This is not surprising in the case of the Buddha given that he lived nearly half a millennium before Jesus and in a region where writing did not come into use for at least another century. It is most surprising in the case of Jesus because so many documents from his time are available – in Latin and Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic. The evidence for some far less significant individuals of the time is often good. Pontius Pilate for example, the Roman governor who tried Jesus, is mentioned in a Latin inscription discovered in Israel in 1961. The Jewish high priest Caiaphas, who Jesus came before after his arrest, is mentioned in an inscription discovered in 1990. But despite the Bible's claim that Jesus was well-known, he gets no mention in any contemporary records. The historian Flavius Josephus, writing about 60 years after Jesus' death made two brief references to him. But most scholars consider the second and longest of these references to have been either added later or more likely to have been partly redacted by later Christians trying to create 'evidence' for the existence of Jesus. In 1971 copies of the two passages in Arabic and Syriac were discovered and found to have small but significant differences from the standard versions, adding further doubts to what Josephus originally wrote about Jesus. The earliest unimpeachable and independent evidence of Jesus are brief references to him in the writings of the Romans Pliny and Tacitus dating from 112 and 115 CE, i.e., about 85 years after Jesus' death.

The earliest undisputed evidence for the Buddha dates from the year 249 BCE, about 160 years after his passing. In that year King Asoka had a great stone pillar erected in the village of Lumbini, now situated in Nepal just a few kilometres across the border from India. The inscription on this pillar reads:

“Twenty years after his coronation, Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi (i.e. Asoka), visited this place and worshipped because here the Buddha, the sage of the Sakyans, was born. He had a stone figure and a pillar erected and because the Lord was born here, the village of Lumbini was exempted from tax and required to pay only one eighth of the produce.”

In 1898 a relic casket was excavated from a stupa at Kapilavatthu which has an inscription on it mentioning the Sakyans and the Buddha. There is some disagreement amongst scholars as to this inscription's exact meaning, but most read it to say: “This casket of relics of the blessed Buddha of the Sakyas [is gifted by] the brothers Sukirti, jointly with their sisters, sons and wives.” There is also uncertainty about the inscription's exact date, but it may predate King Asoka's conversion to Buddhism, i.e. before circa 256 BCE, and if so, it would be the

earliest decipherable written record from India and the earliest mention of the Buddha

Their Social Backgrounds

The Buddha and Jesus lived far from each other in both time and space. The Buddha was born in about 563 BC, although the exact date is uncertain. Tradition says he was born decades before this while recent research suggests he may have been born decades later. However, there is no controversy concerning where he was born. The Tipitaka says this took place in a park or garden called Lumbini between the towns of Kapilavatthu and Devadaha and is confirmed by solid archaeological evidence – King Asoka’s Lumbini inscription.

Lumbini is on the northern edge of what was then called the Middle Land (*majjhima desa*), the broad shallow valley of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers, corresponding to the modern Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and parts of the lowlands of Nepal. The Middle Land was the centre of India’s newly emerging civilisation. The first cities had only recently grown up, continental trade had started and it was a time of great social change. The Middle Land was made up of about a dozen countries, large and important monarchies such as Kosala, Magadha and Vamsā, and several small chiefdoms ruled by elected councils such as Kusinārā of the Mallas, Pippalivana, Vethadīpaka, Allakappa of the Bulis and Devadaha of the Koliyas. Within 100 years of the Buddha’s passing Magadha had absorbed most of these states and would go on to dominate almost all India.

Throughout the Bible, Jesus is referred to as “Jesus of Nazareth”, Nazareth being a town in what is now northern Israel. In Jesus’ time it was an obscure village in the province of Galilee, so insignificant that it is not mentioned in any Jewish sources until the 3rd century CE. Nazareth was Jesus’ ancestral home; his mother and father both lived there and he grew to adulthood there (Lk.2.39). However, the Bible maintains that he was not born there. According to Matthew, when King Herod heard a prophecy that a baby born in Nazareth would become king of the Jews, he ordered his soldiers to kill every baby boy in the village, fearing that the child would grow up and replace him or his heir. Being forewarned of this by an angel, Jesus’ parents fled to Egypt and on the way Jesus was born in a stable at the back of an inn in the small town of Bethlehem (Matt.2,16-18). Strangely, this story is not mentioned in the other three Gospels, nor is Herod’s massacre mentioned in any historical sources of the time. Nearly all Bible scholars consider it to be legendary.

But if this is so, why would Matthew tell this tale? Centuries before Jesus, the Jewish scriptures (i.e. the Old Testament) prophesied that a great saviour, what they called a messiah, would be born in Bethlehem. Matthew believed Jesus to be that messiah and so he probably concocted the story about Jesus being born in

Bethlehem to fit the prophecy. It seems much more probable that Jesus was born in Nazareth.

The horizon Jesus knew, the land the Jews considered sacred, had fallen under Roman domination either by direct rule or through proxies several decades before his birth. The most important political divisions were Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and Syria. The Romans had introduced new laws, taxes and customs, which the Jews resented, and more importantly new gods, which the Jews hated fanatically. The whole land was simmering with social, political and religious tensions and was often on the edge of rebellion. Some 36 years after Jesus' death a major revolt against the Romans finally broke out only to end in defeat for the Jews, the sacking of their sacred city Jerusalem and the total destruction of the city's great temple to God.

Their Ancestries

Although Jesus' parents were humble folk, the Bible claims that Jesus had royal blood, being the descendant of the great Jewish hero King David. As this king lived nearly 800 years before Jesus, it is highly unlikely that family records going back so far would have survived and Jesus would have known his ancestry. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke have genealogies of Jesus but as both of these have almost nothing in common, they are probably fanciful (Matt. I,1-16; Lk.III,23-38).

The Buddha was born in the Sakyian country, a small chiefdom named after the people who lived there, the Sakyans. It was on the northern edge of the Middle Land, situated between the much larger kingdom of Kosala and the confederacy of Vajjī, corresponding to the north-east corner of the modern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh and the lowlands of Nepal. The Sakyans claimed to be descendants of the sons of the semi-mythical King Okkāka, who had been driven into exile by the machinations of his second queen. Settling down in a forest of *sāka* trees they became known as Sakyans (D.I,93). The *sāka* is the Indian Teak (*Tectona grandis*), prized for its beautiful and durable wood. However, the name Sakya is actually derived from *śak* meaning to be able or capable. The Sakyans also claimed to be of the Ādicca lineage which supposedly went back to the Vedic sun god. As with the claims about Jesus' royal ancestry, there is probably no basis to either of the Sakyans' claims about their origins.

Their Families and Parents

Although nominally independent, the Sakyans were under the influence of their larger and more powerful neighbour Kosala which surrounded them on two sides. The Tipitaka says: "The Sakyans are vassals of the king of Kosala, they

offer him humble service and salutation, do his bidding and pay him homage” (D.III,83). This explains why once the Buddha said that his homeland belonged to the king of Kosala (Sn.422). Towards the end of the Buddha’s life or perhaps a few years later, the Sakyan’s *de jure* independence came to an end when their lands were formerly absorbed into Kosala.

The Sakyans had a reputation for pride and impulsiveness and were considered rustics by their neighbours. A group of Sakyan youths are reported as saying of themselves: “We Sakyans are a proud people” (Vin. II,183), and Upāli, himself a Sakyan, described his countrymen as “a fierce people” (Vin.II,183). Taking a more positive stance, the Buddha said his kinsmen were “endowed with wealth and energy” (Sn.422). When the arrogant young brahman Ambaṭṭha complained to the Buddha that during a visit to Kapilavatthu the Sakyan did not give him due respect, the Buddha defended his kinsmen: “But Ambaṭṭha, even the quail, such a little bird, can talk as she likes in her own nest” (D.I,91).

Despite S. Radhakrishnan’s famous but unsubstantiated claim that the Buddha “was born, grew up and died a Hindu”, we do not know what religion prevailed amongst the Sakyans and thus might have influenced the young Gotama. The only brahman who is reported to have visited Kapilavatthu was mocked by the youths of the clan. It is unlikely that Brahmanism, which had been slowly moving east into the Middle Land for the previous 300 years, had yet established itself amongst the Sakyans. The only hint we have of the religious life of the Sakyans is the brief comment that Vappa, the Buddha’s uncle, was a follower of Jainism, suggesting that at least some of the Sakyan elite were attracted to non-Brahmanical religions. The majority of the Sakyans, like the majority of inhabitants of the Middle Land at the time, were probably what would now be called animists, worshiping their own local spirits and gods.

The Buddha’s father, Suddhodana, a name meaning “pure rice”, was married to two sisters, Mahāmāya, the Buddha’s mother, and Mahāpajāpati Gotami, who became the Buddha’s step-mother. Whether he was married to them at the same time or married the latter after the former’s death is not known. Legend claims that the Buddha’s father Suddhodana was a king of the Sakyans although this is not explicitly mentioned in the earliest texts. Nowhere is the Buddha called a prince (*rāja kumāra*), nowhere is he or his family said to live in a palace, and only once is his father called *rāja*. This word is usually translated as king but in the 5th century BCE it still retained its older meaning of ruler or chief, without any regal connotations. Even in the very places where one would expect the Buddha to call his father a king he did not do so. For example, when asked by King Bimbisāra about his family and birth, Gotama simply replied that he was from a Sakyan family (Sn.322-4;455).

What is known is that the Sakyans had a body of men called ‘chief-makers’ (*rājā kattāro*) who probably elected their leader either for a set period or for as long as he had their confidence (D.II,233). Once the Buddha was invited to inaugurate a new council hall in Kapilavatthu, the kind of place where the chief-makers would

have gathered to conduct business and the chief presided over their meetings as the first amongst equals (S.IV,182). Thus we can say that while Gotama was from a patrician or ruling class family, he was not royalty in the sense that it was understood in later centuries or today. It is also worth noting that Suddhodana gets only three brief mentions in the Tipitaka (D.II,52; Sn.685; Vin.I,82).

- Mahāmāyā, the Buddha's mother, died seven days after giving birth and thus the Tipitaka records no other information about her. It does however, tell us a little more about Mahāpajāpati Gotami, his step-mother. "As his mother's sister, she was his nurse, his stepmother, the one who gave him milk. She suckled the Lord when his own mother died" (M.III,253). After Suddhodana passed away, the Buddha happened to be visiting Kapilavatthu and Mahāpajāpati asked him to allow her to become a nun, but he refused. When he left for Vesālī shortly afterwards, Mahāpajāpati and several other women who also wanted to become nuns, decided to follow him. When they arrived, Ānanda saw Mahāpajāpati "her feet swollen, her limbs covered with dust and her face stained with tears" and decided to speak to the Buddha on the women's behalf. Again the Buddha refused to ordain the women. Finally, Ānanda asked the Buddha whether or not women were able to become saints (i.e. attain awakening) like men, and he replied: "Having renounced their home, women too are able to become saints." Finally relenting, the Buddha gave permission for the establishment of a women's monastic order (Vin.II,253 ff). One is left with the impression that he did this somewhat reluctantly, but also with the impression that Mahāpajāpati Gotami was a strong woman determined to get her way.

Jesus had no offspring because he never married, but the Gotama was married and had a son named Rāhula. According to legend, the Buddha left his home to become a wandering ascetic shortly after Rāhula was born, meaning that the child had no father during his formative years. The Buddha could be accused of irresponsibility for abandoning his wife and child and some have indeed done this, but his actions should be seen as a sacrifice for the benefit of the whole of humanity rather than a thoughtless abandonment. It could not have been easy for him to leave his family, but his goal was to find the answer to the problem of suffering. History is full of examples of great individuals who have given up that which is nearest and dearest to them in order to achieve some greater good or to discover some important truth, and the Buddha was one of these. It is not surprising therefore that when Rāhula grew up he had a deep admiration for and respect for his father. On one occasion he said to his father: "I will always praise [you], the torchbearer of humanity" (*ukkādhāro manussānaṃ niccaṃ apacito mayā*, Sn.336).

Something that may throw more light on the Sakyans and thus on the Buddha and his family is the only two references from the Tipitaka describing what the main Sakyan urban center Kapilavatthu was like. In one place, an inhabitant of Kapilavatthu described it as being "rich, prosperous, full of people, crowded and thickly populated" which seems to be describing something bigger

than a mere village (S.V,369). The findings of archaeology can help resolve the apparent disparity between these two descriptions. In the 1980s archaeologists did an extensive survey of ancient settlement sites in the Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh dating from between the 7th to the 3rd century BCE. They found that of 99 sites 41 covered an area of less than one hectare and 40 between one and two hectares. Thus as many as 81 settlements were less than two hectares and it was calculated that these could have had a population of not more than 500 people. There were 14 settlements covering an area of between two and four hectares and these could have had a population of between 500 and 1000. Four settlements were more than four hectares and could have had a population of between 1,200 and 1,300. All these population centres were much smaller than the main cities of the time and they would qualify as large villages today. If Kapilavatthu had a population of 1300 it would have been big enough to be described as bustling and crowded, especially if it was also a centre of commerce and the seat of government.

Excavations conducted at Kapilavatthu in the early 1970s confirm the impression that it was a modest place even by the standards of the time. The excavations revealed that the area it took up was small, although the whole area could not be explored because much of it was under cultivation. All the most ancient structures had mud walls and the only ones made of baked brick dated from well after the Buddha's time. Kapilavatthu would have been nothing like Siddhodana's grand royal capital as described in later Buddhist legend.

As with the Buddha's father, Jesus' father Joseph gets only scant mention in the Bible – very briefly in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John, and not at all in Mark, the oldest Gospel, or in Paul's epistles, the earliest of all Christian documents. In one place, Jesus is described as “the *teckton*'s son” thus giving us Joseph's profession. The Greek word *teckton* is usually translated as carpenter but it actually means something like a fixer or a handyman. As was the custom of the time, Jesus probably followed his father's trade.

Considering how important Jesus' mother Mary was to become in later Christian theology, it is surprising how little attention she is given in the Bible. The Gospel of John only refers to her twice without using her name (Jn.2;1-12; 19;25-6) and Mark, the oldest Gospel, mentions her twice and names her just once (Mk.6;3; 3,31-2). Matthew and Luke mention her a few times, mainly in relation to Jesus' birth. The only significant detail about Mary is provided by Luke who says she was already pregnant at her wedding and that when Joseph discovered this, he decided to quietly divorce her until she told him that she had been impregnated by God (Matt.1,18-25).

Their Siblings

The Bible tells us that Jesus was the first child of what became a large family, which would have been quite typical of the time. His brothers were James, Jose, Jude and Simon. He also had several sisters although none of them are named (Mk.6,3; Matt.13,55-56). That Jesus was still unmarried when he was in his late 20s would have been most unusual, especially since his younger brothers were married (1 Cor.9,5). Other than this, the Bible provides only three other fragments of information about Jesus' siblings. While Jesus was teachings in Galilee his brothers tried to persuade him to leave and go to Judea, apparently he was an embarrassment to them and they did not believe the things he was teachings or the claims he was making (Jn.7,1-5). On another occasion, when he was teaching to a large crowd, his family tried to take him away saying that he was "mad" or "out of his mind" (*exeste*, Mk.3,20). After Jesus died, his younger brother James one of the leaders of the early church (Gal.1,19; Jude.1,1).

Early tradition makes no mention of Gotama having any brothers or sisters but it does refer to several half-brothers and cousins, of which six appear in the Tipitaka. Ānanda, Anurudha and Mahānāma were sons of his father's brother, Devadatta was the son of his mother's brother, Tissa was the son of his father's sister and Nanda was the son of his father's second wife Mahāpajāpati Gotami. Nanda had a similar height and facial features to the Buddha (Vin.IV,173; S.II,282).

Their Births

Matthew and Luke claim that Jesus' conception took place when God miraculously impregnated his mother Mary (Matt.1,18-25; Lk.1,26-38). Strangely, the two earliest Christian documents, the epistles of Paul and the Gospel of Mark, do not mention this seemingly crucial detail. According to Matthew, Joseph discovered that Mary was pregnant before the wedding and decided to marry her only to save her from disgrace.

There are two different accounts of the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. Luke says that Joseph and Mary left Nazareth because the Romans were going to conduct a census which required everyone to return to the place of their birth. Because Bethlehem was Joseph's ancestral home, the couple went there and that is how Jesus came to be born there. This story is full of problems. There was a Roman census in 6 CE, but this is some years after Jesus' birth and would not have affected Jesus' parents anyway because Galilee was not a part of the Roman Empire at that time. And even if Galilee had been in Roman territory, a census would not require everyone to return to their place of birth. Indeed, within the Roman Empire, this would have required perhaps millions of people to move. The purpose of a census was to give an estimate of how much tax could be levied,

not to find out who was born where. Further, Matthew says nothing about a census, but claims the family fled Nazareth for Egypt because of King Herod plan to kill all the baby boys in the town and Jesus was born in Bethlehem while on the way.

Luke says a group of shepherds alerted to Jesus' birth by an angel went to pay homage to the child. According to Matthew it was not shepherds but three wise men, the so-called Magi, who were guided to the inn in Bethlehem by a star. Luke says nothing about the Magi and Matthew says nothing about the shepherds. There has been much speculation about the star that guided the Magi to Bethlehem. Guesses have ranged from Haley's comet which appeared in 12 BCE, to a supernova that was observed in 5 BCE. It would of course be impossible to be guided to a specific location, be it a house, town, district or even a country, by a star, comet or supernova – phenomena that can be seen for thousands of miles. Furthermore, Matthew specifically says that the "star" (*aster*) moved in front of the Magi and eventually stopped and hovered over the inn where Jesus and his parents were (Matt.2, 9). So if the claim about the star is true, it could not have been any astronomical body known to science.

As for Gotama's birth, later legend maintains that his mother dreamed of a white elephant around the time of or during his conception, that she was a virgin when she gave birth, and that Gotama was born from his mother's right side rather than through the birth canal. None of these stories are mentioned in the Tipitaka or even in the *Acchariyābbhūta Sutta*, an admittedly late discourse recounting several wondrous events that supposedly occurred during Gotama's birth.

One of these wondrous events mentioned in this discourse involves not a star but a light, and not a light identifying a particular location but one which made a particular outlook possible. "When the Bodhisattva descended into his mother's womb, a great immeasurable light more radiant even than the light of the gods shone forth into the world. And even in the dark, gloomy spaces between the worlds where the light of our moon and sun, powerful and majestic though they be, cannot reach, even there did that light shine. And the beings that inhabit that darkness became aware of each other because of that light and thought: 'Indeed there are other beings here'." (M.III,120, condensed). It would seem that this story was not meant to suggest that an actual light appeared when the Gotama was born. Rather, it is a literary device, an allegory, a way of saying that the advent of the Buddha would enable beings to become aware of each other and so making empathy and understanding between them possible.

Some of the other details mentioned in the discourse may have been based on fact. For example, the discourse claims that Mahāmāyā gave birth while standing, which is by no means improbable. Little is known of ancient Indian birthing practices, but it appears that women sometimes deliver in either a sitting, lateral or upright position. Interestingly, Britain's Royal College of Midwives recommends upright birthing and says that it is quite safe if the midwife and other attendants are properly trained and prepared for it. Almost the only thing that can

be said with certainty about Gotama's birth is that it took place in Lumbini, which was in a district of the Sakyan lands somewhere between Kapilavatthu and Devadaha, the main Koliyan town (M.II,214). Lumbini is traditionally described as being a garden or park but in the Tipitaka it is called a village (*gāma*, Sn.683). King Asoka's Lumbini also describes it as a village.

Their Names

The term Buddha is the past participle of the noun *bujjhati* which means 'realized' or 'awakened' and when used in reference to a person means one who has realized or awakened to something. In the Tipitaka, the Buddha is often referred to as being a Buddha but he is never addressed by the term. He was referred to or addressed by his clan name Gotama meaning 'best cow', as good Gotama (*bho Gotama*) or as ascetic Gotama (*samaṇa Gotama*). The Gotama clan name reflects an earlier time in India when having many cattle was a measure of wealth and a source of pride. More formally, the Buddha was called Lord (*bhagava*), occasionally Kinsman of the Sun (*ādiccabhandu*, D.III:197), a reference to the Sakyan Ādicca lineage, and once only as the Sakyan Sage (*Sakyamuni*). He usually referred to himself as Tathāgata, an unusual word in which *tatha* could be used as an adjective meaning true or real, or as the adverb *tathā* meaning thus or so. The former is probably meant. Further, if the word is arranged *tathā + āgata* it can mean 'he who has come to the truth' or *tathā + gata* 'he who had thus gone. Interestingly, never once is the Buddha called Siddhattha or Siddhattha Gotama. In fact, the name Siddhattha occurs only once in the Tipitaka, in the Apadāna, a book included in the Tipitaka at a very late date. It may well have been his given name but it gets no mention in the earliest records.

The Bible says that Jesus' father Joseph had a dream in which an angel told him to name his soon-to-be born son Jesus (Matt.1,20-21). This name is derived from the Greek *lesous*, the Greek rendering of the Hebrew Yehoshua, or as would be said in English, Joshua. The name Jesus (i.e. Yehoshua or Joshua) was a common one amongst the ancient Jews. Four people with that name are mentioned in the Old Testament, the ancient historian Josephus mentions five people so named apart from the Jesus of Christianity, and Israeli archaeologists have uncovered over 70 tombs of people named Jesus dating from around the time of Jesus. To the villagers and neighbours who knew Jesus he was "the son of Mary, brother of James, Jose, Judas, and Simon" (Mk.6,3). He was also known simply as "Joseph's son" or "the handyman's son" (Lk.4,22; Matt.13,55). Jesus was sometimes addressed as Christ from the Greek meaning 'anointed one' and referred to someone who had been selected by God to do his work. He was also occasionally called *rabbi*, the Hebrew word for teacher, or sometimes as Master (*epistates*) or Lord (*kurios*). This last title can also mean 'Mister' or 'Sir'; wives would address

their husbands as *kurios* and even statues of gods were called *kurios*. Occasionally Jesus was addressed as Son of David, a reference to his supposed relation to King David (Matt.15,22).

Their Childhoods

Eight days after Jesus' birth he was circumcised in accordance with God's law (Lk.2:21). The Bible stipulates that a woman is impure for 40 days after giving birth and this period having elapsed, Jesus' parents took him to the great temple in Jerusalem. There they encountered a holy man named Simon who had been told by God that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah, the king promised by God to save the Jewish people. When Simon saw Jesus, he was convinced that this boy was the promised and longed-for Messiah and he gave the boy a blessing (Lk.2:25-35).

One incident in the Buddha's childhood bears some resemblance to Jesus' encounter with Simon. A hermit named Asita lived in a forest in the Sakyan country and one day he noticed how jubilant the gods were and asked them the reason for it. They replied: "A Bodhisattva, an excellent and incomparable jewel, has been born in the Sakyan town of Lumbini, for the welfare and happiness of the human world. This is why we are so happy." Anxious to see this child, Asita went to Kapilavatthu where Suddhodana welcomed him and gave him the baby to hold. Being accomplished in "signs and mantras" he examined the boy and proclaimed that he would attain complete awakening (*sambodhi*), "the ultimate purified vision" (*parama visuddhidassa*), and proclaim the Truth "out of compassion of the many" (*bahujam hitanukampa*). Then tears welled up in Asita's eyes and noticing this and alarmed by it, Suddhodana asked him if he had seen some misfortune in the boy's future. The sage replied that he was sad because he knew that he would pass away before this all unfolded (Sn.683-694). Later elaborations of the Asita story, and there are several of them, each more detailed than the earlier ones, often say that Asita predicted that the baby would become either a universal monarch (*cakkavattin*) or a fully awakened sage (*buddha*). This either-or-prediction is not found in the Tipitaka account.

Like all devout Jews, Jesus' parents visited the great temple in Jerusalem every year to celebrate the holy day of Passover. When Jesus was 12 they went again, but on setting out to return home, Joseph and Mary noticed that he was not with them and went back to the city to find him. After three days of frantic searching they found Jesus in the temple listening to the priests and asking them questions. Onlookers were surprised that one so young could speak with such confidence and intelligence. When Mary found him she scolded him for going missing but he replied: "Don't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" meaning in God's temple (Lk.2:41-52). These few scraps of information point to Jesus having a religious interest even at an early age. We are told that during his

ministry, Jesus went to Nazareth and in the town's synagogue and read out a passage from the Old Testament (Lk.4,16-20). It would have been most unusual at that time for a person of his class and origins to be literate, although it is possible. More likely, Jesus had learned several passages from the scriptures by heart and just quoted them from memory. Either way, it indicates that he had some familiarity with the Old Testament.

Concerning Gotama's childhood and youth, there are only two brief pieces of information. Once in later life when reminiscing about his youth, the Buddha said that he was "delicately brought up, most delicately brought up, exceptionally delicately brought up" in that he wore fine silks and perfumes, had a troupe of female musicians to entertain him, an umbrella-bearer to accompany him when he went out and sumptuous food to eat. He also mentioned that he had three mansions to live in, one each for the summer, winter and monsoon (A.I,145). This confirms the impression that Gotama's family was wealthy. The other piece of information, again mentioned by the Buddha himself, is more significant. One day, while he sat in the shade of a tree watching his father work, he had what might now be called a mystical experience. Apparently quite spontaneously, he fell into a meditative state which he later called *jhāna* (M.I,246). This experience was to have a profound influence on his awakening years later.

Most of the other stories about Gotama's youth: him saving a goose from his cousin Devadatta; winning athletic and martial competitions; courting and then marrying Yasodharā; etc., do not appear in the Tipitaka. Gotama's encounter with the so-called Four Signs: an old man; a sick man; a corpse and a wandering ascetic; which Joseph Campbell rightly said was "the most celebrated example of the call to adventure in the literature of the world", is not found in the Tipitaka either.

Their Physical Appearances

There is no information whatsoever in the Bible about Jesus' appearance. He is nearly always portrayed in art as decidedly Western, bearded and with long hair, but of course he was Semitic so he would have had a swarthy complexion and black hair. Given St. Paul's comment that "even Nature tells you that long hair on a man is a disgrace"(1Cor.11,14). Jesus almost certainly wore his hair short and all the earliest depictions show him beardless and with short hair. Once, when Jesus mixed with a crowd in order to slip quietly away, no one noticed him, from which it can be inferred that there was little about his appearance that would stand out or attract attention (Lk.3:30).

Early Christian writers were almost unanimous in declaring that Jesus was physically unattractive. Irenaeus in the early 2nd century described him as "a weak and inglorious man". As evidence that he was ugly Origen (184-253) quoted this

supposed prophecy about Jesus from the Old Testament: “He was so disfigured that he hardly looked human...He had no dignity or beauty to make us take notice of him. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him...No one would even look at him” (Is.53,3). The Acts of Peter (second half of 2nd cent.) states that “amongst us he appeared lowly and ill-favoured”. The historian Josephus, probably drawing on Christian sources, described Jesus as “dark skinned, of small stature, three cubits high, hunchbacked, with a long face, long nose and meeting eyebrows, so that they who see him might be frightened, with scanty hair ... and an undeveloped beard.” Writing in about 175 CE, Celsus wrote: “Yet, Jesus’ body was no different than any other, but, as they [Christians] say, was short, ugly and undistinguished” (*Contra Celsum* 6,75). There seems no good reason for saying all this if it were not true. Of course, it should be kept in mind that a person’s moral and spiritual qualities have nothing to do with their physical appearance.

Except in the sculpture of Gandhara from the 2nd to 5th century CE, the Buddha has usually been depicted in a stylised rather than a realistic manner. Even today, in depictions of his final passing, he is always shown looking 25 or 30 at most, although we know he was about 80 when he died. But tradition aside, the Tipitaka provides a great deal of interesting information about the Buddha’s physical appearance. We are told that he was four finger-breadth’s taller (*caturaṅgulomaka*) than his handsome and younger half-brother Nanda, who was often mistaken for him from a distance. According to the Buddha’s own words, before his renunciation he had black hair, probably long and a beard. Although statues of the Buddha always show him with hair, this is an iconographic convention and not historically accurate. At the time of his renunciation, he “cut off his hair and beard” and later as a monk he wandered “with a shaved head” (*nivuttakeso*, Sn.456).

All sources agree that the Buddha was particularly good-looking. Sonadaṇḍa described him as “handsome, of fine appearance, pleasant to see, with a good complexion and a beautiful form and countenance”(D.I,115). Another witness, Doṇa, said that he was “beautiful, inspiring confidence, calm, composed, with the dignity and presence of a perfectly tamed elephant” (A.II,38). These natural good looks were enhanced by his deep inner calm. Another observer noted: “It is wonderful, truly marvellous how serene is the good Gotama’s presence, how clear and radiant is his complexion. Just as golden jujube fruit in the autumn is clear and radiant, so too is the good Gotama’s complexion” (A.I,181). Nonetheless, like everyone else the Buddha’s physical appearance declined with age. Ānanda said this of him in old age: “The Lord’s complexion is no longer clear and radiant, his limbs are flabby and wrinkled, his body stooped and his faculties have deteriorated” (S.V,216). In the months before his death the Buddha said of himself:

“I am now old, aged, worn out, one who has traversed life’s path. Being around 80 I am approaching the end of my life. Just as an old cart can only be kept going by being patched up, so too my body can only be kept going by being patched up” (D.II,100).

Ever since the first images of the Buddha started to be made in about the 1st century 100 CE, he has always been depicted with elongated ear lobes with a split down their middle. As the ear piercing ceremony (*kaṇṇavedha*) was an important rite of passage for both boys and girls, there seems a good chance that Gotama would have undergone this ceremony. After the ear lobes had been pierced, a small object that put in it and over the time this object was enlarged, gradually stretching the earlobe until it became big enough to take an earring or an earplug (*kaṇṇālankāra* or *kaṇṇikā*). Earrings were of various types of metal, including gold for those who could afford it, while earplugs were made of shell, bone, ivory or clay. When these ornaments were removed, as Gotama would have done on becoming a monk, the slit earlobe would have drooped down. Nowhere does the Tipitaka mention Gotama wearing ear ornaments of any kind, but it seems the ancient sculptors assumed he did and so they depicted him as if he had.

Some passages in the Tipitaka assert that the Buddha’s body exhibited 32 auspicious marks (*mahāpurisa lakkhaṇa*), the most unusual and perplexing innovation in early Buddhist doctrine. However, almost all early sources contradict this assertion. When King Ajātasattu went to meet the Buddha, he was unable to distinguish him from the surrounding monks, which he would have been able to do immediately if the Buddha had these marks. Pukkasāti sat talking to the Buddha for several hours before realizing who he was. If the Buddha had any of the marks, the young man would have immediately noticed and known that he was in the presence of someone quite unusual. When Upaka encountered the Buddha walking along the road to Gayā, the thing that caught his attention was his “clear faculties and radiant complexion”, not anything strange about his body (D.I,50; M.III,238; I,170).

Their Attire

How a person is perceived is to some extent influenced by their attire. Today and for nearly 2000 years, Jesus has been depicted wearing a long flowing robe, usually white, and sometimes with a blue or red sash over his right shoulder. The Bible says only one thing about Jesus clothes – that just before his execution he was wearing seamless (*araphos*) undergarment (*chitona*), having probably been stripped of his other clothes before (Jn.19,23-24). How he dressed normally was probably the same as other ordinary humble folk of the time. Wall paintings in the ancient synagogue at Dura-Europos, built in 244 CE, show Jewish men clad in short-sleeved tunics partly covered by robes reaching down a little below the

knees. As Jesus associated long robes (*stolai*) with honor, wealth and privilege, things he despised (Mk.12,38), it is unlikely that modern depictions of his attire are accurate. The Dura-Europos paintings also depict the men with short hair, again suggesting that Jesus did not wear long hair.

As a layman, Gotama wore the same type of clothes other ordinary men wore: a turban (*veṭṭha*); a jacket (*kañcuka*); an upper robe (*uttarāsanga*); and a sarong or dhoti (*nivāsana*, A.I,145). Turbans depicted in ancient art were tied and arranged quite different from the way they commonly are in India today. The jacket was probably closed by tying together small strings attached to the hem and ones worn in the winter would have had long sleeves and the summer variety short sleeves. The upper robe was a large rectangular piece of cloth which could be arranged in several different ways around the body. The sarong went down to the ankles, was pleated in the front and held in place with a belt (*bandhana*) which could be very elaborate, judging by ancient depictions of male clothing. It was normal for men to wear underpants (*kopina*) which were probably similar to what modern Indians call a *kaupina*. The only difference between Gotama's and most other people's clothing, was that his were made of Kāsi cloth, a high quality and expensive fabric manufactured in Benares (A.I,248).

The Vinaya, the monastic rules, describes in detail how a monk's robes were designed and how they should be worn, and thus we have a very good idea of how the Buddha dressed after he became a monk. This attire consisted of three separate pieces of cloth: a rectangular piece wrapped around the waist and secured by a belt (*antaravāsaka*); a larger rectangular outer robe (*uttarāsanga*) draped around his whole body, over the left shoulder and under the right arm; and a double-layered outer robe (*saṅghātī*) for use in the winter. The three together were called *ticīvara* or *kāsāva* and were dyed a yellowish tawny color. This colour was thought to have symbolized renunciation or letting go because leaves go yellow before they drop from the tree. Normally the outer robe only covered the left shoulder but when monks went into a town or village the Buddha asked them to adjust the robe so that it covered both shoulders. In the earliest depictions of the Buddha from Gandhara, this is exactly how the Buddha is shown – with either one or both shoulders covered.

Their Languages

It is not known what the Buddha's mother tongue was although it must have been the dialect spoken in the borderland of north-eastern Kosala where he spent his first decades. After his awakening, he travelled and taught widely so it is likely that he became proficient in several languages, and there is evidence that this is the case. In one discourse, he noted that different regions had different words for bowl, and then he listed eight of them - *pāti*, *patta*, *vittha*, *serāva*, *dhāropa*, *pona*, *hana*, and *pisīla*. This suggests that he had at least some

knowledge of the languages and dialects then spoken in northern India. However, we know little of what these languages were so we can only speculate what the Buddha's mother tongue was, although recently one of the world's leading authorities in early Buddhism, Richard Gombrich, has argued that the Buddha did in fact speak Pāli.

Whatever the case, at some early date, possibly during the Third Council convened by King Asoka, everything the Buddha had said that had been remembered in different languages and dialects, was rendered into Magadhi, now usually called Pāli. Shortly after this the first Indian monks arrived in Sri Lanka bringing the Tipitaka with them in either in their memories or in written form, and it has been preserved there in Pāli ever since. In India itself, the Buddha's discourses were later translated into Sanskrit and then taken to China and translated into Chinese. These Chinese translations, although not complete, are substantially the same as the Pāli ones. Sometimes difficulties in the Pāli texts can be resolved by referring to the Chinese translations.

Jesus and his immediate disciples spoke Aramaic, the language of the common people in Palestine. Greek and Latin were the languages of administration and learning throughout the Roman Empire, including Israel. As nearly all Jesus' words in the four Gospels are in Greek this means that they must be based on earlier Aramaic records.

There are four Aramaic words and phrases in the Bible which preserve Jesus' own words in his mother tongue. When he healed a child he said to her: "*Talitha cun*" (Little girl, rise.); once he commanded "*Ephphatha!*" "Be opened!" and he addressed God as *Abba* meaning "Father." According to Matthew, his last words were: "*Eli lema sabachthani,*" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk. 5,41; 7,34; 14,36; 11,9).

Their Callings

The seminal experience in Jesus' life prior to his teaching career was his meeting with John the Baptist. John was an ascetic itinerant preacher who "wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey". He was a fierce critic of the Jewish priests, telling them that God would burn them in the unquenchable fire (Matt.3,7-12). Like many others at the time, John expected God to visit his terrible judgment on humankind very soon and preached that people should prepare for this by undergoing baptism, a kind of ritual washing, to purify themselves of their sins (Mk.I,4). John also expected this event to be preceded by the appearance of someone greater than himself who would baptize people in the Holy Spirit (*parakletos*, Matt.3,11). Jesus seems to have become a disciple of John the Baptist or at least his admirer, and accepted his prediction about God's impending destruction of the world. His baptism by John was probably the turning point in his life and the beginning of

his ministry.

Legend says that the Gotama's father feared that one day he would renounce the world and become either a great ruler or a great spiritual teacher. To make sure he would become the former and not the latter, Suddhodana had him confined in a beautiful palace provided with all imaginable pleasures. However, one day, with the help of his charioteer Channa, Gotama managed to slip out of his palace and drive through the streets of Kapilavatthu. During this outing the two encountered a man bent with age, a sick man, a corpse being taken for cremation and a wandering ascetic, none of which Gotama had ever seen before. It was these so-called Four Signs (*catu nimitta*) that first confronted him with the realities of life and aroused within him the desire to quest for a way to overcome them. The story of his palatial confinement is not found in the Tipitaka, nor can the one about his dramatic and iconic encounter with the Four Signs, even though both are recounted in almost every modern biography of the Buddha. However, it is easy to see how the second of these legends evolved.

Once when the Buddha was reminiscing he said:

“Before my awakening, while I was still an unawakened bodhisattva, I too being subject to birth, ageing, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement, sought after that which likewise is subject to such things. But then I thought: ‘Why should I do this? Being myself subject to birth, ageing, sickness, death, sorrow and defilement and seeing the danger in them, I should seek after the unageing, unailing, non-dying, sorrowless and undefiled supreme security from bondage, Nirvana.’ Then later, while still young, with black hair, endowed with the blessings of youth, in the prime of life and despite the weeping and wailing of my parents, I shaved off my hair and beard, put on the yellow robe and went forth from the home life into homelessness.” (M.I,163, condensed).

It is clear that at some later time the phenomenon of ageing was transformed into an old man, sickness into a sick man, death into a corpse, and so on. This also opens up the possibility that Gotama had been sensitive to the various travails of ordinary existence for some time and that his renunciation was not an impulse triggered by a single incident.

Being Tempted

After his baptism by John the Baptist Jesus retreated into the Judean desert and fasted for 40 days. During this time, he was ministered to by angels which is usually taken to mean that these heavenly beings provided him with food and water. It was also during this time that the Devil appeared before him and tried to tempt him. Firstly, the Devil challenged him to perform a miracle - to turn stones

into bread. Then he asked him to jump from a great height and trust the angels to break his fall. And finally he said that if Jesus would worship him he would give him sovereignty over the whole world (Matt.4,1-11; Lk.4,1-13). These three temptations are usually interpreted as attempts to appeal to Jesus' pride, to test his faith, and to arouse in him a desire for worldly power. In each case Jesus firmly rejected the Devil's offers.

A series of events in the Buddha's life parallel Jesus' temptation in some ways. During the second and final phase of Gotama's quest for awakening, he practiced exercises in self-mortification, which gradually became more and more extreme. These included maintaining uncomfortable postures for long periods, prolonged fasts and eating filth (M.I,77-81). When it looked as if he might perish from exhaustion and starvation, gods offered to feed him with divine food through the pores of his skin so he would not technically break his fast. Gotama rejected this offer (M.I,245). Eventually, his body could take no more and he collapsed. Realising that such self-mortification was ineffective, he decided to eat normally again, rest and regain his strength before trying another approach (M.I,247). As he sat beneath a tree, later to be known as the Bodhi Tree, Māra appeared. Initially Māra tried to get him to give up his quest, return to normal life and just be a good person by "making merit". When this did not work, Māra assembled his "army" around him and attacked him. The Buddha said that he overcame these attacks with insight and by sheer determination (Sn.442-3).

There is little doubt that the authors of the Bible took the Devil to be an actual being just as millions of Christians still do. In the Tipitaka's account of the Buddha's temptation, Māra is a personification of the physical and psychological barriers to awakening (Sn.425 ff). This is clear from the constituents of his "army"; i.e. sensual pleasures, discontent, hunger and thirst, craving, sloth and torpor, fear, doubt, hypocrisy and obstinacy, gain, honour and fame, desire for reputation and exalting oneself while disparaging others (Sn.436-8). In several other discourses there are references to Māra's daughters and again their names point to them being personifications of negative mental states rather than actual beings. The "daughters" are named Craving (*tanhā*), Lust (*arati*) and Desire (*raga*, S.I,124).

Their Teaching Careers

It is not certain how long Jesus lived for or his ministry lasted. Bible scholars are in general agreement that he was 30 or perhaps a year older when he was executed. Everything he did as recorded in the first three Gospels could be fitted easily into a single year, although the Gospel of John, written much later than the other Gospels, says he celebrated three Passovers during his teaching career. According to Christian theology, Jesus' life and particularly his death, were part of God's plan to redeem humanity from sin. However, given that his

teaching career was brief and restricted to Israel, a minor corner of the Roman Empire, it gave only a limited number of people a short period of time to see him and hear his Gospel. It is curious that God did not have Jesus live for 60 or 70 years and travel throughout the Roman empire so that many more people would have the opportunity to be saved.

The Buddha said that he had renounced the world to become a wandering monk at the age of 29 (D.II,151; M.I,163). It can be calculated that he attained awakening when he was 35, although this is not directly mentioned in the Tipitaka. Just before he died, he commented that he had been a monk for “about 50 years” (*vassāni pannāsā samādhikāni*) and that he was “about 80”, unusually long-lived for the time (D.II,100). From this one can estimate that the Buddha’s mission lasted for at least 45 years.

Teaching Children

When a group of people brought their children to Jesus so he could “put his hands on them and pray for them” the disciples rebuked them and told them to go away. Jesus said that the little ones could come to him because the kingdom of heaven belonged to them (Matt.19,13-14). There is no mention of these children having the Gospel explained to them, of them knowing that Jesus was divine, or of them being baptised, all necessary for being saved and going to heaven, so it seems strange that Jesus should say this.

Today, depictions of Jesus with children are very popular and show him with them sitting on his knee, explaining things to them or listening to them, him running through fields of flowers while holding their hands, playing ball with them, even of him dancing ring-a-rosy with delighted toddlers. While such images suggest Jesus often interacted with children there is only this one incident in the Bible when he did.

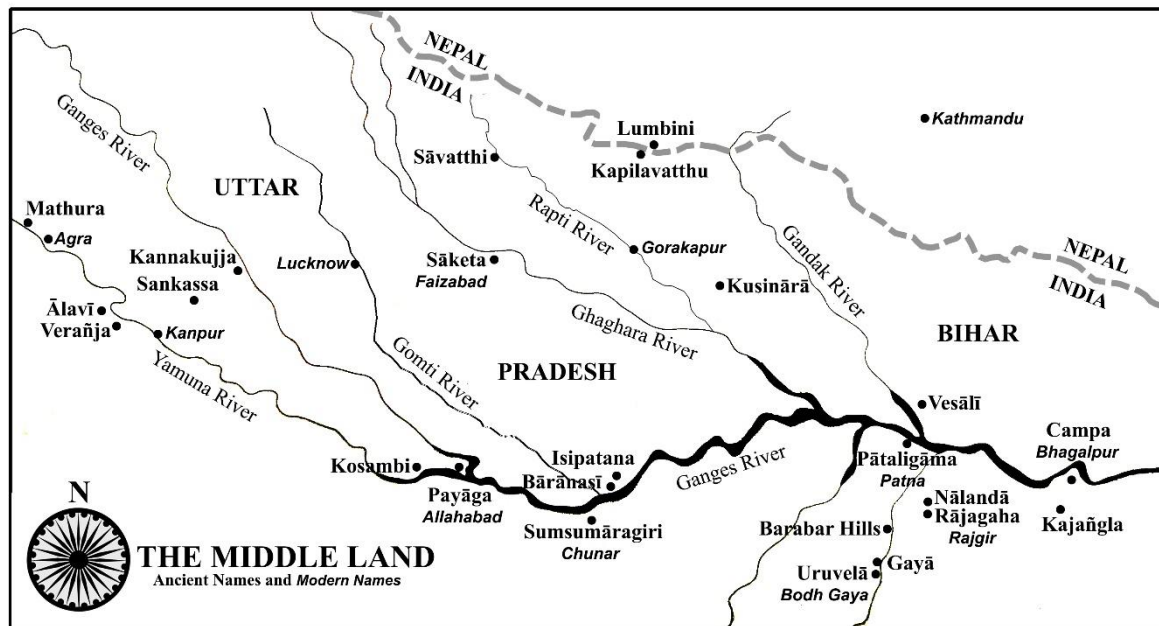
There were several occasions where the Buddha explained aspects of his Dhamma to children. Once he came across a group of boys tormenting a snake with a stick and in simple language they could understand, told them the consequences of both cruel and restrained actions. “One desiring happiness while using a stick to hurt other who likewise desire happiness, will find no happiness after passing away. But one desiring happiness does not harm others who likewise desire happiness will find happiness after passing away” (Ud.11-12). The Buddha also spend time teaching his son Rāhula, and although there is no mention how old the boy was at the time, it is thought that he was not yet in his teens. In one of these talks the Buddha explained to Rāhula the importance of truthfulness, using a prop while doing so. Taking a pot with little water in it he told Rāhula that the spiritual life was of little value for one who lied; turning the pot over he said that one’s spiritual endeavours would be overturned by lying, and finally

showing the boy the empty pot he said that the spiritual life of one who lies would be empty. Using an ordinary object while making a point or explaining an idea, as the Buddha did here, would have added a visual dimension to it and have a greater impact on a young mind (M.I,414).

Interestingly, the Buddha once used a child as a prop to explain something to an adult. Once, a man who happened to have his baby on his lap at the time, asked the Buddha if he would ever say anything that would upset or be disliked by others. The Buddha asked the man what he would do if his baby put a stick or a stone in its mouth and the man replied that he would immediately put his finger in the child's mouth and get the object out, even if it meant drawing blood. The Buddha asked the man why he would act so and he replied that he would do so because he knew that such an object could be a serious danger to the child and he had compassion for it. The Buddha then explained that telling the truth is not always welcomed but that if he thought doing so would upset another, he would do it gently, at an appropriate time and that his motivation would always be compassion for the person (M.I,392-395).

Their Travels

It seems that Jesus was on the move almost continually during his ministry. From the 1st century BCE onwards the Romans built a network of roads throughout Israel and these would have made Jesus' wanderings relatively easy. Roman rule had also greatly improved security so that long-distance travel was fairly safe although not everywhere and not all the time. In Jesus' famous parable, the man who had been robbed, beaten and left for dead and who the Good Samaritan helped, had been travelling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Presumably Jesus included this detail in his parable because such things occasionally happened even on well-used roads. The furthest north Jesus went was the Tyre and Sidon region, the furthest south Jerusalem, and he only ventured a little east of the River Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. Consequently, his mission would have covered an area of about 5,600 square kilometers.



The region where the Buddha spent his life is the wide, shallow Ganges and Yamuna valley and is defined in the north by the Himalayan foothills. There is only one reference to the Buddha going into these hills, a passage saying that he once “sojourned in a forest hut in the Himalayan region”(S.I,116). The Mizrapur and the Rajmahal Hills and the Vindhyachal Range follow the southern edge of the valley and it is unlikely that the Buddha ever went beyond these hills or even into them. The furthest east he went which can still be identified is the town of Kajañgla, now Kankjol 18 kilometers south of Rajmahal, and the furthest west is Mathura, about 180 kilometers south of Delhi. These two places are about 1000 kilometers from each other. It is hard to say how thoroughly the Buddha covered the Middle Land but during 50 years of wayfaring he could have easily visited much of it. The Tipitaka names nearly 900 of places he visited or passed through: cities; towns; villages; hills; caves; rivers; and forests. Thus, he may well have covered at least 290,000 square kilometres.

The practice amongst the itinerate ascetics of the Buddha’s time was to remain in one place during the three months of the monsoon and spend the remaining nine months wayfaring. The Buddha adhered to this tradition at least until about the last 20 years of his life when he spent more time in and around Sāvaththī, the capital of Kosala. The Tipitaka records some of the Buddha’s itineraries. For example, in the 12 months after his awakening he went from Uruvelā to Isipatana near Vārānasi, back to Uruvelā and from there to Rājagaha via Gayā and Latṭivana, a distance of about 315 kilometres. The longest trip recorded in the Tipitaka has him going from Rājagaha to Sāvaththī via Vesālī and then back to Rājagaha on the alternative route by way of Kitagiri and Ālavī (modern Airwa about 28 kilometres from Kannauj), a round trip of at least 1600

kilometres. It is likely that the Buddha would have started a trip like this at the end of the rainy season and arrived back in time for the next one nine months later. The Buddha's final journey took him from Rājagaha, through Nālandā to Pāṭaligāma (modern Patna), then to Vesālī where he spent the three months of the rainy season, and eventually to Kusinārā. This 275 kilometres trek must have been strenuous and trying for a man of about 80 (D.II,72-137). How much time this and the Buddha's other journeys took is hard to estimate.

There were important practical reasons to move from place to place. In a world without the communications that we take for granted it allowed the Buddha to spread his teachings far and wide. He was also aware that some personal contact with him was important, especially for newly ordained monks and nuns and this may have been a factor in determining which districts he visited and how often (S.III,90). During his wanderings he might visit a district, teach, make some disciples, even ordain a few monks or nuns, and then perhaps not come again for many years. If a monk from such a district wished to see him again he could simply set off to wherever the Buddha was staying at the time.

Soṇa Kuṭikaṇṇa was ordained by Mahā Kaccāna and about a year later developed the desire to meet the man whose teachings he had committed himself to. He said to his preceptor: "I have not yet met the Lord face to face. I have only heard about what he is like. If you give me permission I will travel to see the Lord, the Noble One, the Awakened Buddha" (Ud.58). For lay disciples with domestic obligations, undertaking a long journey to see the Buddha was more difficult and so they may have had to wait, perhaps years before they got to see him again. The Thapataya Sutta gives some idea of the excitement caused in an outlying district when its inhabitants heard that the Buddha might be on his way and how the anticipation increased as word of his gradual approach reached them (S.V,348-349). Elsewhere we read of people's anxiousness for news from a visiting monk about the Buddha and of what he had been teaching.

Once while the Buddha was residing in Cātumā several hundred monks turned up to see him (M.I,456). However, with him moving around a lot, it was not always possible to know where he was at any one time. The Sutta Nipāta describes how the 16 disciples of the ascetic Bāvarī set out from the Godāvarī, probably from where it flows through Maharashtra, for northern India in the hope of meeting the Buddha. First they heard he was in Sāvattihī and so they headed there. They went through Kosambī and Sāketa and arrived in Sāvattihī only to be told that the Buddha had left. They followed his route through Setavya, Kapilavatthu, Kusinārā, Pāvā, and Vesālī, finally catching up with him at the Pāsāṇaka Shrine, "and like a thirsty man going for cool water...they quickly ascended the mountain" (Sn.1014).

The Buddha is often described as travelling with 500 monks, a conventional number meaning 'many', or simply with "a large group of monks". At other times, he would go off and wander by himself for a while (S.III,95). It seems that he went everywhere on foot except for when he had to cross major

rivers such as at Payāga, modern Allahabad, when he would have taken a ferry. When travelling he might sleep in a roadside rest house, a threshing floor, an old potter's shed or if nothing else was available, in the open "on the leaf strewn ground"(M.I,206; D.II,131; A.I,136; M.III,238). Once, when he was in the Kuru country, he stayed in a small hut, "its floor carpeted with grass" (M.I, 501). On a return visit to Kapilavatthu he could find no accommodation and had to make do in the simple hermitage of the ascetic Bharañḍu (A.I,276 ff).

The Buddha once told his monks that they should "wander forth for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the good and the happiness of gods and humans. Teach the Dhamma which is beautiful in the beginning, the middle and the end. Explain both the letter and the spirit of the completely fulfilled and perfectly pure spiritual life" (Vin.I,20). In saying this the Buddha was expressing the reason for his many long and arduous journeys; compassion for the world. He wanted as many people as possible to have the opportunity to hear his Dhamma.

Their Disciples

Both the Buddha and Jesus collected around themselves a group of disciples. Jesus had 70 helpers, a number of close devotees, many of them women (Lk.10,1; 8,1-3), and a coterie of 12 disciples who are usually called apostles. That number of apostles was selected because Jesus promised that each of them would rule over one of the 12 tribes of Israel after the world ended (Matt.19,28; Lk.22,29-30). The Bible depicts these apostles as an unpromising and rather lacklustre lot. Peter, James and John were "unlettered" meaning that they were illiterate (Acts.4,13). Matthew was a tax collector which, if he was at the level of record-keeper, means he would have been able to read and write. If he was just an enforcer, which is more likely, he too would have been illiterate and probably someone capable of violence. Either way, those connected with tax collecting were a despised group of men and with good reason. Tradition says Luke was a doctor but whether this means he had trained in medicine or was just a local folk healer is not certain.

At one point, Jesus found the apostles bickering with each other about which of them was the greatest, probably concerning their status when the Kingdom of Heaven was established. They often failed to understand what Jesus was saying to them and he rebuked them as "men of little faith" (Mk.9,33-35; Mk.4,13; 6,52; 8,14-21; Matt.25-27). They also proved to be unreliable in a crisis. When Jesus asked them to keep watch while he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, they fell asleep. After he was arrested, his senior disciple Peter lied and denied ever having known him, while Judas used to steal money and eventually betrayed Jesus to the authorities.

Jesus sent the 12 apostles out to spread the teaching with distinct instructions:

“Go nowhere among the gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. You received without payment so give without payment. Take no gold, silver or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, two tunics, sandals or a staff; for labourers deserve their food. Whatever town or village you enter, find out who in it is worthy, and stay there until you leave. As you enter the house, greet it. If the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town. Truly I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Judgment Day for that town” (Matt.10,5-15).

This commission and several others Jesus gave his apostles bear interesting comparison with the Buddha’s instructions to his disciples. They were to go alone in order to spread the Dhamma as widely as possible, whereas Jesus wanted his apostles to go in pairs (Vin.I,21; Lk,10,1). The former were to teach the Dhamma out of “compassion of the many” while Jesus’ were to teach for the benefit of their fellow Jews only, gentiles (*ethnikos* i.e. non-Jews, outsiders, non-believers) and Samaritans were to be ignored. On another occasion Jesus said that one should treat gentiles as one would tax collectors, that is, shun them and keep away from them (Matt.18,15-17). The idea that the Gospel was primarily for Jews and not for others would have been in keeping with the Jewish exclusiveness of the time and is in part confirmed by another incident recorded in the Gospels. A Canaanite woman once came to Jesus and begged him to heal her daughter who was possessed by a demon. Jesus ignored her pleas. When the apostles urged him to send the woman away he said to the woman: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The desperate woman pleaded once more: “Lord, help me”. Jesus responded: “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” By dogs he meant the Canaanites and other non-Jews. To this the woman replied: “Yes Lord, but even dogs eat crumbs that fall from the master’s table.” Jesus finally relented saying: “Woman you have great faith. Your request is granted” and exorcized the demon (Matt.15,22-28; Mk.7,24-29). It is not clear whether Jesus was simply testing this poor woman’s faith or had no intention of helping her but changed his mind because of the woman’s pleading. One is reminded of the Buddha’s reaction to Mahāpajāpati’s request, although there is a considerable difference between refusing to allow a woman to become a nun and refusing to help a distraught and desperate mother with a sick child.

The Dhamma that the Buddha's disciples were to teach was about "suffering and the ending of suffering" while Jesus' disciples were to warn that the end of the world was fast approaching. The former was only to proclaim the Dhamma, the latter to teach the Gospel but also to perform various miracles, specifically raising the dead, healing the sick and exorcising demons. Both the Buddha and Jesus expected their disciples to take with them the bare minimum for life; eight basic requisites for the monks and for the apostles even less and neither were to expect any monetary return. The Buddha said to his monks: "One should not go about making a business out of the Dhamma" (Ud.66). Indeed, monks were told not even to touch money, i.e. gold and silver. Jesus' instructions to his apostle's end on an unattractive note absent from the Buddha's. He told the apostles that if anyone in any town ignored the message they were proclaiming or refused to believe it, they or the town would be cursed on the Judgment Day and suffer a fate worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, two cities God had punished by incinerating with sulphur and fire (Lk.9,5, also 10,10-12).

Once, probably earlier in his career, the Buddha mentioned that he had "an assembly of hundreds", while later he counted his disciples in thousands; monks and nuns, lay men and lay women, many of whom had attained one or another of the four stages leading to awakening or awakening itself (A.IV,85; M.I,490 ff). While he asked them to look to him as their guide, example and inspiration, he still expected them all, ordained and lay, men and women, to be "accomplished and well-trained, learned and erudite, knowers of the Dhamma, living by Dhamma and walking the path of Dhamma,...and pass on to others what they have received from the Teacher, teach it and proclaim it, establish it and explain it, promote it and clarify it,...so as to refute false teachings and impart this wondrous Dhamma" (D.II,105, condensed).

The Buddha's chief disciples were Sāriputta and Moggallāna, both brahmans, the first known for his wisdom and the second for his psychic abilities. Such was Sāriputta's wisdom that the Buddha sometimes asked him to give a talk in his place. It seems that the Buddha had planned that either or both of these two disciples would lead the monastic order (*saṅgha*) after his passing but it was not to be. Both men predeceased him and another eminent disciple, Mahā Kassapa, took on the role. He it was who convened and chaired the First Council three months after the Buddha's death. Sāriputta's and Moggallāna's deaths seemed to have left the Buddha with a sense of loss as is clear from his comment at the time: "This assembly seems empty to me now that Moggallāna and Sāriputta have attained final Nirvana" (S.V,164).

Peter, sometimes also called Simon Peter, was Jesus' chief disciples. He usually spoke for the other apostles, he is always listed as first amongst them, and it seems Jesus wanted him to lead the early church after his, Jesus', death. Tradition says that Peter travelled to Rome, founded the first church there and become its first bishop (i.e. Pope). And yet only two minor books in the Bible are attributed to Peter, which is strange given that he was with Jesus from the

beginning through to the very end. By contrast, the writings of Paul, who never met Jesus, make up nearly 30% of the New Testament. Paul spent two years in Rome but said nothing about Peter and in his Letter to the Romans he greeted 50 friends by name but Peter is not one of them (Rom.16,1-23). It would appear that quite early in Christianity Peter was side-lined by Paul for some reason. Likewise, James, the brother of Jesus, who must have known Jesus better than anyone, gets only one small book in the New Testament.

The Tipitaka preserves nearly 100 sermons and dialogues by Sāriputta and Moggallāna.

Jesus had a particularly close relationship with one of his disciples. This individual is never named and is only ever referred to as “the disciple who Jesus loved”. It was this disciple who leaned his head on Jesus’ lap during the Last Supper. He may have also been the young man naked except for a linen cloth who was with Jesus on the night he was arrested (Mk.14,51-52). Exactly why someone so special to Jesus was kept anonymous and why an almost naked youth should be with him in the dark has never been explained.

The Buddha had a very close relationship with one of his disciples too, his cousin Ānanda. During the last 25 years of the Buddha’s life, Ānanda acted as his man-servant and assistant and the Buddha came to rely on him and trust him implicitly. If Sāriputta personified wisdom and Moggallāna personified psychic ability, then Ānanda certainly exemplified kindness, gentleness, warmth and love. The Buddha praised him for his “loving acts of body, loving acts of speech and loving acts of mind” (*mettena kāya kamma, mettena vacī kamma, mettena mano kamma*), meaning that he was always ready to lend a helping hand, spoke kindly to people, and thought well of others (D.II,144). The Buddha even said that Ānanda shared some of the very qualities he himself had – that people were delighted to see him, delighted when he taught the Dhamma and disappointed when he finished speaking (D.II,145). On the night the Buddha passed away Ānanda leaned against the door post sobbing at the thought that the Buddha’s end was near.

Judas and Devadatta

The most notorious of Jesus’ apostles was Judas Iscariot. The meaning of the epithet Iscariot is uncertain. It could mean ‘of Kerioth’, suggesting that he came from the village of that name. Alternatively, it could mean ‘dagger man’ and that Judas was associated with a group of anti-Roman terrorists called the Sicarri who assassinated Romans and their Jewish collaborators. Initially Judas, like the other apostles, had the power to exorcise evil spirits and perform miraculous healings (Matt.10,5-10; Lk.9-1), but for reasons that are not explained, he gradually went bad. One of his jobs was to look after the money

Jesus and the other apostles used for their needs and to distribute to the poor, but in fact he would help himself to it. Once when a female devotee poured expensive perfume over Jesus, Judas complained: “Why wasn’t this perfume sold for 300 silver coins and the money given to the poor?” The other apostles suspected that he did not really care about the poor but wanted to steal the money (Jn.12,3-6). Jesus knew or had a premonition that one of his apostles would eventually betray him and sensed that it would be Judas. This turned out to be right. After Jesus’ death Judas died also. There are two different accounts of how this happened; one says he hanged himself, the other says he fell over rupturing his abdomen so that his intestines spilled out (Matt.27,3-5; Act.1,18-19).

If the Buddha had an equivalent to “the disciple that Jesus loved” then he also had an equivalent to Judas; Devadatta, the son of his uncle Suppabuddha. When the Buddha returned to Kapilavatthu for the first time after his awakening, several young Sakyan men, including Devadatta, announced that they wanted to become monks (Vin.II,182). For years Devadatta proved to be a sincere and diligent monk and in several places in the texts he is praised as such (Vin.II,189). The Buddha named him together with several others as an exemplary disciple (Ud.3-4). But things were to change. Later, the Buddha said of him: “Once Devadatta’s character was one way but now it is another way” (Vin.II,189). This change began after Devadatta started to manifest psychic powers as a result of his diligent meditation and he gradually became arrogant and conceited. He came to feel that the Buddha had drifted too far from the traditional ascetic lifestyle and he was able to get some other monks to agree with him. Confronting the Buddha about this, Devadatta demanded that several acetic practices be made compulsory for all monks; that they live only in the forest, never accept invitations to eat at devotees’ homes but live only by begging, wear only rag robes, live in the open and not in a monastery, and that they be vegetarian. Perhaps trying to avoid a conflict, the Buddha said that monks could follow these practices if they wished to but that he would not to make them compulsory, so Devadatta and his supporters formed a splinter group. This was the greatest crisis the Buddha had to face during his 45-year ministry. The Vinaya even claims Devadatta tried to murder the Buddha on two occasions, although this may be an early attempt to make him look as bad as possible (Vin.II,191ff). Whatever the case, his supporters eventually abandoned him and returned to the Buddha and tradition says he later died discredited and alone.

Heavenly Visitations

It is claimed that both Jesus and the Buddha occasionally had visitations from heavenly beings. Once Jesus led his disciples to the top of a mountain and as they looked on, his appearance gradually changed to a dazzling white. Then the ancient prophets Elijah and Moses appeared with him, leaving the disciples

who witnessed this speechless. Later Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after he had died (Mk.9,2-9).

A week after the Buddha's awakening something similar happened to him. Realising that the truths he had discovered were "deep, difficult to see and understand...subtle and intelligible to the wise" and that the world is "delighted only by sense pleasures", he decided not to teach to others what he had realised. It would only be "tiresome and annoying" to him if they simply argued with him. Brahmā Sahampatī, a deity from one of the highest heavens, dismayed by this decision, appeared before the Buddha, bowed and beseeched him to reconsider:

"Before you, there has been an impure Dhamma in Magadha, devised by impure minds. Open the gate of the Immortal so that all who are capable of hearing can respond to you, oh Stainless One." Thinking that few people would understand the Dhamma but there were some "with but little dust in their eyes" the Buddha decided to teach for their sake (Vin.I,4-6).

In the following decades, various divine beings often visited the Buddha, usually to ask him questions on spiritual matters.

Several of the Buddha's disciples had similar encounters with divine beings. Apparently, gods would sometimes manifest themselves to and converse with Ugga, one of the Buddha's more advanced lay disciples. While others might have considered such divine visitations a sign of special favour or a great blessing, Ugga was quite unimpressed and unmoved. Anything of significance the gods could have told him he had already learned from the Buddha (A.IV, 211).

The Background to their Missions

Centuries before Jesus, the Jews came to believe in a single deity named Yahweh who had a special relationship with them – giving them laws to live by, receiving their sacrifices, and protecting them from their enemies. If and when they were invaded and occupied by neighbouring kingdoms who worshipped other gods, the Jews believed that Yahweh would send a king to drive the occupiers out and liberate them. Such a king would be called a messiah, meaning 'anointed one' because he would be consecrated and anointed by God for this task. The title Christ which Jesus was given, is from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *māšîaḥ*. Anyone could qualify to be a messiah if he had military prowess. When the pagan Persian king Cyrus allowed the Jews, who had been driven into exile, to return to their homeland, the Bible hailed him as a messiah (Is.45,1).

By Jesus' time, the Jews had been living under Roman domination, directly or indirectly, for decades and were longing for God to send a messiah to free them from these hated pagan overlords. The understanding of the nature and mission

of a messiah evolved over the centuries but several things remained unchanged; that the messiah would be a human king, that he would be anointed and empowered by God, and that he would liberate the Jewish homeland from its enemies. It seems that Jesus came to believe that he was the long-awaited messiah.

Around the 6th century BCE in India the notion had evolved that at some time in the future a universal monarch, a 'wheel-turner' (*cakkavatin*), would unite all India, not through military might but through the power of his virtue, and establish a just and righteous society. The Buddha was familiar with the wheel-turner concept and mentioned it several times, but he never claimed to be a wheel-turning monarch himself, none of his disciples ever considered him to be one (e.g. D.III,58 ff; A.I,109 ff), and as was shown before, Asita did not predict that he would become one. A. p.1057 bottom

Many of the wandering ascetics (*samaṇa*) of the Buddha's time looked back to great spiritually accomplished masters who supposedly lived in the distant past. Such masters were called Buddhas, Jinas, Tīrthaṅkaras, Kevalins, Uttamapurisas or Munis. The Jains for example, claimed that their religion had been founded by Pārśva, probably a real person who lived in about the 7th century BCE. Others may also have been real people whose names at least had been remembered; most were properly legendary or semi-legendary figures. The Buddha believed in such past awakened masters, naming six of them, and considered himself to be the most recent of these. Such awakened beings were not, the Buddha believed, sent by any deity, they would not come at any particular time, and they were not associated with any particular ethnic group, but would benefit anyone who would listen to them. The concept of past Buddhas was based on the idea that ultimate truth was eternal (*dhammo sananto*), that humans have a natural capacity to comprehend it, and that some individuals would sometimes do this.

Related to the belief in a messiah, many Jews during Jesus' time also had apocalyptic expectations, i.e. the idea that the world or at least the world as it was known, would soon end. The belief was that the world was a corrupt and evil place and an angry God was going to destroy it in a cataclysm of brimstone and fire, destroy the wicked, save the righteous and then establish a new and perfect world.

How Others Saw Them

Having been in the public arena for so long and proclaiming some ideas that challenged existing beliefs, the Buddha of course attracted opposition, criticism and sometimes even antipathy. Although unruffled by such reactions, he usually made attempts to justify his position by explaining himself more fully and usually without attacking his critics on a personal level.

Within a year of his awakening, the Buddha had made disciples of the three Kassapa brothers, the most well-known and esteemed *samaṇas* in Magadha, together with all their followers. Shortly after this, some 250 disciples of another *samaṇa* teacher, Sañjaya Belatthiputta, abandoned him to join the Buddha's order also. These two events created great interest throughout Magadha and made the Buddha famous very early in his career. Soon numerous young men were requesting to become monks and the Buddha was happy to accept them all. But his readiness to ordain anyone who asked for it soon created problems. Ill-trained and unsupervised monks were wandering all over the place causing embarrassment. Also, so many youths and men abandoning their families created disquiet amongst the people affected by it and led to grumbling against the Buddha himself. People were saying: "The *samaṇa* Gotama proceeds by making us childless, by making us widows and by breaking up families." If the Buddha was concerned by this, he did not mention it. When informed of what people were saying about him he commented: "This noise will not last long, it will continue for seven days and then cease" (Vin.I, 43). Only after this did the Buddha start laying down rules for vetting candidates and for ordaining and training monks. He had apparently not given sufficient thought to the proper organisation of his order before accepting large numbers of candidates into it.

Although the Buddha was situated firmly within the non-Vedic *samaṇa* tradition, he disregarded some of its most basic assumptions, particularly the practice of painful austerities and self-mortification (*attakilmatha*). For this he was sometimes criticised by other ascetics. When, after several years of undergoing such disciplines himself, he finally abandoned them and started washing and eating properly, the five disciples who had attached themselves to him were outraged. They accused him of "reverting to the life of plenty" (*āvatto bahullāya*) and left him in disgust (Vin.I,9). The ascetic Kassapa repeated to the Buddha the accusation he had heard about him: "The ascetic Gotama disapproves of all austerities, he criticises and blames all those who live the hard life." The Buddha denied this. He explained that he praised austerities that led to understanding and liberation and criticised those that did not, implying that the first did not necessarily lead to the second (D.I,161ff). As shown above, the justification for Devadatta breaking with the Buddha and founding his own order was the Buddha's de-emphasis of the value of austerity and self-mortification.

One interesting perception that many people had of the Buddha was that despite his relative youth he claimed to be fully awakened, while most others making such claims were "long gone in years". King Pasenadi asked the Buddha about this: "Even those ascetics and brahmins who are the head of orders and sects, well-known teachers, famous and considered so by the general public, even they do not claim to have attained the unsurpassed perfect awakening. Therefore, why should you make such a claim when you are still so young and you have so recently become an ascetic?" The Buddha replied that even though a king might be young, a snake only recently hatched or a fire just ignited, they could still have

an impact and that therefore careful note should be taken of them (S.I,68-70). For the Buddha, being awakened had nothing to do with age. “One should not be called an elder just because one’s hair is grey. It could be said, ‘He has grown old in vain.’ In whom there is truth and Dhamma, harmlessness, restraint, control, and who has purged the mental defilements, that one is an elder” (Dhp. 260-261).

As will be mentioned in more detail below, public discussions and debates on religious questions were a feature on Indian society during the Buddha’s time. For some, such events were a chance to learn about the new ideas being aired while for a few they were an opportunity to promote themselves as clever and entertaining disputants. There were “certain learned nobles who are clever, well-versed in the doctrines of others, real hair-splitters, who go about demolishing the views of others with their sharp intelligence. When they hear that the samana Gotama will visit a certain village or town they formulate a question thinking: ‘We will go and ask him this question and if he answers like this we will say that and if he answers like that we will say this and thereby refute his Dhamma’... But when they go to him and he delights, uplifts, inspires and gladdens them with talk on Dhamma they do not even ask their question, let alone refute his Dhamma” (M.I,176, condensed) As a result of the Buddha’s ability to disarm and impress such opponents and disputants, some people suspected him of doing so by occult means (M.I,381).

Another criticism of the Buddha and interestingly one that continues to be made even today, was that his concept of Nirvana and his doctrine of non-self (*anatta*) amounted to a form of nihilism (*uceddhavada*). When accused of being a nihilist he denied it and responded: “There is one way of speaking truthfully that one could say I teach a doctrine of annihilation and train my disciples in it. I teach the annihilation of greed, hatred and delusion, I teach the annihilation of many evil and wrong mental states” (Vin.I,234-235).

A few of the more extreme samanaṣas accused the Buddha of being careless with life. When the ascetic Māgandiya saw the grass spread out on the floor where the Buddha was sleeping he commented: “It is a sorry sight indeed when we see the samanaṣas Gotama’s bed, that destroyer of growth” (M.I,502). It is not entirely certain what this criticism meant but it is likely that Māgandiya accepted the belief current at the time amongst some samanaṣas that plants were sentient life and thus to pluck or cut them was tantamount to killing, something the more scrupulous samanaṣas would avoid (M.I,369).

Others condemned the Buddha for supposed indirect killing. The Jains, who were strict vegetarians, attacked the Buddha and his disciples for eating meat. “Many Jains went through the town, from one street to another, from one square to another, waving their arms and shouting, ‘The general Sīha has this very day slaughtered a large creature to feed to the samana Gotama who is going to eat it knowing that it was slaughtered specifically for him’.” (A.IV,187). The Buddha did not respond to the charge that accepting and then eating a meal of meat amounted to killing. However, he made it a rule for his monks and nuns that

they should not accept such a meal if they saw, heard or suspected that the meat was from an animal that had been slaughtered specifically for them (M.I,369). It is widely believed that the Buddha taught vegetarianism but this is not correct, although the practice became common amongst some Buddhists in later centuries.

At the end of a discussion with the Buddha an interlocutor would often express his or her satisfaction with what the Buddha had said - but not always. Several weeks after his awakening, the Buddha set off to find his five former disciples in order to teach them what he had realised. On the road between Uruvelā and Gayā he encountered an ascetic named Upaka. Even from a distance Upaka noticed and was impressed by the Buddha's calm demeanour. When the two got to each other Upaka said to the Buddha: "Your senses are clear and your complexion is clear and radiant. Who is your teacher?" The Buddha replied that he had no teachers and because he had attained complete awakening no one was in a position to teach him anything. This reply may have been true but Upaka took it to be an outrageous boast. Shaking his head he walked off saying: "It may be so, your reverence"(M.I,171).

After giving a talk to a group of his own monks at Ukkaṭṭhā, we are told that they were "not delighted by the Lord's words" although we are not told why this was so (M.I,6). On another occasion, while on a visit to Kapilavatthu, the Buddha met his mother's brother Daṇḍapāni who asked him to explain his Dhamma. After listening without comment until the Buddha had finished, the old man "shook his head, wagged his tongue, raised his eyebrows so that three wrinkles formed on his forehead and then walked off leaning on his stick"(M.I, 108-109). Once during a talk with a brahman, the Buddha said that those brahmans who so confidently explained what the ancient sages taught while admitting that they themselves did not have their attainments, were like a string of blind men. "The first one does not see, the middle one does not see and neither does the last". At this, the brahman became "angry and displeased with this comparison and he reviled, disparaged and criticised the Lord, saying: 'The samaṇa Gotama will be disgraced!'"(M.II,200). In this case, the discussion continued, the tension eased and eventually the brahman went on to develop some respect for the Buddha.

The Tipitaka also records a few examples where some of the Buddha's disciples abandoned him. Sunakkhatta, who had been a monk for some time, was dissatisfied with the Dhamma and said to the Buddha: "Lord, I am leaving you. I am no longer living by your guidance." The Buddha responded to this declaration by questioning Sunakkhatta. "Did I ever say to you, 'Come, and live by my teachings'?"

"No Lord."

"Then did you ever say to me that you wished to live by my teachings?"

"No Lord."

"That being the case, who are you and what are you giving up, you foolish man?" (D.III,2-3).

Apparently Sunakkhatta had hoped to witness the Buddha perform a psychic feat or miracle and when this did not happen he became disappointed. More commonly though, those who dropped out of the monastic order maintained their commitment to the Dhamma. “Even those who fall from the monkhood and return to the lay life, still praise the Buddha, the Dhamma and the order. They blame themselves rather than others, saying: ‘We were unlucky, we had scant merit, for although we became monks in such a well-proclaimed Dhamma, we were unable to live the perfect and pure spiritual life for our whole lives.’ Having become monastery attendants or lay disciples they take and observe the Five Precepts” (M.II,5).

The most disturbing event in the whole of the Buddha’s career happened during one of his sojourns in Vesālī. He had given a talk to an assembly of monks on a contemplation called *asubhabhāvana*. This practice involved contemplating the unpleasant aspects of physicality; the sometimes revolting bodily discharges that soon become apparent without regular washing. The purpose of this practice was to encourage detachment towards the body, to cool sexual impulses and to act as a balance to the usual over-emphasis on physical attractiveness. After his talk the Buddha announced that he wanted to go into a solitary retreat for half a month and that no one was to visit him except the monk who brought his food. While he was away the monks did this contemplation with drastic results for some of them. The Tipitaka recounts that some 30 became so disgusted their bodies that they committed suicide. When the Buddha returned from his retreat and noticed some of the monks missing, he asked where they were and was told what had happened. The Tipitaka records that he then gave a talk on mindfulness of breathing, emphasising its ability to evoke tranquillity and calm, but it records nothing he had to say about this tragedy (S.V,321-322). It is also silent about comments others’ may have made about it, although people must have been as deeply shocked by it as they would be even today. It is often claimed that the Buddha was able to read a person’s mind or at least sense their abilities and inclinations and present the Dhamma to them in such a way that it would appeal specifically to them. The Vesālī incident is evidence that he could not always do this.

Despite the occasional criticisms and negative assessments, the Buddha was the most respected teacher of his time, along with the Jain teacher Mahāvīra who was senior to him by about a dozen years. People were attracted as much by what the Buddha said as how he acted. One admirer stated: “The Lord acts as he speaks and he speaks as he acts. Other than him, we find no teacher as consistent as this whether we survey the past or the present” (D.II,224). His penetrating wisdom and the persuasiveness with which he explained his Dhamma are mentioned time and again as among his most noticeable traits. The Tipitaka records this conversation between two brahmans.

“At that time, the brahman Kāranapāli was constructing a building for the Licchavis. On seeing his fellow brahman Pingiyānī coming in the distance

he approached him and asked: ‘How are you? From where is your honour Pingiyāni coming from so early in the day?’

‘I come from the presence of the samaṇa Gotama.’

‘Well, what do you think of his clarity of wisdom? Do you think he is a wise man?’

‘But what am I compared to him? Who am I to judge his clarity? Only one like him who could judge his clarity of wisdom?’

‘High indeed is the praise that you give the samaṇa Gotama.’

‘But what am I compared to him? Who am I to praise the samaṇa Gotama? Truly he is praised by the praised. He is the highest amongst gods and humans’.” (A.III,237).

Once a monk who had spent the rainy season with the Buddha in Sāvattthī arrived in Kapilavatthu. When people heard where the monk had come from he found himself deluged with questions about the Buddha (S.V,450). On another occasion a group of brahmins from Kosala and Magadha who had arrived in Vesālī heard that the Buddha just happened to be in town and decided that the opportunity to meet him was too good to miss. The Buddha had given his attendant instructions that he was not to be disturbed, when the brahmins were informed of this they were adamant that they would not leave until they got to meet the famous teacher. Seeing this impasse, the novice Sīha asked the attendant to tell the Buddha that there were three people waiting to see him. The attendant said he would not do this but he would not object if Sīha did. This was done, and the Buddha asked Sīha to put a mat outside his residence in the shade for him to sit on while he talked to the brahmins (D.I,151).

Such was the Buddha’s Dhamma and the way he presented it that it could even have a noticeable effect on a person’s physical features. When Sāriputta met Nakulapitā and noticed how peaceful and composed he looked, he commented to him: “Householder, your senses are calmed, your complexion is clear and radiant, so I suppose today you have had a face to face talk with the Lord?” Nakulapitā replied: “How could it be otherwise, Sir? I have just now been sprinkled with the nectar of the Lord’s Dhamma” (S.III,2).

People often expressed surprise by what was seen as the Buddha’s magnanimity and openness, particularly concerning religious matters. Once, on meeting a party of ascetics, their leader asked him to explain his Dhamma. He replied: “It is hard for you, having different opinions, inclinations and biases, and following a different teacher, to understand the doctrine I teach. Therefore, let us discuss your teaching.” The ascetics were astonished by this. “It is wonderful, truly marvellous, how great are the powers of the samaṇa Gotama in that he holds back his own teaching and invites others to discuss theirs!” (D.III,40).

Some teachers would tell their disciples or admirers not to give any help to those of other religions, an attitude that prevails amongst some religious people even today. As will be pointed out below, while the Buddha could be critical of

other doctrines he said of himself: “I analyse things first. I do not [usually] speak categorically” (*vibhajjavādo nāham ettha ekamsavādo*, M.II,197). By this he meant that he refrained from making sweeping generalizations about other beliefs but would examine them and acknowledge any truths they might contain while also pointing out their weaknesses. Likewise, he was able to acknowledge that the followers of other religions might well be sincerely striving for truth and thus were worthy of encouragement and support. When Upāli left Jainism to embrace the Dhamma, the Buddha said to him: “For a long time your family has supported the Jains so you should consider still giving them alms when they come to your house” (M.I,378-379). On another occasion someone said to the Buddha: “I have heard it said that you, good Gotama, teach that charity should only be given to you, not to others, to your disciples, not to the disciples of other teachers. Are those who say this representing your opinion without distorting it? Do they speak according to your teaching? For indeed good Gotama, I am anxious not to misrepresent you.” The Buddha replied: “Those who say this are not of my opinion, they misrepresent me and say something false. Truly, whoever discourages another from giving charity hinders in three ways. He hinders the giver from acquiring good, he hinders the receiver from receiving the charity, and he has already ruined himself through his stinginess” (A.I,161). There is no record of what people thought about the Buddha’s openness towards and respect for others’ beliefs but it is likely that they considered it to be a welcome difference from the more common jealousy and competitiveness between most other sects of the time.

People also noticed and admired the Buddha’s love of silence. He said: “Learn this from the waters. In mountain clefts and chasms, small streams gush loudly, but great rivers flow silently. Empty things make a noise while the full is always quiet. The fool is like a half-filled pot; the wise person is like a deep still pool” (Sn.720-1). He praised in particular, the maintenance of a dignified silence in the face of insults and false accusations. “Not to react to anger with angry words is to win a battle hard to win. It is to act for one’s own and the other’s welfare, although those who do not know the Dhamma will think you are a fool” (S.I,162).

Despite the numerous accounts of the Buddha giving talks and engaging in dialogues and debates, he nonetheless spent a good deal of his time meditating far into the night, going into solitary retreat, sometimes for as long as three months, and frequently just sitting in silence (S.V,325-326). It was said of him that he “seeks lodgings in the forest, in the depth of the jungle, in quiet places with little noise, places far from the crowd, undisturbed by people and well suited for solitude” (D.III,38). Once a group of ascetics were sitting noisily talking and arguing when they saw the Buddha in the distance. One of them said to the others: “Quiet Sirs, make no noise. That ascetic Gotama is coming and he likes silence and speaks in praise of silence. If he sees that our group is quiet he might come and visit us” (D.I,179).

Even people who met and listened to the Buddha without necessarily becoming his disciples would sometimes express their admiration for him. A good example of this is this comment by the leading brahman Soṇadaṇḍa.

“The samaṇa Gotama is well-born on both sides of his family, being of pure and unbroken descent for at least seven generations, irreproachable as far as his birth is concerned. He renounced a large kin group and gave up much gold and grain ... He is virtuous, his virtue is wide and ever-widening. He is well-spoken, of pleasing speech, polite, with attractive enunciation, clear and to the point. He is the teacher of many. He has given up sensuality and vanity. He teaches action and the results of action and honours the blameless brahman traditions. He is an ascetic of high birth, coming from a leading warrior caste family, one of great wealth and estate. People come from foreign kingdoms and lands to consult him... Many gods and humans are devoted to him and if he stays in some town or village that place is not troubled by malevolent spirits. He has a crowd of followers, he is a teacher of teachers and even the heads or various sects come to discuss matters with him. Unlike some other ascetics and brahmans, his fame is based on his genuine attainment of unsurpassed knowledge and conduct. Even King Bimbisāra of Magadha has become his disciple, as has his son and wife, his courtiers and ministers. So has King Pasenadi of Kosala and the brahman Pokkharasāti too”(D.I,119, condensed).

Soṇadaṇḍa’s accolade tells us something about the Buddha and also about the concerns and interests of the brahman class of the time, what they considered admirable.

Jesus’ uncompromising attitude is well summed up by his assertion; “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” (Matt 12,30). For him, things were either black or white, good or evil, right or wrong. This made him a confrontational and polarising figure, attracting both praise and blame in equal measure. Some were intrigued and impressed by him and thought he might be John the Baptist reborn; others believed he was Elijah, or one of the other Old Testament prophets (Mk.6,14-15). His chief disciple Peter was among those who believed he was the long hoped-for messiah (Mk.8,27). Others were less impressed, saying: “Look at this man! He is a glutton and a drinker, a friend of tax collectors and other sinners”(Matt,11,19). When several priests saw Jesus in the house of a tax collector eating with a group of bad types, they asked him why he would mix with such people. He replied: “People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people but sinners”(Mk.2,17). This explanation was perfectly reasonable and underlined Jesus’ belief in a loving, caring God who wanted to save everyone, including people who others had given up on and shunned.

Nevertheless, his actions were unconventional and seen as unworthy of a religious teacher. It may also have raised suspicions about his private behaviour, just as it would today if a monk, priest or pastor mixed with petty criminals, prostitutes or gang members.

Jesus was able to attract large crowds, sometimes up to four or five thousand strong, sometimes so many that there would be a crush (Mk.5,24; Matt,8,18). It seems likely that some in these crowds came to hear what he had to say but just as many came hoping to either witness a miracle or to be miraculously healed.

“News about him spread through the whole country of Syria so that people brought to him all those who were sick, suffering from all kinds of diseases and disorders: people with demons, epileptics, and paralytics – and Jesus healed them all. Large crowds followed him from Galilee and the Ten Towns, from Jerusalem, Judea, and the lands on the other side of the Jordan” (Matt,4,23-25).

The evidence suggests that large crowds did not necessarily mean that they all accepted his Gospel or were even interested in it. “The people in the towns where he performed most of his miracles did not turn from their sins”(Matt.11,20), and because of this Jesus had severe words for them: “You can be sure that on the Judgment Day, God will show more mercy to Sodom than to you!”(Matt.11,21-24). After he fed a huge crowd by miraculously producing food for them they followed him as he left, but not because they liked what he was teaching or because of the miracle he had performed, but because of the food they got, as Jesus himself realized (Jn.6,25-26).

Whether liked or not, believed or not, there can be no doubt that there was something about Jesus which made people sit up and take notice of him. His sometimes confrontational approach was part of it, so were his miraculous abilities, the claims he made about himself, and his startling predictions about the end of the world. So too were some of the things he taught. It is generally agreed that the pinnacle of Jesus’ Gospel was the Sermon on the Mount. While continuing to be lauded, parts of this famous sermon have almost never been put into practice and would not even get assent today if recommended by someone else.

For example, few would agree that looking at a woman with lust should count as equivalent to actually committing adultery, or that calling someone a fool deserves being condemned to eternal hell. The prohibition against divorcing one’s wife only if she is unfaithful, has condemned millions to either a loveless marriage or the stigma of being an adulterer. Giving no thought for the future might be possible for monks, but would be totally impractical for the vast majority of people. Someone who tried to live like this would be branded irresponsible. Is it really advisable or even good “not resist an evil person”? And

if someone sues you for a certain amount and wins, are you really going to give them more than the court awarded them? Most intelligent people today would consider lending anything to anyone who asks for it, to be an invitation to exploitation.

The advice to mutilate oneself to avoid committing sin and thereby going to hell is extreme by any standard, and while most commentators claim that this was hyperbole on the part of Jesus, it is the only part of the Sermon that is ever considered such (Matt.5,29-30). It is interesting what the Buddha had to say about self-mutilation. Once a monk actually cut off his genitals in despair at being unable to control his sexual urges. When the Buddha was informed of this he commented: "This foolish man cut off one thing when he should have cut off another," i.e. the desires and fantasies rather than the organ that responded to them. He then made it an offence to mutilate oneself for any reason (Vin.II,110).

Despite this, other parts of the Sermon on the Mount are a timeless and universal call to kindness and virtue that any decent person could agree with. Jesus declared that the merciful, the peacemakers, the pure of heart and those who thirst for righteousness are blessed. He asked his audience to speak straightforwardly and honestly rather than taking oaths, to try to reconcile with an adversary instead of taking them to court, to refrain from judging others or retaliating against abuse, to love one's enemies and sincerely pray for those who persecute you. He urged people to treat others as they would want to be treated themselves. He said that one's piety should be unostentatious and one's acts of charity unadvertised. He counselled that if while making an offering to God you remember that someone has something against you, leave your offering on the altar, go and make up with that person and then return and make your offering. He said one should pray with humble gratitude for "your daily bread" which he believed, God has provided.

It is not surprising that some people were impressed by this sermon, not only its content, but because of the simple, unfeigned sincerity with which he proclaimed. It was probably much more alive and personal than the dull, legalistic sermons of the Pharisees that people were used to. But other things Jesus taught or perhaps the way he phrased them, disturbed people and they distanced themselves from him. Once he preached:

"I am telling you the truth; if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have life in yourselves. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them to life on the last day. For my flesh is the real food; my blood is the real drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me and I live in them"(Jn.6,53-56).

This was too much for his audience. "Because of this, many of Jesus' followers turned back and would not go with him anymore"(Jn.6,66). Perhaps if

Jesus had taken the time to explain what he meant by these startling words he might have got a different reaction. However, at a time when consuming raw meat, let alone human flesh, was taboo, and even all blood had to be flushed from meat before being consumed in order to conform to the God's dietary laws, it shocked and repelled people.

When Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth and gave a talk in the town's synagogue, the locals were surprised that the country boy they have known, the handyman's son, spoke with such eloquence and learning. Surprised but not impressed! They were cool towards him and what he had to say. Perhaps they thought he was getting above his station, perhaps he said something that offended them, or perhaps they had heard about his reputation of mixing with shady characters. Whatever it was, being cold-shouldered by the folk he had grown up with seems to have shaken Jesus. He tried to heal some of the town's sick but his miraculous powers failed him and only two or three were healed. Annoyed that no one had faith in him, he left Nazareth and went to the surrounding villages (Mk.6,1-6).

The Old Testament lays out all the laws that God gave to Moses for the Jews to live by. These include every aspect of life and all religious rituals that must be practiced. One of the most important of these laws is to rest on the Sabbath, the last day of the week. This was interpreted to mean refraining from virtually any activity, even the simplest. The criteria of a person's piety were how strictly they practiced all these laws. While Jesus taught that people should follow the sacred laws more closely than the Pharisees did (Matt.5,17-20), he was actually committed to a less burdensome application of them, or at least some of them, and his critics were quick to point out this contradiction. They asked him why he did not fast as did the disciples of John the Baptist and other pious folk (Matt.9,14; Mk.2,18). When he offhandedly plucked a head of wheat while walking through a wheat field he was accused of breaking the Sabbath. His rebuttal to this charge was a good one. "The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings; they were not made for the Sabbath" (Mk.2,27). It may well have been that some of the Pharisees were hypocritical nit-pickers when it came to following the law, but that was no good reason for Jesus to ignore it.

Once a group of Pharisees invited Jesus to a meal, which may have been just a friendly gesture on their part or an attempt to get to know him better. When Jesus began eating one of the Pharisees mentioned to him that he had not washed his hands first, as was the custom. This triggered a long angry tirade from Jesus against the Pharisees. Addressing him in a respectful manner they pleaded: "Teacher, when you say this you insult us too!" Ignoring this, Jesus continued to tar all Pharisees with the same brush (Lk.11,37-52). This and similar outbursts must have struck some people as incongruous given that Jesus taught one should not judge others.

The Buddha was quite capable of being critical and he sometimes was towards aspects of Brahmanism and what he saw as the hypocrisy of some of its

priests. In the Abhayarājakumāra Sutta however, he said that if he did deliver criticism it would be based on fact, likely to be remedial, spoken at an appropriate time, and always motivated by compassion (M.I,395). One is left with the impression that Jesus' frequent angry outbursts did not include such considerations.

Their Last Days

The four accounts of Jesus' last days agree in general while differing considerably in detail. This is particularly so in the case of his trial, which is not surprising given that it would not have been open to the public and none of his disciples would have been present. According to Matthew, Jesus remained silent throughout the proceedings, while John claims he was quite vocal, asking questions, answering them and explaining himself (Matt.27,11-14; Jn.18.33; 19,1-11). Rather than present the four versions, it will be better to rely mainly on Matthew's account.

Jesus' last journey took him to Jerusalem where he went to participate in the important feast of Passover. He entered the city riding on a donkey or a colt. Being already well-known, a crowd gathered to watch and welcome his arrival, some even laying their cloaks on the road for him to ride over. Other inhabitants had never heard of him and asked the others: "Who is this?" (Matt.21,8-9). What happened next is somewhat confused. The first three Gospels say that Jesus went to the great temple and drove the money changers out, although John says this happened at the beginning of his ministry.

As a part of the Passover ritual, participants had to sacrifice an animal at the great temple in Jerusalem. Coming from all over the land they could not easily bring an animal with them so there were arrangements for them to buy one in the temple. They could not buy an animal using Roman currency because it had an image of the emperor in it, anathema in such a holy place, so they had to change their Roman coins into special temple currency. This was the role of the money changers. Jesus was apparently outraged by all this and he knocked over the money changers' tables, drove them out and blocked anyone carrying anything through the temple courtyard (Matt.11,15-16). Disrupting the usual running of such a major institution must have alarmed the authorities. After this, Jesus had a tense confrontation with the temple priests (Jn.8,42-47). Later, perhaps the next day, he gave talks in the temple which included yet another bitter condemnations of the priests.

"Watch out for the teachers of the law, who like to walk around in their long robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplace, who choose the reserved seats in the synagogues and the best places at feasts. They take

advantage of widows and rob them of their homes, and make a show of saying long prayers. Their punishment will be all the worse” (Lk.20,45-47).

On this occasion Jesus was addressing a crowd of ordinary folk, but later he said even more harsh things directly to the priests: “You snakes and children of snakes! How do you expect to escape from hell?” In seemingly uncontrollable rage he even accused them of being murderers (Matt.23,33-34). In an earlier encounter with the priests he went beyond this, calling them children of the Devil (Jn.8,44). With the best will in the world, it is difficult to detect a sense of proportion or kindness in these words.

Not surprisingly, such outbursts made Jesus no friends. His disruption in the temple must have worried the Romans and his tirades against the temple priests must have lost him any sympathy they may have had for him. Jesus as depicted in the New Testament is sometimes markedly different from the “gentle Jesus meek and mild” of the famous hymn and of popular perception.

The Jewish priests knew only too well that if Jesus’ behaviour provoked the Romans to initiate a crackdown it would be bad for everyone, so they decided to get rid of him. They got help from a surprising quarter, one of Jesus’ own apostles, Judas. Why this apostle should turn against his master is hard to explain. Was it nothing more than a desire for money as the New Testament maintains? (Jn.12,1-8). Jesus had promised Judas that he would be amongst the 12 apostles to rule with him over the Kingdom of God once it was established (Matt.19,28). Had he ceased to believe this promise, or was it some other motive? Whatever it was, Jesus sensed that he was going to be arrested and that one of his disciples was going to have a hand in this. After sharing the Passover meal together he and the apostles went to the garden of Gethsemane just beyond the walls of Jerusalem, while Judas snuck away by himself. Wanting to pray in private, Jesus asked the apostles to keep watch while he did so. When he came back he found them asleep. This happened two more times and seemingly in exasperation, Jesus rebuked them: “Simon, are you asleep? Weren’t you able to stay awake for even an hour?” (Matt.26,40). Just as he said this Judas and a crowd of armed men sent by the high priest arrived and seized Jesus. There was a brief struggle during which Peter drew his sword and cut the ear off a servant of the high priest (Matt,26,50).

This incident raises a few questions. Jesus had once said that he had not come “to bring peace on earth but the sword” (*alla machairan*, Matt.10,34), and before his arrest he had instructed his disciples to arm themselves. “Whoever does not have a sword must sell his coat and buy one” (Lk.22,36). It seems he was expecting trouble and wanted his disciples to protect him, apparently by force if necessary, and that the apostles understood this is evidenced by one of them shedding blood. Luke claims that Jesus only wanted the disciples to have swords in order to fulfil a supposed prophesy about the Messiah from the Old Testament. In fact, this prophesy says nothing about weapons or violence and it

is unlikely that the passage refers to Jesus. It mentions a messenger sent by God to free the Jewish people from enslavement by their neighbours. Continuing, it says: “He was placed in a grave with those who are evil, he was buried with the rich... He will see his descendants, he will live long”(Is.52,7-15 to 53,1-12). None of this is applicable to or happened to Jesus.

The use of violence or coercion for any reason or by anyone, even violent language, is completely at odds with the most fundamental principles of the Buddha’s ethics. Many times he said that one should “put aside the stick and the sword and live with care, empathy and kindly compassion for all living beings” (D.I,4). He also taught: “Putting aside the weapon towards all beings in the world, whether moving or still, one should not kill, get others to kill, or encourage killing” (Sn.394). King Pasenadi expressed amazement that the Buddha was able to train even undisciplined and unruly people “without stick or sword” (*adaṇḍena asatthena*, Mk.1,122). The Buddha referred to violent language as “stabbing others with the weapon of the tongue” (M.I,320) and insisted that his followers should restrain themselves from such speech. Quite apart from using actual or even allegorical weapons, the Buddha said that just to manufacture or sell them would be contrary to his teaching of Right Livelihood (*sammā ājiva*), the fifth step on his Noble Eightfold Path (A.III,308).

After his arrest, Jesus was taken before the council of Jewish priests and elders but he refused to answer any of the charges they brought against him, and the witness statements were contradictory. Finally, the high priest asked him whether he was the Messiah to which he replied: “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated on the right-hand of the Almighty and coming with the clouds of heaven.” Not for the first time Jesus was stating to the people he was addressing that they would be there when the Judgment Day arrived. However, it was not this claim that sealed his fate but the admission that he believed himself to be the Messiah. For this he was accused of blasphemy and the council voted to have him executed (Matt.14,60-63). The next morning he was put in chains and brought before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who alone had the right to order an execution. Having heard the priests’ accusations against Jesus, Pilate asked him: “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replied: “So you say.” This is a curious answer for someone who had preached: “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no’.” (Matt.5,37). Pilate did not say he was the king of the Jews, he simply asked him if he claimed to be.

During Passover there was a tradition of reprieving any prisoner asked for by the public, so Pilate asked the crowd gathered outside his palace whether they wanted Jesus released or a prisoner named Barabbas. The crowd cried out for the release of Barabbas and for Jesus they howled: “Crucify him!” (Mk.15,13). Mark says that the high priest egged the crowd on to say this, although this is hard to understand. Only a few days before large crowds were welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem, laying their cloaks on the ground before him, crying out “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” and later, appreciative crowds were

listening to him teach in the temple. Just how the public was so easily transformed from adulation to murderous condemnation is not clear. Whatever the case, Pilate ordered Jesus to be executed by crucifixion, a particularly ghastly form of capital punishment. He was handed over to the soldiers who beat, mocked and humiliated him, then took him outside the walls of the city and crucified him.

The last months of the Buddha's life are recounted in the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, the longest discourse in the Tipitaka. It opens with the Buddha leaving Rājagaha, describes the events that took place during his journey north and then north-west, his death in Kusinārā and the disposal of his remains, and ends with the division of his ashes. It is only necessary to relate the final days and anything previous relevant to them.

The Buddha foretold his death three months before it happened and tradition adds that he also foretold where he would die, in the town of Kusinārā (D.II,106). That he had a premonition about the time of his passing and that it actually came true is perhaps not surprising. People have occasionally been known to have the strange ability to predict the time of their death. That he accurately predicted where he would die seems less credible. A look at the map of the route the Buddha would have taken during this last journey strongly suggests that he intended to make one final visit to his hometown before dying but that he was delayed by a serious illness and died in Kusinārā before reaching Kapilavatthu.

The Buddha, Ānanda and the party of monks accompanying them arrived in Vesālī just as the monsoon was beginning and in accordance with the tradition among ascetics, they found places to stay for the next three months. The Buddha took up lodgings in the small village of Beluva, one of the outer suburbs of the city. While there "he was attacked by a severe sickness, with sharp pains as if he was about to die but he endured all this mindfully, clearly aware and without complaint" (D.II,99). Even today in India, water-borne diseases are common during the monsoon. After the monsoon the party set off again, passing through Bhaṇḍagāma, Jambugāma, Bhoganagāma and eventually Pāvā, where they stayed in a mango orchard owned by a blacksmith named Cunda (D.II,126). Cunda welcomed them and invited them to a meal the next day. During the meal the Buddha was served and ate a dish called *sūkaramaddava* after which "he was attacked by a severe sickness with bloody diarrhoea (*lohita pakkhandika*) and sharp pain" (D.II,127-8).

There has been a great deal of speculation and controversy around this incident. *Sūkaramaddava* literally means 'boar's softness' although what it consisted of is unknown. Critics of the Buddha, thinking that he taught vegetarianism, have claimed that *sūkaramaddava* was a pork dish and that in eating it he was contravening his own precepts and being hypocritical. In fact, the Buddha never advocated vegetarianism and there are several places in the Tipitaka mentioning him being served and eating meat. (e.g. A.III,49; IV,187; Vin.I,239; III,208). The meat of both domestic and wild animals was a common

food at the time and it was considered acceptable to offer it to ascetics such as the Buddha.

Sūkaramaddava may have been a pork preparation of some kind, e.g. tender pork, but not necessarily. Then as now, culinary preparations could be given names entirely unrelated to their ingredients. It has also been claimed that the Buddha died from eating poison mushrooms, from food poisoning or even that he was deliberately poisoned. There is no evidence for such theories. The fact that the Buddha's main symptom was exudative diarrhoea suggest that he suffered from either gastroenteritis or some other water borne disease. However, given that he had been sick while staying in Vesālī and that he was around 80, this points to his death being due to a continuation of this earlier sickness, whatever it was, and the affliction he suffered in Pāvā, exacerbated by exhaustion. Earlier during his journey he had mentioned the only time he was physically comfortable was when he went into deep meditation (D.II,100).

Having recovered somewhat, the Buddha and the monks accompanying continued on their way but he grew increasingly frail and they had to stop, the Buddha asking Ānanda to fold a robe into four so he could sit on it while resting at the foot of a tree. While there, they were approached by a man named Pukkusa who had been a disciple of the Buddha's old teacher Ālāra Kālāma. Pukkusa offered the Buddha two cloth of gold robes, he accepted one and asked that the other be given to Ānanda. When Pukkusa left, Ānanda draped one robe over the Buddha and almost immediately his body was transfigured, becoming "radiant and glowing", so much so that the cloth of gold robe appeared dull (D.II,133). When Ānanda mentioned this, the Buddha said that this phenomenon had only happened to him once before, on the night he attained awakening. The account of his awakening mentions rays (*raṃsi*) of blue and yellow, red, white and orange light emanated from his body (Vin.I.25).

The party moved on to the Kukuṭṭhā River, where they drank and bathed. While there, the Buddha asked Cundaka to fold a robe into four and place it on the ground so he could lie down and rest again. Cundaka did this and then sat watch beside the Buddha to attend to anything he might need, keeping awake the whole time. He had been attentive to the Buddha's needs in the past as well. Once when the Buddha was sick Cundaka had visited him and the two of them talked about the Dhamma. The texts suggest that the Buddha's illness eased as a result of Cundaka's caring presence (D.II,134; S.V,81).

The party continued until they arrived at a grove of sal trees on the outskirts of the Malla's main town Kusinārā The Buddha asked Ānanda to prepare a bed for him between two large sal trees. As he lay down, the tree spontaneously burst into blossom and flower petals showered down over the Buddha's body. When Ānanda expressed his astonishment at this the Buddha took the opportunity to make an important point.

“These sal trees have burst into blossom out of season. Never before has the Tathāgata been so honoured and revered, revered, esteemed and respected. But the monk or the nun, the layman or lay woman disciple who lives practicing the Dhamma fully and perfectly fulfils the Dhamma way, it is they who truly honour the Tathāgata, revere, reverence and respects him in the highest way” (D.II,137-8).

This is yet another example of the Buddhist ideas that miracles are of minor importance compared with living in accordance with the Dhamma and that the Dhamma is for everyone, monastic and lay, men and women.

Realising that the end was near, the Buddha gave some final advice and instructions. He encouraged every devotee to go on pilgrimage to the place where he was born, awakened, proclaimed the Dhamma for the first time, and where he passed away. He warned monks not to become too familiar with women and gave instructions of how his remains were to be disposed of. He thanked and praised Ānanda for his many years of selfless service, advised that the errant monk Channa be disciplined and gave permission for any of the minor monastic rules to be changed if necessary. As a final encouragement, he also said: “Ānanda, it may be that you think, ‘The Teacher guidance has ceased, and now we have no teacher.’ But this is not how you should see it. The Dhamma and training I have taught you, after I am gone let them be your teacher” (D.II,154).

Their Last Words

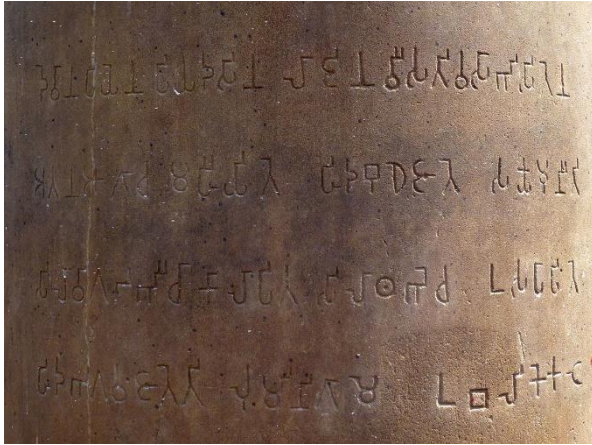
Now the Buddha’s end had come. With the monks who had accompanied him during his final journey and others gathered around, he uttered his final words.

“Now monks I declare to you; all conditioned things are impermanent, strive on with awareness” (*Handa dāni bhikkhave āmantayāmi vo; vayadhammā saṅkāra, appamādena sampādettha*, D.II,156).

Because there are four different accounts of Jesus’ trial, execution and death, there are also four different versions of his final utterance. According to Matthew he said: “My God, my God, why did you abandon me?” Mark records: “He gave a loud cry and breathed his last.” Luke’s account says he cried out in a loud voice: “Father! In your hands I place my spirit!” According to John he said: “I am thirsty” and some cheap wine with bitter herb was lifted up to his lips. Then he uttered: “It is finished” and died (Matt.27,46; Mk.15,37; Lk.23,46; Jn.19,28-30).

Some of those gathered around the Buddha’s deathbed broke into tears while others, understanding the nature of ordinary conditioned existence,

remained calm and spent the rest of the night in silent meditation. While the Buddha's passing evokes sadness and a sense of loss, such feelings are tempered by knowing that it came at the end of a long and fruitful life and that it was in keeping with the natural course of things. The death of Jesus by contrast was tragic. In the prime of life, he suffered the humiliation and brutality of the type still inflicted on people in police stations and secret police dungeons around the world. Christians believe that Jesus' death was a part of God's plan – decided upon beforehand, the participants all acting in accordance to God's will, and necessary to redeem humanity from sin – and that his subsequent resurrection was a triumph over mortality. Nonetheless, the accounts of Jesus' end can still move one to pity.



1. The Lumbini inscription of King Asoka, 249 BCE.



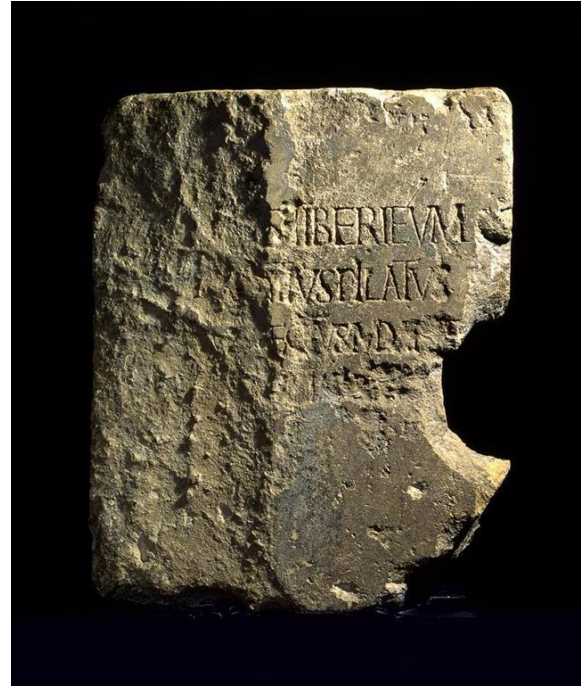
2. The Sattapaṇṇa Cave in Rajagaha, site of the first Buddhist council.



3. The Kapilavatthu relic casket with inscription.



4. One of the earliest images of the Buddha, c. 140 CE.



5. Inscription mentioning Pontius Pilate who condemned Jesus.



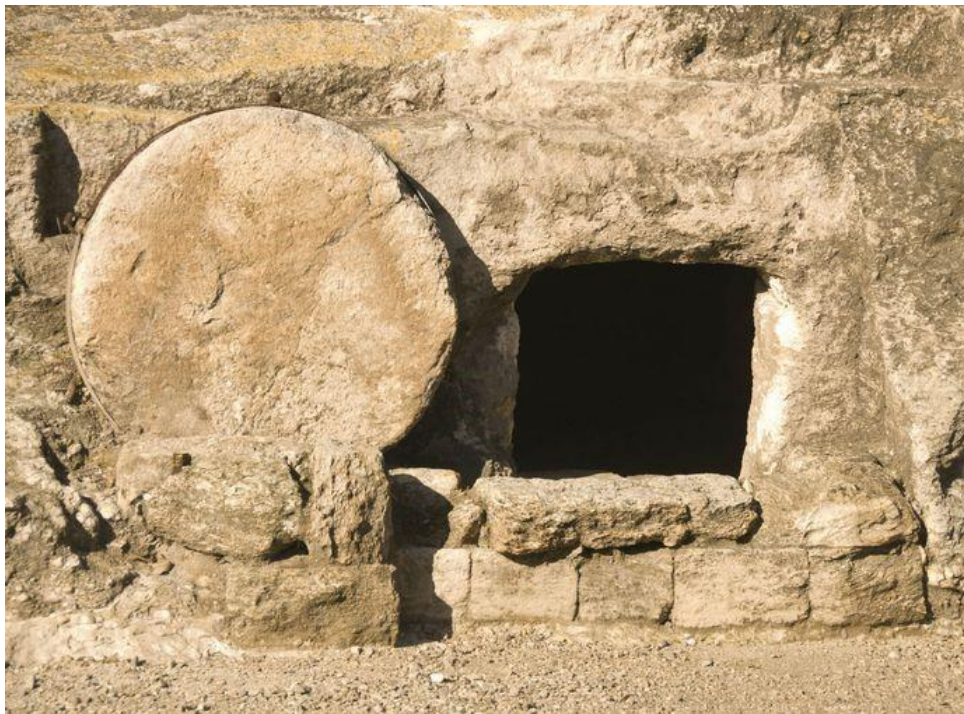
6. Apollonius of Tyana, credited with miraculous powers similar to those of Jesus.



7. One of the earliest depictions of Jesus, with short hair and beardless, 3rd century CE.



8. A contemporary depiction of Jesus and the Buddha as friends.



9. A traditional Jewish tomb similar to the one Jesus' body was placed in.



10. Dura-Europos synagogue painting showing typical male Jewish dress and hairstyles 100 years after Jesus.



11. Buddha images from 250-300 CE accurately depicting the open and closed robe styles worn by the Buddha.

The Dhamma and the Gospel



What they named Their Teachings

Jesus never gave his teaching a name, almost certainly because he did not see it as something new but as a restatement of Judaism, a return to what he took to be the essence the ancient Jewish sacred law combined with John the Baptist's apocalyptic theology. He said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them" (Matt.5,17; Lk.16,17). He asked his followers to practice the God's law with even more zeal than the Pharisees did (Matt.5,17-20). Perhaps Jesus' single most famous pronouncement and one encapsulating an idea often assumed to be unique to him, "Love your neighbour as yourself", actually comes from the Old Testament, written some 500 years before his time. Jesus described his teaching as *euangelion*, a Greek word meaning 'good news' and which has come into English as 'gospel' (Matt.4,23). From an early period, Jesus' followers were called Nazarenes or Christians (Acts. 24,5; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16) although Jesus himself never used these terms. Paul called them slaves of Christ (*doulos christou*, Rom.1,1; Cor.7,22; 1 Gal. 1,10 Cor.), a term with slight variations still being used more than a century later in works such as *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

The Buddha called his teachings Dhamma, a word meaning reality, the way things are, or actuality. Sometimes he called it the Instruction (*sāsana*). He named the central conception of his Dhamma the Four Noble Truths. The fourth of these, the practical one, he called the Middle Way (*majjhima patipadā*) because he said it avoided the extremes of self-mortification on the one hand and sensual indulgence on the other (S.V,421). His first disciples called themselves or were called, Gotama's disciples (*gotama sāvaka*) and sons of the Sakyan (*sakaya putta*) if they were monks, and daughters of the Sakyan (*sakya dhīta*) if they were nuns (A.IV,202; D.II,271; Vin.IV,236). Male lay disciples were called *upāsaka* and females *upāsikā*, from the word *upasati* 'to be close'. They sat close to the Buddha when he was teaching and the ideas they accepted and tried to live by were close to what he expected of his disciples.

Even academic publications often claim that Buddhism started as a branch or a reform of Hinduism and that it borrowed some of its central concepts from it. Such assertions need to be clarified and then challenged. While most Indians during the Buddha's time were probably animists, Brahmanism was the main formal religion, with a priesthood, a canon of scriptures, a liturgical language and various formulated doctrines and set rituals. It was based on the Vedas and its supreme god was Brahmā or according to some texts, Pajāpati. In the centuries

after the Buddha, Brahmanism gradually evolved into what is now called and is recognisable as Hinduism. In the process, many Brahmanical doctrines and practices fell into abeyance or changed radically, so that while Brahmanism and Hinduism have much in common they have distinct differences as well. Scholars sometimes distinguish between them by calling them Vedic Hinduism and Purāṇic Hinduism. The situation is similar in some ways to the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. The latter grew out of the former, retaining some features and developing many new ideas, so that the two became distinct religions.

The two religious specialists during the Buddha's time were the brahmins and the *samaṇas*. The brahmins were the hereditary priests of Brahmanism and considered the Vedas to be the ultimate spiritual authority. The *samaṇas* were wandering ascetics who rejected the Vedas and most Brahmanical beliefs and practices, disregarded social norms and expectations and gave precedence to experience over dogma and scriptural authority. They experimented with meditation, self-mortification, yogic breathing, fasting and long periods of solitude. They were also usually celibate, mendicant and itinerant. The Buddha said of the typical *samaṇa* that "having accepted sufficient alms he goes his way as a bird when it flies here or there taking nothing with it but its wings" (D.I,71). The *samaṇas* were sometimes also known as ford-makers (*titthakara*) because they were trying to find or claimed to have found a way to cross the raging river of conditioned existence. Likewise, they were sometimes called mendicants (*bhikkhus*) because they begged for their food or ascetics (*tapassin*) because they exerted themselves. During the Buddha's time, there were at least a dozen major fraternities or sects of *samaṇas* but the ones that attracted most attention were the Jains, then called the Bondless Ones (*niganthas*), and the Buddha's Saṅgha or monastic community.

The more orthodox followers of Brahmanism, particularly brahmin priests, regarded *samaṇas* as rivals, heretics and on a par with outcastes because they ignored caste rules. The Tipitaka often records various brahmins referring to the Buddha or his monks as miserable ascetics (*samaṇaka*) and menials (*ibbha*, D.I,90). The antagonism between *samaṇas* and brahmins was highlighted by Patañjali (circa. 150 BCE), who wrote that they were "like cat and mouse, dog and fox, snake and mongoose" meaning that they were polar opposites in both their lifestyles and their approaches to spirituality. He added that "the opposition between the two is eternal" (*Mahābhāṣya* II,4,9). The Buddha was very much within the *samaṇa* tradition and throughout the Tipitaka he is often addressed as the "samaṇa Gotama". When he renounced the world, he did not seek out a brahmin teacher to study the Vedas from, but rather the two respected *samaṇa* gurus, Ālāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta (M.I,63-64).

Just as the Buddha rejected the Brahmanical approach to the religious life, he also rejected most of its doctrines. The central sacrament of Brahmanism was the worship of Agni, the god of fire, and the sacrifices (*yāga*) in which offerings

(*homa*) were made to Agni and other gods. Agni is mentioned in the Vedas more than any other deity and the Vedas and the *Samhitās*, the *Grhya Sūtras* and the *Brāhmaṇas* describe in minute detail when and how these sacrifices were to be performed, their meaning and their efficacy. The Buddha was highly critical of these rituals, particularly the sacrifices in which animals were slaughtered. To him, the sacrifices were “not worth a sixteenth of having a calm mind”. He called the worship of Agni ineffective and dismissed it as “an outlet to failure” (*apāyamukhānī*). “If one were to sacrifice to the sacred fire for a hundred years in the forest or another were to honour someone who had developed himself, that would be better than the hundred years of sacrifice” (Dhp.107; D.I,9; A.IV,41ff). Again: “Not fire worship, undergoing penance, chanting the sacred hymns, making oblations or conducting fire sacrifices can win immortality or purify one who has not gone beyond doubt” (Sn.249). The Buddha chose to itemise the three root mental defilements – greed, hatred and ignorance, (*lobha*, *dosa* and *moha*) and call them fires, to parallel and also contrast with the three sacred fires of Brahmanism – the *Āhavanīya*, the *Gārhapatya* and the *Dakṣiṇāgni*. Brahmanism required that these three sacred household fires be tended and kept burning for all one’s life; the Buddha taught that one attained awakening only by extinguishing the three fires. Of the several names the Buddha gave to the state of complete liberation, the most common was Nirvana, meaning ‘to blow out’, i.e. to blow out the burning mental defilements.

The Buddha also rejected in the strongest terms the caste system, the very cornerstone of the Brahminical divinely ordained social order. The divine origin of the institution of caste can be found in *R̥g Veda* X,90, *Atharva Veda* XX.6,6; *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 7,1,1,4-6; *Bhagavad Gītā* IV,13; *Mahābhārata* 12.73,4-5 and in several places in the *Purāṇas*. The only social division the Buddha recognized was that of householders (*gahapati*) and home-leavers, (*pabbajita*), i.e. monastics, and one could change from one to another. He taught that everyone was worthy of being considered a brahman if they were virtuous, turning on its head the Brahminical notion that a brahman was someone born to brahman parents, who in turn had to be “of pure descent through at least seven generations” (D.I,113). He said: “I do not consider one a brahman simply by being born to or emerging from the womb of a brahman mother. Such a one is just a chanter [of the Vedic hymns]” (Dhp.396). “Whoever is friendly amidst the hostile, peaceful amidst the violent, content amidst the clinging, it is he I call a brahman” (Dhp.406). “Even if one chants the Vedic hymns, one born brahman is not one if he is internally rotten, soiled and supports himself by fraudulent means. Whether warrior caste, brahman caste, merchant caste, menial caste, outcaste or scavenger, if one is energetic, determined and always makes an effort, one can attain the highest purity. You should know that this is a fact” (S.I,166). Once, hearing that the Buddha “teaches that all four castes are pure”, a brahman went to debate with and refute him on this issue. When this brahman kept insisting that brahmins are pure because they are born from Brahmā’s mouth, the Buddha replied that it was

an observable fact that they were born from their mother's womb, just like everyone else (M.II,147ff). Such ideas were not meant to 'reform' Brahmanism, they were meant to undermine it and be an alternative to it, and brahmins were only too aware of this.

Because the Buddha and his monks accepted food from and mixed with people of all castes, even outcastes, in the eyes of upper caste people they were as impure and contaminating as outcastes. When the Buddha approached the brahmin Aggikabhāradvāja to beg for food he was rebuffed and insulted. "Stop there you shaveling, you miserable ascetic, you outcaste!" (Sn.p.21.22). When he went to the brahmin village of Thunā and the people saw him coming, they stuffed their well with grass and rice husks so he could not drink from it and thereby pollute their water (Ud.78).

For most people today caste would be considered an outdated custom or a matter of justice or equality, but to brahmins it was something quite different. It was the very foundation of their view of themselves, their role in society and the underpinning of the divinely created social order of which they were the pinnacle. The Buddha's repudiation of caste left the orthodox aghast.

Another important Brahmanical practice which the Buddha criticised was ritual bathing. He maintained that bathing in the Ganges or other sacred rivers could never wash away the evil a person had done any more than the water in a village well could (M.I,39). He said that real pollution came from negative thoughts and immoral behaviour and this could only be cleaned by changing one's heart and one's actions. He called this the "inner washing" (*sināto antarena sinānena*, M.I,39). For him, to live in austerity and moral purity was to be "washed without water" (*sinānam anodakam*, S.I,43).

Brahmanism was a strongly domestic religion. During the Buddha's time people married for all the reasons they always have, but within Brahmanism marriage was imperative because some of its central rites could not be performed or even participated in by an unmarried man. The brahmin who conducted a sacrifice had to be married, and the wife of a man who sponsored a sacrifice had to be present during its performance, otherwise it would be ineffective. An important Brahminical concept which centred on family and producing male progeny was the doctrine of the Threefold Debt (*trirṇa*). According to this doctrine, as soon as a man is born he incurs three debts which must be repaid before he dies – studentship to teachers, sacrifices to gods and producing a son. Having a son was not just to perpetuate the family line, it guaranteed immortality. A son had to ignite his parent's funeral pyre and only he could make the offerings that sustained his ancestors in the world of the fathers (*pitṛloka*). "The father who sees the face of his new-born son repays his debt and attains immortality...By means of a son a father crosses the mighty darkness...A wife is a friend; a daughter is grief but a son is a light in the highest heaven." "Through your offspring (i.e. son), you are born again in heaven. That O mortal, is your immortality." "By having a son a man gains the world, through a son he obtains

immortality and through a son's grandson he attains the crest of the sun." To become a celibate monk or nun and thus never produce a son was, according to Brahmanism, to cease to exist after death, it was annihilation.

For the Buddha as for Jesus and the first Christians, home life was a hindrance to spiritual aspirations. St. Paul's words on this matter could have been spoken, at least in part, by the Buddha:

"I would like you to be free from worries. An unmarried man concerns himself with the Lord's work because he is trying to please the Lord. But a married man concerns himself with worldly matters because he wants to please his wife, and so he is pulled in two directions...I am saying this because I want to help you. I am not trying to put restrictions on you. Instead, I want you to do what is right and proper and to give yourselves completely to the Lord's service without any reservations" (1 Cor.7.32-35).

The Buddha put it this way: "The household life is confining and dusty while the homeless life is as free as the breeze. It is not easy living the household life and also living the completely perfected holy life, purified and polished like a conch shell" (D.I,63). The Buddha said that "sons do not protect you" and that "one obsessed with getting sons or cattle will be carried away by death" (Dhp.287-288). Again, such ideas struck at the very heart of Brahmanism's teaching on salvation. Other things the Buddha had to say about family life will be discussed below.

The Buddha did not teach that the goal of the religious life was to go to heaven, or what in Brahmanism was called the world of the fathers (*pitṛloka*). He considered the celestial state to be better than hell, but distinctly inferior to Nirvana. For him, heaven, like all conditioned states, was impermanent and when one's time there was over, one could well be reborn as a human again and be heir to all the travails of bodily existence. Thus "the wise are not interested in the glories of heaven", and attaining even the first stage of awakening "is better than going to heaven" (Dhp.187;178). Related to this, there was no place in the Buddha's Dhamma for a single supreme being, as will be shown below.

An important daily ritual in Brahmanism was the worship of the direction, sometimes the four cardinal ones, sometimes these four plus the nadir and the zenith, sometimes all six plus the intermediate directions. When the young man Sigāla told the Buddha that he worshipped the six directions at the request of his dying father, the Buddha said that he too taught the worship of the directions but in a very different way. He explained that for each direction one should consider a known person – parent, spouse, friend, teacher, employee, etc., and "worship" them by treating them with respect and kindness (D.III,180 ff). Sigāla was probably worshipping the directional gods as taught in *Gautama Dharmasūtra* 5,11.

Even in unexpected and seemingly minor matters, the evidence shows that the Buddha sought to distance his Dhamma from Brahmanism. For example, the sacred language of Brahmanism was Sanskrit which was believed to be the language of the gods – primordial, pure and eternal. Once a vernacular, by the 6th century BCE Sanskrit was used mainly for chanting the Vedic hymns during sacrifices and other rituals. On one occasion two monks, both from brahman backgrounds, suggested to the Buddha that all his teachings be rendered into metrical Sanskrit (*chandās*). The Buddha rebuked them saying:

“How can you foolish men say such a thing. It would not be pleasing to those not yet pleased with the Dhamma or increase the number of those already pleased by it. Rather, it would be unpleasing for those not yet pleased and also to those already pleased.” Then he added: “I want you to learn my words each in your own language” (*anujānāmi bhikkhave sakāya niruttiyā buddha vaccanaṃ pariyāpunituṃ*, Vin.II,139).

There can be no doubt that the Buddha did not want his teachings to be associated with the Brahmanical priestly class or be in a language inaccessible to the majority of people. Despite this, in later centuries Sanskrit became India’s language of the culture and learning and by about the 1st century BCE, bowing to the inevitable, monks translated the Buddha’s discourses into Sanskrit and started composing various works in that language.

During the Vedic sacrifice special cakes (*pūralāsa*) were consecrated with holy mantras, offered to the gods and then eaten by the participants. The Buddha was once offered such cakes by a brahman who had just conducted a sacrifice, but he refused to accept them, saying that no awakened person would eat such food (Sn.48). This is the only time the Buddha ever refused to eat food offered to him and he did so because he did not want to be associated with or be seen to benefit from a Brahmanical ritual.

Thus the Buddha either criticised, rejected, reinterpreted or simply ignored almost every one of the essential doctrines and practices of Brahmanism. Likewise, the central principles of his Dhamma – the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the Three Characteristics of Existence, the doctrine of no-self and Dependant Origination – are not found in the Vedas or in later Brahmanical texts. Neither do any of the Vedas mention kamma or rebirth, absolutely fundamental concepts in Buddhism, although versions of both these ideas were later incorporated into Hinduism. In fact, the Buddha distinctly said that these and the other truths he had realised had “not been heard about before” (*pubbe ananussutesu*, S.V,422).

Given that the Buddha presented his Dhamma as an alternative to the prevailing religions and that the brahman priests were well aware of this, it is not surprising that the Tipitaka records numerous examples of brahman hostility towards the Buddha, his Dhamma, and his disciples. They disparaged Buddhist

monks as “the black scrapings of our kinsmen’s foot” (*ibbhā kiṇhā bandhupadāpaccā*), equating them with the lowest caste who Brahmā supposedly created from his feet. Once some brahmins who had become the Buddha’s disciples commented to him that their fellow brahmins now “insult and abuse us. They do not hold back with their usual flood of insults” (D.III,80). When the brahmin Akkosaka heard that a member of his clan had become a Buddhist, he went to the Buddha and “abused and reviled him with rude harsh words” (S.I,161-162).

Although meditation of various kinds would later become an important part of Hindu spirituality, there were no such practices in Brahmanism and brahmins mocked and disparaged this aspect of Buddhism. “As a cat at a door post, a rubbish heap or a drain meditates, contemplates, ruminates, and speculates, so these ascetics ...claim, ‘We meditate, we are meditators!’ With their drooping shoulders, their heads hanging down, limp all over, they meditate...” (M.I,334, condensed). Some of the Buddha’s disciples were not always prepared to take such abuse lying down. Several young brahmin students once encountered the senior monk Kaccāna in the forest and sniped that he and other monks were only given respect by lowly menials (*bhāratakā*). Deciding not to let this insult pass, Kaccāna replied: “Puffed up with pride... bathing at sunrise, chanting the three Vedas, reciting mantras, rules, vows and penance... hypocrisy, crooked staffs and ritual ablutions, these are the marks of brahmins. But it is by having a focused mind, clear and free from blemishes and by being gentle towards all beings that is the way to Brahmā” (S.IV,117-18).

Brahmanism’s hostility towards and criticism of Buddhism, like that of Hinduism later, continued for centuries. The *Maitri Upaniṣad* says:

“There are those who love to distract believers in the Vedas by the jugglery of false arguments, comparisons and parallelisms...The world is bewildered by a doctrine that denies the self (*nairātmyavāda*), by false comparisons and proofs, it does not discern the difference between the wisdom of the Vedas and other knowledge...Some say that there should be attention to Dhamma instead of the Vedas...But it is the Vedas that are true. The wise should base their lives on the Vedas. A brahmin should only study what is in the Vedas.”

This is obviously a criticism of the Buddhist doctrine of no self (*anattā*), of Buddhism’s rejection of the authority of the Vedas, and of the logical arguments Buddhists used to support their views. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* depicted the Buddha as a cunning seducer who used illusion and ignorance (*māyāmoha*) to wean people away from the truth. In his commentaries on the *Vedānta Sūtras*, Śaṅkarācāriya wrote: “The Buddha’s Dhamma must be completely rejected by all those who have regard for their own happiness.” Kumārila Bhaṭṭa’s *Śloka-vārttika* contains a detailed critique of Buddhist doctrines and concluded by

dismissing it as suitable only for outcastes, foreigners and savages. The *Prameyamālā* saw Buddhism as being at odds with and a threat to Hinduism, stating: “The truth contained in the three Vedas is destroyed by the followers of Kaṇāda, by the Buddhists and by other heretics. Previously, it was protected by Viṣṇu with his trident.”

All this disagreement and disparagement would have been meaningless and unnecessary if Buddhism had been just a branch of or a reform of Brahmanism or later Hinduism. The Buddha certainly used the vernacular of the time which included some Brahmanical terminology, but he saw his Dhamma as distinct from Brahmanism and so did the Brahmanical philosophers and thinkers, both during his time and later.

Despite the Buddha’s rejection of Brahmanism and his criticism of some brahmans, and theirs of him, the two were sometimes on good terms with each other. The more open-minded and liberal brahmans in particular, could be curious about the Buddha and respectful towards his ideas and engage in polite dialogue with him. Likewise, the Buddha praised those brahmans who lived simple devote lives. And as mentioned above, a good number of them converted to Buddhism and even became monks.

Their Teaching Styles

The fact that the Dhamma and the Gospel took hold so firmly and spread so quickly was due in part to the teaching style of both Jesus and the Buddha. In Jesus’ case, this was even more remarkable given that his career was so short and initially met with sometimes violent opposition. It is obvious that the two men were extremely effective communicators to their respective audiences.

Jesus addressed his message primarily to the simple Jewish peasants of Israel and he spoke in a manner that appealed to them. It is quite likely that his words as preserved in the first three Gospels fairly accurately reflect his teaching style – interesting parables drawing mainly on elements from peasant life and the experiences of ordinary people, and short, memorable adages and parables. According to most scholars, Jesus used about 40 parables. When his apostles asked him why he used these parables to communicate with people he gave a rather perplexing answer.

“The knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you but not to them... The reason I use parables in talking to them is that they look but do not see, and they listen but do not hear or understand... As for you, how fortunate you are! Your eyes see and your ears hear. I assure you that many prophets and many of God’s people wanted very much to see what you see, but they could not, and hear what you hear, but

they did not”(Matt.13,11-17).

This suggests that the purpose of the parables was to conceal something that was only revealed to the inner circle. Yet it is widely assumed, and it seems to be the case, that the parables were the main way Jesus got his message across.

A justly famous example of Jesus’ ability to effect positive change in people with a few simple words is what he said to a crowd who had assembled to stone a woman accused of adultery. Hoping to get Jesus to criticise God’s law which lays down stoning as a punishment for this offence, the presiding priests asked Jesus what he would do in this case. Jesus paused for a moment, lent down and drew something on the ground with his finger, then stood up and said: “Let him amongst you who is without sin throw the first stone.” One by one the crowd dropped their stones and drifted away, and when they had all gone Jesus asked the woman: “Is there no one left to condemn you?” When she answered “No” he said: “Then neither do I condemn you. Go, and sin no more” (Jn.8,1-11). A great deal is packed into these three short sentences. They prompted the crowd to think of their own shortcomings rather than the woman’s, they balanced mercy and forgiveness with a plea to the woman to change her behaviour, and at the same time they subtly rebuked the priests for their scheming. This is a wonderful story and one of several examples of Jesus’ power as a teacher.

The popular perception of the Buddha, even by today’s Buddhists, is that he was a semi-recluse who spent most of his time alone in forest glades and mountain caves. This perception is not supported by the Tipitaka which depicts him very much as an urbanite. He lived mainly within walking distance of large cities and towns – Rājagaha, Kosambī, Sāketa, Sāvattihī, Vesālī, Campa, Mathura, etc. Even when he went into rural areas or forest retreats he was always near a village or hamlet which he needed to get his food. This meant that while the Buddha’s audience came from all backgrounds, typically they were city-dwellers, often from the economic, religious and political class: merchants, ascetics of various sects; military men; occasionally even royalty. Sunidha, Vassakāra and Uggā were all government ministers, Jīvaka was a physician, Sīha a general, Gaṇaka Moggallāna an accountant, Abhaya a prince and Cundi and Sumanā were both princesses. Many of the brahmans he dialogued with were the leaders of their clans and communities and a significant number of them became monks. Others such as Anāthapiṇḍaka, Ghosita, Kukkuṭa, Kālaka and Pāvārika were wealthy businessmen. Such people were often familiar with and interested in the various religious and philosophical theories being discussed at the time and homely parables, unsubstantiated claims and threats of hell for not believing would not have impressed them.

This should not be taken to mean that the Buddha had nothing to say to ordinary folk or that his Dhamma was not relevant to their lives. Pañcakanga was a carpenter, Yodhajīva a soldier, while Pessa, Aritṭha and Kesi were animal trainers, generally considered a rough group of men. Angulimāla was a

highwayman and Upāli had been a barber before becoming a monk. Khujjuttarā was a servant in Kosambī's royal harem and of the numerous other women the Buddha spoke to or with, most were probably ordinary housewives.

The Buddha often engaged in dialogues with one or more of the people who came to hear him or ask him questions, sometimes while people who accompanied the protagonist listened in. These encounters would take the form of the Buddha asking questions of the visitor who answered them, or the visitor doing the questioning and the Buddha the answering. Inevitably, towards the end of such a back and forth the Buddha would give his perspective. Some of these dialogues were quite long. They were usually conducted in a polite manner and only rarely became heated as for example those with Ambaṭṭha, Assalāyana and Cankī (D.I,87ff; MII,147ff; M.II,163ff).

The Buddha sometimes used parables (*upamākathā*) in this teaching although he more often favoured similes (*upamā*). When explaining something he would sometimes say: "I shall give you a simile because some intelligent people understand better by means of one" (S.II,114). No one has ever counted all the Buddha's similes and parables but there are some 165 in the Majjhima Nikāya, about 170 in the Saṃyutta Nikāya and many more in the other books of the Tipitaka. These similes draw on a wide variety of elements ranging from natural phenomena to travelling, country life, business, animal taming, royalty, metallurgy, household articles and duties, to name but a few. Their richness, diversity and realism suggest a mind of a careful observer with wide experience. One of the more famous of these is the Parable of the Raft.

The Buddha saw his Dhamma mainly in utilitarian terms, as something used to accomplish a particular goal, i.e. awakening, after which it would become redundant. To explain what he meant he told a story of a man who, in the course of a journey, came to a wide river and knowing the country on his side to be dangerous and the other side safe, was determined to cross over. With no ferry or bridge available, he constructed a raft of grass, foliage and branches and using his hands and feet paddled to the further bank of the river. Having done this and thinking how useful the raft had been, he decided to hoist it onto his head and carry it with him for the remainder of his journey. Then the Buddha asked his monks if they thought this was an intelligent thing for the man to do. They answered that it was not, and then the Buddha concluded by saying: "Monks, when you understand that the Dhamma is similar to a raft, you [eventually] let go of even good states, how much more so bad ones" (M.I,134-135).

Another of the Buddha's parables that used the image of crossing a river, although to make a different point, is this one. A man once asked the Buddha what he thought of those who claimed that liberation could be achieved through self-mortification. In answer to this the Buddha said:

"Suppose a man wanting to cross a river were to take an axe, go into a forest and chop down a young, straight tree without any knots. He would

lop off the crown, strip the foliage and branches off, shape the log with the axe, trim it with an adze, smooth it with a scraper, then polish it with a stone ball, and having done so set out across the river. What do you think? Would he be able to cross that river?" The man answered: "No sir, he would not. Because although the log had been well shaped on the outside it had not been cleaned out on the inside."

The Buddha then said that unless someone had "cleaned the inside" by cultivating behavioural and psychological purity, he or she would not be able to attain awakening (A.II,200-201).

Undoubtedly the Buddha's most famous parable, and one that later spread throughout the world, is about the blind men and the elephant. The story's appeal lays in how well it makes its point, its striking juxtaposition of man and beast, and its gentle humour. It has been used to illustrate different ideas or sometimes as just as an amusing tale, but the Buddha used it to highlight a specific point. Once, some monks noticed a group of ascetics quarrelling with one another about some philosophical or theological issue. Later, they mentioned what they had seen to the Buddha and he said: "Ascetics of other sects are blind and unseeing. They don't know the good or the bad, what is true and what false, and consequently they are always quarrelling, arguing and fighting, stabbing each other with the weapon of the tongue." He then related the parable and having done so summed up its meaning: "Some ascetics and brahmins are attached to their own views and having seized hold of them they wrangle, because they see only one part of a thing."

So the point of the parable is that seeing only one aspect of a thing (*ekamga dassino*) gives an incomplete or partial understanding and that this leads to contention. Implicit in this is that one needs to take time assembling all the facts, and examining the pros and cons of an issue before drawing conclusions (Ud.67-69). It was characteristic of the Buddha that he would encourage his disciples to examine all aspects of an issue in order to arrive at the truth. On one occasion a group of monks were arguing over some matter and the lay people asked him who was right and who wrong. Rather than give his opinion, the Buddha advised them to "listen to the details from both, and having done this, accept the opinion, the view, the standpoint of the monks who speak according to fact" (Vin.I,355). He made this same point when he once said: "One does not arrive at truth just because he can settle a matter quickly. It is the one who examines what is and is not factual who is sagacious" (Dhp.256-7).

An aspect of the Buddha's approach to teaching which rarely gets mentioned is its gentle humour. His discourses and dialogues contain numerous puns, humorous exaggerations, irony and occasional satire. These would not have caused guffaws or giggles although some of them may well have raised a smile. Unfortunately, for the most part this humour is not apparent to the modern reader. The Buddha is never described as laughing but he often smiled (e.g. A.III,214;

M.II,45;74; S.I,24; Thi.630), and King Pasenadi said that in contrast to the other monks and ascetics of the time, the Buddha's disciples were "happy, cheerful and elated (*hatṭha pahaṭṭhe udaggudagge*, M.II,121).

By contrast, the New Testament seem to be devoid of lightness and humour, although this is in keeping with its general sombre tenor. The Bible never mentions Jesus laughing or even smiling, which is hardly surprising given that the Bible equates him with "the man of sorrow" (*vir dolōrum*, Is.53), despised, rejected, taking on the pain and sin of the world and destined to be executed in a most gruesome and agonising manner. The first Christians were painfully aware of humanity's sinfulness and that they were living at a time when they would witness the complete destruction of the world – neither of these a laughing matter. Thus James' advice: "Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you hypocrites! Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to crying and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up" (Jam.4,8-10).

Another way the Buddha communicated his Dhamma was by participating in the public debates that were a feature of the time. So popular were these events that some towns even had debating halls in which to hold them. The Tipitaka and other contemporary sources give a good idea of how these debates were conducted. If on being asked a legitimate question for a third time, an opponent could not answer, he was considered to have been defeated (M.I,231). Participants were expected to use recognised arguments and adhere to accepted procedures, and a moderator tried to make sure they did (Sn.827). To dodge a question by asking another question, change the subject or ridicule the questioner, was considered improper. Likewise, to shout down an opponent, catch him up when he hesitated or interrupt from the side-lines were also unacceptable (M.II,168). A teacher who held his own in debate could win honour, patronage and disciples, while the defeated had to slink away in shame. There is a description of a participant in a debate with the Buddha "reduced to silence, his head lowered, his eyes downcast, at a loss, unable to make a reply" while the audience "assailed him on all sides with a torrent of abuse and poked fun at him..." (A.I,187). Vague theologies and dreamy doctrines were soon subjected to hard reason, logical scrutiny and demands for evidence. Those that stood the test, like the Buddha's Dhamma, flourished; those that did not faded away.

Debates could get heated and sometimes even end in blows, and this was probably the reason why during the early part of his career the Buddha avoided such assemblies. He observed: "Some debates are conducted in a spirit of hostility and some in a spirit of truth. Either way, the sage does not get involved" (Sn.780). As a consequence, at the beginning of his career the Buddha was accused of being unable to defend his ideas in the face of scrutiny. One critic said of him: "Who does the samana Gotama speak to? From whom does he get his lucidity of wisdom? His wisdom is destroyed by living in solitude, he is unused to discussions, he is no good at speaking, he is completely out of touch. Like an

antelope that circles around and keeps to the edges, so does the ascetic Gotama” (D.III,38). It seems that for a long time the Buddha was content to let his Dhamma speak for itself. But as people began to seek deeper explanations of it and it began to be criticised and even misrepresented, he was compelled to participate in public debates and discussions. He soon earned a reputation for being able to explain his philosophy with great clarity and to defend it effectively against criticism. He also began to subject the doctrines of others to hard questioning.

What has been dubbed “the silence of the Buddha” has become almost proverbial and has been widely commented on in both academic and popular writings. Supposedly the Buddha characteristically responded to questions by maintaining an enigmatic silence and that this was a significant aspect of his teaching style. Certainly the Buddha occasionally refused to answer questions he considered to be trivial or irreverent, but he would usually explain his reasons for doing so. Of the Buddha’s several thousand discourses, in only two did he decline to answer a question and just remain silent (A.V,194; S.IV, 400).

The Buddha’s aim was never to defeat an opponent, silence a critic or even to win disciples, but to lead people from ignorance to clarity and understanding. In one of the most heartfelt appeals he ever made he said: “I tell you this. Let an intelligent person who is sincere, honest and straightforward come to me and I will teach him Dhamma. If he practises as he is taught, within seven days and by his own knowledge and vision, he will attain that holy life and goal. Now you may think that I say this just to get disciples or to make you abandon your rules. But this is not so. Keep your teacher and continue to follow your rules. You may think that I say this so you will give up your way of life, follow things you consider bad or reject things you consider good. But this is not so. Live as you see fit and continue to reject things you consider bad and follow things you consider good. But there are states that are unskilful, defiled, leading to rebirth, fearful, causing distress and associated with birth, decay and death, and it is only for the overcoming of these things that I teach the Dhamma” (D.III,55-6, condensed).

Miracles

As much as being a great moral teacher, Jesus was also a man of miracles. His birth was miraculous, he performed numerous supernatural feats throughout his short career, he exorcized demons, marvels took place in his presence, and his earthly life was finished with a miracle – his resurrection. There were times when he refused to demonstrate his amazing powers as when the Devil tempted him or the Pharisees challenged him to do so. At other times he performed miracles almost casually. He caused a tree to wither and die because it had no fruit, it not being the right season. When all the wine at a wedding he was attending ran out, he turned several jars of water into wine. On another occasion, he caused some

fishermen's nets to be filled with fish. Once he made a coin appear in a fish's mouth so it could be used to pay his and his apostles' tax. This curious miracle begs the question of why he didn't manifest the coin in his hand or in his pocket. Why in a fish's mouth? These would seem to be examples of using extraordinary divine abilities for rather trivial ends (Mk.11,12-14; Jn.2,1-11; Lk.5.1-11; Matt.17,24-27).

Jesus' miraculous healing of the sick were of a different order in that they were obviously motivated by compassion. In some such cases he did not have to pronounce a blessing, touch the afflicted person or even notice them for them to be healed. His clothes and even his body fluids somehow emanated a miraculous energy. A woman who had been ill for years was immediately cured simply by touching Jesus' robe, and on another occasion Jesus spat on the ground, mixed the spittle with the dust, applied the mud to a blind man's eyes, and his sight was restored (Mk.5,25-32; 8,22-23). Jesus maintained that anyone who had faith in him could cure diseases just as he himself did, simply by laying their hands on the afflicted. But they could do more than that if they truly believed. They would, he promised, be able to speak in strange or unknown languages (*glōssais*), exorcize demons, pick up poisonous snakes and not get bitten and even drink deadly poison and not die (Mk.16,18). These are perhaps Jesus' most curious promises. Exactly what the advantage would be in speaking languages no one could understand is by no means clear. And there would probably be very few people today, despite having deep faith, who would be prepared to drink cyanide or strychnine.

According to the Gospels, several miracles and signs occurred just as Jesus died – an earthquake, the curtain in the great temple tearing, and the sun going dark. This last occurrence has been interpreted as an eclipse. Astronomers know that a solar eclipse visible from Jerusalem took place at 11:05 on the 24th November in the year 29 CE. However, three of the Gospels are clear that Jesus died at the start of the Jewish festival of Passover which is celebrated in March/April. Further, this darkness is said to have continued for three hours, far longer than any solar eclipse, so whatever it was it was not a natural phenomenon (Matt.27,45; Mk.15,33; Lk.23,44-45). It is also strange that such a noticeable and probably terrifying phenomenon is not recorded in any of the literature of the time.

But surely the most astonishing miracle coinciding with Jesus' death was a mass resurrection. It is claimed that numerous people who had recently died came out of their graves and walked around in Jerusalem so that "many people saw them" (Matt.27,52-5). Their loved ones who would have been still getting over their grief, must have been speechless; the Roman governor and the officials under him would have been utterly amazed and sent reports of this back to Rome. One could well imagine at least one or two of these resurrected people writing or getting someone to write for them, an account of their extraordinary experience. It must have still being discussed decades later. But inexplicably, other than in

the Gospel of Matthew, there is no record of this event in any documents of the time or even later. Stranger still, neither Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, James or any of the other apostles thought it worthwhile to mention this amazing event. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded numerous significant events that occurred during this time, including all kinds of portents and wonders, but he said nothing about this one.

A strange thing about Jesus' miraculous power is that it seemed to fluctuate or only work sometimes. When he attempted to heal a group of sick people in Nazareth his power only worked on a few of them, apparently somewhat embarrassing him (Mk.6,5-6). On another occasion he touched a blind man and then asked him if he could see. The man replied he could only make out vague shapes and movement. Jesus had to touch him a second time before his vision was fully restored (Mk.8,22-25).

Jesus' miraculous powers were called 'signs' (*sêmeia*) because they were meant to be and were seen as proof that he had God's favour or even that he was divine himself (Jn.20,30-31). He said:

“Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (Jn.10,37).

So people were not asked to believe in Jesus primarily because of his moral teachings, his loving nature or even the claims he made about himself, but because he could perform miracles. It is often the case nowadays that Jesus' miracles are downplayed or given a naturalistic explanation and he is recommended for his moral teachings and his emphasis on love.

Jesus' exclusivist claims created a problem as far as his miracles were concerned. If he and he alone had God's favour or was divine, and proof of this was that he or those acting in his name could do miracles, how could the miracles done by others, even by pagans, be explained? The solution to this apparent quandary was to insist that any miracles done by others were actually the work of the Devil (2 Thess.2,9; Rev.16,14). But in solving one problem, this explanation only created another. The Pharisees pointed out that if the Devil gave some people miraculous powers, then perhaps Jesus' powers came from the Devil too. Jesus' rebuttal of this charge was, one must say, rather weak (Matt.22,26).

It is worth noting that Jesus was only one of many wonder-workers attracting attention in and around Israel in the 1st century CE. Hanina ben Dosa, Vespasian before becoming emperor, Simon Magus and Theudas, were all credited with having miraculous powers. Theudas is mentioned in several sources, including the Bible, as is another wonder-worker called the Egyptian who, according to Josephus, attracted crowds of up to 30,000. The miracles of Apollonius of Tyana (15-100 CE) especially, were something of an embarrassment to the early Christians because they were so like those done by

Jesus and just as well attested. Interestingly, Apollonius' disciples accused Jesus of using demonic power to do his miracles, just as the first Christians explained away Apollonius's miracles by saying that they were just tricks or caused by the Devil. Not surprisingly, in the first two centuries after Jesus died, Christians had to defend Jesus against the charge that he was really only a magician, for example Tertullian in his *Apologeticus* 21.17;23.7,12 and Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* 69.7.

Before examining the Buddha's attitude to what are generally considered miracles, it is necessary to clarify a few things. Miracles are usually thought of as being caused by or connected in some way with supernatural beings, in Christianity with either the Devil or God. The Devil performs miracles to mislead or seduce people, while God does them to demonstrate his power, punish the wicked or in answer to prayers. However, the Buddha understood 'miracles' (*pāṭihāriya*) to be an outcome or a by-product of mental development. Thus in the Buddhist context it is more appropriate to speak of psychic power (*iddhi*) than miracles. The Buddha freely acknowledged that some of the other ascetics of his time possessed psychic powers as a result of their spiritual practise. They might well misinterpret the significance of such powers or draw wrong conclusions from them, but he never accused them of being in league with the forces of evil.

It is also true that the Buddha generally had a cautious attitude towards all superhuman abilities. Someone once asked him to get one of his monks to "demonstrate a superhuman ability, a psychic feat or a miracle (*uttari manussa dhamma iddhi pāṭihāra*) so that even more people will have faith in you". The Buddha replied that there were such abilities which thoughtful or sceptical people would have legitimate doubts about. However, there was one such power that everyone could have confidence in; what he called "the superhuman ability, the psychic feat, the miracle of education" (*anusāsani*). This consisted he said, of encouraging others with advice such as this: "Consider in this way, not in that. Direct your mind in this way, not in that. Give up that, enhance this and persevere with it" (D.I,211ff). In other words, rather than bedazzling people with supposed miracles, as is sometimes done today, the Buddha thought it far better to encourage people to think, consider, reflect and behave in certain ways.

On another occasion a wealthy merchant had a valuable sandalwood bowl placed on the top of a bamboo pole which was then erected in the centre of the town. Then he had a proclamation made to the effect that anyone who could rise to the top of the pole through psychic power could have the bowl. The monk Piṇḍola heard of this and having manifested the ability to levitate, he took up the challenge and retrieved the bowl. When the Buddha came to hear of this he rebuked the monk in the strongest terms: "You are like a prostitute who lifts her dress for the sake of a miserable coin" (Vin.II,110-111). Then he made it an offence for monks or nuns to display any psychic abilities they might develop. What happened subsequent to Piṇḍola's demonstration helps explain the Buddha's reaction to it. "Noisy, excited crowds began following Piṇḍola

around.” The Buddha wanted people to respect him and his monks because of their virtue and wisdom, not because they could manifest marvels and miracles.

Buddhism has long pointed out that miraculous powers should not be taken as evidence of spiritual or even moral accomplishments, and there is evidence from both Christianity and Buddhism to support this assertion. Devadatta had such powers and he caused the Buddha considerable problems; Judas could exorcise evil spirits and perform miraculous healings and yet he used to steal money and he eventually betrayed Jesus. As far as the Buddha was concerned, miracles were one thing and the Dhamma was something else entirely. He said:

“Whether superhuman abilities, psychic feats or miracles are performed or not, my purpose in teaching the Dhamma is to lead whoever practices it to the complete freedom from suffering. In which case what is the point of performing miracles?” (D.III,4).

Miraculous healings formed a significant part of Jesus’ ministry and were one of the reasons why people accepted his claims and his Gospel. He healed the blind, the paralysed and the leprous, he cast out demons and even brought the dead back to life. Interestingly, there are no examples from the Tipitaka of the Buddha or any of his disciples performing miraculous healings or exorcisms. This was partly for the reasons given above, but also because the Buddha saw his goal and purpose as solving the problem of human suffering at its most fundamental level. He saw sickness, decrepitude and death as inherent in embodied existence, as indeed they are. Thus for him, miraculously curing a sick person was no guarantee that they would not become sick again, and bringing a dead person back to life simply meant that the revived person would have to die a second time later. Are miraculous healings impressive? Definitely! Are they sure to attract a following? Absolutely! However, from the Buddhist perspective they do not go to the heart of the problem.

It should not be taken from this that the Buddha lacked compassion for the sick or that he ignored their plight. He healed, helped and comforted them as any decent person would, although through normal means. He considered visiting and caring for the sick to be virtuous acts and out of compassion he did both, and he encouraged his disciples to do the same (e.g. A.III,144; 295 ff; S.V,79-80;381. After washing a monk who was suffering from diarrhoea and had been neglected by his fellows, the Buddha called the monks together, admonished them for their indifference and then concluded: “He who would nurse me, let him nurse the sick.” (*yo bhikkhave maṃ upat̐taheyya so gilānaṃ upat̐thahissati*, Vin.I,300 ff). It became well known amongst the Buddha’s disciples that: “Caring for the sick is praised by the Lord” (*bhagavatā kho āvuso gilānupaṭ̐hānaṃ vaṇṇitaṃ*, Vin.I,303 ff).

Jesus too admonished his disciples to minister to the sick but he expanded this call for compassion to feeding the hungry, quenching the thirsty, providing

shelter to strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting those in prison. He even said that in some mystical sense he was literally present in the sick and all who suffer (Matt.25,35-37). One could well imagine that the Buddha's pragmatic and sensible admonishment would not move or motivate people to the same degree and in the same way as Jesus' words would. This may be why social engagement is more common in the Christian world than it is in Buddhist countries.

The Afterlife and the Soul

During Jesus' time, Jewish theologians were split into two groups – the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The former rejected belief in any type of afterlife and the latter taught that there was a life after death, although exactly in what form is not clear (Acts.23,7-8). On the question of the afterlife, Jesus sided with the Pharisees. He believed in a heaven (*ouranos*), sometimes also called paradise (*paradeisos*), and a hell. He described heaven as a place of “eternal life” where the inhabitants “shine like the sun” and “see God” and apparently do not marry. Whether they would retain their physical bodies was not clear, although as Jesus still had his body when he rose up to heaven after his resurrection it seems likely that heavenly beings would have theirs too. The only spatial description Jesus gave of heaven was that it had rooms, although what this could mean is not clear (Matt.5,8; 13,43; 22,30; Jn.14,2). Jesus used several words and phrases for hell – hades, the fiery furnace (*kaminos tou pyrus*), the outer darkness (*exoteros skotos*) and Gehenna, named after a ravine outside Jerusalem where it was believed child sacrifices were once made (Matt.11,23; 5,22; 25,41). He described hell as a place of extreme pain “where the worms that eat them never die and the fire never goes out”(Mk.9,48).

The Buddha taught that the individual was made up of a collection, literally ‘a heap’ (*khanda*) of parts, all of them interdependent and in a constant state of flux. The body was, he said, “bound up with consciousness and dependent on it” (*ettha sitam ettha patibaddham*, D.I,76). When an individual died, the body dropped away, the consciousness re-established itself in another physical entity, animated it, and their next life would begin. The Buddha called this process “existence after existence”, “moving from womb to womb” or more precisely, “re-becoming” (*punabbhava*, Sn.1060; 278; D.II,15). As he explained it, at death the consciousness “moves upwards” (*uddhagāmi*), then “descends” (*avakkanti*) into the womb i.e. a mother's newly fertilised egg, and finds “a resting place” (*patiṭṭhā*) there, although these spatial descriptions are probably only metaphorical (D.II,63; III,103; S.V,370). The circumstances of one's present life are conditioned in part by the kamma one created in the present life and the previous life, and the same process will continue in the next life; kamma being how one's consciousness has been constructed and moulded by all one's intentional thoughts, speech and actions. The word ‘conditioned’ is more

appropriate here than ‘determined’ because the Buddha said that it is possible to modify one’s kamma, just as it is possible to change the thought patterns and behaviour that create it (A.I,249; Dh.173).

Perhaps the most persistent misunderstandings concerning kamma is the idea that it is the cause of everything that happens. The Buddha considered this idea a result of muddled awareness (*mutṭhassati*) and a false view leading to fatalism because it would mean that everything is predetermined, thus cancelling out the possibility for personal choice, initiative and freedom. He called it one of the three false and pernicious views, the others being that everything is caused by an all-powerful god (*issa*, Sanskrit *īśvara*) and that everything is without specific cause, i.e. random (A.I,173; S.IV,230). Buddhism recognizes at least five broad causes of why things happen, kamma being only one of them; the others are natural laws (*dhamma niyāma*), biological laws (*bīja niyāma*), physical laws (*utu niyāma*), and psychological laws (*citta niyāma*, As.854). For example, the Buddha said that some illnesses and physical injury may be due to kamma but they are just as likely to be caused by an imbalance of bile, an imbalance of phlegm, an imbalance of wind, an imbalance of all three bodily humours combined, by climatic changes, by carelessness and by accidents (S.IV,230). On other occasions, he pointed out that a poor diet can also lead to sickness (A.III,144) as can overeating (M.I,473). In short: “What happens as a result of kamma is much less than what happens as a result of other causes. The fool goes too far in saying that everything that happens is a result of kamma” (Mil.135-136).

Another serious misunderstanding about kamma is that you can never escape from or change it. Once again, this contradicts what the Buddha taught. He said: “To say that a person experiences exactly the kamma he makes would mean that it would not be possible to live the spiritual life and there would be no chance of putting an end to suffering.” He then explained that a good deed done by a predominantly evil person would probably have little kammic effect, just as an evil deed done by a very good person would probably have only a minor kammic effect (A.I,249-250). This would also mean that a series of positive actions subsequent to a negative one might well ‘dilute’ the kamma created by the negative action. For example, speaking harshly or rudely to someone, later feeling regretful about it and then making amends to them by sincerely apologising, may modify or perhaps even erase the negative kamma made earlier. Of course, it goes the other way too; positive kamma created earlier could be diminished or even cancelled out by some stronger or equally strong negative action done now.

There are several spheres one can be born into, the most significant being the human, the heavenly and the purgatorial spheres. Most of the Buddha’s statements indicate that these spheres are spatial locations, but others suggest that they are more experiences than places. For example: “Fools say that purgatory is

under the sea. But I say that purgatory is really a word for painful experience” (S.IV,206).

The Buddha’s descriptions of heaven and purgatory were not that different from those of Jesus; heavenly beings would experience joy and happiness and purgatorial beings pain and distress. However, there the similarities end, and in several significant ways. For Jesus, heaven and hell were eternal; for the Buddha they lasted only for as long as one’s kamma had not played itself out. When it had, one would pass away and be reborn in another sphere. Thus in the Buddhist context, it is more appropriate to speak of purgatory than hell. Jesus’ understanding was that one’s fate in the afterlife depended on God’s judgment (*krino*, Matt.5,21-22) – good and faithful individuals being assigned to heaven, sinners and unbelievers being condemned to hell. This examination and evaluation would take place on what Jesus called the Judgment Day (*Imera tis krísis*). In the case of sinners and unbelievers, God would deliver his judgment against them with wrath (*orge*), fury (*thumos*) and without mercy (*aneleos*) and thus it was also known as “the Day of Wrath” (*hemera orge*, Matt.3.7; Rom.2,5; Rev.19,15).

For the Buddha, neither he nor a divine being decided a person’s post-mortem destiny, rather, they created it themselves by how they chose to behave during their life, i.e. their kamma. It was a process of impersonal cause and effect. Consequently, the Buddha did not see heaven, purgatory or a human existence as a reward or a punishment but as a natural outcome of specific causes – positive ones in the case of heaven or an advantageous human life and negative ones in the case of purgatory or a difficult human life. For Jesus, heaven was a reward (*misthos*) granted by God, and hell a punishment, a penalty (*kolasis*), imposed by him (Matt.5,12; 6,5; 25,46; Lk.6,35). The major difference between the two men’s vision of heaven is that Jesus considered it to be the ultimate goal, whereas for the Buddha it was part of unsatisfactory conditioned existence; better than purgatory but inferior to Nirvana.

All Christian churches assert as one of their central teachings that humans possess a soul; an incorporeal, immortal essence which is the real person, animated by God when he creates them, and destined for heaven or hell after physical death. Despite its theological importance, Jesus said almost nothing about the soul. He used the word spirit (*pneuma* or *psyche*) in several different contexts but only occasionally in the sense of a soul, as when he said “that which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of spirit is spirit” and “Into your hands I place my spirit” (Jn.3.6; Lk.23,46). It was the early church fathers and later theologians who worked out the details.

Brahmanism and the Upanaṣadic sages who had just started coming into prominence around the Buddha’s time, had a wide range of ideas about what they called the self (*ātman*), the spirit (*jīva*) or the true person (*puruṣa*), its nature and destiny. All these theories asserted in one way or another that the self was immortal and in some way related to the divine. In contrast to this and indeed

differing from nearly all other samaṇa teachers of the time, the Buddha taught that there was no eternal self or soul. This was the central theme of his second sermon, the Discourse on the Sign of No-self (*Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*). In it he said to understand that all compounded things were unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), impermanent (*anicca*) and no-self (*anattā*) was a crucial step in attaining awakening.

“Body is not self, feelings are not self, perception is not self, mental constructs are not self and consciousness is not self...When one sees this, one becomes detached from these things, being detached, the passions fade, when the passions have faded one is free and being free one knows one is free” (S.III,66-67).

For the Buddha, the truth of no-self was not just a theory, the result of intellectual speculation, but the outcome of a profound investigative insight into the nature of reality.

When some people learn that the Buddha taught that there is no self and also that individuals are reborn, they ask how there can be personal continuity if there is nothing to pass from one life to the next. This problem is more apparent than real. Firstly, the Buddha did not teach that there was no empirical self, i.e. the sense of being distinct and separate from others, one’s orientation in space, the feeling of continuity that comes from remembering the past and imagining the future, associating with a name and being called by that name, etc. Clearly such experiences exist. He taught that there was no metaphysical self, no eternal unchanging essence behind the appearance.

Using an example can help clarify what the Buddha meant. A mother might take out the family photo album and show her children photos of herself when she was a child. According to science, not one cell in her body is the same as when she was young. Her thoughts, ideas and beliefs are all different from when she was a child. Even her facial features when young, although vaguely similar, are hardly recognisable to her children. Even so, when the curious children ask their mother: “Is that you mummy?”, and she answers “Yes”, no one would accuse her of lying. Despite the fact that both body and mind are continually changing, it is still valid to say that the person who is reborn is a continuation in some way of the person who died – not because any unchanging self has passed from one to another, but because identity persists in memories, self-image, dispositions, traits, mental habits and psychological tendencies. It is the consciousness which includes all these things that passes from one life to another and that experiences the result (*vipāka*) of kamma done in the past life, the present one and in future lives.

Misapprehending the empirical self or the sense of self, as an eternal essence or soul, results in the ‘me’ notion which automatically gives rise the ‘mine’ idea – my car, my money, my country, my political party, my religion. It

is behind the longing for eternal life, the terror of annihilation at death, the desire to possess things to enhance the self, and all the consequent suffering these things cause.

Renunciation

The Buddha started his quest for truth by giving up his life of ease and privilege and walking out on his family. After his awakening he founded an order of men and women who followed his example. As the Buddha saw it, the encumbrances of home life, the demands and expectations of society and the time, effort and trouble they required, made the attainment of awakening much more difficult. He acknowledged that married lay people could achieve awakening and indeed some of them did, but for them it was more challenging. As a result of this emphasis on renunciation, Buddhism has been characterised in the West as a “world-denying” religion as opposed to Christianity which is supposedly “world-affirming”. This claim is perplexing given that a complete reading of Jesus’ words as presented in the New Testament indicate that his world-denying theology is one of the few things he and the Buddha had in common.

Jesus too advocated giving up one’s family: “And I assure you that anyone who leaves home or wife or brother or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will receive much more in the present age and eternal life in the age to come” (Lk.18,28-30). When Jesus’ mother and brothers came looking for him he left them standing outside and pointedly told the disciples gathered around him that they were his only family (Mk.3,31-35). He stressed this repudiation of familial bonds still further by saying: “You must not call anyone here on earth ‘Father’, because you have only one father, the one in heaven” (Matt.23,9). But he went even beyond this, saying that his very purpose of teaching was to break up families. “I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies will be those of his own household” (Matt.10,35-36).

The apostles understood Jesus to be saying that the things of the world are mere dust compared to God. Paul said that it is “right and proper” (*euschēmon kai euparedron*) to give up marriage in order to focus entirely on God (Cor.7,32-35) and that you should “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Col.3,2). “Do not love the world or anything that belongs to the world. If you love the world, you do not love the Father. Everything that belongs to the world – what is sinful self-desires, what people see and want, and everything in this world that people are proud of – none of that comes from the Father; it comes from the world” (1Jn.2,15-17). James put it like this: “Don’t you know that to be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. If you want to be the world’s friend you make yourself God’s enemy” (Jam.4,4), and Peter urged

Christians to be “strangers and refugees in this world” (1Pt.2,11) and Paul asked them to “put to death all worldly desires” (Col.3,5-6). To emphasise how Christians should feel about the world, Jesus even used the word *miseo*, meaning ‘to hate’ or ‘to detest’. “Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal” (Jn.12,25). And again: “Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they hate their father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters and themselves as well” (Lk.14,26).

Some of this could have been spoken by the Buddha except that he would have refrained from such robust language and would not have countenanced hating oneself or indeed hating anything. He used gentler terms equivalent to ‘renounce’ or ‘let go of’ or ‘be detached from’. Because the starting point of Buddhism is suffering (*dukkha*), its critics claim that this is pessimistic and even faulty, because much happiness can be derived from the world too. But the Buddha was a more insightful thinker than his critics give him credit for and he readily acknowledged the positive in the world. “If there was no satisfaction in the world, beings would not be entranced by it.” And again: “Whatever satisfaction there is in the world I have found it, I have seen it with wisdom and know its limits in the world” (A.I,259-260). The word here translated as satisfaction is *assāda* which can mean enjoyment, fulfilment, gratification, even sweetness. The Buddha recommended renunciation because worldly satisfaction exists together with unhappiness, it is impermanent, it has an addictive quality to it, and while attempting to experience it or prolong the experience of it, people are apt to do things that deprive others of it. Further, a higher and more refined happiness is available to those who transform themselves, which requires paying less attention to the pleasures the world offers. The Buddha would not have agreed with the idea that “everything that belongs to the world” is opposed to the spiritual quest and that it should be hated.

Just as importantly, the Buddha recommended renunciation mainly to those intending to become monks and nuns, not to everyone. Concerning family life, he had a great deal to say about loving conjugal, parental and filial relationships. He used generic words such as *piya*, *pema* and *sineha* for familial love but also the more specific terms such as maternal love (*matteyya*) and paternal love (*petteyya*), all of which he lauded. Being a boy and an only child, the young Gotama was probably particularly cherished by his parents. Later, he became a husband for more than a decade and very briefly a father. This, together with his penetrating understanding of human desires, needs and motivations, allowed him to speak of familial relationships with insightfulness and sensitivity.

The parents’ role, apart from loving and caring for their offspring was, the Buddha said “to restrain them from wrong, encourage them to do good, give them an education, provide them with a suitable marriage partner and leave them an inheritance” (D.III,189). For children: “Love of one’s mother and love of one’s father is true happiness in the world” he said (Dhp.332). Parents were particularly

worthy of their children's love, respect and gratitude he believed, "because they do much for their children; they bring them up, nourish them and introduce them to the world." As if to underscore the blessing of this loving gratitude, he added that it was impossible to repay one's parents for all they had done for one. Then he added this important proviso: "But whoever encourages their unbelieving parents to have faith, their immoral parents to become virtuous or their ignorant parents to become wise, such a one by so doing, does repay, does more than repay their parents" (A.II,70). The minds of parents who are so honoured and cherished will have "beautiful thoughts and compassion (*kalyāṇena manasā anukampanti*) towards their offspring and wish them well saying: 'May you live long!'" (A.III,76-77).

For the Buddha, love, tenderness and mutual respect were the basis for a successful marriage, that is to say, a happy and enduring one. He reproached the brahmins for buying their wives rather than "coming together in harmony and out of mutual affection", things he clearly considered made far better foundations for a lifetime partnership. As he commented in the Jātaka: "In this world, union without love is suffering." He said that "cherishing one's spouse and child is the greatest blessing", that a loving wife was "the best friend one can have", and that a couple who were following his Dhamma would "speak loving words to each other", and live together "with joyful minds, of one heart and in harmony" (A.III,222; Ja.II,205; 262; S.I,37; A.II,59; Ja.II,122).

When two people love each other deeply they often have a strong feeling that their coming together was somehow "destined". Scientists have tried to explain such feelings in terms of chemical changes in the body and they might be right, although there could be another explanation. According to the Buddha's understanding, each person comes into the present life from an earlier one and if they have not attained awakening will go on to a new one after they die. A person's intentional thoughts, speech and actions (i.e. their kamma) will be a major factor in conditioning their experiences in each life. But beyond that, a strong identification with, connection to or attachment for a particular location or culture, may cause them to be reborn there. Likewise, a close bond or affinity with a particular person may draw them to that person in the next life (A.II,62).

The ideal loving couple would be Nakulapitā and Nakulamātā, who were close disciples of the Buddha. Once Nakulamātā devotedly nursed her husband through a long illness, encouraging and reassuring him all the while. When the Buddha came to know of this he said to Nakulapitā: "You have benefited, good sir, you have greatly benefited, in having your wife full of compassion for you, with love for your welfare, as your mentor and teacher" (A.III,295-8). From the Buddhist perspective, these qualities would be a recipe for an enduring and enriching relationship – faithfulness (*anubbata*), compassion (*anukampikā*) concern for one another's welfare (*atthakāmā*) and being each other's mentor and teacher (*ovādikā anusasikā*). On another occasion, Nakulamātā and Nakulapitā came to the Buddha and said that since their marriage when they were young they

had never been unfaithful to each other, not even in thought let alone in deed and that so close was their relationship that they wanted to be together in the next life just as they had been in this one. The Buddha replied: “If a husband and wife wish to see each other in the present life and the future lives also and they have the same faith, the same virtue, the same generosity and the same wisdom then they may see each other in this live and future ones” (A.II,61-62). A Buddhists reading through the four Gospels to find practical advice and guidance for living in the world or for family life is likely to be surprised and disappointed. As seen above, almost all of Jesus’ pronouncements on both subjects were negative. Concerning conjugal relationships, the only thing he ever taught on the subject was that a husband could divorce his wife only if she committed adultery (Matt.5,31-32; 19,1-9; Mk.10,1-5).

Returning to the subject at hand, the Buddha’s reason for advocating radical renunciation for his more committed disciples was quite different from that of Jesus. The Buddha believed that the world and its pleasures offered “meagre satisfaction and much pain and tribulation” (M.I,130), and that the higher and more refined happiness of Nirvana was attainable. “If by giving up a limited happiness one can experience a greater happiness, the wise person should forsake the limited and thus behold the greater” (Dhp.290). As will be shown below, Jesus taught radical renunciation because he was convinced that the world was soon to pass away and be replaced by the Kingdom of God, where possessions, family relations, status and personal achievements would count for nothing.

Love

For most people today it is Jesus’ teachings on kindness and love (*agape*) which attract most attention, often overshadowing many or even most of the other ideas he taught. This is not surprising; it is the most appealing thing about his Gospel. Jesus spoke of love often and in a heartfelt, almost passionate manner. Moved by this, his immediate disciples emphasised love just as much and on occasion with even more eloquence. Jesus never defined what he meant by love but Paul did so with considerable success.

“Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous, conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered, selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope and patience never fail” (1Cor.13,4-7).

When asked how one could be saved, Jesus replied that one had to love God and one’s neighbour (Lk.10,25-27). Such ideas were not new. Jesus was quoting Old Testament. Nor was he the first, even within the Jewish tradition, to

emphasise the importance of this idea. Hillel, who died when Jesus was just a boy, taught that being loving was the epitome of the sacred law.

Jesus' exhortation indicates two focuses for love. For him, love towards God should be deep and strong "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind" (Mk.12,30). Love of one's fellows should be expressed in kindness and patience, generosity and forgiveness, non-retaliation and even a preparedness to die for another should the need arise (1Jn.15,13). John was echoing Jesus' intent when he wrote: "If we are rich and see others in need, yet close our hearts against them, how can we claim that we love God? My children, love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action" (1Jn.3,17-18). Again: "If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars. For we cannot love God, who we have not seen, if we do not love others, who we have seen"(1Jn.4,20). These are among the most powerful and moving words in all religious literature.

When Jesus said that to be saved one had to love God and one's neighbour and was then asked who one's neighbour was, he told the parable of the Good Samaritan. The meaning of the parable is clear; to love is to help anyone in need, whether they be a stranger or even an enemy (Lk.10,25-37). Jesus' call for an almost unworldly love led the first Christians to believe that such a love could only have a divine origin and that it "comes from God" (1Jn.4,1). Paul said that it was God who "has poured out his love into our hearts" (Rom.5,5). "No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us" (1Jn.4,12). So as the early Christians understood it, love was not actually an initiative of the individual, but something bestowed by God. This implies that love is a divine attribute, a notion most people would find attractive. But it also raises an important question. If God fills some people with love why does he not fill everyone with it? Most people would agree that the world is in desperate need of more love.

An outside observer might notice what appears to be a quandary in Jesus' understanding of love, whether it be human or divine. On one occasion he said: "If you obey my commandments you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remained in his love" (Jn.15,10). The inference here is that if you do not follow Jesus' commandments he will withdraw his love from you. Furthermore, for Jesus the highest love, God's love, could accommodate the intention to condemn people to eternal hell. Jesus emphasised repeatedly that either he or God would judge each individual on the Judgment Day and decide their fate. If they were found to be sinful, unrepentant or unbelieving, he or God would assign them to everlasting punishment. Jesus warned that on that day he would reward those who helped others when they were in distress, but those who failed to do so would be under God's curse and he would say to them: "Away with you to the eternal fire that has been prepared by the Devil and his angels" (Matt.25.41-46). "Just as the weeds are gathered up and burned in a fire, so the same thing will happen at the end of the age; the Son of

Man will send out his angels to gather up out of his Kingdom all those who cause people to sin and all others who do evil things, and they will throw them into the fiery furnace where they will cry and gnash their teeth” (Matt.13,40-43. For those who had not repented their sins or who did not believe in God or Jesus, there would be no forgiveness and no reprieve. “Whoever disobeys the Son will not have life, but will be under God’s eternal punishment” (Jn.3,36, also Jn.8,24; 11, 25;12,47-48), “God will show no mercy when he judges the person who has not been merciful”(Ja.2,13). Any sin can be forgiven, Jesus warned, but not speaking against the Holy Spirit or saying something against the Son of Man “in this age or the ages to come” (Matt.12,31-32). So love as Jesus understood it, including God’s love, very definitely had its limits and its conditions.

It is interesting to compare the divine reaction to insult, criticism, disbelief or even just honest scepticism, with that of an awakened human being such as the Buddha. He told his monks:

“Should anyone speak disparagingly of me, the Dhamma or the Saṅgha, you should not get angry, resentful or upset because of that. For if you did, you would not be able recognise if what they said was true or not. Therefore, if others speak disparagingly of me, the Dhamma or the Saṅgha, you should explain whatever is incorrect saying: ‘This is not correct, that is not true, we do not do this, that is not our way’.”(D.I,1-3).

Because the Buddha saw his Dhamma primarily as a way of overcoming both physical and psychological suffering (*dukkha*) and because compassion is the most appropriate response to suffering, it is only natural that he should have spoken of empathy, solicitude and particularly compassion (*anukampati*, *dayā* and *karuṇā*) more than love (*metta*).

“Giving up ill-will and hatred, one abides with a mind of kindly compassion for all living beings and purifies the mind of that ill-will and hatred...Giving up the taking of life, and putting aside the stick and the sword, one lives with care, empathy and kindly compassion for all living beings” (D.I,63, condensed).

The most noticeable feature of the Buddha’s personality was his compassion and this was not just something he felt for others or what they felt in his presence; it was the motive for much of what he said and did. “What should be done out of compassion for his disciples by a teacher who cares about their welfare and out of compassion for them, I have done for you.” He visited and comforted the sick “out of compassion”, and he taught the Dhamma “out of compassion” Once, he went into the forest looking for a serial killer because he had compassion for the murderer himself and for his potential victims (M.I,46; A.III,379; S.V,344-345; A.III,168). The Buddha’s compassion seems to have

even transcended the bounds of time. He is described sometimes as doing or refraining from doing certain things “out of compassion for coming generations” (M.II,91-92). Once, he said his very reason for being was “for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the good and the happiness of gods and humans” (A.II,147).

Nonetheless, while laying great stress on compassion, the Buddha had plenty to say about love as well. He saw love (*mettā*) as an immeasurable or boundless (*appamāna*) state which was part of an ensemble of four related states, the others being compassion (*karuṇā*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*), and called them “Brahmā-like abiding” (*brahmavihāra*). This was his advice on love to his disciples. “You should train yourselves like this, ‘Our minds shall not be perverted, nor shall we speak evil speech but with kindness and compassion, we will live with a mind free from hatred and filled with love. We will live suffusing firstly one person with love and starting with them, suffuse the whole world with a love that is expansive, pervasive, immeasurable and utterly devoid of hatred or enmity.’ This is how you should train yourselves” (M.I,127). Love as the Buddha understood it, had a strong nurturing component. “Just as a mother would protect her one and only child with her life, so should you cultivate an unbounded mind towards all beings and love towards the whole world” (Sn.149-150). Nor was there any place for retaliation or retribution in the Buddha’s love. “Even if low-down criminals were to cut you limb from limb with a double-handled saw, if you filled your mind with hatred you would not be practising my teachings” (M.I,129). This might be seen as an equivalent to Jesus’ exhortation to “turn the other cheek”.

For the Buddha, having a loving heart was many times better than doing good with the intention of getting some personal advantage from it.

“Just as the radiance of all stars is not worth a sixteenth part of the moon’s radiance; just as in the last month of the rainy season in the autumn, when the sky is clear and free from clouds, the sun rises into the sky and flashes, radiates and dispels all darkness; just as in the pre-dawn light the healing star shines flashes and radiates; so too, whatever good deeds one might do for the purpose of a good rebirth, none of them are worth a sixteenth part of that love which frees the mind. It is this love that frees the mind and which illuminates, glows and shines, surpassing all those good deeds” (It.20).

Likewise, performing various religious rituals was, for the Buddha, of little worth compared with having love (A.IV,151), and he called upon his disciples to “live in concord, harmony and agreement, like milk and water mixed, looking upon each other with the eyes of love” (*samaggā sammodamāmā avivadamāmā khīrodakībhūtā aññamaññaṃ piyacakkhūni sampassantā viharanti*, A.I,243). One should, he said, speak with love, share the Dhamma with love and minister

to the sick out of love for them (A.III, 243-4; III,196; III,144).

Perhaps most striking of all, the Buddha said that if one has a loving heart, one's future in the present life and the hereafter need not be a cause for concern. "A noble disciple who is without longing or hatred, who is unconfused and has lucid awareness, dwells pervading the four directions with a mind filled with love and compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Then above, below, across and everywhere, to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the whole world with a mind filled with love and compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity that is expansive and pervasive, immeasurable and utterly devoid of hatred or enmity. Such a disciple can have these four confidences.

"He can think: 'If there is an afterlife and if good and bad deeds have a result, then when my body disintegrates after death I will be reborn in a good place or in a heaven realm.' This is the first confidence he can have. Or he can think, 'Even if there is no afterlife and good and bad deeds have no result, nonetheless in this life I live devoid of hatred and enmity, happily and free from trouble.' This is the second confidence he can have. Or he can think, 'If one who is evil is repaid with evil then how can suffering come to me because I do no evil?' This is the third confidence he can have. Or he can think, 'If one who is evil is not repaid with evil I am pure nonetheless'." (A.I,192).

Thus, according to the Buddha's understanding, an exalted afterlife was not dependant on "believing in the Buddha" or having faith in a particular deity, but on being virtuous and loving. This contrasts significantly with Jesus' understanding that being loving was not sufficient for salvation. Unless one also had faith in God one could not be saved.

There were other differences between the two men's understanding of love, despite some similarities. For the Buddha, empathy, solicitude, compassion and love were to have a universal application and be extended to all sentient beings, not just to humans. While the Old Testament includes several rules to protect animals from cruelty and over-work, Jesus said nothing about the treatment of animals. Paul brushed the Old Testament rules aside, insisting they were for the benefit of humans only and that God was not concerned about the fate of animals (1 Cor.9,9-10), a position that all Christian theologians maintained until recently.

Perhaps significant also is that while the Buddha spoke of love as involving acts of kindness, he emphasised the proactive expressions of love less often than did Jesus. The Buddha spoke of love mainly in psychological terms, as a state of mind; Jesus saw it more in behavioural terms, as something done for and expressed in actions towards others. It is possible that how the Buddha spoke of love is the reason why Buddhist cultures have traditionally been less proactive in organized long-term charitable endeavours and social engagement than

Christian ones.

The Tipitaka tells of a young man who became a monk despite opposition from his parents, and some months later returned to his parents' home while begging for alms. Still hoping to get their son to change his mind, the parents invited him to a meal the next day and before he came they piled money and other valuables in the dining room to entice him to disrobe. When he came, they showed him the money and told him that if he returned to being a layman, all of it would be his. He replied: "If you take my advice, have this pile of money and valuables loaded into a cart, taken to the Ganges and dumped in" (M.II,64). Significantly, he did not ask his parents to distribute the money amongst the poor, as Jesus or a Christian might have done.

Faith

Christian sects hold differing positions on the role of faith in their religion. Catholicism teaches that salvation depends on faith and good works; Protestantism that faith alone is sufficient. Whoever is right, Jesus taught that faith (*pisteōs*) was an important, if not the most important, quality that bridged the chasm between humanity and God. "Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Again: "For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life." And again: "You will die for your sins if you do not believe that 'I Am Who I Am'." And once more: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not have life, but will remain under God's punishment." When someone asked Jesus what must be done to please God he replied: "What God wants you to do is believe in the one he sent" i.e. Jesus (Mk.16,16; Jn.3,16; 8,23-24; 3,36; 6,29).

This same point was reiterated again and again by the apostles. "No one can please God without faith, for whoever comes to God must have faith that God exists and rewards those who seek him" (Heb.11,6).

From these and similar statements it can be seen that there are two objects of faith – God and Jesus. To have faith in God means to believe certain claims made about him – that he created everything, that he has three natures, that he has a son, that he sent his son to die for humankind, etc. To have faith in Jesus likewise means to believe that he was born of a virgin, he is the Son of God, that he was resurrected after he died, that he will come again to judge the world, etc. Thus salvation depends on having no doubt, uncertainty or hesitation about certain ideas. "When you pray you must not doubt at all. Whoever doubts is like a wave in the sea which is driven and blown about by the wind. If you are like that, unable to make up your mind and undecided in all you do, you must not think that you will receive anything from the Lord" (Jam.1,6-8). God responds to this total acceptance of certain ideas by saving the believer.

All the creeds of Christianity – the Apostles Creed, the Nicæan Creed, Chalcedonian Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Augsburg Confession, the Pillars of Adventism, the Methodist Articles of Religion, etc. – all itemise specific ideas about God and Jesus that must be believed to become a Christian and be saved. There is no suggestion that all these claims need be intellectually understood; to be convinced of them or to implicitly trust or hope that they are true is enough. Interestingly, none of these creeds say anything about how to behave, mention anything about being loving, or even mention the word love. Likewise, even the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, believed by many scholars to be the oldest account of the essence of Christianity, only states and explains a set of ideas that must be believed. For Jesus, the ideal faith was simple, trusting and unquestioning, like that of a child. As he said: “I assure you that unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt.18,3).

Faith (*saddhā*) and confidence (*pasāda*) have an importance in the preliminary stages of a Buddhist’s journey towards awakening. Thus the Buddha referred to faith as a seed (*saddhā bījaṃ*, Sn.77), meaning that one might not even start exploring the Dhamma or living by it without at least some initial faith or confidence that it will produce results. This can be seen in doctrinal categories such as the Four Accomplishments (*catu sampadā*), the Five Riches (*pañca dhana*), the Five Strengths (*pañca bala*), the Five Spiritual Faculties (*pañca indriya*) and the Seven Good States (*satta saddgammehi*, A.III,53; II,66; M.I,356) etc., all of which start with faith but end with wisdom (*pañña*). Likewise, the Transcendental Dependent Arising says that an awareness of the inadequate and unsatisfactory nature of conditioned existence (*dukkha*) leads to faith, which paves the way for higher and more important spiritual qualities. The fact that Right Faith is not one of the steps on the Noble Eightfold Path further indicates that while faith is helpful for spiritual growth, it must be superseded by other more important qualities. The Buddha claimed that it was possible to attain awakening “without recourse to faith, personal preference, revelation...” (*aññatreva saddhāya...ruciyā...anussavā...etc.* S.IV, 138-9). By contrast, faith is so fundamental to Christianity that in English and most other European languages ‘faith’ is a synonym for religion. This is not to say that thoughtfulness and examination are better means of knowledge than faith, but only that Buddhism and Christianity differ on this matter, as they do on so many others.

Buddhism distinguishes between reasoned faith (*ākāravatī saddhā*) and baseless faith (*amūlikā saddhā*). Reasoned faith grows out of a careful assessment of probabilities, inferences and facts, while baseless faith is that activated by hope, a strong appeal to the emotions, being awed by miracles or accepting the first claim one encounters without having examined alternatives. The first is more intellectual while the second is more emotional. The Buddha’s preference for reasoned faith is well illustrated by his encounter with Upāli, a respected community leader and a follower of Jainism. After a discussion with the Buddha,

Upāli decided to become his disciple “from this day onward for as long as life lasts”. Rather than accept Upāli’s avowal of faith, the Buddha asked him to take time to consider before deciding: “Make a careful investigation Upāli. It is appropriate for well-known people like yourself to make a careful investigation first” (M.I,379). The Buddha’s advice here contrasts interestingly with Jesus’ comments to Thomas, who said he would only believe that Jesus had been resurrected if he had empirical evidence (to see and touch). “Jesus said to him: ‘Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing!’.” (Jn.20,29). St. Paul told the first Christian the same thing, to rely on faith rather than what their senses tell them: “For we live by faith, not by sight” (2Cor.5,7). Thus Christianity asserts the superiority of faith over physical evidence.

According to the Buddha’s understanding, confidence becomes unshakable (*aveccappasāda*) as one sees its transformational effects (M.I,37ff). It is only as individuals start experiencing the fruits of their practice that these inspire confidence in the Buddha so that their esteem for him becomes truly strong (M.III,11). For example, the Buddha actually asked his disciples to examine his behaviour and character to see if what he said about himself was true – to see if there was a difference between his public persona and private behaviour, to note if he practised what he preached, to observe if there were changes in his character as he became famous and esteemed. The Buddha claimed that if a disciple did this over a period of time, he or she would develop a faith in the Buddha that was “supported by reasons” (*ākāravatī*, M.I,318-320). So for the Buddha, faith was a helpful psychological state which eventually had to be replaced by personal experience. For Jesus it was a spiritual power that God responded to by saving the person who had it. But paradoxically, one can only have faith or indeed any spiritual quality, if it is granted to one by God. “It is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith. It is not through your own efforts, but God’s gift” (Eph.2,8; Jam.I,5; Rom.9,14-18).

The End of the World

For several centuries before the turn of the first millennium and for at least a century and a half after it, many Jews believed the world had become so wicked that God was going to destroy it. There was a precedent for this when God wiped out almost all living things with a great flood at the time of Noah. A hundred years before Jesus, a Jewish sect called the Essenes was teaching that the day of destruction was near. The idea can be found in a Jewish work called the *Psalms of Solomon* written in about 90 BCE. John the Baptist taught the same thing, Jesus did, so did his apostles after his death, and it was a major theme of preaching by the first several generations of Christians. The fiery John the Baptist harangued and no doubt terrified the crowds who came to hear him, warning them to repent

because of “the punishment God is about to send” (Matt.3,7). “The axe is ready to cut down the tree at its roots; every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire” (Matt.3,10). It was a message that Jesus took to heart. He came to believe that he was the Son of Man sent by God to judge the world; the wicked being destroyed and the righteous rewarded. The poor and the humble were going to be exalted and the rich and powerful brought low. “The meek shall inherit the earth” Jesus promised (Matt.5,5). The time had come to love each other, to give to anyone who asked, forgive one’s enemies, turn the other cheek and give no thought for tomorrow. The overthrow of the old world and its replacement by a new and perfect one was imminent.

The opening scene would be the sun and moon going dark, the stars falling from the heavens and the Son of Man coming through the clouds in glory.

“There will be a shout of command, the archangel’s voice, the sound of God’s trumpet, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first, then we who are living at that time will be gathered up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord” (1Thess.4,16-17; 5,3).

The apostle John had a vision of the chaos and terror that would happen at this time. Amongst other things, God will let loose hideous monsters that “were not given the power to kill people but only torture them for five months and their torment will be like the sting of a scorpion. In those days, men will search for death but will not find it, they will long for death but death will be denied them” (Rev.9,5-6). All this was going to happen quite unexpectedly, “like a thief in the night”, and very soon. “When people say, ‘Everything is quiet and safe’ then suddenly destruction will hit them! It will come as suddenly as the pains that come upon a woman in labour, and people will not escape” (1Thess.5,3). Jesus warned the Jewish high priest that he would “see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven”(Mk.14,62). He also warned his audience that they would witness this dramatic end. “Remember that all these things will happen before the people now living have all died.” Again: “I tell you, there are some here who will not die until they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power” (Matt.24:34; Mark13:30; Lk.21:32). Jesus repeated again and again to John in a vision that: “I am coming soon!” (*Idou erchomai tachy*, Rev.3.11; 22.7; 22,12)

Today, those who believe this promise tend to provoke ridicule or are thought to be deluded, but it is obvious that Jesus meant what he said and the first several generations of Christians took him very seriously. John promised his readers: “My children, the end is near! You were told that the Enemy of Christ would come, and now many enemies of Christ have already appeared, and so we know the end is near”(1Jn.2:18). James asked “all God’s people scattered over

the whole world” to “Keep your hopes high, for the day of the Lord’s coming is near”(Jam.5,8). According to Peter: “The end of all things is near”(1Pt.4,7) and Paul reminded people that “the Lord is coming soon” (1Cor.10,11; Phil.4,5) and warned them to be careful of their behaviour “for we live at a time when the end of the world is about to come”. “The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” (Rom.13,11). When someone asked Paul for his advice on marriage he replied:

“Have you got a wife? Then don’t try to get rid of her. Are you unmarried? Then don’t look for a wife...What I mean is this, my friends: there is not much time left and from now on married people should live as though they were not married...” (1Cor.7,27-29).

The reason why the apostles and the first generations of Christians tried so frantically to convert others was because they wanted to save as many people as possible and there was so little time left in which to do it.

The Buddha’s conception of the world, indeed of the whole cosmos, its origin, structure and fate, differed in almost every respect from that of Jesus. He did not accept the notion that the universe were a divine creation, but rather a phenomenon that had come into existence through a process of natural forces, causes and effects. Nor did he think universe have a specific beginning in time or an end. It was made up of world systems (*lokadhatu*) or galaxies (*cakkavali*, *cakka* means a wheel) and within them are “a thousands of suns, thousands of moons, thousands of continents” (A.I,227). It went through an endless cycle of destruction and reformation over a period of aeons. The Buddha said: “There comes a time when, sooner or later, after a vast duration, this universe contracts (*samvattati*)...Then there comes a time when, sooner or later, after a vast duration, this universe expands (*vivattati*)...” (D.I,17, condensed). When asked how long one of these periods of coming into being and passing away last, the Buddha said they would take a *kappa*. When further asked how long a *kappa* was he replied:

“It would not be easy to calculate by counting years, centuries or even millennia.” Then he gave this simile. “If once in a hundred years a man were to stroke the peak of a mighty rocky mountain once with a silk cloth, that mountain would be worn away before a *kappa* had expired” (S.II,181).

The Buddha was also able to conceptualize the idea of vast distances in space, and spoke of “the black, gloomy regions of darkness between the world systems, where the light of our moon and sun, powerful and majestic though they are, cannot reach” (M.III,124). This is perhaps something like what we call intergalactic space. Interestingly, the Buddha also suggested that there were

beings in the dark, silent space, although it's not clear whether he thought of them as gods or some other type of lifeform (M.III,124). As for the Earth, it was seen as a disk (*maṇḍala*, D.I,134) that spins "like a potter's wheel or the stone in an oil mill" (*Nidānakathā* 25), and that it "rests on water, which rests on wind which in turn rests of space"(D.II,107).

There is no suggestion in this or anything the Buddha said about the world or the cosmos that they were the outcome of a divine will, that a divine power was overlooking them or intervening in them, or that a divine being was going to destroy them. There are things about the cosmos which the Buddha spoke of which no scientist would agree with today, and this is hardly surprising – he never claimed to be divine. But given how long ago he lived, some of his ideas are remarkably realistic.

Salvation and Awakening

The Kingdom of God which Jesus believed was about to replace the old world after it had been destroyed by God would be utopian one, an existence of abundant joy for eternity in the presence of God. Nonetheless, the vision of an apocalyptic destruction of the entire world, together with all its natural wonders and everything that humans have achieved and loved, is an overwhelmingly negative one. Adding to this grim vision is Jesus' contention that only a small number will survive the apocalypse to be able to enjoy the Kingdom of God, many will be called but few (*oligoi*) will be chosen (Matt.22,14). "The gate to hell is wide and the road that leads to it is easy, and there are many who travel it. But the gate to life is narrow and the way that leads to it is hard, and there are few people who find it" (Matt.7,13-14), and further "...many will try to get through but will be unable" (Lk.13,24). Apparently, even believing in Jesus and his Gospel was no guarantee of salvation.

"When the Day of Judgment comes, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God's message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!' Then I will say to them, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you wicked people!'" (Matt.7,21-23).

Peter, Jesus' senior apostle and leader of the early church, went so far as to say this: "It is difficult for good people to be saved; what then will become of godless sinners?" (1Pt.4,18). Even those who have never heard of God, Jesus or his Gospel are destined to eternal damnation. According to Paul, the evidence of God's existence is obvious and everywhere, so not believing in the Christian god is no excuse (Rom.1,18-21). God actually revealed to the apostle John the number who would be saved; a mere 144,000 (Rev.7,1-4). As for the others, a terrible

fate awaited them.

When the Buddha was asked how many people would realise Nirvana he refused to answer, one of only two times he ever did this, probably because he considered the question to be irrelevant. Thinking that the questioner might go away disappointed, Ānanda answered on the Buddha's behalf. He said that if there were a city surrounded by a strong wall with only one gate, anyone who entered the city would have to go through that gate. He then said that anyone who realised Nirvana would do so by following the Noble Eightfold Path (A.V,193-5). While stating that his teaching "goes against the stream" (*patisoṭagāmin*) the Buddha acknowledged that there were at least some people "with little dust in their eyes" (*apparajakkhajātikā*) and that many thousands of his disciples had attained one or another of the stages that make complete awakening inevitable (M.I,490). His feeling on the chances of attaining Nirvana was well summed up by the nun Sumedha when she said: "The Immortal has been attained by many and can still be attained even today by those who make an effort, but not by those who do not try" (Thi.513).

Wealth

While Jesus was sure that only a few would be saved on the Judgment Day, mainly the humble, the neglected and the lowly, he taught it would be virtually impossible for the rich. "My children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God? It is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" (Mk.10,24). He warned against what he called "the deceitfulness of wealth" (*he apate tou ploutou*) and declared that his mission from God was specifically to the poor (*echrisen me euangelisasthai ptochois*, Lk.4,18). He was well aware that wealth could make people greedy, proud and contemptuous of their fellows and of spiritual pursuits, and he pointed this out on several occasions. However, Jesus' attitude seemed to have gone beyond this to condemning the rich simply for being rich. It has been observed more than once that Jesus reserved his harshest words firstly for hypocrites and then for the wealthy.

He told a story of a rich man who died and went to hell while the poor man who used to sit at his door hoping to get something to eat died and was carried to heaven by the angels. In hell and suffering terrible agony, the rich man begged for pity from Abraham and the poor man now sitting beside him in paradise, even for a drop of water to ease his thirst. They both refused. They even refused a plea from the man to send a message to his brothers warning them not to be neglectful of the poor as he had been (Lk.16,19-31). This is a troubling parable. There is no suggestion that the poor man was particularly virtuous; it seems that his saving grace was only that he was poor. The rich man for his part perhaps deserved to be rebuked for his callousness and neglect, even chastised for it, but did he

deserve eternal punishment? Most troubling of all, the story lacks compassion; Abraham's and the poor man's response to the rich man's pleas for mercy suggests spite and vengefulness.

Several of Jesus' other comments about the rich suggest the same thing. "How terrible for you who are rich now; you have had your easy life! How terrible for you who are full now; you will go hungry! How terrible for you who laugh now; you will mourn and weep!" (Lk.6,24-5). Following Jesus' lead, his apostles took a similar stance.

"And now you rich people, listen to me! Weep and wail over the miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches have rotted away, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. Your gold and silver are covered with rust, and this rust will be a witness against you and will eat up your flesh like fire. You have piled up riches in these last days" (Jam.5,1-3).

Again:

"Those Christians who are poor must be glad when God lifts them up, and the rich Christians must be glad when God brings them down. For the rich will pass away like a wild flower. The sun rises with its blazing heat and burns the plant, its flower falls off, and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way the rich will be destroyed while they go about their business" (Jam.1,9-11).

God was said to love everyone but he had more for the poor than the rich and it seems Jesus and his apostles thought similarly. "Has not God chosen the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and to possess the Kingdom which he has promised to those who love him?" (Jam.2,5; Lk.6,20). Mary, Jesus' mother, said of God: "He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away with empty hands" (Lk.1,53). In an all-or-nothing approach characteristic of Jesus, he declared that there were only two choices – God or wealth (Lk.16,13). For him, the only riches worth striving for were heavenly ones. "Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor. Provide yourself with purses that don't wear out, and save your riches in heaven, where they will never decrease, because no thief can get them. For your heart will always be where your riches are" (Lk.12-34; Matt.19.21).

On the one hand such teachings about the poor have been the template for the long Christian tradition of care and compassion for the disadvantaged, probably Christianity's greatest contribution to the societies where it has flourished, and an example that others could do well to follow. On the other hand, it almost seems to fetishize poverty and the poor. Jesus said that to invite the sick and the wretched to your celebrations or social events is more blessed than to invite the members of your family, your friends and neighbours (Lk.14,12-14).

Quite apart from the fact that very few people ever do or ever have done this, is it really necessary to be thinking about the poor all the time, to include the poor in everything, to valorise the poor more than everyone else? Are not the poor as capable of greed and mean-spiritedness, selfishness, dishonesty and malice as others?

In accordance with these teachings about wealth and in expectation of the imminent end of the world, the first Christians sold all their possessions, pooled the money and shared it out equally between them.

“All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed...None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they all shared with one another everything they had...There was no one in the group who was in need. Those who owned land or houses would sell them, bring the money received from the sale and hand it over to the apostles; and it would be distributed according to the needs of the people” (Acts 4,32-35).

Such behaviour conformed to both the letter and spirit of Jesus’s teachings, and made sense to people who believed that the world was soon to end and they would be taken up to heaven. But the fact that it has never been done since the first several generations of Christians, except amongst small communities of monks and nuns, speaks of its impracticality and for an unspoken acceptance that Jesus was wrong about the imminent end of the world.

While the Buddha considered ordinary conditioned existence to be unsatisfactory, and transcending it to be the most worthwhile of all endeavours, his Dhamma does not exhibit the intense sense of urgency characteristic of Jesus’ Gospel. For the Buddha, the world was not on the brink of destruction and the doctrine of rebirth meant that those who did not attain awakening in the present life would have a chance of doing so in the next one, and if not then, hopefully in the life after that. Accepting that many people were going to live “in the world” he took this into account in his Dhamma and offered sound, practical and realistic advice on how to do so righteously. Among the types of happiness he considered to be worthwhile and legitimate were the happiness of ownership (*atthisukha*), the happiness of wealth (*bhogasukha*) and the happiness of being free from debt (*anaṇasukha*, A.V,181). The Buddha said: “Take the case of the person who makes his wealth lawfully and without harming others and in doing so makes himself happy and fulfilled, shares it with others, does good works, makes use of it without greed or infatuation, aware of its limitations and keeping in mind his own spiritual growth; that person is praiseworthy on all these counts” (A.V,182). Here the Buddha was saying that wealthy people could be praiseworthy (*pāsaṃso*) according to how they made their wealth, how they utilised it and their

attitude towards it. An upright person should make his or her wealth lawfully (*dhammena*), without harming others (*samvibhajati*) and without infringing the norms and standards of society. Having earned their wealth, they should use it meaningfully and in ways that give them happiness and fulfilment (*attānam sukheti pīneti*), rather than squandering it on frivolous pursuits or trite luxuries or never spending it at all. Even while enjoying themselves, they should never forget the many who do not have the blessings they do and share their wealth with others and support charities and religious institutions (*puññāni karoti*).

On another occasion, the Buddha advised dividing one's financial resources into four and using one part for living expenses, two parts for one's work or investments and one part kept aside for future eventualities (D.III,188). Contrasting quite dramatically with this sensible and prudent advice is Jesus' Parable of the Rich Fool, which is a clear discouragement to the acquisition of wealth, even for the sake of basic security and comfort (Lk.12,16-21). Timothy makes this same point. "Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and are caught in the trap of many foolish and harmful desires which pull them down to ruin and destruction" (1Tim.6,9). The Buddha's Dhamma had a relevance and appeal to everyone, including the wealthy.

The Buddha was aware that being in debt or lacking sufficient financial resources could be a source of anxiety so he advised his disciples to maintain what he called a balanced lifestyle (*samam jīvikam*). "And what is a balanced lifestyle? One knows both one's income and expenditure, and lives neither extravagantly nor miserly, knowing well that income after expenditure will stand at a particular amount and that expenditure not exceed income. (A.IV,292). Some of the things that can waste one's hard earned and carefully husbanded financial resources are promiscuity, carousing, gambling and associating with reckless people and the Buddha strongly advised against such things (A.IV,293).

Wealth has a tendency to make people proud and complacent, especially if it has been acquired suddenly or with little effort. The Buddha observed: "Few are the people in the world who, when they acquire great wealth, do not get carried away by it, become negligent, chase after sensual pleasures and mistreat others" (S.I,74). Remembering this caution, the Buddha said thoughtful disciples should keep in mind the limitations of their wealth (*ādīnavadassāvī*). They should know that while it can give them so much in some areas, it cannot deliver some of the most important things in life, and this will encourage them to use their wealth without greed, infatuation or longing (*amucchita*). They should also understand that their wealth can have an even greater value if they use the time, freedom and opportunities it gives them to focus on their spiritual growth (*nissaraṇapañña*).

While praising wealth rightfully acquired and thoughtfully used, the Buddha always balanced this by pointing out another type of wealth, of greater value, that was accessible to everyone, that could never be stolen or lost, and that could be taken into the next life. "There are these five types of wealth. What five?

The wealth of faith, the wealth of virtue, the wealth of learning, the wealth of generosity and the wealth of wisdom.” Whoever is ‘rich’ in these and other kinds of spiritual treasures “whether they be a man or a woman, they are not poor and nor are their lives empty” (A.III,53).

Inclusiveness and Exclusiveness

The eminent theologian John Hick defined religious exclusiveness as:

“...the view that one particular mode of religious thought [namely one’s own] is alone valid, all others being false”; inclusiveness as “the view that one’s own tradition has the whole truth but that this truth is nevertheless partially reflected in other traditions”; and pluralism as “the view that the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real or the Ultimate.”

By Hick’s definitions, and they are good ones, the Buddha taught a Dhamma that is inclusive. He was the first to teach a vision of reality and a philosophy of life for all humankind, not just for one particular caste, gender or ethnic group. He described himself as “a teacher of gods and humans” (*sathhā devamanussānam*) i.e. of all beings capable of reasoning and comprehension. Once, he said rhetorically, that even the trees would embrace the Dhamma if they had discernment, “how much more so human beings!” (A.II,194). After he made his first disciples, he instructed them to proclaim the Dhamma “for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world” (Vin.I,20). This universalism was especially noteworthy considering the particularism of the Brahmanism of the time, which excluded the lowest caste, outcastes and foreigners (*milakkha*) from any place or role in the religion.

The nature of the Buddha’s Dhamma lends itself comfortably to religious inclusivity. The Buddha never claimed that the way he understood, formulated and presented the Dhamma was the only way to awakening. Some have argued that his statement “There is no ascetic outside” (*samaṇo natthi bāhire*, Dh.p.254), suggests exclusivism because it means that outside (*bāhira*) Buddhism, no one can be a genuine seeker and therefore attain awakening. However, all the statement actually says is that other than the Buddha’s ordained disciples, no other monastics qualified to be genuine ascetics, which may well have been the case at the time he said it.

An inquirer once asked the Buddha if the ascetics of other sects and religions had attained awakening and he replied:

“I do not say that all ascetics and brahmins are shrouded in birth and death. Whoever does not cling to sense experience or morality and rules, who has

given up doubts, who is free from craving and defilements, I say that one has attained Nirvana” (Sn.1082).

Thus the Buddha’s answer was not a sweeping assertion that only within his Dhamma could someone attain final liberation, but rather an “it depends”. On another occasion when asked the same question he replied: “I do not deny that others can become awakened ones” (*na kho...arahattassa maccharāyāmi*, D.III,7). And in yet another discourse, he affirmed this stance even more clearly, saying that some individuals “attain the unalterable path” (*okkamati niyāmaṃ*) that leads to awakening even if they never saw him or heard his Dhamma (A.I,121).

The exclusiveness of Christianity has been responsible for its long and tragic history of intolerance and persecution, although this has started to soften in recent decades, at least in some quarters. But Christians still have a long way to go to catch up with the gentler and more inclusive religions such as Buddhism and Jainism. In 256 BCE the Indian Buddhist emperor Asoka wrote this:

“The king does not value gifts and honours as much as he values growth in the essentials of all religions, and this can be done in different ways but they all have their root in restrained speech. Not praising one’s own religion and condemning the religion of others without justification. But better still is to honour other religions. This way all religions benefit...Therefore, harmony between religions is commendable” (Twelfth Rock Edict).

In the 11th century CE the great Jain sage Hemacandra (1089-1172) wrote these sentiments:

“I am not partial to Mahāvīra [the founder of Jainism] nor do I despise people such as Kapila [founder of an important Hindu sect]. Rather, one should have confidence in whoever speaks according to reason.” (*Lokatattvaṇimaya* 38).

The reason for the Buddha’s open attitude towards other paths was not just because he was tolerant and well-informed about them, although he was, but because of his understanding of the nature of truth and the liberation it can impart. Attaining liberation, as the Buddha understood it, was not dependent on believing in, winning the approval of or receiving grace from a deity, but on realising certain natural truths, which he believed everyone had the ability to do. Consequently, it is conceivable that even those who have never come into contact with the Dhamma could become awakened. Having said this, an openness to the Buddha’s teaching makes an appreciation of it more likely. Appreciation of the teaching would make the desire to practice it stronger. Practising the Buddha’s teaching would make attaining awakening many times more probable.

According to Jesus, we have only one earthly life and if we are not saved before death we will be damned for eternity. There are only two possible destinies, heaven or hell, and both of them are everlasting. The Buddha's doctrine of rebirth means that if one has not attained awakening in this life one always has the possibility of doing so in the next. Furthermore, linked to the doctrine of rebirth is the doctrine of kamma, the idea that intentional thoughts, speech and actions build one's character and thereby condition one's present and future – next week, next month, next year and perhaps next life. Having the right conceptual or intellectual understanding (*sammā diṭṭhi*) is crucial but one's beliefs are only significant to the degree that they influence one's behaviour and thereby one's kamma. Thus an upright and virtuous person could have a positive rebirth no matter what his or her religious beliefs, or even if they have none. As was shown before, anyone who is kind and loving will have a good rebirth no matter what religion they follow. Certainly Buddhists will rejoice when someone embraces the Dhamma, but they can also be glad that someone is a genuine Hindu or Jew, a practising Christian or Jain. Thus the need to assert superiority over other faiths and to be always trying to convert others has not generally been characteristic of Buddhism.

To say that Christianity claims an exclusive legitimacy is not controversial. On this issue Jesus was unambiguous. "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me", and: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not have life, but will remain under God's punishment." "Whoever denies me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven" (Jn.14,6; 3,36; Matt.10,33). He presented the choices available simply and clearly: "Anyone who is not for me is really against me" (Matt.12,30). The apostles took these and similar statements at face value, as they were clearly meant to be, and have been central to Christian orthodoxy since they were first said. "Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us." And again: "For there is one God, and there is one who brings God and humans together, the man Jesus Christ" (1Tim.2,5; Acts 4,12).

These exclusivist claims have motivated Christians to spread their religion and have guaranteed its success in terms of the number of its adherents. But Jesus' instructions to his disciples to compel, force or induce (Greek *anankason*, Latin *compelle*, Lk,14,23) people to convert "so that my house will be full", have also meant that persecution and even violence has too often accompanied this evangelizing.

God

There can be no doubt that the biggest, the most striking, the most fundamental difference between the Buddha and Jesus, and the one from which many of the other dissimilarities stem, is their ideas about God. Jesus believed implicitly in a personal God; the Buddha did not.

Jesus' god had been worshipped for centuries. Called Yahweh, he was the national god of the Jews and had a distinctly Janus-like nature. One side of his nature was benign and nurturing, at least towards his votaries. In a jarring contrast to this, he was also demanding, quick to anger, vengeful and terrifying when disobeyed. Even common English usage points to this other side. We refer to an upright, honest person as "God fearing" because ignoring God's commandments can have frightful consequences. To scare someone is to "put the fear of God in them". A huge natural catastrophe is often described as being "of biblical proportions" because of its similarity to the plagues God inflicted on Egypt. Somewhere evoking happiness and delight is said to be "like heaven", but a place where some atrocity has been or is being committed is commonly described as "hell on Earth" or "like hell", because it is thought to resemble the place to which God condemns sinners and unbelievers for eternal punishment.

Around the turn of the first millennium, great Jewish thinkers and theologians such as Hillel, Rabbi Avika and Simon the Just were giving more emphasis to God's loving nature and Jesus would be counted among these. Nonetheless, Jesus was quite aware of God's other side and was not averse to reminding people of it. "Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of God who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matt.10,28). This hell was, he warned, a deep pit from which it is impossible to cross over into heaven, a place of wailing and gnashing of teeth, a state where "the worm that eats them never dies, and the fire that burns them never goes out" (Matt.13,50; 24,51; Mk.9,43; Mk.9,48; Lk.13,20).

The Brahmanism of the Buddha's time and for centuries before him, believed in innumerable gods – Yama, Suriya, Soma, Agni, Canda, Indra, Varuṇa, and Pajāpati being amongst the most popular. However, by the 7th/6th centuries BCE, the beginning of what would later evolve into a form of henotheism was starting to develop, at least amongst the more sophisticated mystics and theologians. Brahmā was emerging as preeminent. He was described as "All-Seeing, All-Powerful, the Lord, Maker, Creator and Ruler, Appointer and Controller, Father of All that Are and All that Shall Be" (M.I,327). He was said to "outshine all other gods in radiance", and "when he appears, he assumes a grosser form because his natural appearance is not perceptible to the eye" (D.II,210). As well as having created everything, Brahmā was also thought of as a benign deity – loving and without anger or ill-will (D.I,247). Devotees praised

him, called upon him for help and worshipped him with offerings and sacrifices. Their hope was to be guided and protected by him in this life and be in fellowship with him (*brahmasahavyatā*) after death (D.I,235). Thus, minus the dark and frightening side, the Brahmā the Buddha was familiar with was equivalent to the supreme deity of the major theistic religions, including Christianity.

While the Buddha tactically acknowledged the reality of Brahmā, he cast doubts on nearly every claim made about him, thereby indirectly rendering worship of and devotion to him meaningless. Far from being immutable, the Buddha said, Brahmā was subject to changes and reverses (*aññathattam atthi vipariṇāmo*) like everyone and everything else (A.V,60). Although Brahmā thought he had created everything he had misunderstood the facts; it all happened through natural forces, the Buddha claimed (D.I,18 ff). When the Buddha asked those “who believed that the Lord, that Brahmā, created everything” (*issara kuttam brahmā kuttam ācariyakam aggaññam paññāpanti*) to explain exactly how it came about, “they could not give a [convincing] answer” (*te mayā puṭṭhā na sampāyanti*, D.III,28). In fact, the Buddha said the belief that all happenings were due to the Lord (*issara nimmānāhetu*) was false, like the belief that everything was due to past karma or without a cause or causes (A.I,173). Brahmā may have claimed to be omniscient but in his better moments he admitted being ignorant of many things (D.I,222). Brahmā’s supposed omniscience was further diminished by the Buddha’s claim that he, Brahmā, would sometimes come to praise him or ask questions about things he did not know, especially concerning spiritual matters (M.I,168; 326; S.I,139; 153).

Then there was the question of theodicy, what is usually called the problem of evil. The early Buddhists asked, as many have before and since, why if the Supreme Being is all-powerful and at the same time all-loving, he does not do nothing about the great evil and suffering in the world.

“Why does Brahmā not straighten out the world? If he really is the Controller, the Highest, Lord of All Beings, why is the whole world in such a mess? Why did he not make the world happy? If he really is the Controller, the Highest, Lord of All Beings, why is there so much deceit and lies, pride and unrighteousness? If he really is the Controller, the Highest, Lord of All Beings, then he must be unrighteous and cruel himself because it was he who created everything” (Ja.VI,208).

Like Jesus, the Buddha was deeply moved by and concerned about human suffering. For Jesus, it all came back to God in one way or another. Sin and its consequent evil and suffering, were the result of humankind disobeying God. For the Buddha, they had psychological roots; clinging and ignorance. For Jesus, the goal of the religious life was to live for eternity in the presence of God. For the Buddha, it was to attain Nirvana. Jesus believed salvation was attained by having

a simple trusting faith in God. The Buddha taught that awakening would come naturally as a result of developing clear-eyed “knowledge and vision of things as they really are” (*yathā bhūta ñāṇa dassana*, A.V,1-2). Jesus believed God’s purpose and will lay behind everything that happened. The Buddha related everything to the mind. The first words in the Dhammapada, the most widely known collections of his sayings, is: “Mind precedes all things, they depend on mind, they are constructed by mind” (Dhp.1). Some have claimed that the Buddha rarely talked about God “because the Divine is beyond words”. The reality is that he only addressed the subject occasionally because amongst the non-Vedic thinkers and intellectuals of the time, of which he was one, the subject was not considered important enough to warrant discussion.

Prayer and Meditation

Jesus took it as granted that there is a single supreme being who involves himself in human affairs and who could be communicated with through prayer. Prayer was and continues to be integral to Christian life and faith. One can pray for help in time of need, both for oneself and others, and for guidance and strength in following the Gospel. Jesus promised that God would answer every sincere prayer. “When you pray and ask for something, believe that you have received it, and you will be given whatever you asked for” (Mk.11,24). The apostles made the same promise:

“This is the confidence we have in God’s presence; we are sure that he hears us if we ask for anything that is according to his will. He hears us whenever we ask him; and since we know this is true, we know also that he gives us what we ask from him” (1Jh.5,14-15).

In fact, all the things people want but do not have is because they do not pray to God for them (Jam.4,2). Prayer can also take the form of praising and giving thanks to God. On one occasion Jesus instructed his disciples to use specific words when praying to God, i.e. the Lord’s Prayer. In later centuries the Christian tradition developed rich and sophisticated systems of prayer and contemplation but as Jesus taught it, prayer was simple, direct and immediate communication between the believer and God.

Prayer was an important practise in the Brahmanism and the Buddha described it as “to beseech, praise and worship with joined hands” (*āyācanti thomayanti pañjalikā namassamānā*) Brahmā and the other Vedic gods (D.I,240). But as there is no place in the Buddha’s understanding of reality for a single supreme deity, praying in the Christian sense has no significance in the Dhamma. Prayer may make people feel better or console them, it may foster virtues such as gratitude, humility and patience, but according to Buddhism, objectively it does not work in the sense that a divine force external to the individual precipitates

such qualities. The Buddha said that the things people long for most; “happiness, longevity, fame and rebirth in heaven”, “cannot be acquired by prayers and vows.” (*na āyācanahetu vā na patthanāhetu*, A.III,47). Some centuries after the Buddha, the *Mahāvastu* gave an interestingly modern and rational explanation of how a combination of chance and coincidence may well give the impression that prayers are answered. “Once a man prayed to a goddess for prosperity and later he just happened to become rich. This is exactly how false beliefs arise” (Mhv.III,402).

For the Buddha the mind (*mano*, *citta* or *viññāna*) was the standpoint from which humans see, interpret, evaluate and judge themselves, others and the world in which they live. This concept is reflected in many things the Buddha said: “The world is led around by the mind and dragged here and there by it. The mind is the single thing that has everything under its control” (S.I,39). If a person’s mind is distorted in some way, their perceptions, then their decisions and from that their behaviour will be problematic. And it is greed, hatred, doubt, longing, biases, pride, lust, worry, etc. that distort the mind.

In one discourse the Buddha compared the mind to a bowl of pure still water in which a person could clearly see the reflection of their face. But if a person is always preoccupied with sensual thoughts it is as if oil paint or dye were tipped into the bowl so that their reflection becomes unclear. For the person who is full of anger it is as if the bowl has been put on a fire so that the boiling bubbling water makes their reflection unrecognizable. The mind of one who is dull and lazy is equivalent to algae and water plants growing on the surface of the water and making it difficult to see one’s face as it really is. A mind troubled by agitation and worry is like a gust blowing over the surface of the water creating ripples so that the reflection is distorted. Being hesitant and doubtful is as if the water is darkened by mud, making one’s reflection unclear (S.V,121-123).

Like so much else the Buddha said, these analogies are not based on theological claims, faith, creeds or even ‘believing in the Buddha’ but on simple, observable psychological phenomenon. Therefore, one of the central principles of the Buddha’s Dhamma is meditation, which is a collection of mental exercises meant to calm and discipline, focus and clarify the mind so one can develop “a knowledge and vision of things as they really are”. The word the Buddha used for meditation is *bhāvana*, literally meaning ‘to develop’, ‘to cultivate’ or ‘to enhance.’ He taught a range of meditation techniques but for our purpose here it is only sufficient to examine a few of them. Prayer is about intercession from or adoration of God; meditation is about knowing and transforming one’s own mind.

The most basic meditation is called mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna sati*). In this practice one focuses attention on the in and out movement of the breath for the purpose of strengthening the ability to concentrate. According to

the Buddha: “Just as in the last month of the hot season when dust and grit blow about and an unexpected shower of rain immediately settles it, so too, mindfulness of breathing, when developed and cultivated, is peaceful and sublime, a pleasant way of living and it dispels and settles evil, unskilful thoughts quickly” (S.V,321). Those doing this meditation will sit in a comfortable posture, usually cross-legged and with a straight back, and gently focus their attention on the in-and-out movement of the breath. As they proceed, they more quickly notice when their attention strays and then return it to the breath. Over time, concentration, mental discipline and physical and psychological relaxation increase. As the practice matures, concentration is allowed to give way to mindfulness (*sati*) i.e. rather than trying to control the attention, one simply becomes aware of what is happening from moment to moment. With the mind purified of distracting thoughts, distorting biases and agitating desires, one sees the truth of *dukkha*, *anicca* and *anatta* and this imparts a profound peace.

Another important practise is called loving kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvana*) which aims to arouse and strengthen love (*mettā*). In this practice one sits in a comfortable posture, composes oneself, and over a period of time thinks about and radiates kindly wishes first to oneself, then a loved person, then a neutral person and finally a disliked person. Gradually any anger or annoyance one has towards others is replaced by a warm patience and forgiveness.

Another meditation technique is called recollection (*anussati*) which unlike some others types, does not seek to still thoughts or just observe them but harness and utilise their potential power. Some of the subjects one can recollect and reflect on are one’s own virtue (*silānussati*), the value of generosity (*cāgānussati*), spiritual friends (*kalyāṇamittānussati*), peace (*upasamāssati*) and the reality of death (*maranassati*, A.V,336-337). Spending at least some time reflecting on these subjects can help strengthen self-appreciation, sharing, the blessings of having good companions, courage in the face of death, etc. In some ways recollection meditation has something in common with prayer except that any transformative effect it might have would be attributed to God by Christians while Buddhists would put it down to the person’s own mind. The Buddha explained the psychology behind the recollections like this: “Whatever one thinks about and reflects on often makes the mind lean in that way” (M.I,115).

Another practice that has some similarity with prayer is affirmation (*adhiññāna* or *dhiti*). An affirmation is a strong resolve, avowal or determination to do or to avoid doing certain something. Making an affirmation clarifies and brings to the forefront of consciousness the goal one aspires to, it marshals and intensifies the power of the mind, and focuses it on the goal. An affirmation can make one “resolute for the highest goal, firm-minded, steadfast and endowed with strength and energy” (Sn.68). When prayers work, as they sometimes appear to,

it is actually due to the power of the mind, not the intervention of a deity. That at least, would be the Buddhist's explanation.

Another important differences between meditation and prayer is meditation's universal application. Prayer presupposes and requires belief in God, while meditation requires nothing beyond the effort to practice it. Consequently, anyone can do meditation and benefit from it, no matter what their religious belief. In fact, in the West now, significant numbers of Christians do meditation. If the Buddha were still with us, he would probably smile knowing that some of his teachings are enriching the spiritual lives of those of other religions. Psychologists too are starting to appreciate the value of meditation, specifically mindfulness meditation. Aspects of it are being integrated into relaxation training, counselling, pain management, psychiatric therapies and mental health care.

Conclusion



Living half a millennium from each other, coming from such disparate backgrounds and being moulded by dramatically different cultural and religious influences, it is hardly surprising that Jesus and the Buddha arrived at such different conclusions about reality. The Buddha was once asked whether “all teachers proclaim the same doctrine, practise the same morality, have the same aspiration and pursue the same goal?” He replied:

“No they do not...The world is made up of many and varied elements. This being the case, beings adhere to one or another of these and whatever they adhere to they become strongly attached to, and then assert, ‘This alone is true and all else is false!’ Consequently, all teachers do not proclaim the same doctrine, practise the same or morality, have the same aspirations or pursue the same goal?” (D.II,282, condensed).

So is it true as an increasing number of commentators claim, that Jesus and the Buddha would have nodded in agreement if they had heard about the other's teachings? Given Jesus's absolutist claims and his belief that the only alternative to salvation was damnation, it is unlikely that he or the first Christians would have approved of the Buddha and his Dhamma. They probably would have had very strong feelings against it if Jesus' comments about the Pharisees is anything to go by. What would the Buddha have thought about Jesus and his Gospel? Ānanda articulated the Buddha's attitude when he said that some religions and

philosophies are outright false (*abrahmacariyavāsā*) and others are unsatisfactory or incomplete while containing important truths. Amongst the first are those that teach materialism, moral relativism, determinism or that salvation or liberation is inevitable. Amongst the second are those that teach some form of afterlife, sound moral values, free will, personal responsibility, and the notion that salvation or liberation is not inevitable but conditional on the individual's behaviour (M.I,521). Jesus' Gospel contains most of the elements in this second group and thus it seems likely the Buddha would have considered it to be an imperfect vision of reality but with important truths and laudable ethics nonetheless. One aspect of the Gospel he would have agreed with would have been the importance of "loving your neighbour as yourself". He may well have also seen a similarity between his own and Jesus' simple itinerate lifestyle and his calls for world renunciation, and found them praiseworthy. He would have been less impressed by Jesus' frequent angry outbursts and threats of damnation.

If Buddhism and Christianity have little in common when it comes to most of the fundamental issues – the findings of this study – what does this mean for respectful interaction between them? If respect for other religions hinges on convincing oneself that they are just a slightly different version of one's own, then it is not really acceptance; it is just a reassuring confirmation of what one already believes. However, is it not possible for people to disagree about even questions of great moment and still be friendly, accepting and respectful towards each other? It is, and it does sometimes happen. I personally know of a Sri Lankan Buddhist expatriate community in Canada that was invited by the local pastor to use his church for their meetings until they were able to get a place of their own. A Buddhist monk in the US told me that two door-to-door missionaries arrived at his house-temple just as he was shovelling snow from the driveway and they stopped to give him a hand. Later, he invited them inside and they had a friendly discussion of their respective beliefs over cups of coffee. I know of another case when during a riot in Sri Lanka, a mob came to loot a church and a Buddhist monk appeared and reproached the crowd for their behaviour so that they were shamed into dispersing. Actions like these do more for mutual respect and understanding than a hundred dialogue sessions and inter-religious conferences.

Discussing doctrinal commonalities certainly has a role in strengthening mutual understanding. As the Buddha said: "Those things about which there is no agreement, let us put aside. Those things about which there is agreement, let the wise bring up, discuss and examine" (D.I,163). However, comparing notes on doctrines can only go so far before repetition starts to set in. Perhaps more important than straining to find similarities between Buddhist and Christian ideas is being or endeavouring to be, a particular type of Buddhist or a particular type of Christian.

Many Christians are committed to the goal of converting those of other faiths, whether by robust or subtle means, come what may. But proselytising is not just an unspoken way of saying “I cannot accept your beliefs”, it is a demonstration of it as well. No matter how friendly inter-religious meetings may be, those whose fellow-religionists are a target of conversion efforts must feel at least some reticence about and suspicion of such events. For a few, it may cause resentment or worse. Other Christians, whose faith is just as strong, understand that there will always be those with different beliefs and come to accept that this is just the way things are and probably always will be. The advantages of this attitude are many, not the least being that believers can focus more attention on removing the beam from their own eyes or from their faith community’s eye, rather than directing it into evangelism. Just as importantly, it can make genuine mutual respect and friendship possible.

In the Introduction it was pointed out how many books there are claiming that Buddhism and Christianity are in general agreement on fundamental issues. However, outnumbering these by many thousands are books by Christians advocating evangelising those of other faiths, including Buddhists. Ones with titles such as *Disciplined Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* and *Spiritual Warfare and Missions: The Battle for God’s Glory among the Nations*, make no effort to hide their agenda or how it is to be implemented. But even publications by mainline and liberal theologians and church leaders endorse this same goal, albeit using more tactful language and recommending more sensitive methods.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), which represents nearly 350 churches in 150 countries, has a special Commission on World Mission and Evangelism which meets every 18 months to report on and discuss strategies and projects to convert non-Christians. It has recently called for “a humbler approach to missions” and recommended that evangelism be done “with gentleness and respect”, an acknowledgment that some evangelism lacks such things. This is a welcomed innovation, but it is also only a different approach to the same long-standing agenda – to replace all other religions with Christianity. Recently, the WCC, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the World Evangelical Alliance, jointly issued a set of 12 principles recommending how missionaries should relate to the people they are trying to convert. One of these principles urged missionaries to “acknowledge and appreciate what is true and good” in other faiths and “to listen” to the people they are evangelizing. Again, these are admirable principles. But if missionaries actually did listen to the people they were trying to convert they might hear them saying that they are content with their own religion and do not wish to be evangelized.

So here we see a quandary. On the one hand some Christians are telling Buddhist that their religion is just a slightly different version of what Jesus taught,

and that actually we are all “friends in conversation”. On the other, many Christian churches, probably the majority, are spending vast amounts of time, resources and ingenuity on trying to replace Buddhism with Christianity. A recent study by The International Bulletin of Missionary Research showed that churches spend up to \$US 45 billion per annum of missionary projects. What are Buddhists to think of these mixed messages?

Tensions between religions often have longstanding and complex causes; economic, political, historical and ethnic, but there can be no doubt that evangelism is a significant contributing factor as well. Those who say that they are committed to inter-religious understanding and cooperation need to honestly acknowledge this and consider what they can do about it. Churches and religious NGOs are limited in the impact they can have on the more complex causes of tensions between faiths, but there is one cause they could effectively stop – evangelism.

This is not to say that some Christian NGOs should stop the enormous amount of good they do in the world. Far from it. But perhaps they should revisit the Parable of the Good Samaritan and note that the Samaritan never considered that his act of compassion might be an opportunity to convert the man he helped. He helped only because he saw a fellow human being in need. Again, rather than discussing abstruse religious doctrines with Buddhists, perhaps Christians could invite them to become full and equal partners in their charitable and development efforts. Actually working together with others to solve practical problems builds bridges far better than just talking with them.

The distinguished Anglican theologian John Macquarrie has written: “In 1964 I published an article entitled ‘Christianity and Other Faiths’... [and] I continue to hold the views I expressed then ... I believe that, however difficult it may be, we should hold to our own traditions and yet respect and even learn from the traditions of others. I drew the conclusion that there should be an end to proselytizing but that equally there should be no syncretism...” To hold to and be true to one’s own faith, to openly and humbly learn from other faiths, to respect other faiths by not trying to replace them with one’s own – this sounds to me like a formula for enriching all faiths and creating lasting harmony between them.

Glossary



Apocalypse. A term for the destruction of the world by God as predicted in the New Testament.

Aramaic. A Semitic language spoken in Israel and much of the Middle East during the time of Jesus.

Asoka. The third emperor of the Mauryan Empire who ruled much of India from 268 to 232 BCE and who did much to promote Buddhism.

Awakening. The state of being completely liberated through knowledge (*bodhi*), according to Buddhism.

Bible. The sacred scriptures of Christianity. It is made up of two collections of writings, the Old Testament written mainly in Hebrew and considered sacred by Jews and Christians; and the New Testament written in Greek, the most important part of the Bible for Christians but not recognised by Jews.

Bodhisattva. A term for someone committed to (*śakta*) attaining awakening (*bodhi*) and often used to refer to the Buddha before his Awakening.

Eightfold Path. The third of the four Noble Truths; Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

Henotheism. The belief in a single supreme god while accepting the existence of other lesser gods.

Gandhara. A region in ancient northern Pakistan and Afghanistan much influenced by Hellenism. It became a major centre of Buddhism.

Gentiles. A term for anyone who is not Jewish, from the Hebrew *goi*, meaning stranger, foreigner or non-believer.

Herod. A tyrannical king who ruled Judea, a part of Israel, between 4 BCE and 39 CE.

Hebrew. The liturgical language of Judaism at the time of Jesus, now the national language of Israel.

Holy Spirit. According to Christianity God has three aspects; the Father, the Son (i.e. Jesus) and the Holy Spirit.

Isipatana. The park where the Buddha preached for the first time, now known as Sarnath.

Last Supper. The Passover meal Jesus shared with his main disciples before he was arrested.

Law. The rules and regulations for living given by God to Moses as found in the Old Testament.

Magadha. The largest and most powerful kingdom during the Buddha's time and the scene of many of his activities.

Mahavāstu. An anthology of Buddhist Sanskrit texts compiled between about the 3rd century BCE and the 2nd century CE.

Magi. Priests of the Zoroastrian religion known for their skills in magic and astrology.

Mahāyāna. The second of three movements within Indian Buddhism, which started to emerge around the 1st century BCE.

New Testament. See Bible.

Old Testament. See Bible.

Passover. An important seven-day Jewish holiday which commemorates the freeing of the Jewish people from slavery in ancient Egypt.

Pāli. A Middle Indo-Aryan language similar to what may have been spoken by the Buddha. The earliest Buddhist documents are in Pāli.

Paul. The most influential figure in early Christianity, although he only became a Christian after Jesus' death.

Pharisees. A movement or sect within the Jewish priesthood during the time of Jesus.

Precepts, the Five. The basic moral principles of Buddhism; to avoid killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and alcoholic intoxicants.

Rājagaha. The capital of Magadha and the scene of many of the Buddha's activities, now called Rajgir.

Sabbath. The last day of the week, i.e. Saturday, during which according to God's law, everyone should take a rest from work. Today, most Christians consider Sunday to be the Sabbath.

Samaṇas. Itinerate ascetics who rejected Vedic orthodoxy and practised a range of disciplines aimed at psychological transformation. The Buddha considered himself to be a *samaṇa*.

Samaritans. A people whose religion differed in some ways from Judaism and who were despised by the Jews. Small communities of Samaritans still live in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Synagogue. A Jewish prayer hall. In ancient Israel there would have been one in most towns and villages.

Tathāgata. A term for someone who has attained complete awakening, meaning both 'he who has come to the truth' or 'he who has thus gone'.

Temple. The grand temple in Jerusalem and the centre of the Jewish religion. Built in 559 BCE it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Today a mosque stands over the site.

Uruvelā. The village in Magadha where the Buddha attained awakening, now called Bodh Gaya.

Vedas. The sacred scriptures of Brahmanism and now the most revered scriptures of Hinduism also. During the Buddha's time there were three Vedas but subsequently a fourth one, the Artharva Veda, was added.

Sacred Texts and Abbreviations



The Pali Tipitaka

- A Aṅguttara Nikāya, ed. R. Morris, E. Hardy, PTS London 1885-1900
As Atthasālanī, ed. E. Müller, PTS London 1897
D Dīgha Nikāya, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids, J. E. Carpenter, PTS London 1890-1911
Dhp Dhammapada, ed. O. Von Hinuber, K. R. Norman, PTS Oxford 1994
It Itvuttaka, ed. E. Windisch, PTS London 1889
Ja Jātaka with commentary, ed. V. Fausboll, PTS London 1877-96
M Majjhima Nikāya, ed. V. Trenckner, R. Chalmers, PTS London 1887-1902
Mhv Mahāvastu, ed. E. Senart, Paris 1882-1897
Mil Milindapañho, ed. V. Trenckner, PTS London 1880
Nid Nidānakathā, Jātaka Vol. I, ed. V. Fausboll, PTS London 1877
S Saṃyutta Nikāya, ed. L. Feer, PTS London 1884-98
Sn Sutta Nipāta, ed. D. Andersen, H. Smith, PTS London 1913
Thi Therīgāthā, ed. H. Oldenberg, R. Pischel, 2nd edition, PTS London 1966
Ud Udāna, ed. P. Steinthal, PTS London 1885
Vin Vinaya Piṭaka, ed. H. Oldenberg, PTS London 1879-83

The Bible

UBS 5th Revised Greek New Testament Readers Edition, 2014.

Good News Bible, Second Revised Edition, 1992.

- Col Colossians
1Cor 1 Corinthians
Ep Ephesians
Gal Galatians
Heb Hebrews
Is Isaiah
Jam James
Jn Gospel of John
1Jn 1 John

Lk Gospel of Luke
Matt Gospel of Matthew
Mk Gospel of Mark
1 Pt 1 Peter
Rev Revelations
Rom Romans
Thess Thessalonians
1 Tim. 1 Timothy

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