

P  
R  
I  
M  
M  
  
S  
H  
A  
R  
O  
N  
D  
A



CHAPTER

## 3

## Hinduism



## FIRST ENCOUNTER

The plane that you have taken to Benares circles in preparation for landing at the Varanasi airport. Looking down from your window seat, you can see the blue-white Ganges River, quite wide here. Everything else is a thousand shades of brown. Beyond the coffee-colored city, the beige fields spread out, seemingly forever.

At the small airport, a dignified customs inspector with a turban and a white beard asks, "Why have you come to India?" Before you can think of an appropriate response, he answers his own question. "I know," he says with a smile and a wave of the hand. "You who come to Benares are all the same." He shakes his head from side to side. "You have come for *spirituality*." After pausing briefly, he adds, "Haven't you!" It sounds more like a statement than a question. It takes you a second to understand his quick pronunciation of that unexpected word—*spirituality*. In a way, he is right. You *have* come for that. You nod in agreement. He smiles again, writes something down on his form, and lets you through.

As you take the small black taxi to your hotel, you realize that you have just accepted—willingly or not—the ancient role that the customs inspector has bestowed upon you. You are now just one more pilgrim who has come to Mother India for her most famous product: religious insight.

You are now a Seeker.



After unpacking at your hotel, you walk out into the streets. It is dusk. Pedicab drivers ring their bells to ask if you want a ride, but you want to walk, to see the life of the streets. Little shops sell tea, and others sell vegetarian foods made of potatoes, wheat, beans, and curried vegetables. Children play in front of their parents' stores. Down the street you see a "gent's tailor" shop, as a thin cow wanders past, chewing on what looks like a paper bag. Another shop sells books and note-paper, and others sell saris and bolts of cloth. From somewhere comes a smell like jasmine. As night falls, the stores are lit by dim bulbs and fluorescent lights, and vendors illuminate their stalls with bright Coleman lanterns. Because you will be rising long before dawn the next day to go down to the Ganges, you soon return to your hotel. You fall asleep quickly.

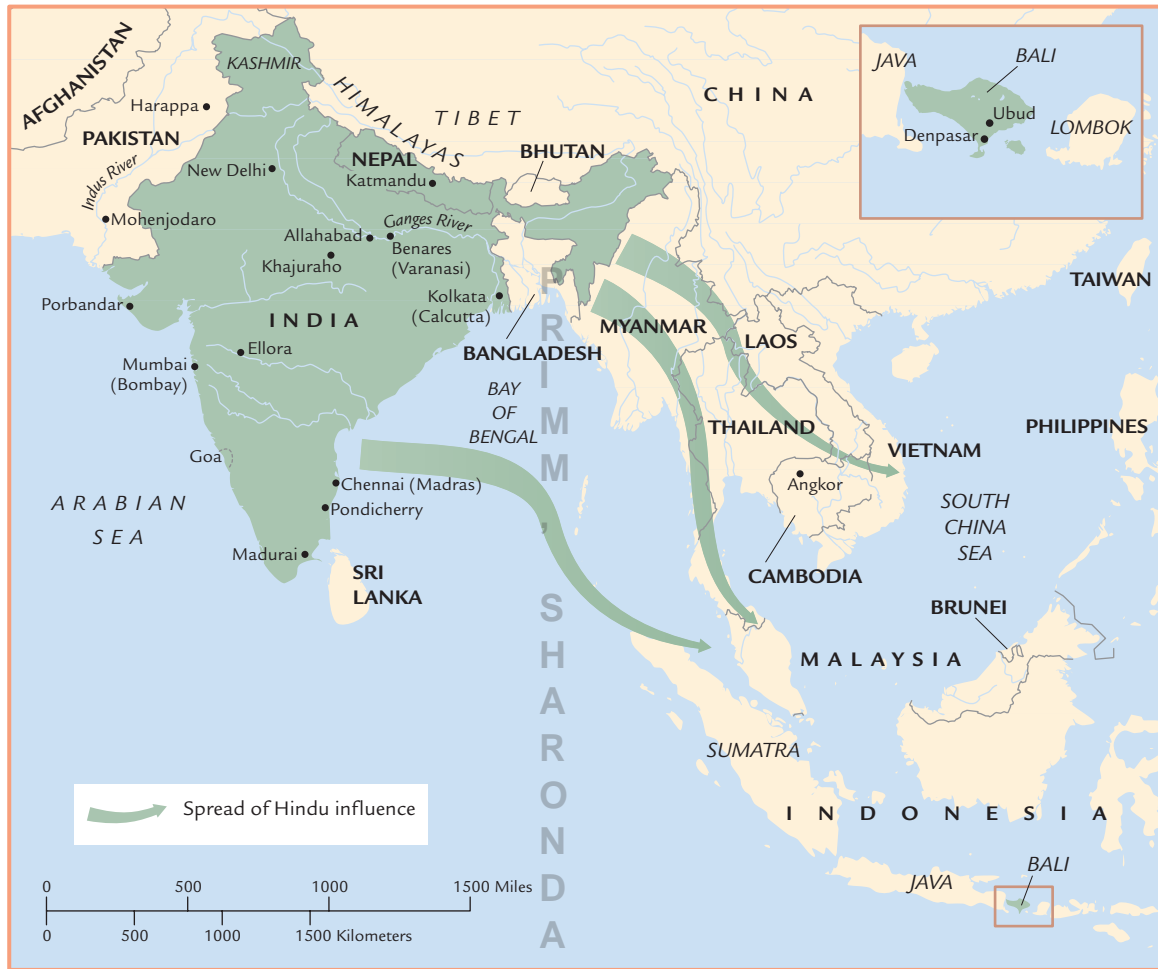
The telephone rings, waking you out of a dream. The man at the front desk notifies you that it is four A.M. Being somewhat groggy, you have to remind yourself that you are in Benares. You get up and dress quickly.

At the front of the hotel you wake a driver sleeping in his pedicab. You negotiate the fare, climb onto the seat, and head off to the main crossing of town, near the river, as the sky begins to lighten. The pedicab drops you near the *ghats* (the stairs that descend to the river), which are already full of people, many going down to the river to bathe at dawn. Some are having sandalwood paste applied to their foreheads as a sign of devotion, and others are carrying brass jugs to collect Ganges water.

As you descend to the river, boat owners call to you. You decide to join the passengers in the boat of a man resembling a Victorian patriarch, with a white handlebar mustache. Off you go, moving slowly upstream. Laughing children jump up and down in the water as men and women wade waist-deep and face the rising sun to pray. Upstream, professional launderers beat clothes on the rocks and lay them out on the stones of the riverbank to dry.

The boat turns back downstream, passing the stairs where you first descended to the river. In the bright morning light you see large umbrellas, under which teachers sit cross-legged, some with disciples around them. Who, you wonder, are these teachers? The area near the shore is crammed with people and boats. On a nearby boat, people shout, *Ganga Ma ki Jai*—"Victory to Mother Ganges!"

The boat continues downstream. On the shore, smoke rises from small pyres, where bodies wrapped in red and white cloth are being cremated. The boatman warns, "No photos here, please." The boat pulls in to shore downstream of the pyres, and everyone gets off. Walking up the stairs, you see small groups of people quietly watching the cremations. At the pyres, a man tends the fires with a bamboo pole, and a dog wanders nearby.



**FIGURE 3.1**  
India, Bali, and the area of Hindu influence.

Later, as you make your way back to the center of town, you notice a pedicab with a covered body tied on the back. It cycles past women sitting beside the road, selling plastic bracelets and colored powders. The pedicab must be on its way to the pyres, you think. The blend of opposites fills your mind: on the banks of the very same river, laundry is washed and bodies are burned; in the streets, life and death appear side by side—yet no one seems to notice the contrasts. Here, the two are one.

### THE ORIGINS OF HINDUISM

Looking at a map of India (Figure 3.1) you can see that this subcontinent, shaped like a diamond, is isolated. Two sides face the sea, while the north is bounded by the steep Himalaya Mountains. There are few mountain passes, and the only easy land entry is via the narrow corridor in the

northwest, in the vicinity of the Indus River, where Pakistan now lies. It is the relative isolation of India that has helped create a culture that is rare and fascinating.

India's climate, except in the mountain regions, is generally warm for most of the year, allowing people to live outdoors much of the time. Indeed, some may even claim that the climate has helped promote religious values that, at least for some, minimize the importance of material goods such as clothing, housing, and wealth.

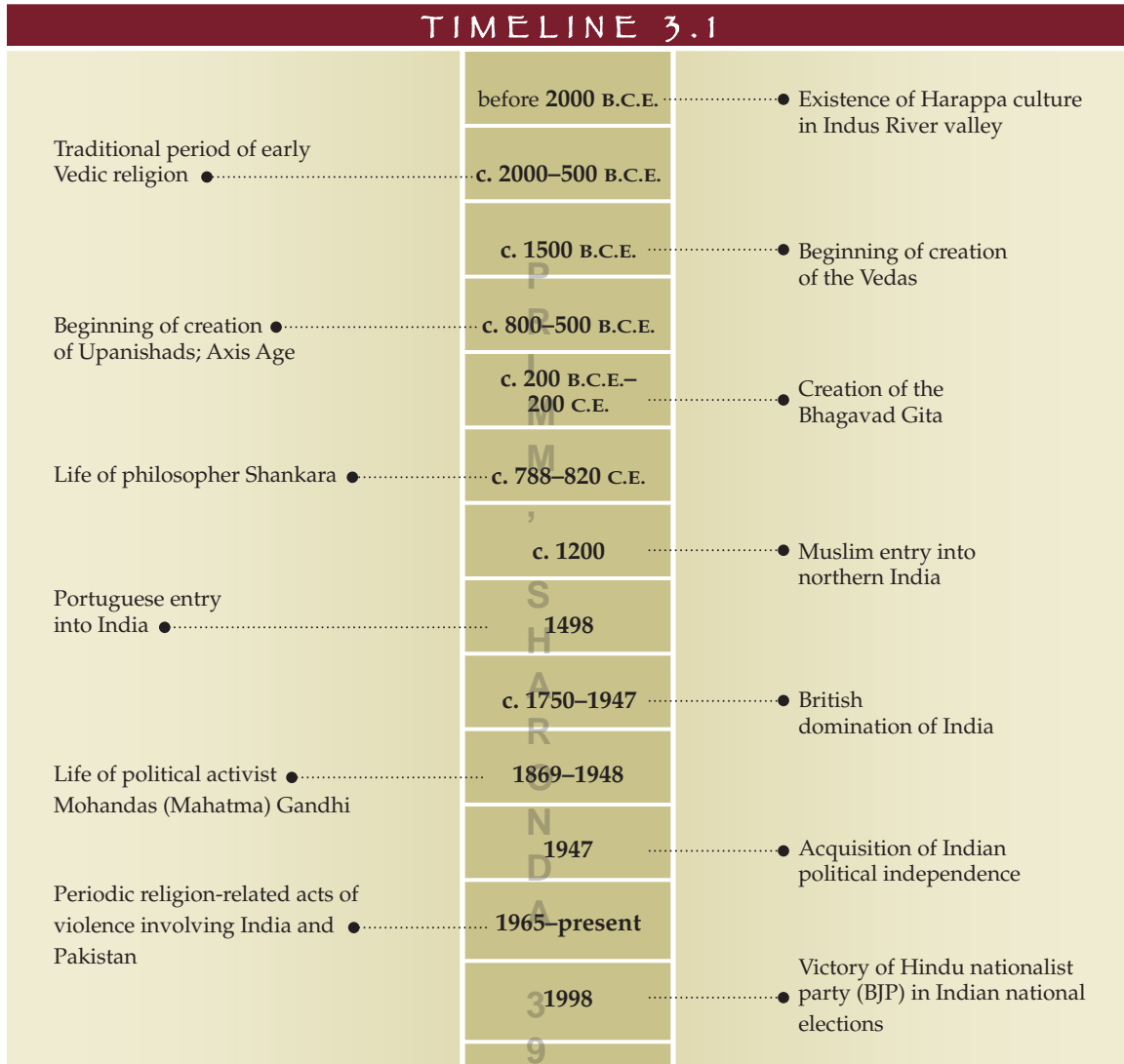
Although hot and dry in many parts, India has many rivers and streams. Most important is the Ganges, which flows out of the Himalayas and is enlarged by tributaries as it moves east toward the Bay of Bengal. By the time the Ganges has reached the town of Benares (also known as Varanasi and Kashi), the river is enormous; in fact, after the summer monsoons the river becomes so wide that often one cannot see to the other side. Because the water of the Ganges is regular and dependable, it has enabled civilization to flourish across much of northern India. It has also given Indian culture a sense of security, protection, and even care, which has led to the popular name for the river, *Ganga Ma* ("Mother Ganges").

The religious life of India is something like the river Ganges. It has flowed along for thousands of years, swirling from its own power but also from the power of new streams that have added to its force. Hinduism, the major religion of India, has been an important part of this flowing energy. Many influences—early indigenous religion and influences from later immigrants—have added to its inherent momentum. It has no one identifiable founder, no strong organizational structure to defend it and spread its influence, nor any creed to define and stabilize its beliefs; and in a way that seems to defy reason, Hinduism unites the worship of many gods with a belief in a single divine reality. In fact, the name *Hinduism* can be misleading. Hinduism is not a single, unified religion; it is more like a family of beliefs.

But the limitations of Hinduism may also be its strengths. It is like a palace that began as a two-room cottage. Over the centuries, wings have been built on to it, and now it has countless rooms, stairs, corridors, statues, fountains, and gardens. There is something here to please and astonish—and dismay—almost everyone. In fact, its beliefs are so rich and profound that Hinduism has greatly influenced the larger world, and its influence continues to grow. In this chapter we will explore the various elements of this religion's foundation and the stages in which additions were made to the sprawling house of Hinduism.

### The Earliest Stage of Indian Religion

In the early twentieth century, engineers who were building a railroad discovered the ruins of an ancient culture in the Indus River valley. Today, most of the Indus River lies in Pakistan, but it traditionally formed the natural border of northwestern India—in fact, the words *India* and *Hindu*



derive from *Indus*. The culture that archeological workers uncovered there flourished before 2000 B.C.E. and is named the Harappa culture, after one of its ancient cities (Timeline 3.1).

Archeologists were amazed by the type of civilization they found. The cities contained regular streets and solid brick houses. Pots and coins were discovered, as well as evidence that running water was used for toilets and baths. As one historian remarks, “no other ancient civilization until that of the Romans had so efficient a system of drains”<sup>1</sup>—a genuine sign of technical development. This complex culture had also invented a writing system, which scholars are still working to decipher.

Timeline of significant events in the history of Hinduism.

Property owners marked their belongings with seals bearing the images of animals, such as the bull, tiger, and rhinoceros, as well as images of men and women. Three seals show a male, sitting in a yogic meditation posture, with horns on his head.<sup>2</sup> Small pillars that suggest male sexuality were also found. Because many of these same symbols still appear in contemporary Indian culture, we can assume that some current religious practices have survived from the distant past. For example, the male with the horns on his head may be a deity and an early form of the god Shiva, and the pillars resemble the low columns that some contemporary Indians worship in honor of Shiva. It is also quite possible that the present-day worship of the divine Great Mother and of tree spirits goes back to this early time.

### The Religion of the Vedic Period

The ancient scriptures of India are called the **Vedas**. They give a great deal of information about gods and worship during what is often called the Vedic period, generally thought to cover about 2000 to 500 B.C.E. The origin of the Vedas and of the religion they describe, however, is uncertain.

In the late eighteenth century, Western scholars recognized that Sanskrit—the ancient language of India and the language of the Vedas—was related to Greek and Latin. They also realized that many of the gods mentioned in the Vedas were the same gods who had been worshiped in Greece and Rome; they discovered, as well, that gods of similar names were mentioned in Iranian sacred literature. Later scholars theorized that a single people, who called themselves Aryans, moved from present-day southern Russia about 2000 B.C.E. in two directions—westward into Europe and eastward into Iran and India. Entering new lands, these people were thought to have carried their language and religion with them. Scholars initially believed that in India the outsiders imposed their social order quickly and violently on the older culture. According to this theory, called the “Aryan invasion theory,” the Vedas were believed to be the religious writings of this invading people.

Next, a variant on the older theory arose: instead of speaking of a single invasion, the newer theory held that there were repeated waves of migrations into Pakistan and northern India, and that from these contacts between foreign and indigenous cultures the religion of the Vedas emerged. More recently, however, this second theory, called the “Aryan migration theory,” has been questioned. The migration theory is still commonly held, but some scholars view any theory that assumes influence from outside India to be a continued relic of Western cultural imperialism. Archeological, linguistic, and genetic investigations continue to offer more clues, but their interpretation has not resolved the issue.

No matter what its origins, the religion described by the Vedas seems to have consisted of the worship of mostly male gods, who were believed to control the forces of nature. The father of the gods was Dyaus Pitr, whose

name means “shining father.” (He is clearly the same god as the Roman god Jupiter and the Greek god Zeus Pater.) The god Indra, god of storm and war, received great attention because of the strength his worshipers hoped to receive from him. He was possibly the memory of a military ancestor, deified by later generations. The god of fire, Agni (whose name is related to the English word *ignite* and to the Latin word for fire, *ignis*), carried sacrifices up to the world of the gods. Dawn and renewal were the charge of the goddess Ushas, one of the few female deities. The god Rudra brought winds. Varuna was the god of the sky and justice; Vishnu was a god of cosmic order; and Surya was the major sun god. The god Soma was thought to cause altered states of mind and to expand consciousness. He worked through a ritual drink, possibly made from a psychedelic mushroom that had the same name (*soma*) and allowed contact with the realm of the gods. The god Yama ruled the afterlife.

Worship of the gods took place at outdoor fire altars. Priestly specialists set apart a square or rectangular space, purified it with water, and constructed one to three low altars inside the space for sacrifice. The usual offerings were milk, clarified butter (called *ghee*), grains, and sometimes animals. A special horse sacrifice, believed to confer great power on a king, occurred on rare occasions.

Sacred chants, which the priests knew from memory, were an essential part of the ceremonies; and because they believed that the chants had power of their own, the priestly class protected them and handed them down orally from father to son. It is these chants, in written form, that make up the core of the earliest Hindu sacred literature, the Vedas. Although many of the Vedic gods are no longer worshiped, elements of the Aryan religion—such as the use of fire and some of the ancient chants by a priestly class—continue to be of great importance to Hindus today.

### The Vedas

The Vedas, which originally were preserved only in oral form but eventually were written down, are the earliest sacred books of Hinduism. The name means “knowledge” or “sacred lore,” and related words in English are *vision* and *wisdom*. Although scholars date the earliest versions of the Vedas to about 1500 B.C.E., Hindus consider them to be far more ancient. They say that the Vedas were revealed to *rishis* (holy men of the distant past), who did not create the Vedas but heard them and transmitted them to later generations.

There are four basic sacred text collections that constitute the Vedas. The Rig Veda<sup>3</sup> (“hymn knowledge”) is a collection of more than a thousand chants to the Aryan gods; the Yajur Veda (“ceremonial knowledge”) contains matter for recitation during sacrifice; the Sama Veda (“chant knowledge”) is a handbook of musical elaborations of Vedic chants; and the Atharva Veda (“knowledge from [the teacher] Atharva”) consists of practical prayers and charms, such as prayers to protect against snakes and sickness.



The Rig Veda, the most important of the Vedas, has an account of the origin of the universe. The universe is said to have emerged from a division and cosmic sacrifice of a primeval superperson, Purusha. But the account includes an admission of uncertainty: “Who knows it for certain; who can proclaim it here; namely, out of what it was born and wherefrom his creations issued? The gods appeared only later—after the creation of the world. Who knows, then, out of what it has evolved?”<sup>4</sup>

The term *Vedas* sometimes indicates only these four collections. In its more common use, it also refers to some later material as well. Detailed ceremonial rules, called Brahmanas and Aranyakas, were added by later generations to each of the four Vedic collections. The Brahmanas, named for the priests who would use them, give details about the proper time and place for ceremonies, the preparation of the ground, ritual objects, and purification rites. The Aranyakas (“forest books”) allowed the rituals to be understood and practiced in nonliteral, symbolic ways by men who had left society and become ascetics in the forests. The four Vedas end with even later works, called the **Upanishads**, which express philosophical and religious ideas that arose in introspective and meditative traditions.

### THE UPANISHADS AND THE AXIS AGE

Around 500 B.C.E., Indian civilization experienced such widespread and important changes that the period is known as the Axis Age, meaning that everything turned in a new direction at this time. Interestingly, great changes were also taking place in other religions and cultures as well: it was the time of the Buddha, Confucius, major Hebrew prophets, and early Greek philosophers.

After many centuries, questioning of Vedic religious beliefs and practices began to emerge with strength. It is possible that earlier religious disciplines reasserted themselves, and there may have been resentment against the priestly class. Some critics questioned the value of the Vedic sacrifices, and we know from the Aranyakas that certain people abandoned social life to live alone in the forests, giving themselves much time for thought and religious experimentation. Thinkers questioned the ancient belief in many gods, seeking instead a single divine reality that might be the source of everything.<sup>5</sup> Some went even further and saw all things as being mystically united. And a few rejected religious ritual altogether.

During this period there seems to have been interest in all sorts of techniques for altering consciousness, such as sitting for long periods in meditation, breathing deeply, fasting, avoiding sexual activity, practicing long periods of silence, going without sleep, experimenting with psychedelic plants, and living in the darkness of caves. All of these things could be done by people of any social class—not just by priests. Evidence of this intellectual ferment and the practice of spiritual disciplines is recorded in the Upanishads.



An ascetic carries water from the Ganges as a cow pursues its own path.

### The Origin of the Upanishads

The Upanishads comprise about a hundred written works that record insights into external and internal reality. Although several interpretations of the name *Upanishads* have been proposed, it is commonly thought to derive from words that mean “sitting near.”<sup>6</sup> If the term’s derivation is correct, it would suggest disciples sitting near a master, learning techniques for achieving religious experience. In any case, primary to the Upanishads is the notion that with spiritual discipline and meditation, both priests and nonpriests can experience the spiritual reality that underlies all seemingly separate realities. Unlike much of the earlier Vedic material, which dictates that only hereditary priests can be religious masters, the Upanishads tell us that a person who has the necessary experience can be a spiritual master. The Upanishads thus possibly continue the religious interest of the forest dwellers of the Aranyakas.

The Upanishads are written primarily in dialogue form, appearing both as prose and as poetry. Because they were produced over many hundreds

of years, dating them is not easy. It is generally thought that those in prose form (such as the Chandogya, Brihadaranyaka, Taittiriya, and Kena Upanishads) may be earlier works than those in poetic form (such as the Katha and Mandukya Upanishads). About a dozen Upanishads are especially popular.

### Important Concepts of the Upanishads

The most important notions in the Upanishads are *Brahman*, *Atman*, *maya*, *karma*, *samsara*, and *moksha*.<sup>7</sup> These primary concepts, which would become essential notions in much later Hindu spirituality, continue to be taught today.

**Brahman and Atman** The term **Brahman** originally stood for the cosmic power present in the Vedic sacrifice and chants, over which the priest had control. (The Sanskrit word *Brahman* is neuter and comes from a stem meaning “to be great.”) In the Upanishads the word *Brahman* was expanded to mean a divine reality at the heart of things. One of the most famous dialogues appears in the Chandogya Upanishad. It involves a priestly father and his son in discussion. The young man, Shvetaketu, has been away, studying with a specialist for many years. He has memorized chants and learned priestly rituals. The young man’s father questions him about what he has learned, and the son proudly recites the formulas he knows. The father then asks him what he knows about Brahman, the Supreme Spirit; but the young man knows nothing. Trying to assist the son’s understanding, the

Brahmins, priests from the highest caste, pray at the beginning of a religious ceremony on the island of Bali.



father asks his son to fill a glass with water, put salt in it, and leave it overnight. The next day he asks his son to find the salt:

“Bring me the salt you put into the water last night.”

Shvetaketu looked into the water, but could not find it, for it had dissolved.

His father then said: “Taste the water from this side. How is it?”

“It is salt [salty].”

“Taste it from the middle. How is it?”

“It is salt.”

“Taste it from that side. How is it?”

“It is salt.”

“Look for the salt again and come again to me.”

The son did so, saying: “I cannot see the salt. I only see water.”

The father then said: “In the same way, O my son, you cannot see the Spirit.

But in truth he is here.

“An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. Thou art That.”<sup>8</sup>

The Upanishads insist that Brahman is something that can be known—not simply believed in. The Shvetasvatara Upanishad, for example, says “I know that Spirit whose infinity is in all, who is ever one beyond time.”<sup>9</sup> Brahman, the Divine Spirit, is so real that it may be known directly, and, as the boy Shvetaketu learned, knowledge of it can be as immediate as tasting the flavor of salt.

What is it to know Brahman? The Upanishads insist that it cannot be put fully into words, but they give hints. Brahman is the lived experience that all things are in some way holy because they come from the same sacred source. It is also the experience that all things are in some way ultimately one. This is an experience that seems to defy common sense, since the world appears to be divided into many objects and types of reality. Nevertheless, when we consider reality more deeply, we recognize many unities: a piece of wood can become a boat or a house or fire or ash; water can turn into a cloud or a plant. So, on closer inspection, all apparent separations and divisions blur. To experience Brahman is to know, firsthand, that every apparently individual reality in the world is actually a wave of the same sacred ocean of energy. Brahman, according to the Upanishads, “is the sun, the moon, and the stars. He is the fire, the waters, and the wind.”<sup>10</sup> Brahman is “the God who appears in forms infinite.”<sup>11</sup>

Brahman is also referred to by three words that help describe its nature as perceived by the knower: Brahman is *sat*, reality itself; *chit*, pure consciousness; and *ananda*, bliss. And although Brahman can be experienced within our everyday world of time and space, those who speak of their experience say that Brahman is ultimately beyond time and beyond space. Thus the Upanishads often add that experiencing the timelessness of Brahman can bring an end to everyday suffering and to the fear of death.

The notion of **Atman** is related to Brahman and is an equally important term in the Upanishads. Although Atman is sometimes translated as “self”

or “soul,” the notion of *Atman* in the Upanishads is different from the notion of an individual soul. Perhaps the term *Atman* would be better translated as “deepest self.” (Sometimes it is translated as “subtle self.”) In Hindu belief, each person has an individual soul (*jiva*), and the individual soul confers uniqueness and personality. But Hinduism asks this question: At the very deepest level, what really am I? I am clearly not just my body—my height and weight and hair color, all of which are subject to alteration. But am I then my tastes, thoughts, and memories? Or is there more? Is there not in me a reality more fundamental than those changing individual characteristics? According to the Upanishads, at the deepest level of what I am is a divine reality, a divine spirit, that everything shares. The Upanishads teach that it is true to say that I am God, because, for the person who understands reality at the deepest level, everything is God. *Atman*, when experienced fully, is identical with *Brahman*. *Atman*, like *Brahman*, is divine, holy, and timeless. Often the term *Brahman* refers to the experience of the sacred within nature and the external universe, while *Atman* refers to the experience of the sacred within oneself. However, the same divine nature simply has two names, and both terms may be used interchangeably.

**Maya** The Upanishads speak of the everyday world as **maya**, which is usually translated as “illusion.”<sup>12</sup> This translation, though, needs explanation. Its root suggests illusion and mystery (as in “magic”), but it also has a more positive, objective connotation that suggests the original stuff of which something is made (as in “material”). The word *maya* thus contains both meanings: “magic” and “matter.” To say that all reality is “maya” is not to say that the world does not exist or that the world is a totally false perception. The world is real, but not in quite the way most people assume. For one thing, human beings view the world as consisting of individual things and people, all separate. In reality, the world is one basic holy reality that takes on many different forms. The Shvetasvatara Upanishad advises us to “know therefore that nature is Maya, but that God is the ruler of Maya; and that all beings in our universe are parts of his infinite splendour.”<sup>13</sup>

People also assume that the world is solid and permanent. In reality, the outside world is more like the inner world of thoughts and dreams—it shifts and changes, just as thoughts and dreams do. People assume that time is real, that it advances at a regular rate, and that past, present, and future are distinct divisions. In reality, time is relative.

The model of reality set forth by the Upanishads is less like a machine made of individual moving parts; it is more like a great consciousness. This view also produces a sense of amazement at the forms and shifts that the universe takes—it is all, ultimately, unexplainable magic.

As I look out at reality from my own individual standpoint, I may see the end of my life as the end of everything. The Upanishads see things differently. First, individuals are not as individual as they suppose. Rather, they are all manifestations of the Divine Spirit, which does not end when the individual dies. They are also the continuation of earlier forms of life that

have simply taken new forms. Hinduism, from about 500 B.C.E., generally adopted the belief that everything living has its own life force and that every life force, when it loses one form, is reborn into another. This process is known as reincarnation.

**Karma** The general Hindu notion of rebirth assumes that human beings have at one or another time existed as a “lower” form, such as animal, insect, and possibly even plant. Hinduism also recognizes grades of human life, from limited and painful to exceptionally pleasant and free. Human beings are also capable of achieving “higher” forms of life, such as superhuman beings and demigods. Rebirth can move in either direction, and the human stage is a dangerous one because each human being must make dramatic choices about how to live. If a human being does not live properly, he or she may be reborn into a very poor or cruel human family—or possibly in a form of life that may be even more limited and difficult, such as a dog, a pig, or an ant. A human being can also make a spectacular leap upward beyond the human level to a superhuman existence or even beyond, to complete freedom.

What determines the direction of one’s rebirth is **karma**. The word comes from a root that means “to do” and implies the notion of moral consequences that are carried along with every act. Karma is the moral law of cause and effect, and belief in karma is a belief that every action has an automatic moral consequence. One well-known saying expresses nicely the nature of karma: What goes around comes around. Karma does not work because it is the will of God or Brahman, but simply because karma is an essential part of the nature of things. It is the way things work. Good karma brings “higher” rebirth; bad karma brings rebirth in “lower,” more painful forms. In a certain way, this belief allows for upward mobility, since human beings, by their actions, have influence over their future births. Ultimate freedom comes when karma ceases to operate; rebirth, whether upward or downward on the scale, has entirely ended.

Some teachers say that karma is intrinsically neither good nor bad but only seems so to the person who experiences it. In this conception, karma is like gravity—it works like a force of nature. It is like rain, which can cause a plant to grow just as it can bring a picnic to its end. Karma helps explain why some people are born with great gifts while others are born with no advantages at all.

**Samsara** The term **samsara** refers to the wheel of life, the circle of constant rebirth, and it suggests strongly that the everyday world is full of change as well as struggle and suffering. The Hindu view of human life, because of its belief in reincarnation, is rather different from that commonly held in the West. Think of how often you hear someone say, “You only live once.” This view of life is not shared by Hindus, who believe an individual is constantly being reborn, having come from different earlier forms and going on to emerge in new forms in the future. Because our present human life is so

short, we may think that we would like several lives in the future as well. But how many would each of us really like? Ten might sound reasonable, but a hundred? a thousand? ten thousand? a million? It's tiring just to think about all those lifetimes! And many of those forms would inevitably be unhappy ones. Sooner or later most of us would want to jump off the merry-go-round of life. We would want escape, release, liberation. This leads us to the next important concept of the Upanishads.

**Moksha** The term **moksha** means “freedom” or “liberation” and comes from a root that means “to be released.” In the Upanishads, moksha is the ultimate human goal. It has various connotations. Moksha certainly includes the notion of getting beyond egotistic responses, such as resentment and anger, which limit the individual. Furthermore, unlike the modern ideal of seeking complete freedom to satisfy one's individual desires, moksha implies liberation even from the limitations of being an individual—from being born a particular person at a specific time to a unique pair of parents—a person with distinct physical characteristics, emotions, desires, and memories. One can take action to overcome these restrictions (for example, by leaving home), which is sometimes a means of attaining moksha, but one can also accept the limitations even while living with them, thereby gaining inner peace and mental freedom.

As one becomes freer, one looks at life less from a selfish and egotistic point of view and more from a perspective that embraces the whole. The unity and sacredness that everything shares become a part of everyday experience. Kindness to all—to animals as well as to people—is one natural result of this insight, and kind actions also generate helpful karma. Detaching oneself from pleasure or pain is another practice that leads to freedom from egotism.

Ultimately, with enough insight and ascetic practice, the individual can go entirely beyond the limited self to know the sacred reality that everything shares. When insight and kindness are perfect, at last the pain of rebirth ends; the limitations of individuality are gone, and only Brahman remains. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad explains complete freedom: “when all has become Spirit, one's own Self, how and whom could one see?”<sup>14</sup>

The Upanishads, though sometimes obscure, are devoted to promoting an insight into ultimate oneness. But the Upanishads do not give detailed instructions for achieving that kind of insight or for living spiritually in the everyday world. Such guidance would have to be developed by later Hindu commentators and practitioners.

## LIVING SPIRITUALLY IN THE EVERYDAY WORLD

The Hinduism that guides people's lives today is a practical mixture of elements. Some of these came from the early stages of religious practice, which we've already discussed, and others developed later. For the ordinary

layperson, Hindu practice usually involves devotion to at least one deity. It recommends finding one's proper work and then doing it unselfishly. Hindu practice may also include the study of religious texts, meditation, and other specifically religious disciplines. The following section will deal with the elements of this practical synthesis, much of which can be found in the short classic, the Bhagavad Gita.

### The Bhagavad Gita

The **Bhagavad Gita** ("divine song" or "song of the Divine One") is part of a very long epic poem called the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata, written some time between 400 B.C.E. and 400 C.E., tells how the sons of Pandu (Pandavas) conquered their cousins, the Kauravas, with the help of the god Krishna. The Bhagavad Gita was inserted at some time into this poem but has its own identity and is often printed separately from the Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Gita, shaped by the priestly class between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E., has become a spiritual classic. It recalls themes from the Upanishads, but it also tries to strike a balance between mysticism and the practical needs of everyday life. Action and adherence to duty are approved and can even be thought of as a spiritual path. As the Bhagavad Gita says, "the wise see knowledge and action as one."<sup>15</sup>

The Bhagavad Gita, like the Upanishads, is written in dialogue form. It occurs almost entirely between two figures: a prince, Arjuna, and his charioteer and advisor, Krishna. Arjuna's royal power is threatened by his hundred cousins, called Kauravas, and he must decide whether to fight with his brothers against them to restore his throne or to accept their rule. He is torn. On the one hand, he knows that his rule is correct, but on the other, he wants to avoid violence. That his enemies are close family members makes the matter even harder. Depressed, Arjuna "[throws] aside his arrows and his bow in the midst of the battlefield. He [sits] down on the seat of the chariot, and his heart [is] overcome with sorrow."<sup>16</sup> In response, Krishna, who later reveals that he is a form of the god Vishnu, explains the need for action. "Now you shall hear how a man may become perfect, if he devotes himself to the work which is natural to him. A man shall reach perfection if he does his duty as an act of worship to the Lord."<sup>17</sup> This means that Arjuna must follow not merely his own desires—neither his fears nor his hope for reward—but he must simply do what is right.



This miniature of Krishna and the *gopis* (milkmaids) dates from the second half of the eighteenth century.



Contrary to the teaching of nonviolence, which was at the time of this epic's creation growing strong in India in such religious traditions as Buddhism and Jainism, Krishna advises Arjuna to fight to protect his throne and the structure of society—to fight is his duty. At a moment of great revelation, Krishna shows Arjuna that a divine reality is at work within everything in the universe—in living and also in dying. Krishna even says that for the warrior “there is nothing nobler than a righteous war.”<sup>18</sup>

The recommendation that Arjuna should fight has posed a moral problem for some followers of Hinduism. Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) is typical of those who have solved this problem by saying that the Bhagavad Gita is religious allegory. Gandhi held that the call to arms is not about real war but rather a call to fight against dangerous moral and psychological forces, such as ignorance, selfishness, and anger. This interpretation, though it seems to go against the literal intent of the text, has been influential.

### The Caste System

When Krishna urges Arjuna to do what his position as a warrior demands, he is reinforcing the **caste** system (a division of society into social classes that are created by birth or occupation). The caste system, the prevalent social system of Hinduism, had already been mentioned in the Rig Veda: “When they divided Purusha [the first person, a superbeing], in how many different portions did they arrange him? What became of his mouth, what of his two arms? What were his two thighs and his two feet called? His mouth became the brahman [priest]; his two arms were made into the rajanya [warrior-noble]; his two thighs the vaishyas [merchants]; from his two feet the shudra [peasant] was born.”<sup>19</sup>

The caste system receives further religious approval in the Bhagavad Gita, which recognizes that there are different types of people and that their ways to perfection will differ, depending on their personality types and roles in society.<sup>20</sup> For example, active people will perfect themselves through the unselfishness of their work, and intellectual people will perfect themselves through teaching and study.

Traditionally, the caste system was based on more than one's type of work, and in modern times it does not always indicate the type of work a person does. Castes (as the term is commonly used) are really social classes (*varna*), which are subdivided into hundreds of subcastes.<sup>21</sup> The caste system dissuades members of different castes, and often subcastes, from intermarrying. It remains strongest in the countryside and in more conservative southern India, but it is weakening in the cities, where people regularly eat together in restaurants and travel together in buses and trains. Although an individual cannot change the caste into which she or he is born, it is believed that a good life in one's present caste will guarantee rebirth in a higher caste or better circumstances. Thus, from the perspective of Hinduism, upward social mobility is possible—even if it takes more than one lifetime to accomplish!

Members of society are divided into five main social classes:

1. The priest (**brahmin**)<sup>22</sup> traditionally performs Vedic rituals and acts as a counselor.
2. The warrior-noble (*kshatriya*) has the role of protecting society. This is the traditional caste of the aristocracy.
3. The merchant (*vaishya*) class includes landowners, moneylenders, and sometimes artisans. Males of the three upper castes (brahmin, kshatriya, and vaishya) receive a sacred cord during a ceremony in their youth and afterward are called “twice-born.”
4. The peasant (*shudra*) does manual labor and is expected to serve the higher castes. The origin of this caste probably goes back to the Aryan subjection of native people, who were forced to do the work of servants. The peasant is called “once-born.”
5. The untouchable (*dalit*) traditionally does the dirtiest work—cleaning toilets, sweeping streets, collecting animal carcasses, and tanning animal hides. Their low status prompted the Indian reformer Mohandas Gandhi to promote another name for the class—*Harijan* (“children of God”)—and he urged their inclusion in regular society.<sup>23</sup>

### The Stages of Life

Just as the individual’s path to “correct action” is suggested by caste and subcaste, traditional Hinduism holds that each stage of life also has its proper way of being lived. Every culture recognizes specific life stages through which each individual passes. In modern secular life the stages seem to be childhood, adolescence, the career years, and retirement (these stages are strongly colored by employment—or the lack of it); but in India the notion of life stages is more religious. The conception was shaped by the ancient ideal of the development of the upper-caste male, particularly of the priestly caste:

1. Student (*brahmacharin*): This first stage is spent laying a religious foundation for life. The young person, between the ages of 8 and 20, studies religious works. Celibacy is a necessary part of the training.
2. Householder (*grihastha*): Marriage (traditionally, arranged by the parents) occurs at about age 20, and the person fulfills the demands of society by raising children.
3. Retiree (*vanaprastha*): When grandchildren arrive, the individual may retire somewhat from ordinary life to spend time once again on religious matters. The ancient ideal was to go into the forest to live, possibly with one’s wife, away from society. In reality, retirees often continue to live with their children and with other relatives in an extended-family setting, but they may eat separately from the rest of the family and spend time on religious pursuits with friends.
4. Renunciate (**sannyasin**): To enter this last stage is considered to be appropriate only after retirement. It is not expected of everyone but is

simply an option. If one wishes to live entirely free from society, one is permitted to leave home. For such a person, the entire world is now his home. A man may leave his wife, although he must ensure that she will be supported. Celibacy is expected, and the sign of this devout, celibate state is an orange robe. The sannyasin, considered to be outside the caste system, is free to wander, begging his food along the way, and many temples have endowments to feed such pilgrims. The sannyasin may remain a constant traveler, making pilgrimage to the sacred sites of India, or he may settle in an **ashram** (religious community) or even live in a cave. The purpose of this kind of life is to hasten mystical insight, to free oneself of all attachments, to end rebirth, and to attain moksha.

### The Goals of Life

Although the Hindu spiritual ideal—such as the lifestyle of the sannyasin—is generally world-denying, Hinduism also exhibits a respect for more worldly goals. In order of increasing value these goals are pleasure (*kama*), economic security and power (*artha*), and social and religious duty (*dharma*). These life goals, which may be pursued simultaneously, are acceptable and even virtuous, as long as they are tempered by moderation and social regulation. Considered highest of the goals, however, is moksha—complete freedom.

### The Yogas

Although the Bhagavad Gita endorses quiet contemplation, it also recommends active spiritual paths. It endorses not only meditation but also the work demanded by one's caste and individual place in society. The various types of **yoga** are methods that can be used to help people live spiritually. The word *yoga* means "union" and is related to the English words *join* and *yoke*. A yoga is a way for people to perfect their union with the divine, and because the yogas suggest roads to perfection, they are also called *margas* ("paths"). There is a tolerant recognition in Hinduism that different sorts of people need different spiritual paths, and an individual's caste and personality type will help determine the appropriate yoga to practice.

**Jnana Yoga ("Knowledge Yoga")** This type of yoga brings insight into one's divine nature by studying the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita and their commentaries and by learning from teachers who have attained insight. **Jnana yoga** is particularly appropriate for priests and intellectuals.

This yoga was highly refined by a school of philosophy that is still quite vital, the school of Vedanta ("Veda end").<sup>24</sup> The term refers to the Upanishads—which come at the end of the Vedas—and to the fact that the Vedanta school has used the ideas of the Upanishads as its primary inspiration.

The greatest teacher of Vedanta, Shankara (c. 788–820), argued that everything is ultimately one—all is Brahman.<sup>25</sup> According to Shankara,

although our ordinary experience leads us to see things as being separate and different, this perception is mistaken. To show that sense perception can be wrong, Shankara used the example of a person who at dusk is frightened by a coil of rope—the observer mistakenly perceives the rope to be a snake. In the same way, Shankara would say, a person who perceives things as being ultimately separate and different from Brahman is mistaken. In his *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, the author likened Brahman to gold, which can take many shapes. Brahman “is that one Reality which appears to our ignorance as a manifold universe of names and forms and changes. Like the gold of which many ornaments are made, it remains in itself unchanged. Such is Brahman, and ‘That art Thou.’ Meditate upon this truth.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the waves of the ocean and the drops of water in the waves may be considered separate entities; but the larger truth is that they are all just the same ocean in varied, changing forms.

Shankara thought that spiritual liberation was achieved when the individual personally came to understand the unity of all things. Shankara so emphasized **monism**—the oneness of everything—that his branch of the Vedanta school is called *Advaita*, which, literally translated, means “not-two-ness” (*a-dvai-ta*). The significance of the term is very subtle. If I say that all reality is “one,” some “other” reality could also exist—something in contrast to the one. But the term *not-two* makes clear that ultimately there is no other reality.

For Shankara, therefore, any devotion to a god or goddess who is thought to be different from the worshiper is also mistaken. This rejection of devotion, however, posed a great problem for those types of Hinduism that emphasized it. As a result, later thinkers of the Vedanta school, such as Ramanuja (d. 1137) and Madhva (active 1240), qualified or denied ultimate monism. They emphasized passages in the Upanishads that seem to speak of Brahman as being separate in some way from the world. They could thereby create systems that made room for religious devotion.

**Karma Yoga (“Action Yoga”)** This type of yoga proposes that all useful work, if done unselfishly, can be a way to perfection. (The word *karma* here is used in its basic sense of “activity.”) Much of what we ordinarily do is motivated by money or pleasure or praise, but deeds performed without a desire for reward are the heart of **karma yoga**. As the Bhagavad Gita says, “Desire for the fruits of work must never be your motive in working.”<sup>27</sup>

**Bhakti Yoga (“Devotion Yoga”)** Most of us have at one time or another fallen in love, and we know that there is something purifying about the experience, because it forces us to look outward, beyond ourselves, to another object of affection. Religions utilize this purifying power when they promote devotion to a god or saint—who is often made visible in a painting or statue. Hinduism, because of its belief in multiple gods, offers rich possibilities for devotion. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna, “Regard me as your dearest loved one. Know me to be your only refuge.”<sup>28</sup>

## RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS



### Hindu Meditation: More Than Emptying the Mind

Over the past three decades, meditation has become popular in the Western world. From students in elementary schools to executives in corporate offices, all kinds of people take time out to sit quietly, empty the mind, and let stress float away.

Meditation in Eastern religious traditions, however, is more complex, at least theoretically. The Yoga Sutras, often attributed to the grammarian Patanjali,<sup>29</sup> list eight steps necessary for perfection of meditation:

- Self-control (*yama*) is the fundamental reorientation of the personality away from selfishness. It involves practicing **ahimsa** (not hurting living beings), exhibiting sexual restraint, shunning greed, refusing to steal, and embracing truthfulness.
- Observance (*niyama*) is the regular practice of the five preceding virtuous pursuits.
- Posture (*asana*) is an integral aspect of meditation, particularly the “lotus posture” (*padmasana*), in which the person meditating is seated with the legs crossed, each foot touching the opposite leg.
- Breath control (*pranayama*) involves deep, regular breathing, holding the breath, and breathing in various rhythms.
- Restraint (*pratyahara*) helps the meditator tune out external distractions.
- Steadying of the mind (*dharana*) teaches the meditator to focus on only one object in order to empty the mind of everything else.
- Meditation (**dhyana**) occurs when the mind is focused only on the object of concentration.
- **Samadhi** is the mental state achieved by deep meditation, in which the individual loses the sense of being separate from the rest of the universe.<sup>30</sup>

**Bhakti yoga** can involve various expressions of devotion—most commonly chants, songs, food offerings, and the anointing of statues. Bhakti yoga can extend also to acts of devotion shown to one’s **guru** (spiritual teacher), to one’s parents, and to one’s spouse. The gods worshiped in bhakti yoga will be described later.

**Raja Yoga (“Royal Yoga”)** This type of yoga promotes meditation. The term **raja yoga** does not appear in the Bhagavad Gita but was introduced later to refer to the steps of meditation described in the box “Hindu Meditation: More Than Emptying the Mind.” Nonetheless, chapter 6 of the Bhagavad Gita describes basic meditation—sitting quietly, turning inward, and calming the mind. Done for short periods of time on a regular basis, meditation lowers stress and brings a sense of peace; done for longer periods of time, it can induce new states of consciousness.

There are many types of meditation. Some involve emptying the mind of thought; others involve focusing on some physical or mental object. Meditation can be done with one’s eyes closed or open or focused on a point a short distance in front of the face. A word or brief phrase, called a **mantra**, is often recited with each breath to help clear the mind of thought. (The short mantra *Om*—which is sometimes called the sound of creation—is frequently used.) Meditation can be done in silence or to gentle music; it can also be done while gazing at a candle, at the moon, or at moving water. Some advanced types of meditation involve techniques taken from additional

yogas. They may have the meditator create symbolic mental images (frequently of a deity), contemplate a sacred diagram (called a *yantra*), or repeat complicated sacred phrases. The many techniques of meditation are called *sadhanas* (“practices”).

**Hatha Yoga (“Force Yoga”)** When most of us in the West think of yoga, we think of the physical exercises of **hatha yoga**. These exercises, which were originally developed to help make long periods of meditation easier, mostly involve stretching and balancing. Breathing exercises are usually considered a part of hatha yoga.

There are many schools of hatha yoga, often named after their founders. Several have gained great popularity. Among them, Iyengar yoga focuses on correct technique and sequence in doing a large number of traditional breathing exercises and yoga postures. Bikram yoga involves a series of twenty-six hatha yoga exercises and two breathing exercises in a heated room (the heat is meant to make the muscles limber and to assist circulation). Ashtanga yoga, named after teachings of the Yoga Sutras, is a demanding series of six sequences of highly athletic yogic postures.

**Kundalini Yoga** Combining elements of both raja yoga and hatha yoga, **Kundalini yoga** teaches that there are seven psychic centers, called *chakras* (“wheels”), that exist, one above the other, along the spinal column. Meditation and physical exercises (as described below) help the meditator lift spiritual energy—called *kundalini* and envisioned as a coiled serpent—from one center to the next. (Literally *kundalini* means “she who lies coiled.”) Each chakra is like a gateway through which the kundalini passes, bringing increased insight and joy. When the kundalini reaches the topmost and seventh center of energy at the crown of the head, the practitioner experiences profound bliss. The topmost center of energy (*sahasrara*) appears in imagery as a lotus flower, and reaching it is compared to the opening of a lotus.

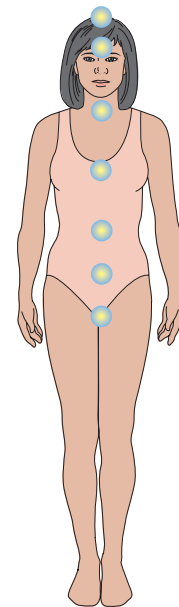
In addition to these six yogas are others. In fact, any systematic set of techniques that leads to greater spirituality can be considered a yoga.

## DEVOTIONAL HINDUISM

Indians have been primarily a rural, agricultural people, and even today only about 15 percent of the population lives in cities. The rest live, as they have for centuries, in more than half a million villages. Men in the villages spend most of their waking hours working as merchants, craftsmen, and farmers, while women marry when young and spend most of their time preparing



In recent years, yoga has become a part of daily life for millions of people across the planet.



The chakras are centers through which energy rises from the base of the spine to the crown of the head.

food, running their households, and caring for their children. The duties of everyday life leave little time to pursue more philosophical paths.

For the majority of Hindus, then, some of the spiritual disciplines just mentioned—study, meditation, and special physical exercises—have had limited appeal. Instead, the great majority of Hindus have followed the path of devotion (**bhakti**) to a god or gods. Hindus worship their gods in village temples and at home altars. Most worship daily, and there are special days dedicated to individual gods. **Puja**, devotional ritual commonly performed at an altar, involves the offering of flowers, food, fire, and incense to images of a god or gods, as well as the occasional singing of hymns.

The earliest layer of devotional Hinduism, probably traceable to the Harappa culture, seems to have involved the anointing of phallic stones, devotion to female divinities of fertility, and the worship of nature spirits. This type of religious devotion continues in India today.

The Vedic religion introduced its own gods as additional objects of worship. Some of these, such as Indra and Agni, were once highly popular, while others, such as Dyaüs Pitr, lost devotees and moved to the background quite early. In this devotional pattern we can see that a certain fluctuation of interest is natural: throughout history, in all religious devotion, interest in some gods rises and interest in others fades away.

Certain gods and goddesses seem to have emerged separately, not as a part of the Vedic pantheon—of these Krishna is one of the best known. Some animal forms became deified, and all deities were eventually incorporated loosely into what is today a fairly large pantheon.

Although Hinduism is often described as a religion that promotes a belief in many gods, in reality individuals tend to focus their devotion on only one of the gods. Sometimes that god is considered to be the greatest of all divine manifestations. There are also strong tendencies in Hinduism toward both monotheism and even monism, because all gods—and everything else as well—are considered, ultimately, to be expressions of a single divine reality. Devotion to an individual god or goddess is often justified by saying that although the divine is ultimately formless, human beings must worship the divine through its physical manifestations. This belief gives rise to much painting, sculpture, music, and ceremony in honor of many gods, who are described in the following sections.

### The Trimurti: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva

Three gods have been particularly important in the devotional and artistic life of Hinduism. Although of differing origins, they have sometimes been linked together—particularly in philosophy and art, where they represent the three forces of creation, preservation, and destruction. The three gods are Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. When linked together, they are often called the **Trimurti**, which means “triple form.”

**Brahma** represents the creative force that made the universe. He is considered the personal aspect of Brahman and has been thought of as the

special patron of the priestly class, the brahmins. Brahma is commonly depicted as an ancient, thoughtful king sitting on a throne. He has four faces, each looking in one of the four directions, and eight arms, each holding symbols of power. His companion animal is a white goose.

In India, worship of Brahma as a separate deity has declined over the past two hundred years, although he is still frequently represented in art, where he is pictured beside Vishnu or Shiva. Perhaps this decline in interest resulted from the popular view of Brahma in India as grandfatherly, distant, and less powerful than either Vishnu or Shiva. (Ironically, however, devotion to Brahma remains quite alive in Thailand, where local Buddhist practice shows many influences from Hinduism. Statues of Brahma appear frequently in outdoor “spirit houses,” where food and flowers—and sometimes dance—are offered to him for good luck and protection.)

**Vishnu** represents the force of preservation in the universe. In the Vedas he is a god associated with the sun, although his role there appears to be small. Thought of as light and warmth that destroys darkness, Vishnu grew in stature until finally becoming a major god of Hinduism. Today Vishnu (in various forms) is the most important object of devotion in India, and about three quarters of all Hindus in India worship him or his manifestations. His followers are called Vaishnavites (or Vaishnavas).

In painting and sculpture, Vishnu is shown in many forms, though usually with a tall crown and a regal manner. Almost always he has four arms,

Hindus across the world celebrate Krishna’s birthday. Here we see a worship service at a temple in the United States.







Stories involving Rama are part of Hindu-influenced cultures throughout South-east Asia. In this staging of one popular story, Rama heads off to recapture his kidnapped wife, Sita.

which hold symbols of power. His companion animal is a great eaglelike bird, Garuda, on whom he flies through the universe.

Because Vishnu is associated with loving-kindness, it is believed that he can appear on earth at different times and in various physical forms to help those in need. Ten major incarnations (or **avatars**) of Vishnu are commonly listed, of which one is still to appear. Some previous incarnations were in animal form: a fish, a boar, and a tortoise. Another was Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha—an intriguing inclusion, which helped Hinduism partially reabsorb Indian Buddhism (see Chapter 4). The incarnation yet to come will be a savior figure on horseback who will judge the human race. Two incarnations of Vishnu are wildly popular—Rama and Krishna.

**Rama** may have been a historical figure who later took on mythic proportions. He appears in the great epic the Ramayana, whose stories have inspired dance as well as art. Rama and his wife, Sita, who are thought of as the ideal couple, are often portrayed together. One of the most commonly told stories concerns the abduction of Sita by Ravan (or Ravana), the demon king of Sri Lanka. Rama, a king, gains the help of Hanuman, leader of the monkeys. Hanuman helps Rama in killing Ravan and in locating and returning Sita. Perhaps because of his image as a helper, Hanuman is today an immensely popular god in his own right. In northern India, Rama is so revered that the term *Ram*, or *Rama*, is really a synonym for “God.”

**Krishna**, another incarnation of Vishnu, may have begun as an object of fertility worship. He is depicted in several forms, which might indicate that he is a coalescence of traditions. In the long epic the Mahabharata, Krishna appears as a mature and solemn god. In later devotional works, the Puranas



("legends"), he is younger; there he is friends with *gopis* (milkmaids who look after herds of cows), and he steals butter and plays the flute, expressing the playful aspect of the divine. In depictions of Krishna, his face and skin are often blue, the color of the sky and of heaven, indicating his true other-worldly nature. His closest milkmaid companion is Radha, with whom he is romantically linked in the Hindu mind.

**Shiva**, the third of the Trimurti and the god linked with destruction, is the most complicated of the gods, both in origin and in conception. The horned figure, sitting in yogic meditation posture, that is found on seals from the Harappa period may be an early form of Shiva, meaning that some aspects of the present-day god may extend back to pre-Vedic India. Another early form is apparently the Vedic god Rudra, a dangerous god of mountains and winds, whom worshipers probably began to call *shiva* ("lucky") in order to neutralize the fear he inspired. In later times, however, his link with destructiveness is often shown in pictures of Shiva appearing at cremation grounds above a human body that is dissolving in flames.

Shiva's connection with destruction may be hard for many non-Hindus to appreciate. In some religions, destruction is associated with divine punishment for wrongdoing. In Hinduism, however, destruction is considered to be simply another part of the divine energy at work in the world. Destruction is a type of recycling, the necessary loss of form, which occurs so that new forms may appear; and death is always thought of as leading to new life. We know that the seed disappears when the tree grows, and the flower must die to make the fruit. Thus Shiva is also associated with re-creation.

The lobby of Bangkok's modern International Airport features this sculpture based on the Mahabharata. It depicts Vishnu helping gods and demons to churn the elixir of immortality from a sea of milk.

## 100 CHAPTER 3 HINDUISM

The elephant-headed god Ganesha, son of Shiva, is believed to help devotees overcome obstacles. People often pause before depictions of Ganesha to ask for success.



The destructive side of Shiva is portrayed in the bronze statues called *Shiva Nataraja* ("ruler of the dance"). As he dances, Shiva is surrounded by a ring of fire, which shows his ability to destroy and transform. His long yogi's hair flies in the air. He has four arms, which signify his many powers. In his upper right arm is a drum, symbolizing creation and the beginning of time; and in the upper left arm is a flame, symbolizing destruction. His lower left arm is pointing to his upraised foot, suggesting that everyone should join him in his dance and be as free as he is. His lower right arm is extended in blessing, which in a symbolic way says

“Don’t be afraid.” He dances on a dwarf-demon, representing the ignorance of all those who do not understand that death is part of the divine process. The art historian Heinrich Zimmer explains that “conquest of this demon lies in the attainment of true wisdom. Therein is release from the bondages of the world.”<sup>31</sup>

The aspect of Shiva that brings re-creation is represented by sexually suggestive forms. (We should note here that in nonindustrial societies the bearing of children is crucial—both for the economic survival of the family and for the care of the parents in their old age. Parents pray to have many healthy children.) A frequent representation of Shiva is a columnar *lingam*—often black, which adds to its mystery. It usually rests on a *yonī*—a circular base that is the female complement to the lingam. The lingam may be a large, natural stone worshiped outdoors; a metal object small enough to be worn around the neck; or a wooden piece of an appropriate size for worship in the home. Shaivites (devotees of Shiva) may pour various liquids, such as milk and rosewater, over the lingam in an act of devotion.

Fertility is further emphasized by Shiva’s companion animal Nandi, the bull, and by Ganesha, the elephant-headed son of Shiva, who has become a symbol of strength and abundance. Both are frequently found in temples dedicated to Shiva. Worship of Shiva is most common in Kashmir and southern India. We should note, too, that Shiva is closely linked with destruction only when he is viewed as part of the Trimurti. Among Shaivites, he is the sole God and is not exclusively related to destruction.

### Worship of the Divine Feminine: Devi

The three gods of the Trimurti are usually portrayed as masculine. But of all the great world religions, Hinduism perhaps most strongly recognizes the female aspects of divinity. This may come from a practical interest in fertility. Worship of female divinities, too, seems to have been a part of pre-Vedic religion, and elements of that early worship have lived on.

The Great Mother, also called **Devi** (“goddess”), is worshiped throughout India, but particularly in the northeast. She is portrayed in many forms and can be both loving and cruel. She is especially harsh to those who show themselves unworthy of her love. Devi is frequently worshiped with extreme human feeling. The worshiper may take on the emotions and even the clothing of a child or spouse of the Great Mother. The mystic Ramakrishna (1836–1886), priest at a temple near Kolkata (Calcutta), spoke of his special devotion to her. “I practised austerities for a long time. . . . My longing for the Divine Mother was so great that I would not eat or sleep. I would lie on the bare ground, placing my head on a lump of earth, and cry out loudly: ‘Mother, Mother, why dost thou not come to me?’ I did not know how the days and nights passed away. . . . When I reached the state of continuous ecstasy, I gave up all external forms of worship; I could no longer perform them. Then I prayed to my Divine Mother: ‘Mother, who will now take care of me? I have no power to take care of myself.’”<sup>33</sup>

Those who have riches  
build temples for Thee;  
what shall I build? I am  
poor. My legs are the  
pillars; this body of  
mine is the temple.

—Basavaraja, in praise  
of Shiva<sup>32</sup>

## 102 CHAPTER 3 HINDUISM

The goddess Durga overcomes the forces of evil.



A

The Divine Feminine appears as several goddesses, of which the most popular are Durga and Kali. The goddess **Durga** (“awe-inspiring,” “distant”) is frequently represented with eight arms, full of implements used to destroy evil. Her face is serene, surrounded by a halo, and she wears a crown. She rides a tiger, which helps her conquer all dangerous obstacles.

**Kali** (“dark”) is more fearsome still. She is often shown wearing a necklace of human skulls, and her fanged teeth drip with blood. Her many arms are full of weapons, which are thought to be dangerous to enemies but protective of her children. Kolkata (“Kali’s stairs”) is named after her temple in this city.

The important role of the Divine Feminine is also seen in the female consorts who accompany many male deities. They are so much a part of the male god that the god cannot be active without them, and thus they are called *shaktis* (“energies”), because they allow the male gods to be effective in the human world.

The goddess Saraswati is the consort of Brahma and is far more popular than he. She is the patron of music, the arts, and culture and is often portrayed with a musical instrument in her hand. The shakti of Vishnu is the goddess Lakshmi, who is commonly dressed as a queen and sits on a lotus. As the consort of Vishnu, she dispenses good luck and protection. Shiva is portrayed with a variety of shaktis, the best known being Parvati and Uma. Sometimes Shiva is himself portrayed as androgynous: half of his body is masculine, while the other side shows a female breast. This androgyny represents the unity that underlies all the apparent opposites of reality—a unity also spoken of in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita.

Divinities of nature are frequently female. The goddess Ganga, who animates the Ganges River, is a good example. Tree spirits, too, are considered female, and frequently it is women who offer them worship.

### The Guru as Object of Devotion

Because Hinduism is not organized in a hierarchical fashion, devotion to a guru (spiritual teacher) is a large and ancient component of Hindu spirituality. The etymology of the word *guru* is expressive: “the one who removes darkness.” Anyone who seeks spiritual growth—no matter what his or her caste or station in life—may seek a guru, whom the individual can visit regularly to seek advice. Even gurus who have taken vows of silence can offer advice and insight to their disciples by writing on tablets or simply by looking at them with love.

Although the majority of gurus are men, female gurus are not uncommon. The guru need only be recognized as a person of holiness. Because a guru expects to be surrounded by students and devotees, he or she will frequently set up an ashram. Usually an ashram is a commune of people living in a single compound, separate from ordinary society, but it may also be in a town and made up of various buildings owned and used by the devotees. Most gurus stay within their communities, but some travel, even outside India, to set up additional ashrams elsewhere. Frequently an aging guru will designate a successor from among his or her closest disciples and those specially trained.

It is common to touch and even kiss the feet of a guru—an act of reverence that is also performed at times for parents and grandparents. To an outsider, such an act may seem excessive. However, many Hindus believe that the guru is both a saint and a living embodiment of the divine. Behind this conception is the recognition that although divine reality exists within all human beings, most people manifest their divine nature inadequately, because their ignorance and self-centeredness restrict its expression. Such people are compared to glass windows that are so dusty that only a little light shines through. However, some people, over many lifetimes of effort, have reached a stage of such achievement that their ego has disappeared and their charity has grown immense. In these rare people the innate divine light shines brilliantly. This view explains why Hindus believe that simply

As a man may be blindfolded, and led away, and left in a strange place; and as, having been so dealt with, he turns in every direction and cries out for someone to remove his bandages and show him the way home; and as one thus entreated may loose his bandages and give him comfort; and as thereupon he walks from village to village, asking his way as he goes; and as he arrives home at last—just so does a man who meets with an illumined teacher obtain true knowledge.

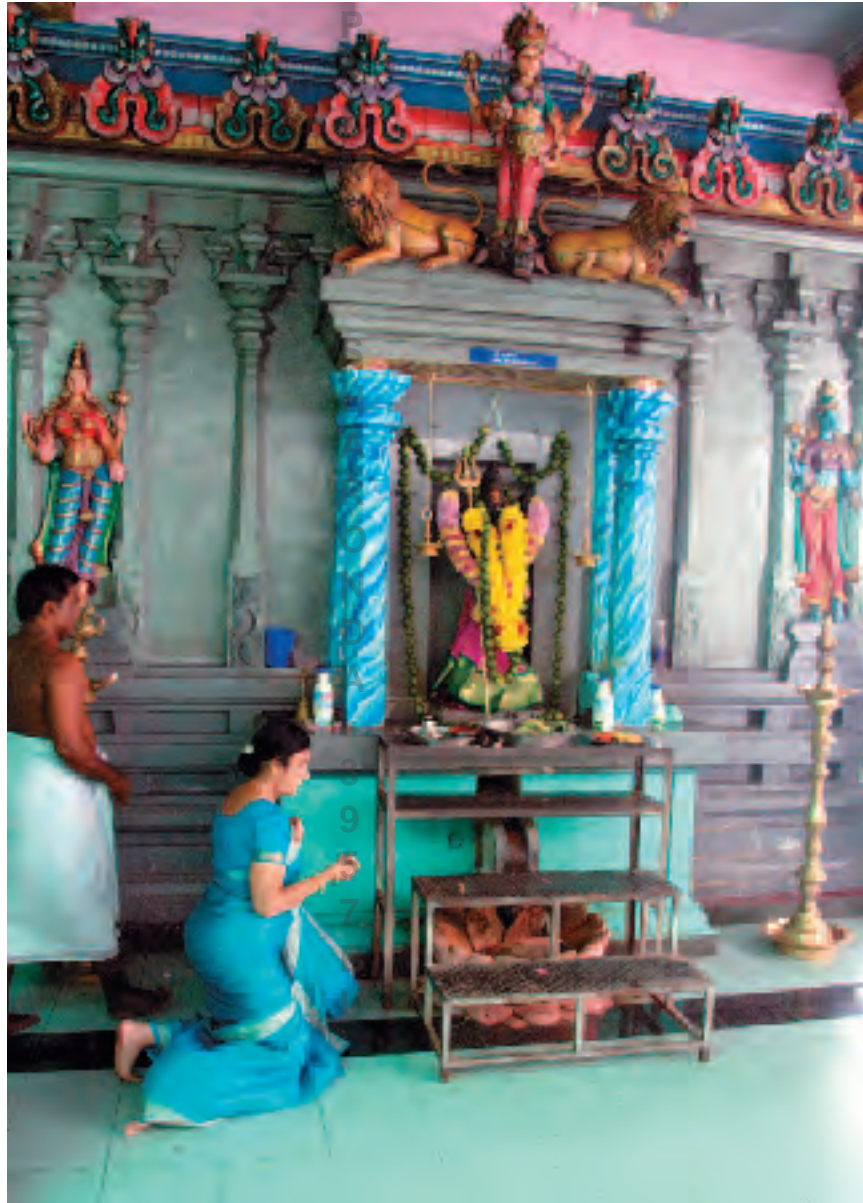
—Chandogya Upanishad<sup>34</sup>

## 104 CHAPTER 3 HINDUISM

being in the presence of the guru allows the disciple to benefit—like a plant in the sunshine—from the guru’s spirituality.

This belief also explains the intriguing practice of *darshan* (“presence”). Because people of spiritual accomplishment are thought to radiate their divine nature, disciples find opportunities to be in the presence of the holy person. Sometimes also a holy person will sit or stand silently, allowing

While priestly roles are primarily male, females in Hindu families commonly take responsibility for much devotional practice.



devotees to come forward one by one to look into the teacher's eyes and to experience the divine energy that shines out.<sup>35</sup>

### Devotion to Animals

Hinduism is distinctive among world religions for its kindness to animals. A devout Hindu does not kill or eat animals. Cows often wander along Indian streets, and cars and taxis take care to drive around them. Furthermore, visitors to some Hindu temples may find monkeys and even mice well fed and running free. Several extremely popular gods, such as Ganesha and Hanuman, have animal features; and gods such as Shiva and Vishnu are regularly portrayed in the company of their animal companions. A Shiva temple would often be thought incomplete without a statue of Nandi, the bull who is Shiva's vehicle.

This devotion to animals in Hinduism has several possible origins: an ancient deification of powerful animals, such as the elephant and tiger; the desire to neutralize dangerous or mischievous animals, such as the snake, rat, and monkey; and even a sense that human beings and animals have the same origin (a belief also common in native religions). Belief in reincarnation has undoubtedly also played a role. When they see animals and insects, many Hindus see prehuman beings who, in their spiritual evolution, will eventually become human themselves. This brings a feeling of closeness to nonhuman forms of animal life.

Among the animals, cows receive special veneration. This tradition may stem from pre-Vedic worship in the Indus River valley of the bull or cow, a symbol of fertility and economic value. In rural India, to have a cow is to have milk and butter, fuel (dried dung), and the warmth and comfort associated with household pets. With a cow, one is never utterly destitute. Affection for the cow may also arise from the strong thread of ancient devotion to the Divine Feminine—hinted at by the commonly used term *gau mata*, "mother cow."

This affection is hard for people outside India to understand. But when one sees an Indian cow, with its gentle face, ambling peacefully along a bustling Indian street, then one experiences clearly why the cow is a powerful symbol in India of all motherliness. (The fact that Muslims butcher cows is a source of terrible friction between the Hindus and Muslims in India.)

### Other Forms of Religious Devotion

Indian thought loves multiplicity. "As many as the sands of the Ganges" is a description applied to a variety of subjects. One example of multiplicity is the Hindu recognition of immense numbers of gods. Realizing that each god or goddess may have several forms and may be accompanied by divine consorts and animal companions, we gain a dizzying sense of the limitlessness of devotional possibilities. In everyday life, every person is expected to have a religious practice involving at least one of these deities, but the exact form generally is not dictated, and virtually no form of devotion is rejected.



## RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS



### Hindu Celebrations

Religious festivals are frequent and usually joyous. Some are clearly associated with the seasons, such as a springtime fertility festival and a post-monsoon festival. Others are related to events in a god's life, such as the site of his birth or places he traveled to. Some festivals are regional, and some are national.

Although India is hot during most of the year, winters can be cold, especially in the north. The spring is therefore welcomed with the celebration *Holi*. It is traditional for boys and girls to playfully throw colored water on each other (nowadays some even use squirt guns), thus evoking images of Krishna's exploits with the milkmaids.

After the monsoons of the summer months, the land is green, the air is cool, and there is a sense of

peacefulness. The season has the feeling of a second spring and a new beginning. People often spend time repairing any damages the rains may have caused.

Holidays at this time reenact the power of goodness to conquer evil forces. For example, *Divali*, recalling the return of Rama and Sita, is a time when people clean their houses and illuminate them outside with candles and lights. Ganesha and Lakshmi, who are both associated with good fortune, are particularly honored at this time.

*Durga Puja*, held in December and particularly popular in northeast India, celebrates the goddess Durga's ability to overcome dangerous powers. People dance in front of her statues in the street, and in Kolkata the festival ends with the immersion of her statues in the river.

Pilgrimage is a common form of religious expression in Hinduism, as it is in many religions. India is dotted with sites that are held to be sacred to the most popular gods and goddesses, and devotees of a particular deity will often try to visit all the important sites associated with that deity. Pilgrimages can also involve listening to a famous guru's sermons and meditating with the guru's followers.

#### PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: A CREMATION IN BALI

A stream flows through tall bamboo at one end of the town, and rice paddies stretch out to the west. In the neighboring hills are several fine temples. The splendid setting of Ubud, this town in central Bali, has long attracted artists, and the town has two major museums of Balinese art, which are lovely buildings in their own right. The town is well located for the exploration of the rest of the island.

I was staying in a small hotel down a dirt road, on the outskirts of town. My second-floor room was up a steep outdoor staircase, but it had a large veranda that looked out over the rice paddies, and every day I heard two roosters crow from a house in the middle of the fields. Each morning the woman who lived next door brought out offerings of flowers and rice on green leaves, and she put the offering with incense at a small altar, dedicated to Brahma, in her garden. As soon as she had put out the rice, said her prayer, and left, birds swooped down to take their share.

People associate Hinduism with India, but it is the principal religion in Bali, as well, where it has blended with folk religion in a highly ritualistic form. When I arrived in Ubud, I went down to the main street to find a driver. (You don't want to be your own driver on Bali.) "I'm not interested in shirts or carvings," I said to the first driver who offered his help—"just temples and ceremonies." He laughed, and we came to a rate quickly. Because his name, Nyoman, is so common in Bali, he had given himself a nickname: "Nyoman Blue." He even had business cards with the name. He said he liked the color and the sound of the word. Every morning he and I would meet on the main street, across from the Casa Luna restaurant, to plan our day's excursion.

One morning when we met he said, "We don't have to drive anywhere today. There's going to be a cremation just outside town. We can walk." He took me several blocks away to where the procession would begin. I had brought the sarong that I had to wear when visiting temples, and put it around my waist.

Already people had assembled, and the street was packed. A life-sized red wooden bull, carved from a tree trunk, had been set atop carrying poles. Nearby was a wooden tower, at the base of which was a small "house" that contained the remains of the deceased person, once an important citizen of the town. Men in black-and-white checkered sarongs and gold headbands were chatting cheerfully and smoking Indonesian clove cigarettes. More people came, but no one looked sad. I tried to find shade as we waited, and then, not knowing how long the procession and cremation would last, I went off to buy a bottle of water.

Just as I returned, the men picked up the tower and the red bull on its poles. The procession began, the men weaving left, right, and sometimes in circles, often at a run—they wanted to make sure that the spirit of the dead man could not find its way back and cause difficulties. We started up a hill. The road curved to the left as it rose, then went down into a grove of tall trees beyond the town. At last we reached a grassy clearing. The men set down what they had carried. I stood under a banyan tree, trying to be unobtrusive. A priest dressed in white watched as the shrouded remains were placed within the red bull. The priest then rang a bell and sprinkled water, with a flower in his fingers. Women relatives of the deceased came forward to place offerings within the bull, and a man nearby held a rooster. Suddenly the red bull erupted in flames, which shot up to the leaves of the banyan tree under which I stood. The smoke was intense, and I moved to the other side of the clearing to escape from it. Several men went to burn the wooden tower, which had been set down in the back of the clearing, and they seemed to congratulate each other. People chatted—it reminded me of the social time after a church service—then drifted away slowly. As we went back, I realized at a bend in the road where I was. I could see the veranda of my hotel, which was just barely visible on the ridge across the rice paddy.

## 108 CHAPTER 3 HINDUISM

A body is cremated in a ritual bull at the end of an elaborate procession and ceremony in Ubud, Bali.



What had struck me was the absence of sadness. Not only was the cremation performed months after the man had died, but any mourning was dissipated by the belief that the deceased had had other lives in the past and would probably have more in the future. The cremation had helped

transform a body back to basic elements and would allow the spirit to move onward in the cycle of rebirths and, ultimately, to release.

## HINDUISM AND THE ARTS

Given Hinduism's tendency toward multiplicity, it is not surprising that Hindu temples, particularly in southern India, are often covered with statues, many with multiple faces and arms. The concept of multiplicity has a purpose. To appreciate this, think of a wheel that begins to turn. At first, each spoke of the wheel is visible, but as the wheel turns more quickly, the spokes disappear and dissolve into a unity. The profusion of images in Hindu art can be similarly hypnotic, with the experience of multiplicity frequently leading to an overarching sense of unity. Profusion thus fits in well with the mystical orientation common in Hinduism.

Another characteristic of Hindu artistic sensibility is symbolism. One of the clearest examples is the depiction in painting and sculpture of figures with multiple arms and faces, which are not literal but symbolic representations of power and wisdom. Specific symbols are associated with individual deities and allow them to be identified. Krishna, for example, is recognized by his flute.

Hindu painting can sometimes be disappointing, such as the rather garish devotional art sold at temple gates. Many fine paintings of the past have undoubtedly vanished because of the fragility of the paper and cloth on which they were done. The murals that remain, however, demonstrate the heights that Hindu devotional painting has sometimes attained; and some yantras—geometrical paintings used in meditation—are unforgettable.

Hindu sculpture, however, far outshines Hindu painting. Fine pieces of sturdy stone and metal are on display in India and in museums around the world. Metal sculpture advanced quite early. The finest generic example of Hindu sculpture is Shiva in his guise as "ruler of the dance" (Nataraja)—an image that was introduced in southern India more than a thousand years ago but which is still produced today. For many, this sculpture represents the perfection of Hindu art, combining visual beauty with a symbolic meaning that intensifies the visual power.

The power of stone sculpture is often quite sensuous. Given the world-denying aspect of some Hindu thought, one might expect that the great stone sculpture of Hinduism would be ascetic—perhaps elongated and otherworldly. The opposite is true, however. Some of the best-known examples of stone sculpture are the figures of sensuous men and women, enjoying life and each other, on the temples of Khajuraho in central India. This sort of sculpture was influenced by Tantrism, the antipuritanical movement that teaches that everything in the world, including sex, can be used to attain higher states of consciousness.

Popular Hinduism has made use of hymns to many gods as expressions of bhakti yoga. Their regular rhythm and repetition help produce a state of altered consciousness in the worshiper, bringing a sense of selflessness and

union with the divine. Instrumental music—especially involving drums and the harmonium, a hand-pumped reed organ—has also been an integral part of religious celebrations for centuries.

Classical Indian instrumental music is less obviously religious, yet much of it has an undeniable mystical quality. It makes use of *ragas*, elements of Indian music that blend features of both scales and melodies. Frequently these ragas are played and musically developed over deep tones that are played as a drone. (The *sitar*, the best-known Indian stringed instrument, has drone strings on its side.) The drone suggests the underlying timeless world of Brahman, against which changing melodies—suggestions of the world of time—move. Musical pieces often begin quite tentatively, then gradually speed up to a very quick pace, and suddenly stop, bringing to the listener (and players) an experience of release and peace.

Indian classical dance is more obviously tied to religion. It interprets stories derived from the tales of the gods, such as Krishna and Rama. Much of it also originated as a part of religious ceremony, performed at religious festivals and in or near temples. Dance is meant to produce delicate states of feeling, some of which are thought to assist contact with particular gods.

## HINDUISM: MODERN CHALLENGES

India, as we have seen, is isolated from other lands by mountains and ocean. This has meant that its rural culture and ancient polytheism could develop undisturbed for centuries. But invasions did occur, inevitably bringing new beliefs and values. Many of these new elements were adopted, but others were fought.

One early invasion was only partially successful. Alexander the Great (d. 323 B.C.E.) brought his army from Greece and reached the Indus River, where he talked with sannyasins about religion and philosophy. He had hoped to conquer India and then reach China, too; but his men, sick and discouraged, forced him to turn back, and he died in Babylon on the way home. Had Alexander been able to fulfill his plans, his influence in India would have been immense. Despite his failure to carry them out, though, forms of Greek government and art, brought by the Greek invaders, profoundly influenced northwest India for centuries.

In the past millennium, two additional waves of influence washed across India: Islam and the British. Islam first came into India from Afghanistan, and a sultanate was set up in Delhi in 1206. After invasions from Turkmenistan, the sultanate was supplanted by the Mughal dynasty, beginning in 1398. The Mughal dynasty continued on into the eighteenth century, even as the British were consolidating their control over much of India.

There could hardly be two religions more in contrast than monotheistic Islam and polytheistic Hinduism. The contrast has produced intense conflict, which continues today. The more than five centuries of Islamic rule that began in 1206 were marked by a spectrum of attitudes toward Hinduism,



Behind this Hindu temple roofline in Benares stands the minaret of a mosque. Peaceful coexistence with other religions, especially Islam, is a major challenge for Hinduism today.

moving back and forth between cruel oppression and complete tolerance. The attitude of the state depended on the opinions of the ruler of the time. For example, Akbar (d. 1605) was so tolerant that he invited members of many other religions to speak at court, and he became convinced that India needed a new religion that would blend the best of all older religions. His great-grandson, Aurangzeb (d. 1707), however, was notoriously harsh in his zeal, destroying Hindu temples and sometimes demanding conversion or death.

Of course, not all conversions to Islam were forced. Islam was very attractive to many people. It was appealing to those who appreciated its monotheistic simplicity, its architecture, its literature, and its way of life. (Many beautiful buildings were created by the Mughals; the Taj Mahal, for example, was built by Aurangzeb's father.) Islam was also appealing because it was the religion of the aristocratic ruling classes; and it was greatly attractive to lower-caste Hindus, who felt oppressed by the Hindu caste system. Consequently, by the end of the Mughal period, Islam was the religion of millions in north India. But this fact would later create great problems, particularly when India became an independent state, and it would remain as a major source of religious friction and violence.

European values have also, gradually, posed a major challenge to traditional Hinduism. This process began after 1500 c.e., when European powers took control of parts of India. Goa, on the west coast, became a center of Portuguese culture that lasted until 1960, when Goa was taken over by Indian army forces. Similarly, Pondicherry, on the southeast coast, was at one time a center of French culture. The most significant European influence on India,



Hindu images on secular objects, such as this image of Shiva on a T-shirt, are popular in some Asian markets. However, this use of sacred images can cause controversy.

however, was English. Great Britain controlled most of the subcontinent for about two centuries. Although India became independent of Britain in 1947, British influence is evident in modern India's law, education, architecture, rail transportation, and military life.

Throughout India today one can find former British churches, mostly shuttered and closed, which only hint at both the positive and negative impact of British Christianity on India. The British were not successful in making many converts, but through their schools and colleges British Christian missionaries helped challenge and change some traditional Hindu beliefs and practices. Among those elements that were questioned were untouchability, child marriage, prohibition of remarriage for widows, polytheism, the content of education, and the role of women.

One of the earliest British-inspired Indian reformers was Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833). He was typical of the many reformers who grew up in Calcutta (now Kolkata), which was for a long time the capital of British India and the center of westernizing thought. While remaining a Hindu and even writing articles in defense of Hinduism, his thinking was influenced by both rationalism and Christianity.<sup>36</sup> He began a movement, the Brahmo Samaj, that adopted Christian-inspired elements: the belief in one God, congregational worship, and an ethical urgency that sought to better the lot of the oppressed. The Brahmo Samaj later split into three branches—all of which are still active.

Possibly as a result of contact with European values, one practice that was made illegal in the early nineteenth century was that of *sati* (or *suttee*, named after the first wife of Shiva). While there is no evidence to suggest that this practice was common, in *sati* a woman whose husband had died could volunteer, as a sign of her wifely devotion, to be burnt alive on her husband's funeral pyre. Although the British found the notion of *sati* horrible, they were unwilling to intervene at first. Reform-minded Indians, however, worked with the British to make the practice illegal. Instances of *sati* still happen today, but they are rare.

### Mohandas Gandhi

Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948) was born in the seaside town of Porbandar in northwestern India, north of Mumbai (Bombay). Because Britain then controlled the country, many Indians advocated violence as a response to British domination. This historic turning point became a defining time in Gandhi's life.

As a young man, Gandhi learned basic ideas of nonviolence from Hinduism and Jainism (see Chapter 5). He was a vegetarian because of his religious

upbringing; yet in his day, young Indian boys believed that the British were strong because they ate meat. Young Gandhi tested this theory by eating meat for a year, but he had a dream of a goat crying in his stomach and was compelled to give up his experiment.<sup>37</sup> His marriage at the age of 13 was arranged by his family to a girl named Kasturbai, also 13.

During his late teen years, family members recommended that Gandhi study law in London. Because his pious Hindu mother feared the bad influences he would be exposed to there, he agreed to take a vow that he would not eat meat, drink wine, or touch a woman while abroad. A Jain monk administered the vow, and Gandhi left for London in the fall of 1888 at the age of 19. Kasturbai and their young son, Harilal, remained with Gandhi's parents.

Feeling rebellious at the time, Gandhi enthusiastically adopted English clothes and manners and even took dancing lessons; but in London he also began serious study. Becoming familiar with the Christian Bible, he was particularly moved by Jesus' call to forgiveness and nonviolence, which he found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) in the New Testament.

It was in London, too, that he first read the Bhagavad Gita, discovering outside India the wisdom in Hinduism. He took to heart its ideal of the active but selfless human being. Such a person, Gandhi later wrote, is a person who is "without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others."<sup>38</sup>

After obtaining his law degree in 1891, Gandhi returned to India; but soon he decided to accept an offer to practice law in South Africa, where there was a large Indian population. There he experienced the inequalities of racial segregation and legal codes that favored Europeans over non-Europeans, and he began to perfect the ideologies that he would later spread in India. His thinking was influenced by writings that advocated simplicity and nonviolence, such as the essay "On Civil Disobedience," by the American author Henry David Thoreau, and the book *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy. A farm that Gandhi bought became something of an ashram, while his law office in Johannesburg became a center for nonviolent political action. He began to employ strikes and marches to publicize his goals and to wear Indian clothing (specifically the *dhoti*, a type of loincloth) as a way of identifying with the Indian cause.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and dedicated his life to seeking Indian independence from Britain. Although he was repeatedly imprisoned, Gandhi insisted that all his followers remain nonviolent. For him, *ahimsa* (nonviolence) was fundamental. Gandhi not only believed in nonviolence for its own



This 1946 photo shows two leaders: a bespectacled Mohandas Gandhi, who eventually led India to its independence; and Jawaharlal Nehru, who was to be the nation's first prime minister.



sake, but he felt that it gave a great moral power to its adherents and that it could sway those who were cruel, thoughtless, and violent. He called this power *satyagraha* (“reality force,” or “holding onto truth”). Gandhi made use of every possible nonviolent technique: marches, hunger strikes, talks, demonstrations, and, of course, publicity. He argued that violence only begets further violence and brutalizes those who are violent, whereas nonviolence begets admiration, spiritual greatness, and ultimate freedom.<sup>39</sup>

One brilliant example of Gandhi’s nonviolent techniques was the Salt March of 1930. At that time the British taxed all salt eaten in India and made it illegal to possess salt not bought from the government monopoly. Gandhi cleverly led a three-week march on foot from his ashram to the ocean, nearly 250 miles away. Fewer than a hundred people began the march with him, but thousands joined along the way. Reaching the sea, Gandhi collected the natural salt left on the beach by the waves—thus breaking the law. In seashore communities all around India, people came to do the same, and thousands were put into jail along with Gandhi. This march was the turning point. Weakened both by the Indian independence movement and by World War II, the British forces at last agreed to leave India in 1947. Perceiving Gandhi’s greatness following the Salt March, the writer Rabindranath Tagore had called him *Mahatma* (“great spirit”). This became his title.

Gandhi believed so much in loving tolerance that he hoped it could keep a newly independent India free of religious battles. Muslim leaders, however, fearful that the Hindu majority would oppress Muslims, worked to create the new separate Muslim state of Pakistan. Some Hindu militants wanted revenge for what they perceived as wrongs done by Muslims to Hindus in the new Pakistan, and one of these Hindu militants assassinated Gandhi early in 1948. Gandhi’s last words were *Ram, Ram* (“God, God”).

Gandhi’s example was so powerful that the idea of *satyagraha* spread to other countries and was adopted in the 1960s by the Baptist minister Martin Luther King Jr. to help protest racial segregation in the United States. King insisted that activists march peacefully and sit in restaurants quietly, without responding to threats or cruelty. Their gentle persistence, magnified by publicity, brought success.<sup>3</sup>

### Contemporary Issues

The issues that moderate Hinduism faces, as it is evolving today, come from three sources: the conservative social teachings of traditional Hinduism, the centuries-old conflict with Islam, and the challenges of the contemporary world.

Some Hindus find religious justification for preserving the rules of untouchability, keeping strictly the divisions of the caste system, and limiting women to traditional roles. The injustices of untouchability have long been recognized, but legal assistance for untouchables came only in the twentieth century. Untouchables, now allowed to enter all temples in India, have made great strides toward some social equality and opportunity. For

example, there is a quota system for untouchables to ensure their inclusion in government positions and their admission to universities. The reality, however, is that in the villages untouchables still must live separately from others. They do not feel free to use wells and other water sources that are used by higher-caste persons, and they feel threatened by violence should they attempt to go beyond their traditional limits.

The caste system is weakening, especially in large cities. But a glance at a big-city Sunday newspaper reveals the caste system's continuing hold on contemporary life. It is common, for example, for Indian parents to place ads seeking a spouse for their child, and these ads frequently detail the son or daughter's caste, educational background, and sometimes even complexion.

The role of women has expanded in modern India, but it remains a focus of heated debate. In India's distant, pre-Vedic past, it is possible that women played an important public role. The importance of female deities and the fact that there have been many female gurus may be a continuation of this early tradition. But the dominant Vedic culture was thoroughly patriarchal. Just as it has been canonized in other religions, so male domination in India was canonized by the law code of Manu (second century B.C.E.). This code made the female subservient to the male and the wife subservient to her husband. A good wife was expected to treat her husband as a god, no matter what his character or treatment of her. Women were not trained to read and write, as this was thought to detract from their principal roles as wives and mothers. Nowadays Hindu women commonly learn to read and write, and many go on to higher education and important public roles. Critics, however, point out that women's education is often only basic and that women are largely limited to a few career areas—teaching, secretarial work, nursing, and medicine. Critics also point out that in villages women are sometimes confined to traditional domestic roles under threat of violence from their husbands. A related problem involves the dowry payments made by a bride's family to the bridegroom's family. In instances when the dowry is deemed insufficient, the wives are threatened and sometimes even killed by the husband's family members, thereby freeing the husband to marry again.

Conflict between Hindus and Muslims has been ongoing, particularly since the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Gandhi had hoped that India would not have to split into parts along religious lines, but Muslim leaders insisted on separation. Ironically, the partition did not bring peace. Disagreement about the border between India and Pakistan, particularly in Kashmir, has never been resolved. Two wars have already been fought, and a third is a constant threat. Since both countries possess atomic weapons, the potential horrors of such a war are especially great.

Conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims within India itself have also continually flared up. Old wounds were reopened in 1992, when Hindu activists destroyed a mosque at Ayodhya in northern India. They argued that it was the birthplace of Rama and the site of a Hindu temple that had been destroyed by the Muslim ruler Babur and replaced with a mosque. Atrocities

on each side have been the result. While India claims to be a secular state, the fact that 85 percent of its people are Hindu gives Hindu causes an undeniable weight, and Muslims argue that the government has not adequately protected them. Similar conflicts have occurred in Kashmir at the site of a Hindu shrine to Shiva. Just as fundamentalism has risen in several other religions, it is now influential in Hinduism.

The third source of conflict comes from the intrusion of contemporary values, particularly individualism, women's rights, sexual freedom, modern fashion, and consumerism. Globalization has made instant some of the conflicts that once arose more slowly. There is now quick communication through e-mail and cell phones, and television brings new values irresistibly into the home. The Western world of banking and financial credit is quickly moving many of its operations to India, where college graduates speak English but salaries are still comparatively low. It is already the case that an American consumer making a routine call for computer help will probably be talking with a computer specialist in Bangalore, Mumbai, or Delhi. These jobs will provide greater economic opportunities for women as well as men, inevitably raising the potential for conflict between traditional values and new freedoms.

### Hindu Influence beyond India

Over the centuries, Hinduism has spread to countries near India and afar, often by way of traders and immigrants. In a few places it has remained strong, whereas in others it has surrendered to other religions. Hinduism is the dominant religion of Nepal, where about 80 percent of the population is Hindu. Hinduism was once widespread in Southeast Asia, but today only traces of it remain. In Cambodia is the great ruin Angkor Wat, originally a Hindu complex. In Thailand, vestiges of a Brahmanical priesthood are particularly active in court ceremony, and images of Brahma, Vishnu, and Ganesha are common. Some forms of ritualistic Buddhism in northern and eastern Asia have kept alive a few Hindu gods, such as Indra, in art and ceremony. Hinduism, of course, continues wherever Indians have migrated.

Hinduism was once widespread in Indonesia, where it was introduced by Indian traders. During the Muslim invasions, however, the Hindu court was forced to retreat from the main island of Java and settled to the east on the small island of Bali, where a fascinating example of Hindu culture thrives. Here, Hinduism lives on in a complicated, beautiful form that is mixed with folk religion and Buddhism. Each village has Hindu temples, where dances based on Indian tales (especially about Rama) are performed. Shadow-puppet plays tell Hindu stories, and Balinese wood carvings reproduce images of Hindu gods, goddesses, and heroes. The central temple of Bali, a complex of buildings on the volcanic Mount Agung, is dedicated to the Trimurti. Although the rest of Indonesia is primarily Muslim, some Hindu elements remain in Indonesian dance and puppet plays.

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES



### The Hindu Diaspora

The word *diaspora* comes from a Greek word that suggests the sowing of seeds. Like seeds being cast in all directions, Hindus have left India over the last two centuries and settled in many faraway parts of the world, taking their religion with them. The first wave of migration began in the nineteenth century, when the British transported Indians, mostly men, to work as agricultural laborers in their other colonies around the world. Many worked on farms in South Africa, Kenya, Mauritius, Trinidad, and Fiji. One migrant who eventually gained prominence was the political leader Mohandas Gandhi. Though born in India, he began his law career and then his pro-independence work in South Africa. Only later in life did he return to India to become a pacifist leader of the independence movement. Smaller numbers of Indians, in order to pursue trade, moved to many large cities throughout Asia.

The second wave of Indian migration began in the first half of the twentieth century, when Indian soldiers who fought in the British army during the First and Second World Wars settled where they had been stationed. This wave of migration continued after India gained its independence from Britain in 1947 and entered the British Commonwealth. Indians moved to Britain and to Commonwealth countries, particularly to Canada and Australia. The large cities in these countries began to develop important Hindu communities.

The third wave of migration began in the second half of the twentieth century. Indians with academic and business backgrounds moved to the United States and to the European continent to study and to pursue careers in teaching and business. They brought with them not only their vegetarian cuisine, their music, and their love of “Bollywood” films, but also their temples and religious customs. Independent films and novels by writers of Indian background explore the complex experience of diaspora Indians. (Accessible examples are the film *Monsoon Wedding* and the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri.) Such works describe how diaspora Indians are pulled in different directions by their desires to be part of the modern Western world and, at the same time, to fulfill their traditional obligations to their parents, culture, and religion.

Indian communities now exist in more than 150 countries. The result is that Hinduism, the predominant religion of India, is becoming a global religion. Hinduism is not a missionary religion and does not normally seek converts. But Hindu worship is today carried on at thousands of temples outside of India. Those who are interested in learning more about the religion can visit one of the several hundred Hindu temples that exist in the United States and Canada. Most are in metropolitan areas, but some exist in unexpected places, including Mississippi and Nova Scotia. The Internet has detailed lists and further information.

Hinduism has had some influence on the West since the nineteenth century. The earliest impact was intellectual, when translations of the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita became available in Latin, French, German, and English. The translations generated great interest among philosophers, scholars, and poets. In the United States, the New England movement called Transcendentalism owes a good deal to its literary contact with Hinduism. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), and Walt Whitman (1819–1892) all spoke in their writings of the sacredness of nature and the ultimate unity of all things, and they sometimes even used terms demonstrating Indian influence, such as *Brahma* and *Oversoul* (another name for Brahman). This literary trend was expressed in another form in England, where composers such as Gustav Holst (1874–1934) and Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) put selections from the Rig Veda and Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* to music.

## 118 CHAPTER 3 HINDUISM

Dance retains an important role in traditional Hindu ceremonies. Here, Krishna's birthday is celebrated with music and ecstatic dance.



The next wave of influence occurred when Indian gurus began to travel to the West. The first of these gurus was Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who represented Hinduism at the first World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. He was the successor to Ramakrishna (mentioned earlier), the noted mystic and devotee of the Great Mother. Vivekananda began the Ramakrishna Mission and set up Vedanta societies and Ramakrishna centers across Europe, India, and the United States. A Vedantist center has existed in Hollywood since the 1930s, and British writers such as Christopher Isherwood (1904–1986), Aldous Huxley (1894–1963), and Gerald Heard (1889–1971) all practiced meditation there. Isherwood, under the influence of his guru, Swami Prabhavananda, became a Vedantist and translated the *Bhagavad Gita* into English.

The third wave of Hindu influence in the West occurred in the late 1960s. The American counterculture embraced India as the fount of wisdom. Commercial air travel made it possible for Indian teachers to come to the West and for westerners to travel to India. Some westerners, such as the Beatles, studied in India with the guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and became enamored of Hinduism. (George Harrison's song "My Sweet Lord" was written to honor Krishna.) The Maharishi eventually came to the United States and established the Transcendental Meditation movement, which promotes regular daily meditation to achieve health and happiness. (The North American



center of the movement is at Maharishi Vedic City, near Fairfield, Iowa.) Some westerners who went to India became disciples of Sai Baba, a contemporary teacher in south-central India, and still others, such as the psychologist Richard Alpert (who took the name Ram Dass), studied with Indian teachers and returned to write about their experiences. Western visitors to India adopted forms of yoga, Hindu vegetarian cuisine, Indian clothing, and Indian music and then took them back to Europe, Canada, and the United States, where they entered the Western mainstream.

The movement called the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was founded in New York in 1967 by Swami Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (1896–1977) to spread a form of devotional practice among westerners. Commonly known as the Hare Krishna movement, ISKCON has succeeded in attracting westerners to live a traditional form of Hindu religious life. Its practitioners worship Krishna as the highest incarnation of the divine, chant daily, eat a vegetarian diet, and, if celibate, wear the traditional orange robe. The impact of this movement in the West has been particularly strong in the area of cuisine, prompting the opening of vegetarian restaurants across Europe, the United States, and Canada.

What we have just discussed—the impact of Hinduism on Western thinkers, musicians, and poets—was in large measure achieved by non-Hindus inspired by Hindu culture. Now Hindus themselves, in and out of India, are producing internationally acclaimed works, especially novels and films. Their particular points of view result from experiences accumulated across centuries in one of the world's richest cultures. Those experiences will in time help global citizens, whatever their origins, to see themselves with an understanding that has been enriched by the Hindu worldview.

Tucked between an international hotel and two elevated Skytrain rails is Bangkok's Erawan Shrine. Although Thailand is officially a Buddhist country, this very popular place of prayer has an image of the Hindu god Brahma at its center. Worshipers offer incense, garlands of marigolds, and prayers for good fortune.

## READING

## KRISHNA'S ADVICE TO ARJUNA

*In the Bhagavad Gita, the god Krishna teaches Arjuna that the wise person rises above pleasure and pain and sees the indestructible Spirit that lies hidden within all the changes of everyday life.*

As the Spirit of our mortal body wanders on in childhood and youth and old age, the Spirit wanders on to a new body: of this the sage has no doubts.

From the world of the senses, Arjuna, comes heat and cold, and pleasure and pain. They come and they go; they are transient. Arise above them, strong soul.

The man whom these cannot move, whose soul is one, beyond pleasure and pain, is worthy of life in eternity.

The unreal never is; the Real never is not. This truth indeed has been seen by those who can see the true.

Interwoven in his creation, the Spirit is beyond destruction. No one can bring to an end the Spirit which is everlasting.<sup>40</sup>

## TEST YOURSELF

- The culture that flourished in the Indus River valley before 2000 B.C.E. is named the \_\_\_\_\_ culture.
  - Vedas
  - Harappa
  - Aryan
  - Indian
- The ancient scriptures of India are called the \_\_\_\_\_. There are four basic text collections: the Rig, the Yajur, the Sama, and the Atharva.
  - Harappas
  - Sanskrits
  - Vedas
  - "Shining Fathers"
- Around 500 B.C.E., Indian civilization experienced such widespread and important changes that the period is called the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Philosopher
  - Prophet
  - Axis
  - Ascetic
- In the Upanishads, the term \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the experience of the sacred within nature and the external universe; while \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the experience of the sacred within oneself. Both terms may be used interchangeably.
  - karma; moksha
  - Brahman; Atman
  - samsara; moksha
  - brahmins; samsara
- The \_\_\_\_\_ is part of a very long epic poem called the Mahabharata; it recalls themes from the Upanishads.
  - Maya
  - Bhagavad Gita
  - Pandavas
  - Jainism
- Hinduism has a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ system with five main social classes: *brahmin* (priest), *kshatriya* (warrior-noble), *vaishya* (merchant), *shudra* (peasant), and *dalit* (untouchable).
  - work
  - education
  - ritual
  - caste
- The word *yoga* means "\_\_\_\_\_."
  - contemplation
  - enlightenment
  - practice
  - union

8. Shankara's belief that spiritual liberation was achieved when the individual personally came to understand the unity of all things is called \_\_\_\_\_.
- devotion
  - Jnana
  - monism
  - meditation
9. When linked together, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva are often called the \_\_\_\_\_.
- Trimurti
  - Shiva
  - Hindu
  - sacred text
10. Mohandas Gandhi's use of \_\_\_\_\_ techniques, including marches, hunger strikes, talks, demonstrations, and publicity, were adopted by Martin Luther King Jr. to help protest racial segregation in the United States.
- traditional
  - nonviolent
  - disruptive
  - Mahatma*
11. Imagine on an exam you are asked to express the most important ideas of the Upanishads in only two sentences. What would you write for your two sentences? How do these sentences capture what is most important in the Upanishads?
12. Choose one of the modern or contemporary challenges facing Hinduism discussed in this chapter. According to Hindu belief, which of the following deities do you think would be especially equipped to assist Hindus in overcoming this challenge: Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, or Devi? Why?

## RESOURCES

### Books

- Bhagavad-Gita: The Song of God*. Trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood. New York: Signet, 2002. A justly famous translation, with a valuable introduction by Aldous Huxley.
- Gandhi, Mohandas. *The Bhagavad Gita According to Gandhi*. Ed. Strohmeier, John. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Hills Books, 2000. The first book to include Gandhi's *Gita* text and his commentary in their entirety.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Essential Gandhi*. Ed. Louis Fischer. New York: Vintage, 2002. Gandhi's writings on politics, nonviolence, spirituality, and his own life.
- Kinsley, David R. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. A comprehensive survey of Hindu goddesses and the role of the divine feminine within Hinduism.
- Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*. New York: Mariner Books, 1999. An award-winning collection of short stories that chronicle the dislocation experienced by Indian migrants to the United States.
- Mittal, S., and G. Thursby, eds. *The Hindu World*. New York: Routledge, 2004. A comprehensive guide to the various literatures, traditions, and practices of Hinduism.
- Patel, Sanjay. *The Little Book of Hindu Deities: From the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow*. New York:

- Plume, 2006. An informative and entertaining introduction to the Hindu pantheon, written and colorfully illustrated by an animator at Pixar studios.
- Ramana Maharshi, Sri. *The Essential Teachings of Ramana Maharshi: A Visual Journey*. Ed. Matthew Greenblatt. Carlsbad, CA: Inner Directions, 2002. Teachings of a great spiritual teacher, combined with photos of him and his ashram.
- The Upanishads*. Trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester. New York: Signet, 2002. A readable translation of twelve basic Upanishads.

### Film/TV

- Aparajito* (English subtitles. Director Satyajit Ray; Merchant-Ivory/Sony.) A depiction of a man's life in Benares and the portrayal of the struggles of his father, a poor brahmin priest.
- Gandhi*. (Director Richard Attenborough; Columbia Tristar.) An epic rendering of the life of Mahatma Gandhi that won several Academy Awards.
- Ganges: River to Heaven*. (Aerial Productions.) A documentary on a hospice in Benares, where aging Hindus come to die in the hope that death at this site will improve their karma in the next life.
- Hinduism: Faith, Festivals, and Rituals*. (Films Media Group.) An examination of devotional ceremonies in the southern Indian state of Kerala.



## 122 CHAPTER 3 HINDUISM

*Mahabharata.* (Director Peter Brook; Parabola Video.) A modern, English-language production of the great Hindu epic.

*Mystic India.* (Giant Screen Films.) An epic account of the late-eighteenth-century spiritual awakening of Neelkanth, an 11-year-old yogi who journeys by foot throughout India for seven years and more than seven thousand miles, seeking enlightenment.

*Short Cut to Nirvana: Kumbh Mela.* (Mela Films LLC.) A documentary exploring the Kumbh Mela, a festival held every twelve years, said to be the largest gathering of human beings in the world.

**Music/Audio**

*The Bhagavad Gita.* (Multimedia and Culture.) An unabridged audiobook of the famed discourse between Krishna and Arjuna (translated into English by Juan Mascaró).

*Darshana: Vedic Chanting for Daily Practice.* (Mother Om Sounds.) A compilation of Vedic chants for daily practice, as performed by Sri Swamini Mayatitananda (Mother Maya).

*Hymns from the Vedas and Upanishads, Vedic Chants.* (Delos Records.) Traditional hymns and chants from classic religious sources.

*Religious Music of Asia.* (Smithsonian Folkways.) A recording of Hindu devotional music.

*Sounds of India.* (Columbia.) Classical devotional music of India, performed by Ravi Shankar.

**Internet**

HinduNet: <http://www.hindunet.org/>. A gateway site that allows users to learn about Hindu faith and ritual, visit Hindu temples online, listen to Hindu scriptures, and participate in discussion forums.

Sanatan Society: <http://www.sanatansociety.org/>. A useful resource for information on Hindu gods, yoga and meditation, Vedic astrology, vegetarianism, and other related topics.

Virtual Religion Index: <http://virtualreligion.net/vri/hindu.html>. Individual sections devoted to the Vedas, the Upanishads, the epics, theology and devotion, schools and teachers, and yoga.

**KEY TERMS**

**ahimsa** (*uh-him'-sa*): "Nonharm," "nonviolence."

**ashram** (*ash'-ram*): A spiritual community.

**Atman** (*at'-mun*): The spiritual essence of all individual human beings.

**avatar** (*ah'-va-tar*): An earthly embodiment of a deity.

**Bhagavad Gita** (*bhuh'-guh-vud gee'-ta*): A religious literary work about Krishna.

**bhakti** (*bhuk'-ti*): Devotion to a deity or guru.

**bhakti yoga**: The spiritual discipline of devotion to a deity or guru.

**Brahma** (*bru-h-mah'*): God of creation.

**Brahman** (*bru-h'-mun*): The spiritual essence of the universe.

**brahmin** (*bru-h'-min*): Member of the priestly caste.

**caste** (*kaast*): One of the major social classes sanctioned by Hinduism.

**Devi** (*deh'-vee*): "Goddess"; the Divine Feminine, also called the Great Mother.

**dhyana** (*dhyah'-nah*): Meditation.

**Durga**: "Awe-inspiring," "distant"; a mother-goddess, a form of Devi.

**guru** (*goo'-roo*): A spiritual teacher.

**hatha yoga** (*hah'-tha yoh'-ga*): The spiritual discipline of postures and bodily exercises.

**jnana yoga** (*gyah'-nuh yoh'-ga; juh-nah'-nah yoh'-ga*): The spiritual discipline of knowledge and insight.

**Kali** (*kah'-lee*): "Dark," a form of Devi; a goddess associated with destruction and rebirth.

**karma**: The moral law of cause and effect that determines the direction of rebirth.

**karma yoga**: The spiritual discipline of selfless action.

**Krishna**: A god associated with divine playfulness; a form of Vishnu.

**kundalini yoga** (*koon-duh-lee'-nee yoh'-ga*): A form of raja yoga that envisions the individual's energy as a force that is capable of being raised from the center of the body to the head, producing a state of joy.

**mantra**: A short sacred phrase, often chanted or used in meditation.

**maya**: "Illusion"; what keeps us from seeing reality correctly; the world, viewed inadequately.

**moksha** (*mohk'-shah*): "Liberation" from personal limitation, egotism, and rebirth.

**monism:** The philosophical position that all apparently separate realities are ultimately one; the belief that God and the universe are the same, that the universe is divine.

**puja** (*poo'-jah*): Offerings and ritual in honor of a deity.

**raja yoga:** The “royal” discipline of meditation.

**Rama:** A god and mythical king; a form of Vishnu.

**samadhi** (*suh-mah'-dhee*): A state of complete inner peace resulting from meditation.

**samsara** (*suhm-sah'-rah*): The everyday world of change and suffering leading to rebirth.

**sannyasin** (*san-nyas'-in*): A wandering holy man.

**Shiva** (*shee'-vah*): A god associated with destruction and rebirth.

**Trimurti** (*tree-mur'-tee*): “Three forms” of the divine—the three gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

**Upanishads** (*oo-pahn'-i-shads*): Written meditations on the spiritual essence of the universe and the self.

**Vedas** (*vay'-duhs*): Four collections of ancient prayers and rituals.

**Vishnu:** A god associated with preservation and love.

**yoga:** A spiritual discipline; a method for perfecting one’s union with the divine.

Visit the Online Learning Center at [www.mhhe.com/molloy5e](http://www.mhhe.com/molloy5e) for additional exercises and features, including “Religion beyond the Classroom” and “For Fuller Understanding.”

P  
R  
I  
M  
A  
R  
Y  
S  
H  
A  
R  
O  
N  
D  
A  
3  
9  
5  
7  
B  
U



D  
A  
7  
B  
U

## CHAPTER 4

## Buddhism


**FIRST ENCOUNTER**

You have arrived in Bangkok, the first stop on a study-tour of Southeast Asia that later will also take you to Cambodia and Laos. Your first hours in the city bring you a chaos of sights and sounds. On the bus from the airport, you notice a number of golden temples, but also a monorail and, everywhere, traffic jams. The city's core is a jungle of modern glass skyscrapers, one of which is your hotel. After you check in, you walk outside to see where you are. All around the hotel are vendors with carts cluttering the cracked sidewalks, selling mango slices, chunks of pineapple, little pancakes, orchid plants, sunglasses, watches, keys, false teeth, and toy motorcycles made of soda cans. You're jet-lagged, but you've seen enough to fall asleep, knowing that you are now in the middle of an overwhelming tapestry of humanity.

In the morning, following your hotel's breakfast buffet, your group is bussed to the World Buddhist Fellowship headquarters, where you listen to a shaven-headed westerner in an orange robe. He says that he is ordinarily a "forest monk" in north-east Thailand but is in the capital for a few days to

teach. After explaining that meditation is at the heart of a monk's life, he discusses the principles of meditation, some of which sound familiar. With his guidance, you and your friends then practice different forms of meditation. First you do sitting meditation, simply being aware of your breathing, in and out. After that you do walking meditation. He makes you walk very slowly, telling you to think about nothing other than the experience of each step you take.



After lunch back at the hotel, you have the afternoon to yourself. Just a couple of blocks away, partially visible through an alley, is what looks like a large temple. The monk this morning told you that Thailand's temples are almost always open to the public. So you head up the alley and then walk up a long flight of stairs to the temple's entrance. There are many pairs of shoes outside the door, and you add yours to the collection. You step inside, pause to let your eyes adjust to the dimmer light, and notice the subsiding traffic noise.

Despite all the shoes, you see only one other person, someone sitting very still in the middle of the floor. From her posture, you assume that she is practicing sitting meditation. Not wanting to disturb her, you sit quietly just inside the door. After you cross your legs, you place your hands in your lap and begin to meditate yourself, trying hard to focus only on your breathing.

Eventually you leave, very quietly since the woman sitting on the floor has still not moved. You wonder why people come to a temple to do this. Don't you usually go to temples for services, or to pray? Is meditation a form of praying? How can you pray if you don't use words? You become curious about the life of the Buddha, the founder of this religion, and wonder where all of this began.

### THE BEGINNINGS OF BUDDHISM: THE LIFE OF THE BUDDHA

Buddhism is one of the world's oldest and most significant religions. It has spread through almost all of Asia, influencing the many cultures there, and is now gaining followers in the West. But it had its beginnings in India and arose from the experience of one person.

India in the fifth century B.C.E. was in a state of religious ferment. Great enthusiasm for personal religious experience led people to experiment with meditation and deep breathing and to study with gurus. A growing number of schools of philosophy taught new ways of thinking, some of which opposed the growth of the priestly Vedic religion. Into this world came Siddhartha Gautama, who would come to be known as the Buddha, or the Awakened One.

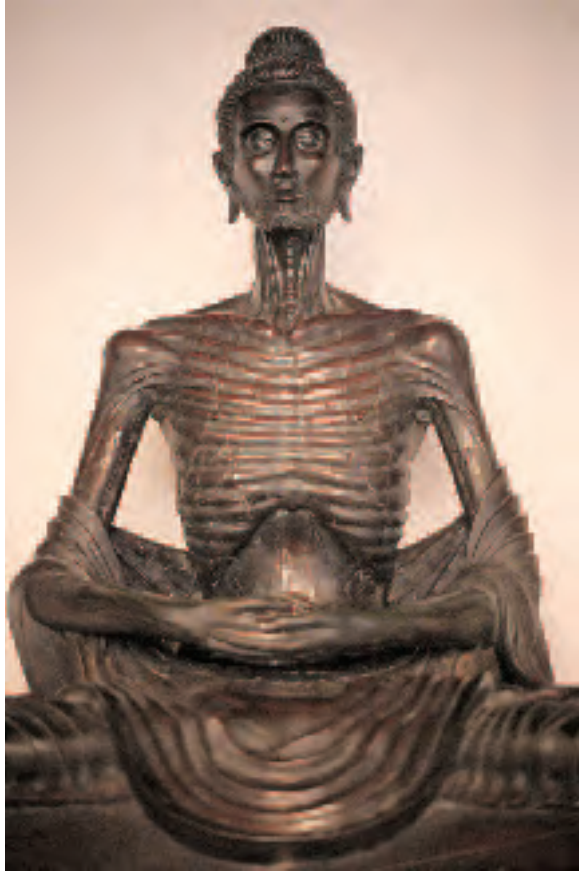
Because so many devout legends have grown up around the story of the Buddha's life and teaching, it is sometimes hard to separate fact from



Siddhartha, a wealthy prince before he attained enlightenment, is here portrayed as the Buddha, with princely crown and raiment. This depiction is frequent in the temples of Myanmar.

fiction.<sup>1</sup> Although there is no single, authoritative biography of the Buddha, his legendary life follows these outlines. Siddhartha was born the son of a prince of the Shakya tribe in what is today Nepal, in the lower Himalaya Mountains. Legend says that his mother, Maya, dreamt that a white elephant entered her side—this was the moment of conception of the future Buddha—and that Siddhartha was born miraculously from her side. Siddhartha's mother died a week after childbirth, and the boy was raised by his aunt.

When a sage inspected the child, he saw special marks on Siddhartha's body, indicating that he would be an illustrious person. At his naming ceremony, priests foretold that his life could go in one of two directions: either he would follow in his father's footsteps, inheriting his position and becoming a great king, a "world ruler"; or, if he were exposed to the sight of suffering, he would become a great spiritual leader, a "world teacher."



Siddhartha, as depicted here, practiced physical deprivation, hoping to achieve insight. This approach proved to be inadequate.

Siddhartha's father, wanting his son to succeed him, took measures to keep the boy from exposure to suffering. Kept in a large walled palace compound, Siddhartha grew up in luxury; married, at an early age, a young woman his father had chosen; and had a son. He was educated and trained as a warrior to prepare for eventually taking over his father's role.

All was going according to his father's plan until Siddhartha disobeyed his father's command not to leave the royal grounds. Visiting a nearby town, he soon witnessed the suffering of ordinary life. He saw—and was moved by—what are called the Four Passing Sights. He came across an old man, crooked and toothless; a sick man, wasted by disease; and a corpse being taken for cremation. Then he saw a *sannyasin* (a wandering holy man, a renunciate) who had no possessions but seemed to be at peace.

The paintings in Buddhist temples retell dramatically Siddhartha's response to what he saw. At 29, he realized that his life up until then had been a pleasant prison, and he saw the same programmed life stretching forward into his old age. The suffering he had just encountered, however, prompted him to question the meaning of human experience, and it threw him into a depression that kept him from enjoying his luxurious and carefree life any longer.

Siddhartha decided to escape. Legend tells how he took a last look at his sleeping family and attendants and rode to the edge of the palace grounds, where he gave his horse to his servant, removed his jewels, and cut off his long black hair. Putting on simple clothing, he went out into the world with nothing but questions. This event is called the Great Going Forth.

It is common in Indian spirituality to seek a teacher, and Siddhartha did just that. Traveling from teacher to teacher, he learned techniques of meditation and discussed philosophy, but he was ultimately unsatisfied. Begging for food and sleeping outdoors, Siddhartha spent about six years seeking answers to his questions—particularly about the troubling facts of suffering and death. His own mother had died young, a death that was apparently without meaning. Why, he often asked, is there suffering? Why do people have to grow old and die? Is there a God or unchanging divine reality behind the surface of things? Is there a soul and an afterlife? Are we reborn? Can we avoid suffering? How should we live?

Seeking answers to his questions, Siddhartha discovered that his teachers agreed on some issues but not on others. So, in the company of five other

nomadic “seekers,” he set out to find the answers he needed. To rid himself of distractions and to purify himself spiritually, Siddhartha also practiced great austerity. Living on as little food, drink, and sleep as possible, he hoped that he would find new insight and even gain spiritual powers.

Eventually, Siddhartha collapsed from weakness. He was found resting under a sacred tree by a kind woman, who had come from the nearby town of Gaya to worship the spirit of the great tree. (Siddhartha was so emaciated that she may have thought him to be the tree spirit.) She offered him food, which he accepted gratefully and ate under the shade of the tree, out of the hot sun. Once revived, Siddhartha realized that his austerities had not strengthened him or brought him any closer to the answers he sought. His five companions, having discovered Siddhartha’s rejection of asceticism, abandoned him.

Being a practical person, Siddhartha decided to adopt a path of moderation—a middle way between self-indulgence and asceticism. He went to another tree, now called the Bodhi Tree,<sup>2</sup> and sat facing the east, resolving to remain there in meditation until he had the understanding he needed. Various traditions give different details, but every version talks of his struggle with hunger, thirst, doubt, and weakness. Some stories describe the work of an evil spirit, Mara, and his daughters who tempted Siddhartha with sensuality and fear. But Siddhartha resisted all temptation. During one entire night, as he sat meditating under a full moon, Siddhartha entered increasingly profound states of awareness. Legend says that he saw his past lives, fathomed the laws of karma that govern everyone, and finally achieved insight into release from suffering and rebirth.

At last, at dawn, he reached a state of profound understanding, called his Awakening, or Enlightenment (**bodhi**). He saw suffering, aging, and death in a new way, recognizing them as an inevitable part of life, but also seeing the possibility of release. We might wonder about the influence of the tree and the moon on Siddhartha. The tree overhead, with its thousands of leaves and twigs, despite its appearance of permanence, would change, age, and die; and the full moon, with its brilliant light, was a promise of new understanding. Whatever the cause of his enlightenment, Siddhartha arose and said that he was now a person who had woken up. From this came his new name: the Buddha, the Awakened One, taken from a Sanskrit word meaning “to wake up.”

The Buddha remained for some time at the site of his enlightenment at Gaya, savoring his new way of looking at life and continuing to meditate. Mythic stories relate that during this time, when a heavy downpour occurred, a cobra raised itself over him to protect him from the rain. (In much of Asia, the snake is not considered a symbol of evil, but rather a protective animal.) At last the Buddha traveled west. He explained his awakening to his five former companions at a deer park at Sarnath, near Benares. Although they had parted with him earlier for abandoning his ascetic habits, they reconciled with him and became his first disciples.

The Buddha spent the rest of his long life traveling from village to village in northeast India, teaching his insights and his way of life. He attracted





A wonder of the world, this huge statue of the Reclining Buddha in Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka, may be unsurpassed in conveying the serenity that is the core of Buddhist teaching.

many followers, and donors gave land, groves, and buildings to the new movement. The Buddha thus began an order (*sangha*) of monks and later of nuns. The Buddha's way was a path of moderation, a middle path, not only for himself but also for his disciples. It was midway between the worldly life of the householder, which he had lived before leaving home, and the ascetic life of social withdrawal, which he had followed after his departure from home. But the specifics of monastic community life and its relation to the nonmonastic world—on whom the monks relied for food—had to be worked out over time.

Tradition tells of the warm friendship the Buddha shared with his disciples and of their way of life, wandering about begging and teaching. The monks remained in one place only during the monsoon months of summer, when the rains were so heavy that travel was impractical. Looking on the Buddha's lifestyle from a modern vantage point, we can see that it was a healthy one: moderate eating, no alcohol, daily walking, regular meditation, pure air. Probably because of this, the Buddha lived to an old age.

When he was 80, legend says, the Buddha ate food offered by a well-meaning blacksmith named Chunda, but the food was spoiled and the Buddha became terribly sick. Sensing that he was dying, he called his disciples. To those who were crying over his impending death, he reminded them that everything must die—even the Buddha himself. He then offered these final words of advice: “You must be your own lamps, be your own refuges. Take refuge in nothing outside yourselves. Hold firm to the truth as a lamp and a refuge, and do not look for refuge to anything besides yourselves.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Buddha’s final instruction was this: Trust your own insights, and use self-control to reach perfection and inner peace.

Following this pronouncement, the Buddha turned on his right side and died. The many sculptures and paintings of the so-called Reclining Buddha may be images of his serene moment of death.<sup>4</sup> In any case, Buddhists idealize the Buddha’s attitude toward death as a model for everyone.

## THE BASIC TEACHINGS OF BUDDHISM

It is impossible to know exactly what the Buddha taught. He did not write down his teachings, nor did his early disciples. The only written versions were recorded several hundred years after his death, following centuries of being passed on orally—and of being interpreted in multiple ways. We must rely on the basic trustworthiness of both the oral traditions and the many written texts that pass on his teachings.

The written teachings that have come down to us are in a number of languages, all of which differ from the language (apparently a variation of Magadhi) spoken by the Buddha. One of the most important languages through which Buddhist teachings have been passed down is Pali, a language related to Sanskrit; another is Sanskrit itself—often called the Latin of India because of its widespread use in earlier years for scholarly works.

At the core of what is generally regarded as basic Buddhism are the Three Jewels (Sanskrit: *Triratna*; Pali: *Tiratana*)—that is, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The Buddha is thought of as an ideal human being whom other human beings should imitate; the image of him, seated in meditation, is a constant model of self-control and mindfulness. He is not usually thought of as being dead, but instead as existing in a timeless dimension beyond the world. The **Dharma** (Sanskrit), or Dhamma (Pali), means the sum total of Buddhist teachings about how to view the world and how to live properly. The **Sangha** is the community of monks and nuns.<sup>5</sup>

The Buddha’s teachings are like the Buddha himself—practical. Surrounded in the India of his day by every kind of speculation about the afterlife, the nature of the divine, and other difficult questions, the Buddha concentrated on what was useful. He refused to talk about anything



The three jewels of Buddhism are the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. In parts of the Buddhist world, all males are expected to join the Sangha, at least for a time. Here, two males are ordained as monks at Wat Bovorn in Bangkok.

else—a benign neglect that has been called his noble silence. He said that a person who speculated about unanswerable questions was like a man who had been wounded by an arrow but refused to pull it out until he knew everything about the arrow and the person who shot it. The wounded man would die before he could get all the information he wanted.

The Buddha wished to concentrate on the two most important questions about existence: How can we minimize suffering—both our own and that of others? And how can we attain inner peace? The Buddha's conclusions are not just intellectual solutions. They are also recommendations for a practical way of living. Buddhist doctrines are not meant to be accepted on blind faith; rather, it is up to each individual to experience them first as truths before accepting them.

### The Three Marks of Reality

Common to all forms of Buddhism is a way of looking at the world. Although this view may seem pessimistic at first, it is meant to be a realistic assessment of existence that, when understood, ultimately helps lead a person to inner peace and even joy. According to this view, reality manifests three characteristics: constant change, a lack of permanent identity, and the existence of suffering. This view is the foundation for the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, which we will discuss shortly.

**Change** One of the things the Buddha recommended is that we look at life as it really is. When we do, he said, the first thing we notice is life's constant change, or impermanence (Pali: **aniccha**; Sanskrit: *anitya*). We are often surprised by change—and pained by it—because we do not expect it, but the fact is that nothing we experience in life ever remains the same. We get used to things (our own face, family, friends, house, car, neighborhood), and they seem to remain basically the same every time we look at them. But that is an illusion, for they are changing daily, gradually. We usually only notice the changes over time.

Everyone knows the shock of change, such as seeing an old friend after many years apart, or looking at childhood photos. Even old movies on television and old songs on the radio—the performers now aged or even long gone—clearly convey the Buddhist sense of the inevitability of change. A family gathering can have the same effect: the death of a much-loved

grandparent may be contrasted by the sight of a great-grandchild playing in a playpen in the corner.

People's viewpoints also change. Think of what the word *love* means to a five-year-old, a teenager, a new parent, or a person who has lost a spouse. Or imagine hearing the news of a divorce between two people you thought were well suited and happily married.

When we truly experience impermanence, we see that all of reality is in motion all the time, that the universe is in flux. As the kaleidoscope of reality slowly turns, its patterns change; and while old patterns disappear, new patterns are born, all of them interesting. As the Buddha taught, the wise person expects change, accepts it, and even savors it. The wise person might also reflect that just as pleasures do not last forever, neither do sorrows.

**No Permanent Identity** We know that the Buddha urged people to abandon egotism and a fixation on material objects. Related to this, he denied the existence of the permanent identity of anything. Thus, the second mark of reality is that each person and each thing is not only changing but is made up of parts that are also constantly changing, a concept referred to as "no permanent identity." In the case of people, it is called "no permanent soul" or "no self." The Pali term is **anatta**; in Sanskrit it is *anatman* ("no *Atman*") because of the Buddha's refusal to accept the Hindu notion of timeless, unchanging reality (*Atman*) underlying everything—people, things, essences, and gods.

For the sake of logical convenience, we often talk about each person or thing as if it were a single unified reality. Let us first consider something nonhuman, say, a car. We call it *a car* as if it were one single reality, but actually it is made up of many things—glass, aluminum, rubber, paint, headlights, belts, pistons, wires, and fluids—many of which are either going wrong right now or probably soon will be.

Then think of how each human being, though called by a single name, is actually made up of organs, body parts, instincts, memories, ideas, and hopes—all of which are constantly changing. Consider also one's self-perception. I naively think I am the same person from day to day, even if I get a haircut or lose weight or see a film. But if I recall myself at age 10 and then compare that person with who I am now, I seem now to be someone quite different.

To the Buddha, to believe that a person has some unchanging identity or soul is as mistaken as believing that a car has an unchanging essence. The car is not a car because it has a "car soul"; rather, it is a car because of a social convention that refers to its many related parts by a single word. This tendency is so strong that we sometimes think that a label (*car*) is the reality. Although the Buddhist view may seem strange at first, it is quite rational—and it helps eliminate surprise when my car won't start, when a friend becomes distant, or when a photo reveals the inevitability of aging. All these changes show the same process at work.<sup>6</sup>

**Suffering** The third characteristic of reality, known as **dukkha** (Pali), or *duhkha* (Sanskrit), is usually translated as "suffering" or "sorrow," but it also

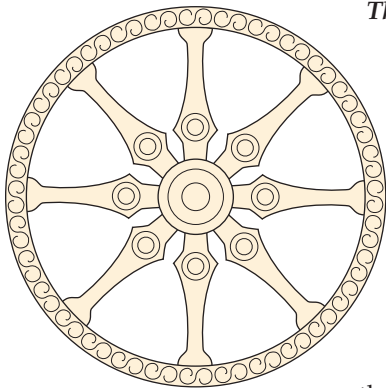
means “dissatisfaction” or “dis-ease.” It refers to the fact that life, when lived conventionally, can never be fully satisfying because of its inescapable change. Even in the midst of pleasure, we often recognize that pleasure is fleeting. Even when all the bills are paid, we know that in a few days there will be more. Try as we might to put everything in our lives in order, disorder soon reasserts itself. In the midst of happy experiences, we may worry about the people we love. And there are times when ever-changing life brings misery: the death of a parent or spouse or child, divorce, sickness, fire, flood, earthquake, war, the loss of job or home.

Dukkha encompasses the whole range, from horrible suffering to everyday frustration. Someone once compared the inevitability of dukkha to buying a new car. Your car brings the pleasures of mobility and pride of ownership, but as you go for your first ride you know what lies ahead: insurance premiums, routine maintenance, and costly repairs.

The Buddha concluded that to live means inescapably to experience sorrow and dissatisfaction. But he analyzed the nature and causes of suffering much like a doctor would diagnose an illness—in order to understand and overcome them. Those who say that Buddhism pessimistically focuses on suffering do not see the hopeful purpose behind that focus. Indeed, no one can escape suffering, but each person can decide how to respond to it, as indicated in the Four Noble Truths.

### The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path

Perhaps to aid in their memorization, some Buddhist teachings were grouped into fours and eights. The Four Noble Truths are a linked chain of truths about life: (1) suffering exists; (2) it has a cause; (3) it has an end; and (4) there is a way to attain release from suffering—namely, by following the Noble Eightfold Path. Let’s look at each concept more closely.



The eight-spoked wheel is an ancient symbol of Buddhist teachings.

***The First Noble Truth: To Live Is to Suffer*** To say it perhaps more descriptively, “birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, death is painful.”<sup>7</sup> Having a body means that we can be tired and sick. Having a mind means that we can be troubled and discouraged. We have so many daily duties that our lives become a long list of things-to-do, and we feel like jugglers trying to keep too many balls spinning in the air. The past cannot be relived, and the future is uncertain. And every day, we have to decide what to do with the rest of our lives. (It has been remarked that adults so frequently ask children “What do you want to be when you grow up?” because the adults themselves are still trying to decide what to do with their own lives.)

To live means to experience anxiety, loss, and sometimes even anguish. In other words, “living means sorrow.” Although the message sounds dark, this truth urges us to be realistic, not melancholy; it is also hopeful

in the sense that if we recognize why suffering comes about, then we can lessen it.

**The Second Noble Truth: Suffering Comes from Desire** When he analyzed suffering, the Buddha saw that it comes from wanting what we cannot have and from never being satisfied with what we do have. The word *trishna* (Sanskrit), or *tanha* (Pali), which is often translated as “desire,” might better be translated as “thirst”; it can also be translated as “craving,” suggesting both an addiction and a fear of loss. Some of our desires are obvious: food, sleep, clothing, housing, health. Some desires are more subtle: privacy, respect, friendship, quiet, stresslessness, security, variety, beauty. And some desires are simply “wants” that are cultivated by our society: alcohol, designer clothes, tobacco, entertainment, expensive food. We all have desires, and because life around us is always changing, no matter how much we acquire we cannot be permanently satisfied. Desire is insatiable, and the result is discontent, dissatisfaction, and sometimes misery. But is there a way to be free of suffering?

**The Third Noble Truth: To End Suffering, End Desire** It is hard to argue with the reasonableness of this truth, yet it goes against modern Western notions. The Western tendency is to strain to achieve every imaginable desire. This tendency seems to thrive in cultures—such as many modern ones—that emphasize individual legal and moral rights, competition between individuals, and individual success in school, in one’s job, and in sports. Belief in a distinct and permanent self or an immortal soul may be the origin of such individualism. This tendency is rather different from the sense of self that comes from a worldview that values the individual’s membership in the group—a view of self more common, traditionally, in tribal and Asian cultures.

To our modern way of thinking, the Buddha’s recommendations may seem rather stark. Nevertheless, he himself left home and family and possessions because he believed—and taught—that *any* kind of attachment will bring inevitable suffering. The shaven head and special clothing of monks and nuns symbolize their radical detachment from worldly concerns.

Buddhists themselves recognize, though, that not everyone can be a monk. Consequently, this third truth is moderated for laypeople. It is commonly interpreted as a recommendation that everyone accept peacefully whatever occurs, aiming less for happiness and more for inner peace. The individual should concentrate on the present moment, not on the past or the future or one’s desires for them. Because times of happiness are always paid for by times of unhappiness (the pendulum swings in both directions), a certain emotional neutrality is the best path.

Acceptance is a step to inner peace if I recognize that what I have right now is actually enough. Ultimately, I have to accept my body, my talents, my family, and even my relatives. Of course, some adjustments can be made: I can move, have plastic surgery, change my job, or get a divorce.

Look within.  
Be still.  
Free from fear and  
attachment,  
Know the sweet joy of  
the way.

—The Dhammapada<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, though, much of life simply has to be accepted—and appreciated when possible.

The essence of the Third Noble Truth is this: I cannot change the outside world, but I can change myself and the way I experience the world.

***The Fourth Noble Truth: Release from Suffering Is Possible and Can Be Attained by Following the Noble Eightfold Path*** The ultimate goal of Buddhism is **nirvana**. (The term is Sanskrit; the equivalent in Pali is *nibbana*.) The term *nirvana* suggests many things: end of suffering, inner peace, and liberation from the limitations of the world. The word *nirvana* seems to mean “blown out,” or “cool,” suggesting that the fires of desire have been extinguished. Upon attaining nirvana, the individual has self-control and is no longer driven from inside by raging emotional forces or from outside by the unpredictable events of life. It may not necessarily imply the elimination of anger (stories tell of the Buddha’s getting angry at disputes within the monastic community), but it does suggest a general inner quiet. Nirvana is also believed to end karma and rebirth after the present life. (More will be said about nirvana later in this chapter.) To reach nirvana, Buddhism recommends following the Noble Eightfold Path.

***The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to Inner Peace*** The eight “steps” of the path actually form a program that the Buddha taught will lead us toward liberation from the impermanence and suffering of reality. Together, they describe three main goals: to face life objectively, to live kindly, and to cultivate inner peace. Although they are often called “steps,” the eight recommendations are not to be practiced sequentially but rather all together. As it is usually translated, the Noble Eightfold Path sounds so old-fashioned that readers may not immediately perceive its practicality. But keep in mind that the word *right* in the following list is a translation of a word that might better be translated as “correct” or “complete.”

1. *Right understanding* I recognize the impermanence of life, the mechanism of desire, and the cause of suffering.
2. *Right intention* My thoughts and motives are pure, not tainted by my emotions and selfish desires.
3. *Right speech* I speak honestly and kindly, in positive ways, avoiding lies, exaggeration, harsh words.
4. *Right action* My actions do not hurt any other being that can feel hurt, including animals; I avoid stealing and sexual conduct that would bring hurt.
5. *Right work* My job does no harm to myself or others.
6. *Right effort* With moderation, I consistently strive to improve.
7. *Right meditation (right mindfulness)* I use the disciplines of meditation (**dhyana**) and focused awareness to contemplate the nature of reality more deeply.
8. *Right contemplation* I cultivate states of blissful inner peace (**samadhi**).



## THE INFLUENCE OF INDIAN THOUGHT ON EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

It is uncertain whether the Buddha intended to begin an entirely new religion. Early Buddhist literature rejects certain elements of the common Vedic practice of the time, particularly its ritualism, its reliance on priests, its caste system, and its belief in any permanent spiritual reality. Non-Buddhists responded argumentatively when women and slaves entered the Buddhist monastic order. Such evidence leads us to think that early Buddhists saw themselves as outside the mainstream priestly Vedic culture—a fact that may have assisted them in developing their own statements of belief and practice. Nevertheless, we do know that early Buddhist teachings accepted certain elements of Indian thought that are today shared to some extent by Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism.

### Ahimsa: “Do No Harm”

Foremost among the elements adopted from the Indian worldview of the Buddha’s day was the ideal of *ahimsa* (“nonharm”; see Chapter 3). It is not clear how old this ideal is, and it has not always been followed. We do know that Vedic sacrifice at the time of the Buddha sometimes included animal sacrifice (and animal sacrifice in Hindu practice can still be found, particularly in Nepal and Bali). But we also know that the ideal of *ahimsa* was already prominent in India before the time of the Buddha and may have had ancient and pre-Vedic origins.

For Buddhism, *ahimsa* is fundamental. The ideal holds that to cause suffering to any being is cruel and unnecessary—life is already hard enough for each of us. *Ahimsa* discourages causing not only physical pain but also

“Right meditation” is practiced not only in monasteries, but also in meditation centers that attract Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.



psychological hurt or the exploitation of another. Upon reaching a real understanding that every being that feels can suffer, the individual gains wider sympathy. It is then natural and satisfying for the individual to live with gentleness.

Ahimsa is a high ideal and not always easy to achieve. Furthermore, we must recognize that there will always be a gap between the ideal and actual practice in different Buddhist cultures and among individuals. Nevertheless, however murky the definition of the “best action” may be, the ideal is fairly clear. A compassionate person does everything possible to avoid causing suffering: “ashamed of roughness, and full of mercy, he dwells compassionate and kind to all creatures that have life.”<sup>9</sup> This empathetic ideal has been interpreted as recommending, when possible, a vegetarian or semivegetarian diet, and it warns against involvement in any jobs or sports that would hurt others, such as being a butcher, hunter, fisherman, soldier, or weapon maker. The result is a way of life that is harmonious and free of remorse.

### The Soul and Karma

The Buddha rejected the notion of a soul (an unchanging spiritual reality), but he accepted some notion of rebirth. How, we might then ask, can an individual be reborn if there is no soul? Buddhism holds that while there is no individual soul, the elements of personality that make up an individual can recombine and thus continue from one lifetime to another. Buddhism offers the examples of a flame passing from one candle to another and the pattern caused by a breeze that passes over many blades of grass. The candles are separate, but only one flame passes between each candle; the blades of grass are rooted to separate places, but the pattern of the breeze travels across them and “unites” them in movement.

Closely related to the notion of rebirth is *karma*. As we discussed in Chapter 3, karma determines how one will be reborn. In Hinduism and Jainism, karma is like something that clings to the soul as it passes from life to life in reincarnation. It works automatically: good actions produce karma that brings good effects, such as intelligence, high birth, and wealth; bad actions produce karma that brings the opposite, including rebirth into animal and insect life-forms. Because the Buddha rejected the existence of a soul, explaining how karma works is more difficult in Buddhism. It is thought to accompany and affect the elements of personality that reappear in later lifetimes. Regardless of their specific manner of functioning, karma and rebirth were already such powerful ideas in the India of the Buddha’s time that they continued in early Buddhism and from there have spread well beyond India. They remain highly influential concepts in Buddhist countries today.

### Nirvana

In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, the everyday world of change is called *samsara*, a term that suggests decay and pain. Liberation from *samsara*,



however, is attained in nirvana. The notion has many similarities with the Hindu goal of *moksha* (“liberation”; discussed in Chapter 3). Nirvana is thought of as existence beyond limitation. Many people in the West associate nirvana with a psychological state, because it is described as evoking joy and peace; but perhaps it is better to see nirvana as being indescribable and beyond all psychological states. Although reaching nirvana occurs rarely, it is theoretically possible to attain during one’s lifetime; the Buddha is said to have “entered nirvana” at the time of his enlightenment. Once a person has reached nirvana, rebirth is finished, and in a culture that believes that individuals have already been born many times before this current life, an end to rebirth can be a welcome thought.

Buddhist images mark these otherwise Hindu structures at Bayon, one of the grandest temples at Angkor.

## THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism might have remained an entirely Indian religion, much as Jainism has, if it were not for an energetic king named Ashoka, who flourished about 250 B.C.E. (Timeline 4.1). Ashoka’s plan to expand his rule over a large part of India naturally entailed much fighting. After a particularly bloody battle in eastern India, as Ashoka was inspecting the battlefield, he saw the scene very differently than he had before. The whole experience

### TIMELINE 4.1

	c. 563–483 B.C.E.	● Traditional dates of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha
Life of Ashoka, Indian king who spread Buddhist values ●	c. 273–232 B.C.E.	
	c. 50 C.E.	● Entry of Buddhism into China
Creation of the Lotus Sutra ●	c. 100 C.E.	
	c. 300 C.E.	● Beginning of the spread of Buddhism in Southeast Asia
Entry of Buddhism into Korea ●	c. 400 C.E.	
	c. 520 C.E.	● Introduction of Bodhidharma's Meditation school of Buddhism to China
Introduction of Buddhism into Japan ●	c. 552 C.E.	
	c. 630 C.E.	● Entry of Buddhism into Tibet
Founding of Tendai and Shingon Buddhism in Japan ●	c. 820 C.E.	
	c. 845 C.E.	● Major persecution of Buddhists in China
Revival of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia ●	c. 1000 C.E.	
	c. 1100–1500	● Decline of Buddhism in India
Life of Honen, founder of the Pure Land sect in Japan ●	1133–1212	
	1158–1210	● Life of Chinul, founder of the Korean Chogye order
Beginning of the growth of Zen in Japan ●	c. 1200	
	1222–1282	● Life of Nichiren, founder of Nichiren Buddhism in Japan
Life of Tsong Kha-pa, Tibetan Buddhist reformer ●	1357–1419	
	1644–1694	● Life of poet Matsuo Basho
Beginning of the World Fellowship of Buddhists ●	c. 1952	
	1989	● Award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama

was so horrifying that Ashoka converted to the ideal of nonviolence. Although it is uncertain whether Ashoka became a Buddhist, he did make political use of Buddhist moral values. A cynic might note that forbidding violence is a practical move for any ruler who wishes to remain on the throne. In any case, the principle of nonviolence is most effective when it is embraced widely; otherwise, the few people who are nonviolent will be preyed upon by the violent.

To bring a large number of the population around to his new nonviolent way of thinking and acting, Ashoka decided to spread the principles of nonviolence throughout India and possibly even beyond. To do this, he erected many stone columns inscribed with his principles, placing some at sites important in the Buddha's life. A number of these columns still exist today.

Our historical knowledge of Ashoka is quite limited, but he looms large in Buddhist legend. One story tells us that Ashoka sent as a missionary to Sri Lanka a son or nephew named Mahinda. Whatever the truth of this story, it is a fact that Sri Lanka is largely Buddhist today. Indeed, it may have been Ashoka who gave Buddhism its urge to spread and helped to make it one of the world's great missionary religions.

In the first centuries after the Buddha's death, in response to widespread and long-standing disagreements over the Buddha's teachings, many Buddhist schools and splinter groups arose. Most of these ultimately died out and are only names to us today. A few survived and crystallized into the great branches of Buddhism that we now recognize: Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.

It was once assumed that each branch emerged after an earlier one, like three waves of thought that came from India in succeeding centuries. But scholars now recognize that essential elements of all three branches frequently existed side by side, possibly even in the earliest days of Buddhism. Sometimes monks of quite different practices lived in the same monasteries, and some still do. In addition, different branches coexisted in or dominated certain regions but then died out. (For example, Mahayana Buddhism, once common in Myanmar, no longer exists there.) Often, too, the boundaries between the branches have been blurred or are even nonexistent.

We should also realize that the three so-called branches are not homogeneous and monolithic. Instead, within them are also divisions and different understandings of belief and practice. (Among Theravada Buddhist orders of monks, for example, some believe they must go barefoot, whereas others wear sandals; some wear orange robes, and others wear brown or burgundy; some believe they must beg for all their food, while others do not; and so on.) The branches are more like families that have many shared elements.

In addition, people who follow a specific Buddhist path are often not aware of other branches. The same is not true of some other religions, in which practitioners are quite aware of the division to which they belong. (For example, Muslims define themselves as Sunni or Shiite, and Christians

Timeline of significant events in Buddhism. ◀

## 142 CHAPTER 4 BUDDHISM



FIGURE 4.1

The birthplace and traditional home of Buddhism: India, China, Japan, and Southeast Asia.

as Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox.) But Buddhist believers of one branch, even if they know of other forms, generally do not define themselves in contrast to those other branches. Instead, they define themselves more according to Buddhist “lineages,” tracing their beliefs and practices back to the great teachers of the past who, in a long chain of masters and disciples, handed on the traditions that they follow.

Thus, before we divide Buddhism into these so-called branches, we must realize that to talk of three “branches” is to greatly oversimplify the complex reality of Buddhism. This approach is only meant to enhance the understanding of the richness of Buddhist history, belief, and practice.

### THERAVADA BUDDHISM: THE WAY OF THE ELDER

In the early centuries of Buddhism, several schools claimed to adhere to the original, unchanged teachings of the Buddha. All of them shared the Buddha’s opposition to Vedic ritual and the brahmin priesthood, as well as his appreciation for simplicity, meditation, and detachment. They took

a conservative approach, hoping to protect the Buddha's rather stark teachings and simple practice from being altered. Of all the conservative schools, one has survived to the present day: Theravada. Its name is often used today to refer to the entire conservative movement.

The Theravada school takes its name from its goal of passing on the Buddha's teachings unchanged. It means "the way (*vada*) of the elders (*thera*)."<sup>1</sup> Theravada monks originally passed on the teachings in oral form, but they eventually wrote them down. Although the school's claim to have kept its teachings relatively unchanged over time is doubtful, it is true that Theravada has a deliberately conservative orientation. Since the nineteenth century, the name *Theravada* has been commonly used to refer to the forms of Buddhism that are found mostly in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

The heart of Theravada Buddhism is its community of monks. As a school, it has always stressed the ideal of reaching nirvana through detachment and desirelessness achieved through meditation. (This, of course, is an ideal that some would point out has been contradicted by the Sangha's having courted wealth and temporal power.) Although Theravada does accept that laypeople can attain nirvana, the life of the monk offers a surer path. The notion is enshrined in the ideal of the **arhat** (Sanskrit; Pali: *arahat*, meaning "perfect being," "worthy"), a person who has reached nirvana.\*

The Theravada monastic community had its distant origins in the wandering sannyasins and in the groups of Hindu ascetics who lived in the forests. (A sign of this connection is the orange robe; it is used by Hindu ascetics and is also worn by many orders of Theravada Buddhist monks.) But even during the Buddha's lifetime, his monks began to live a settled life during the summertime monsoon season, giving their time to discussion and inhabiting caves or groves and parks donated by lay followers.

Theravada spread very early from India to Sri Lanka, where it has gone through several phases of growth and decline. By the fourth century, it had



Buddhists typically visit their local temple at the New Year. They leave offerings and receive blessings from the temple's monks.

\*In the discussion of Theravada Buddhism, it would be more accurate to use the Pali terms *nibbana*, *arahat*, and *sutta*, as opposed to the Sanskrit terms *nirvana*, *arhat*, and *sutra*; however, for the sake of consistency, the text throughout this chapter will reflect the terminology (whether Pali or Sanskrit) that is most familiar in the West.

## 144 CHAPTER 4 BUDDHISM

These Myanmar nuns with trays on their heads go into the community every morning to receive food offerings.



been carried—along with other elements of Indian culture—to Myanmar (Burma) and to Thailand. Theravada did not become predominant in Myanmar until the mid-eleventh century, when Bagan began to flourish as a great Buddhist city and center of Theravada under King Anawratha. Fourteenth-century Thailand, having freed itself of Khmer domination, also adopted Theravada Buddhism. The conservatism of Theravada was politically appealing to rulers for its moral rigor. Today it is the dominant religion in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.

Theravada monks must beg daily for their food, which has meant that they, like the Buddha's early followers, have to live close to laypeople. In fact, Theravada monasteries are often in the middle of towns. Many monasteries run schools, meditation centers, and medical clinics, as well as care for stray animals (which sometimes overrun the grounds). In return, monks are the beneficiaries of regular donations. When Theravada monks go out on their begging rounds in the early morning, people who wish to donate food freely offer them rice and vegetables. Donors believe they are receiving beneficial karma from their acts of generosity, and people support

## DEEPER INSIGHTS



## Buddhism in Thailand

Theravada Buddhism is the state religion of Thailand, and more than 90 percent of Thais are Buddhists. Thai Buddhists, however, practice a religion that blends elements from Buddhism, Hinduism, and folk belief. Perhaps because Buddhism so emphasizes tolerance, Buddhism as it is actually practiced is rich with elements from many sources.

Buddhism's prevalence in Thailand is evident in everyday life. Thais frequently act publicly on the assumption that doing good deeds will "make merit"—bring good karma for this life and for future lives. To make merit, Thais offer coins to the needy on the street, give food and robes to monks, attend Buddhist services, and help animals. And Buddhist monks can be seen everywhere—walking in the streets and riding in the back of buses (which they ride free), in *tuk-tuks* (three-wheeled cabs), and on riverboats.

Yet equally visible are "spirit houses." These look like miniature temples, and they are erected on high posts at the corner of a piece of land, on high-rise rooftops, or under large, old trees. Spirit houses are dedicated to the guardian spirits of the property and to the spirits of

former owners. Worshipers offer food and flowers to them daily.

Frequently the Hindu god Brahma is the figure inside the spirit houses, and small images of dancing girls—derived from Hindu temple worship—are left as permanent offerings. In shops a visitor might see a statue of Ganesha, the elephant-headed Hindu god associated with success. Another influence of Hinduism is readily apparent in Thai art and dance, which tell the stories of Rama, Sita, and Hanuman, whose tales are retold in the *Ramakien*, the Thai version of the *Ramayana*.

A strong magical dimension is part of Thai Buddhism as well. Thai males often wear a necklace of Buddhist amulets to defend themselves against sickness and injury (the owners will describe in happy detail the origin and power of each of the amulets). Tattoos, often with images of the Buddha, Rama, and Hanuman, are thought to have a similar effect. And taxi drivers—not to mention their often anxious passengers—hope that the multiple Buddhist images on their dashboards will offer needed protection in traffic.

the monasteries much like other societies give to libraries and other social agencies. At Buddhist festivals monks are given new robes and pails of essential items, such as soap, toothpaste, razors, and canned goods. Donations are especially given at the New Year festival and at the beginning and end of the rainy season. (This period, often called "Buddhist Lent," begins in late summer and lasts for three months. During this time monks stay in their monasteries for study.)

Most weddings, funerals, and other family events are considered incomplete without the presence of monks, who are expected to chant from the *sutras* (sayings of the Buddha, which we will discuss shortly) to provide merit for the family members. Monks are also an important part of festivals, many of which are organized by monasteries themselves. (It is not unusual to see monks under a small pavilion that has been set up specially at a festival for the exhibition of puppet shows, acrobatics, and even kickboxing.) Older monks are consulted for advice on business and marriage, and some are firmly believed to have special powers (such monks are consulted for picking winning lottery ticket numbers). Statues of old and wizened monks—monks who are believed to be wonderworkers—may even be found for sale in markets. They are bought and placed on a high shelf in people's homes,





Although the monk's life may appear easy to Western eyes, the reality is seldom free of care: many child monks are orphans or unwanted children; monastic buildings are sometimes poorly maintained. Yet a spirit of calm and compassion can be palpable on a monastery's grounds.

where the statues receive signs of hopeful veneration in the form of flowers, water, and incense.

In Theravada Buddhism, not only is ordination performed for men who are planning to become monks for life, but "temporary ordination" is also commonly performed. Frequently, temporary ordination lasts for an entire rainy season, but it may also be done for shorter periods. Temporary ordination is considered an effective way to "make merit" for oneself and one's family. It is thought to positively influence the formation of young men's characters, and it is sometimes undertaken by whole groups, such as policemen, for whom it is viewed as a sign of sincerity and goodwill.

Monasticism, as we see, permeates society and everyday life in Theravada Buddhist cultures. As mentioned earlier, monasteries exist even in the centers of cities, where monks can be seen everywhere. There is a fluidity to monastic life, too, since Theravada monks often choose to leave monastic life, even after many years. But during the time that men are monks, they are considered role models and are expected to live up to strict moral standards.

The earliest Western translators and scholars of Theravada Buddhism saw Buddhism through the lens of their own culture. Key to their conception of what makes a religion was a body of written scriptures; the scholars assumed that written scriptures played a central role in believers' lives. More recent scholarship points out that Buddhist teachings have been largely passed on orally. Because the vast majority of Buddhists have been unable to read, they have learned their religious beliefs and practices not from books, but from hearing sermons, seeing temple paintings, and listening to older family members. And long before written material existed, certain monks were known as specialists in chanting the words of the Buddha, the rules of their order, and

the precepts of right living. Eventually this oral material was indeed written down and codified. But, as we learn about the written scriptures, we must understand the primary role that oral transmission has played.

In addition to the so-called canonical scriptures, folktales have been influential. The most famous are the hundreds of Jataka Tales. They are similar to Aesop's Fables, and early forms of them may have influenced those tales and similar collections in other countries. The tales are about human beings and animals, and each tale teaches a moral lesson about a particular virtue, such as friendship, truthfulness, generosity, or moderation. In Theravada Buddhism the tales are often put within a Buddhist context. Typically, the tale begins with the Buddha telling the tale. The tale then ends with the Buddha saying that in a past life he was one of the animal or human figures in the story. The Jataka Tales are frequently the subject of art, plays, and dance in Southeast Asia.

### Theravada Teachings and Literature

The Theravada collection of the Buddha's teachings is called the Pali Canon. As a whole, this mass of material is called *Tipitaka* (Pali), or **Tripitaka** (Sanskrit), which means "three baskets." The name comes from the fact that the writings were divided according to their subject matter into three groups.

The first collection (called *vinaya*—Pali and Sanskrit) outlines the procedural rules for monastic life. These include rules on begging, eating, relations with monks and nonmonks, and other disciplines.<sup>10</sup> The second collection comprises sayings of the Buddha in the form of sermons or dialogues. This type of material is called *sutta* (Pali), or **sutra** (Sanskrit). A third collection, developed later, is called *abhidhamma* (Pali), or *abhidharma* (Sanskrit), meaning "the works that go beyond the elementary teachings." It systematized the doctrine presented more or less randomly in the sutras.

### Theravada Art and Architecture

Images of the Buddha did not appear in the earliest centuries of Buddhism; instead, artists used symbols to represent him and his teachings. One symbol was the eight-spoked wheel, which derived from the Noble Eightfold Path and represented all the basic Buddhist teachings, the Dharma. (The wheel may have been suggested either by the disk of the sun, symbolizing light and health, or by the wheel of a king's chariot, a symbol of royal rulership.) The umbrella, often carried to protect an important person from the hot sun, symbolized the Buddha's authority. Other common symbols included a set of footprints, a lotus flower, and an empty throne. Many types of **stupas**, which began as large mounds, arose over the remains of Buddhist monks and at important Buddhist sites. Symbols may have been used at first simply because artists were struggling with the basic challenge of depicting simultaneously the humanity of the Buddha and his great spiritual attainment, his enlightenment. By the first century of the common era, however, images of the Buddha

## 148 CHAPTER 4 BUDDHISM

The Reclining Buddha at Wat Po in Bangkok, which fills an entire temple, is one of the most revered images in Thailand. If you look closely at the bottom of the image, you will see worshipers standing in front of the altar.



began to appear. (Scholars debate the possible influence of Greek sculptural traditions.<sup>11</sup>) In Theravada countries we now frequently see statues of the Buddha meditating, standing (with hand outstretched in blessing),

walking, or reclining. Some of the most beautiful sculptures are the Reclining Buddhas of Sri Lanka and Thailand.

## MAHAYANA BUDDHISM: THE "BIG VEHICLE"

The second great branch of Buddhism is called Mahayana, a word that is usually translated as "big vehicle." It suggests a large ferryboat in which all types of people can be carried across a river, and it hints at the broad scope of the Mahayana vision, which can accommodate a wide variety of people seeking enlightenment. Mahayana emphasizes that nirvana is not only attainable by monks but is a possibility for everyone. Mahayana also stresses that enlightenment is a call to compassion, for "the Mahayana tradition maintains that a person must save himself by saving others."<sup>12</sup>

Some critics of Mahayana Buddhism claim that it has allowed ritual and speculation—which had been deemphasized by the Buddha—to creep back in. It is possible that the Indian love of ritual and imagery remains alive in a new form in Mahayana. For example, the fire ceremony of some Mahayana sects certainly derives from Vedic practice. But this is really to say that Mahayana initially was thoroughly Indian and sought to express its truths in very Indian ways.<sup>13</sup>

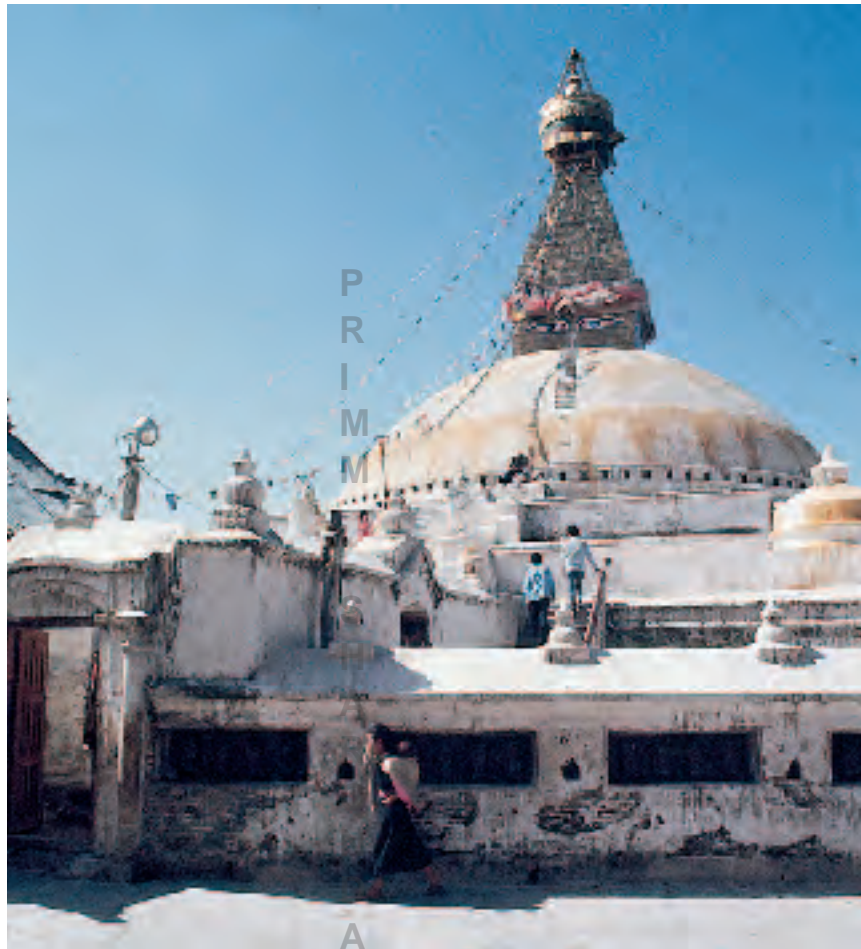
It is possible that some practices or attitudes of early Buddhism did not always fulfill the religious needs of the many laypeople who appreciated ritual. Mahayana Buddhism, however, has abundantly met almost every religious and philosophical need.<sup>14</sup> It is the source of some of the most extraordinary creations of the human mind—in its art, architecture, philosophy, psychology, and ceremony.

### New Ideals: Compassion and the Bodhisattva

In Mahayana Buddhism, the religious ideal broadened: from the exemplar of the monastic person, fairly detached from family life, it expanded to include nonmonks, women, and the married. Mahayana began to explore the possibilities of following a religious path that was active in the world. This difference signaled a shift in the notion of what is virtuous. It might have represented a reaction against Indian asceticism and the cult of the sannyasin, or it might have indicated a new form of devotionism and love of ritual. It might also have come from a widening of the concept of nirvana. Nirvana was now thought to be found within samsara, the everyday world of change. This devotional shift began in India and in central Asia, but it grew in strength when Mahayana entered China, a culture that has long valued nature and the physical world in general. In Mahayana, the human body and the material realm are viewed positively, and there is a great openness toward art and music. Mahayana grew as the senses and emotions were increasingly viewed as means of spiritual transformation.

## 150 CHAPTER 4 BUDDHISM

The Hindu ritual of anointing sacred objects became a part of Mahayana devotional practice, as seen here in the anointed dome of Boudhanath in Nepal.



In Mahayana, wisdom remained an important goal, but the pairing of wisdom and compassion was central to its teachings. Compassion became an essential virtue and the preeminent expression of wisdom. The term for this compassion is **karuna**, which may also be translated as “empathy,” “sympathy,” or “kindness.” Karuna is somewhat different from the Western notion of kindness, in which one separate human being, out of an abundance of individual generosity, gives to another separate human being. Rather, karuna implies that we all are part of the same ever-changing universe. Deep down, the individual is not really different from anyone or anything else. To be kind to others is actually to be kind to oneself. Karuna in action simply means living out this awareness of the unity of the universe. With this perception of the interrelatedness of all beings, including animals, compassion comes naturally: if I am kind, my kindness must be shown toward anything that can feel pain. The great prayer of Buddhist compassion is this: May all

creatures be well and happy. It is a common Mahayana practice to mentally project this wish to the world every day.

The esteem for *karuna* influences the human ideal in Mahayana. Instead of the Theravada ideal of the arhat, who is esteemed for detached wisdom and unworldly living, the ideal in Mahayana Buddhism is the person of deep compassion, the **bodhisattva** ("enlightenment being"). Because a bodhisattva embodies compassion, it is often said that a bodhisattva will refuse to fully enter nirvana, in order to be reborn on earth to help others. A person may even take the "bodhisattva vow" to be constantly reborn until all are enlightened.

The same kind of openness to a variety of religious paths that we saw in Hinduism is also typical of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana recognizes that people differ greatly and find themselves at different stages of spiritual development. For example, a person who would not benefit from study or meditation might be able to achieve a new level of understanding through the use of ritual, imagery, and religious objects. It is possible to find the influence of *bhakti yoga* (see Chapter 3) in Mahayana, because Mahayana even endorses devotion to deities. Some critics may label such practices as superstition. Regardless, Mahayana is open to anything that can lead to greater spiritual awareness, a concept known as "skillful means" (Sanskrit: *upaya*).

### Mahayana Thought and Worldview

Mahayana has encouraged a vision of reality that is imaginative, wide, and often profound. A legendary story tells of a Chinese emperor who began reading certain Mahayana sutras; he then said in astonishment that the experience was like looking out over the ocean. He sensed the vastness of the Mahayana vision, as he experienced both the quantity and the quality of the sutras that he was attempting to understand.

Several key notions must be introduced here. They show a worldview of a universe populated by holy personalities and full of the divine. These notions may seem dry when they are only read about, but they will become very meaningful when a person is experiencing Mahayana art in temples and museums. These ideas underlie Mahayana sculpture, painting, and belief.

**The Three-Body Doctrine (Tri-kaya Doctrine)** In Mahayana, the Buddha nature can express itself in three ways. This is called the **trikaya** ("three-body") doctrine. The historical Buddha who lived in India came to be considered the manifestation of a divine reality, "the cosmic Buddha nature." The Sanskrit term for this is *Dharmakaya* (often translated as "law body," "form body," or "body of reality"). According to Mahayana Buddhism, the cosmic Buddha nature, although invisible, permeates all things. (It is sometimes compared to the Hindu notion of Brahman, which may have influenced it.) In people, the cosmic Buddha nature frequently presents itself as potential. In fact, it is our true nature that we need to recognize and realize. *Dharmakaya* also exists in the natural world, for all things are a sacred manifestation of the cosmic Buddha nature. When we experience the mystery of the natural world, we experience the *Dharmakaya*.



At Boudhanath in Katmandu, Nepal, these eyes represent the omnipresent Buddha nature.

Siddhartha Gautama's physical body, because it is considered an incarnation of this divine reality, is called *Nirmanakaya* ("transformation body"). The notion that the historical Buddha was a divine manifestation reminds us of the Hindu notion of the multiple incarnations of Vishnu, and this Mahayana notion may have been influenced by that Hindu belief.

In keeping with the notion of many incarnations, many Mahayana schools believe in more than one transformation body of the Buddha. We might recall that both Theravada and Mahayana schools describe the Buddha's knowledge of his past lives. Both branches of Buddhism also believe that another historical Buddha, **Maitreya** (Sanskrit; Pali: *Metteya*), will appear on earth in the future to inaugurate a golden age. In several Mahayana cultures, this belief has taken on great importance. In China and Vietnam, the Buddha who will come is called *Mi-lo-fo* and is often shown as an overweight, joyful, "laughing Buddha." In Korea, the notion of *Miruk* (as *Maitreya* is known there) has been especially influential in generating belief in a messianic future, which has prompted the creation of many beautiful statues in his honor. He is often shown seated on a stool or raised platform in the so-called Western style, with one leg down on the floor and the other crossed over it, his head resting thoughtfully on one hand as he contemplates the future.

In Mahayana philosophy, the cosmic Buddha nature has also taken bodily shape in supernatural Buddhas who live in the heavens beyond our earth. These Buddhas have radiant, invulnerable bodies and live in constant

happiness. In Sanskrit, they are called Sambhogakaya Buddhas ("perfect-bliss-body" Buddhas). Mahayana Buddhism envisions many Buddhas existing simultaneously, each with his own sphere of influence (called a "Buddha Land"). Particularly important is the bliss-body Buddha who created a Buddha Land in the western direction of the setting sun. There he receives the dying who wish enlightenment after death. His name in India was **Amitabha Buddha** (Chinese: Amito-fo; Japanese: Amida Butsu). Many devout Buddhists hope to be reborn in his paradise. After attaining enlightenment there, they can return to the world to save other beings. Their devotion to Amitabha Buddha has inspired a great body of fine painting and sculpture that depicts a large Buddha seated on a lotus flower, surrounded by peaceful disciples in pavilions set in gardens full of flowers.

**Heavenly Bodhisattvas** We have already discussed the focus of Mahayana on the earthly bodhisattva, a saintly person of great compassion. But Mahayana Buddhism also holds that many bodhisattvas who are eager to help human beings also exist in other dimensions beyond the earth. They, too, are beings of great compassion. Some once lived on earth and have been reborn beyond this world, but they retain an interest in it. They may appear miraculously on earth when needed or possibly may even be reborn to help others.

The most significant of the heavenly bodhisattvas has been Avalokiteshvara, who looks down from a location above in order to give help. In India, Avalokiteshvara was portrayed as male, but in China this bodhisattva was conceived as feminine because of her association with compassion and mercy. Her name in Chinese is **Guanyin** (Kuan-yin,\* "hears cries"). She first appeared in early depictions as having both male and female characteristics, but eventually she became entirely feminine. (As an object of devotion, she plays a role in Asia similar to that of Mary in Europe.) East Asian paintings and sculpture frequently show her with a very sweet face, dressed all in white, holding the jewel of wisdom or a vase of nectar, and with the moon under her feet or in the sky behind her. Other artistic renderings of her,

\*Note: Two systems are currently used for transcribing Chinese words into English: the *pinyin* and Wade-Giles systems. Because the Chinese government and the United Nations have adopted pinyin, it has become the most commonly used system. The older Wade-Giles was the standard transcription system until pinyin was adopted, and it is still frequently encountered (as in the spelling of *Kuan-yin*). For major Chinese terms in this book (both here and in Chapter 6), the pinyin spelling is given first and the Wade-Giles spelling second.



In Mahayana, the bodhisattva Guanyin is venerated as a manifestation of compassion.



particularly in temple sculpture, show her with a halo of many arms (she is said to have a thousand), representing her many powers to help. In the palm of each hand is an eye, symbolizing her ability to see everyone in need. In China and Japan (where this bodhisattva became popularly known as Kannon), many temples were dedicated to her.

**Shunyata** One Mahayana doctrine asserts that all reality is *shunya* (“empty”; that is, empty of permanent essence). Literally, **shunyata** may be translated as “emptiness” or “zero-ness.” But what does this mean? The notion is an outgrowth of the basic Buddhist view of reality that everything is constantly shifting, changing, taking new form. If we consider an individual person, we can say the “individual” is a pattern, made of parts in continuous change. If we broaden our scope, larger patterns appear, such as the patterns of a family, a city, or a society. Similarly, nature is a combination of smaller patterns making larger patterns, like wheels within wheels. And even the parts themselves ultimately disintegrate as new parts are born. To better understand this concept, think of clouds, which look large and substantial but are forever appearing and disappearing, moving past each other and changing shape and size. Because everything is in constant change, each apparently individual person and thing is actually “empty” of any permanent individual identity. The notion of *shunyata* also suggests the experience that everything is a part of everything else, that all people and things exist together.

**Tathata** Literally translated, the word **tathata** means “thatness,” “thusness,” or “suchness.” This is a rich notion that invites each person’s experience and interpretation. *Tathata* represents a view of experience that says that reality is revealed in each moment, as we savor patterns, relationships, and change. Because no moment is exactly the same, and no object is exactly the same, each can be observed and appreciated as it passes. Thus, simple, everyday events reveal the nature of reality. We may experience “thatness” when two elements come together in an unexpected way—for example, when a small child says something childlike but wise. Sometimes it comes when we notice a moment of change, such as when, after a long string of muggy summer days, we get up to add a blanket to the bed on the first crisp autumn night. Or it might be when we notice elements coming together somewhat unexpectedly—for example, when a bird drinks from a water fountain or a dog joyously sticks its nose out of the window of a passing car. It might be when we recognize the uniqueness of a simple object or event, such as the beauty of a particular apple in the supermarket, or the special way that the shadow of a tree falls on a nearby building at this particular moment. The experience can also come from something funny or sad. Although *tathata* involves the mundane, it is also a poetic moment that will never return in exactly the same way.

The wonder that can be seen in everyday life is what the term *tathata* suggests. We know we are experiencing the “thatness” of reality when we experience something and say to ourselves, “Yes, that’s it; that is the

way things are." In the moment, we recognize that reality is wondrously beautiful but also that its patterns are fragile and passing.

### Mahayana Literature

Mahayana Buddhism in India developed versions of the Tripitaka in Sanskrit. A host of additional written works also became canonical. Many of the new Mahayana works were called sutras because they purported to be the words of the Buddha, but in reality they were imaginative, colorful creations written at least several centuries after the Buddha lived, from about 100 B.C.E. to about 600 C.E. The teachings of these sutras, however, may be seen as a natural development of basic Buddhist insights.

Primary among these texts are the Prajnaparamita Sutras ("sutras on the perfection of wisdom"), the earliest of which may have been written about 100 B.C.E. These sutras attempt to contrast ordinary understanding with the enlightened understanding that everything in the universe is interdependent.

The influential Vimalakirti Sutra teaches that it is possible to live a devout Buddhist life without necessarily becoming a monk. The hero of the sutra is the man Vimalakirti, who was, as one historian describes him, "a layman rich and powerful, a brilliant conversationalist, a respected householder who surrounded himself with the pleasures of life, but was also a faithful and wise disciple of the Buddha, a man full of wisdom and thoroughly disciplined in his conduct."<sup>15</sup> Because the main figure is not a monk but more like a devout gentleman, we can see why this sutra became popular with laypeople. Its purpose, though, was serious. It showed that individuals can work successfully amidst the dangers of worldly life, can avoid causing harm, and can actually help themselves and others.

Two works that would have great influence on East Asian Buddhism were the Pure Land Sutras (two versions of the Sukhavati Vyuha Sutra, "sutra of the vision of the happy land"). The sutras speak of a heavenly realm, the Pure Land, established by the merciful Amitabha Buddha, where human beings can be reborn. All that is necessary for rebirth in the Pure Land is devotion to this Buddha, as shown by repetition of his name as a sign of total trust in him. These sutras would eventually give birth to a wildly successful movement, the Pure Land movement, which is still popular today. (We will discuss the Pure Land school of Mahayana a little later in this chapter.)

One of the most widely loved works of Mahayana was the Saddharma Pundarika Sutra ("lotus sutra of the good law"), known simply as the Lotus Sutra. In this sutra, the Buddha shows his transcendent, cosmic nature. As he preaches to thousands of his disciples, his light and wisdom extend out into the universe. Using parables, the sutra insists rather democratically that all people have the Buddha nature and that all, therefore, can become Buddhas. Many of its parables talk of the "skillful means" that can lead people of differing types and mentalities to enlightenment.

## 156 CHAPTER 4 BUDDHISM

Worshippers are dwarfed by the Buddha image in this Mahayana temple of southern China.



### The Spread of Mahayana in East Asia

Mahayana Buddhism spread out of India to central Asia and to China, which it entered in the first century of the common era. As Buddhism spread to China and its neighboring regions, Sanskrit writings were translated bit by bit into at least thirteen central Asian languages. In China, several Chinese versions were made of most of the major works. By the eighth century, an

enormous number of Buddhist works had been translated into Chinese.<sup>16</sup>

The appeal of Mahayana Buddhism in ancient China is worth considering. In some ways, the Buddhist ideal of monastic celibacy went against the grain of the Chinese Confucian culture, which (1) saw moral demands existing within family relationships, (2) venerated ancestors, and (3) valued continuity of the family line (see Chapter 6). Yet Mahayana Buddhism had virtues that appealed to a wide spectrum of the population. It accepted local cults and continued their practice of using rituals that promised magic, healing, and fertility for the masses of ordinary people. It created great temples with beautiful art and ceremony. It promoted peace and family harmony. It answered questions about the afterlife and performed funeral and memorial services for the dead. It provided a secure way of community life for people not interested in having children or creating their own families. It offered philosophical insights not already present in Chinese culture. And it provided many rulers with prayers and rituals that would help protect the nation and the rulers themselves.

How many individual schools and lineages existed is still being debated. Some forms of Mahayana may have been entirely separate schools, and others merely different interpretations of rules and teachings that existed within the same monasteries. Despite occasional persecution as a dangerous, foreign import, Mahayana spread throughout China. In particular, two forms of Mahayana flourished. The school of meditation (Chan, Ch'an) became highly influential among monks, poets, and artists. The Pure Land movement, with its devotion to Amitabha Buddha, became the primary form of devotion for laypeople. Ultimately, Buddhism was linked with Daoism and Confucianism as one of the officially sanctioned "Three Doctrines," and it became an essential part of Chinese culture.

Buddhism and its literature were carried into Korea from central Asia and China as early as 372 C.E.<sup>17</sup> Buddhism was adopted widely for its supposed powers to protect the three kingdoms then ruling the peninsula. Monasteries were thought of as powerhouses, sending monks' prayers to powerful Buddhas and bodhisattvas and receiving their celestial care in return. Korea was unified by the Silla kingdom, producing the Unified Silla dynasty (668–918 C.E.), and this unification led to a blending of religious elements from Daoism, Confucianism, shamanism, and Buddhism. Buddhism became the state religion and primary practitioner of official ritual.



At a Korean temple, people sit or kneel before images such as these. Congregants typically either meditate or study Buddhist scriptures.

## RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS



### Buddhist Festivals

The most important Buddhist festivals focus on the birth of the Buddha, his enlightenment, his death, the celebration of the New Year, and sometimes the commemoration of the dead. The exact dates for these celebrations and memorials differ from culture to culture.

In Theravada Buddhist countries, one great celebration (Vesak) recalls the birth, the enlightenment, and the death of the Buddha. It is celebrated at the time of the full moon in May.

In Mahayana Buddhism, the three festivals of the Buddha's life are separate. His birth is celebrated on the eighth day of the fourth month; his enlightenment is commemorated in winter on Bodhi Day, the eighth day of the twelfth month; and his death is recalled in early spring on the fifteenth day of the second month.

(Chinese and Korean Buddhists follow the lunar calendar, while Japanese Buddhists use the Western calendar.)

Celebration of the New Year often includes a visit to a temple to end the old year and the sharing of a vegetarian meal to welcome the new year. (The Japanese keep the Western New Year, while the Chinese celebrate their lunar New Year in February.)

In Japan the dead are remembered in a midsummer festival called O-Bon, derived from older Chinese practice. It has blended with Shinto elements and a belief in the Mahayana bodhisattva Jizo, who guides the dead back to the spirit world. If possible, the spirits' return is lighted with candles that drift down a stream or out into the ocean.



*During summer, O-Bon is celebrated across the world at Buddhist temples that have origins in Japan. At every temple, there is special dancing. At temples near bodies of water, lanterns with the names of dead ancestors may be set afloat.*

Buddhism in Korea reached its height during the Koryo dynasty (918–1392 c.e.). During this time, 80,000 wooden blocks were carved for the printing of all Korean and Chinese Buddhist texts of the Korean Tripitaka. After the first set of blocks was burned during a Mongol invasion, another set, which still exists, was finished in 1251. One of the greatest exponents of Korean Buddhism at this time was the monk Chinul (1158–1210). Given to a monastery as a young boy, he began meditation and textual study early. He had three great experiences of insight, all prompted by his reading of Mahayana materials. He founded the Chogye order, which combines textual study with regular meditation. It is still influential today.

Buddhism was supplanted by Confucianism as the state religion during the Yi dynasty (1392–1910). Nevertheless, although the aristocracy identified with Confucianism, the common people remained Buddhist.

Buddhism entered Japan in the sixth century c.e., where it began to grow after some initial resistance. It became so powerful in the early capital of Nara that in 794 the new capital city of Kyoto (then called Heian-kyo) was founded partly in order to be free from the influence of Buddhist clergy. The new capital was designed on a grid pattern, after Chinese models, and Japanese culture imported many elements of the Chinese culture of the time. Because the founding of the new capital coincided with a vibrant period of Mahayana Buddhism in China, Japanese Buddhism also imported Chinese Buddhist practices and teachings.

The history of Buddhism in Japan shows a movement toward increasing the power of laypeople. The first period, when the capital was at Nara, was dominated by essentially monastic Buddhist schools. In the second period, after the capital moved, the dominant schools (Shingon and Tendai; Figure 4.2) were ritualistic and appealed to the aristocracy. Their prominence lasted for about four hundred years. In the thirteenth century, however, two schools (Pure Land and Zen) particularly appealed to commoners and the military. Because Zen was adopted by many in the military, which controlled Japan until 1868, it became enormously influential in Japanese culture in general. (The separate schools are described in the following section.)

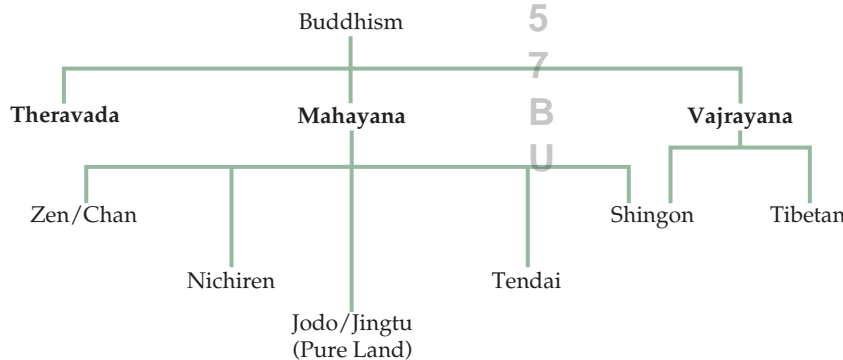


FIGURE 4.2  
Branches and schools of  
Buddhism

## 160 CHAPTER 4 BUDDHISM

At this Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Honolulu, congregants celebrate the lunar New Year.



### Some Major Schools of Mahayana

The many ideals of Mahayana Buddhism contain the seeds for a variety of schools of intellectual interpretation and practice. One such ideal—the notion that kindness is the supreme sign of enlightened awareness—has allowed many pre-Buddhist beliefs and practices to continue within Mahayana Buddhism: old gods receive new names, making them into heavenly Buddhas and bodhisattvas; old beliefs are absorbed; and old practices persist with new meanings. As we discussed earlier, Mahayana Buddhism also recognizes that people find themselves at different stages of spiritual evolution. Thus, whatever helps a person move to the next stage of awareness may be religiously acceptable. This is the notion of “skillful means”: some people need images to look at and gods to pray to; other people need a community of devout friends; and a very few need only silence and emptiness. Finally, the multiplicity of Mahayana texts invites many philosophical and practical approaches, as one Buddhist group focuses on one text and another Buddhist group focuses on another. The sects of Mahayana Buddhism thus show a wide variety of attitudes toward the use of art and ritual, toward the acceptance of pleasure, and toward worldly success.

These interesting differences are exhibited in the major sects of Japan, as described in the following pages. It was traditionally thought that these



An image of the bodhisattva Jizo is backed by a painting of the Shingon Kongo-kai mandala.

individual sects (except for one) began in China and were then introduced to Japan. Exactly how separate the sects originally were in China, however, is a matter of current debate. In Japan and Hawai'i, the sects have remained rather separate, and their differences may be easily experienced by interested travelers.



**Shingon** The name of this school is Shingon (Chinese: Zhen-yan, Chen-yan) and means “true word” or “word of truth.” The title refers to the use of sacred chants, called mantras. We might recall that the spread of Mahayana Buddhism in China was due in part to the magical effects that were thought to come from Buddhist ritual. People believed that Buddhist ritual, if carefully performed, would provide security for rulers, children for married couples, and more favorable agricultural conditions for farmers.

Behind Shingon ritual is a focus on experiencing union with the cosmic Buddha nature. This can be accomplished through the chanting of mantras, accompanied by a multitude of rituals and ritual objects. Foremost among these rituals is a fire ceremony, the *goma*, a continuation of the Vedic fire ceremony. In this ceremony, the priest builds a fire within a square sacred space bounded by colored cords. The priest throws wood and leaves slowly into the fire, symbolically destroying all egotistic hindrances to mystical union.

Shingon uses two **mandalas**, which are geometrical designs, usually painted on cloth, that present reality in symbolic form. One mandala, the Kongo-kai (“diamond-world”) mandala, shows the universe from the point of view of the wise person, who sees the universe as whole and perfect. It represents the universe seen as nirvana. The other mandala, the Tai-zo (“womb”) mandala, shows the universe from the point of view of the compassionate person. It sees the universe as samsara, a place of suffering and growth that needs our help.

Shingon developed from a type of magically oriented Buddhism that originated in India and was introduced to China. It was established in Japan by Kukai (774–835 C.E.), a Japanese monk who studied in China and returned to Japan with new knowledge of ritual and with books, mandalas, and altar implements. After his death, he received the name Kobo Daishi (“the Great Master who spreads the Dharma”), and under that name he has become a venerated cultural hero in Japan. Shingon, because of its love of ritual, has inspired many arts, particularly sculpture and painting. It has similarities with Tibetan Buddhism, and it thus contains some elements of Vajrayana Buddhism (discussed later in this chapter).

**Tendai** The Tendai (Chinese: Tiantai, T’ien-t’ai) sect is named for the great Chinese monastic institution at Mount Tiantai (“heavenly terrace”), where the sect is thought to have begun in eastern China. A large complex of monasteries arose there.<sup>18</sup>

By the eighth century C.E., there were many varied Buddhist texts, some written up to a thousand years after the time of the Buddha. When they had been translated into Chinese, the result was great confusion. How could the Buddha have uttered so many sermons, some with apparently contradictory ideas? The solution was to organize the teachings according to levels of complexity. It was taught that the Buddha had revealed his most basic insights to everybody, but that he had revealed his most difficult thoughts

only to those disciples who could understand them. The Tiantai (Tendai) sect attempted to categorize all the teachings and present them in a meaningful way, as a kind of ladder of steps leading to full enlightenment. Naturally, its own special teachings were at the top.

In Japan, this sect was favored by the emperor and his court for the expected benefits and protection it would bring to the country. The Japanese monk who went to China and returned with skills in Tendai Buddhism was Saicho (767–822 C.E.), who later received the honorary title Dengyo Daishi ("the Great Master who transmits the teachings"). Tendai's center, Enryaku-ji, is located on Mount Hiei, north of Kyoto.

**Jodo, or Pure Land** The Pure Land (Chinese: Jingtu, Ching-t'-u) school created a devotional form of Buddhism that could be practiced by lay-people as well as monks. The cult of bodhisattvas already existed in India and central Asia, but it had great appeal in China too. Pure Land Buddhism in China can be traced back to the monk Tan Luan (T'an Luan, c. 476–542). Legend says that he instituted the devotion to Amitabha Buddha as the result of a vision. Complete devotion to this Buddha, the monk thought, would result in the believer's rebirth in Amitabha's Pure Land, the Western Paradise. Devotees regularly repeated a short phrase, derived from Mahayana scriptures and praising Amitabha Buddha. At first the repetition of the Buddha's name was a monastic practice, but it then spread to the laity. In Chinese, the phrase is *Namo Amito-fo*; in Japanese, *Namu Amida Butsu*. Both mean "Praise to Amitabha Buddha." Daily repetition and recitation at the moment of death were thought to ensure the believer's rebirth in the Western Paradise.

In Japan, the Pure Land movement was spread by the monk Honen (1133–1212), who was originally a Tendai monk at Mount Hiei. His movement became a separate sect called Jodo Shu ("Pure Land sect"). Shinran (1173–1262), a disciple of Honen, continued the laicization of the *nembutsu*, as the chant is called in Japanese. He taught that human actions to attain salvation were unimportant in comparison to the saving power of the Buddha. Convinced that monastic practice was unnecessary, Shinran married. (He has often been compared with Martin Luther, who also married and emphasized simple trust as the way to salvation.) The movement that Shinran began eventually grew into the Jodo Shin Shu ("True Pure Land sect"). Pure Land sects have been extremely popular in China and Japan, and this popularity has made them the largest form of Mahayana Buddhism.

It was once common to think of the Pure Land as a real location somewhere beyond the earth. Today, however, it is often considered a metaphor for a compassionate and joyful way of living in the everyday world.

Pure Land Buddhism has inspired—and continues to inspire—the arts. In sculpture and painting, Amida (Amitabha) is often shown at the center of a triad. At his left and right are two bodhisattvas. Amida is also seen alone, surrounded by beams of light, descending from the sky to offer help

and receive the departed. The same images, sometimes drawn in gold on indigo paper, often appear in manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra.

**Nichiren** Unlike the other sects discussed thus far, Nichiren Buddhism began in Japan. Its founder was a Tendai monk, Nichiren (1222–1282). After being trained at Mount Hiei, Nichiren sought a simpler path than Tendai, which used many sutras and practices in the search for enlightenment. Out of the thousands of Mahayana texts, Nichiren wanted to find one that contained all the essential teachings of Buddhism. Following the lead of the Tendai tradition, which had already given much attention to the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren asserted that the Lotus Sutra was indeed the embodiment of all essential religious teaching. He thought of himself as a reincarnation of a minor Buddha in the Lotus Sutra (his monastic name Nichiren means “sun lotus”). His sect uses a chant that honors this sutra: *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, meaning “Praise to the mystic law of the Lotus Sutra.” Devout followers repeat the mantra many times a day, especially in the morning and evening. They believe that doing so will connect them with the divine power of the universe.

Nichiren Buddhism has produced several branches. Among the most important are Nichiren Shu (“Nichiren sect”), Nichiren Sho-Shu (“True Nichiren sect”), and Soka Gakkai (“Value Creation Educational Society”). The Nichiren Shu treats its founder as a bodhisattva, or Buddhist saint. The Nichiren Sho-Shu elevates Nichiren to the role of a reincarnation of the Buddha, “the Buddha of the present age.” The Soka Gakkai branch was formerly a lay arm of Nichiren Sho-Shu. However, an angry split occurred in 1991–1992, and Soka Gakkai became fully independent. There is in all of these branches an acceptance of the material world and an attempt to improve it. Soka Gakkai particularly works to reform society through political means, seeking peace through intercultural understanding.

Nichiren Buddhism was little known outside Japan until after World War II. It has now established itself all around the world. The goal-oriented chanting of some Nichiren groups has been very attractive to some westerners, and several celebrities (such as Tina Turner) practice a form of this faith.

**Zen** Zen Buddhism, a school of Mahayana Buddhism, began in China and was carried to Japan. Its influence has been so significant that it merits discussion in some detail.

Zen takes its name from the seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path—*dhyana* (“meditation”). In Chinese the word is *chan* (*ch’ an*), and in Japanese it is *zen*. (In the discussion here, Chan refers to the sect in China, and Zen refers to the sect as it developed in Japan.) The complexity that had overtaken Chinese Buddhism helped create a counterbalancing movement toward simplification. For the Chan sect in China, simplification came from looking directly to the enlightenment experience of Siddhartha



Buddhists are faithful in remembering the dead, honoring their spirits at home altars or temple columbaria (vaults containing ashes of the dead). Some temples even encourage relatives to "make merit" as a way of speeding relatives' progress toward nirvana.

Gautama. Siddhartha had become the Buddha, the Enlightened One, through his practice of meditation. Although he did not deny the value of ritual, the Buddha did not think that it led to enlightenment. Taking after the Buddha, the members of the Chan movement, in their desire for enlightenment, favored the technique of seated meditation, just as Siddhartha Gautama had.

Chan Buddhism traditionally traces itself back to a Buddhist monk named Bodhidharma, who is said to have come to China (about 500 C.E.) from India or central Asia and in China began his Meditation school. Bodhidharma is often shown sitting in meditation, with Western facial features, swarthy skin, a light beard, and an earring. In paintings, he faces a wall to indicate his strong desire to block out anything that would distract him from his meditation. It has been said that he meditated for so long that his legs became withered. He is the embodiment of patience and persistence.

The native Chinese religious and philosophical movement called Daoism (see Chapter 6) undoubtedly paved the way for Chan Buddhism and influenced it. Daoism had similar ideals: silence, detachment, acceptance, distrust of symbolization, and union with the universe. Daoism also practiced meditation. Daoism may have added to Buddhism its own esteem

for the natural world and its appreciation for humor, although exactly how Daoism influenced Chan is debated. There are also Confucian elements in Chan and Zen, such as the communal nature of monastery life and the transmission of realization from master to disciple.

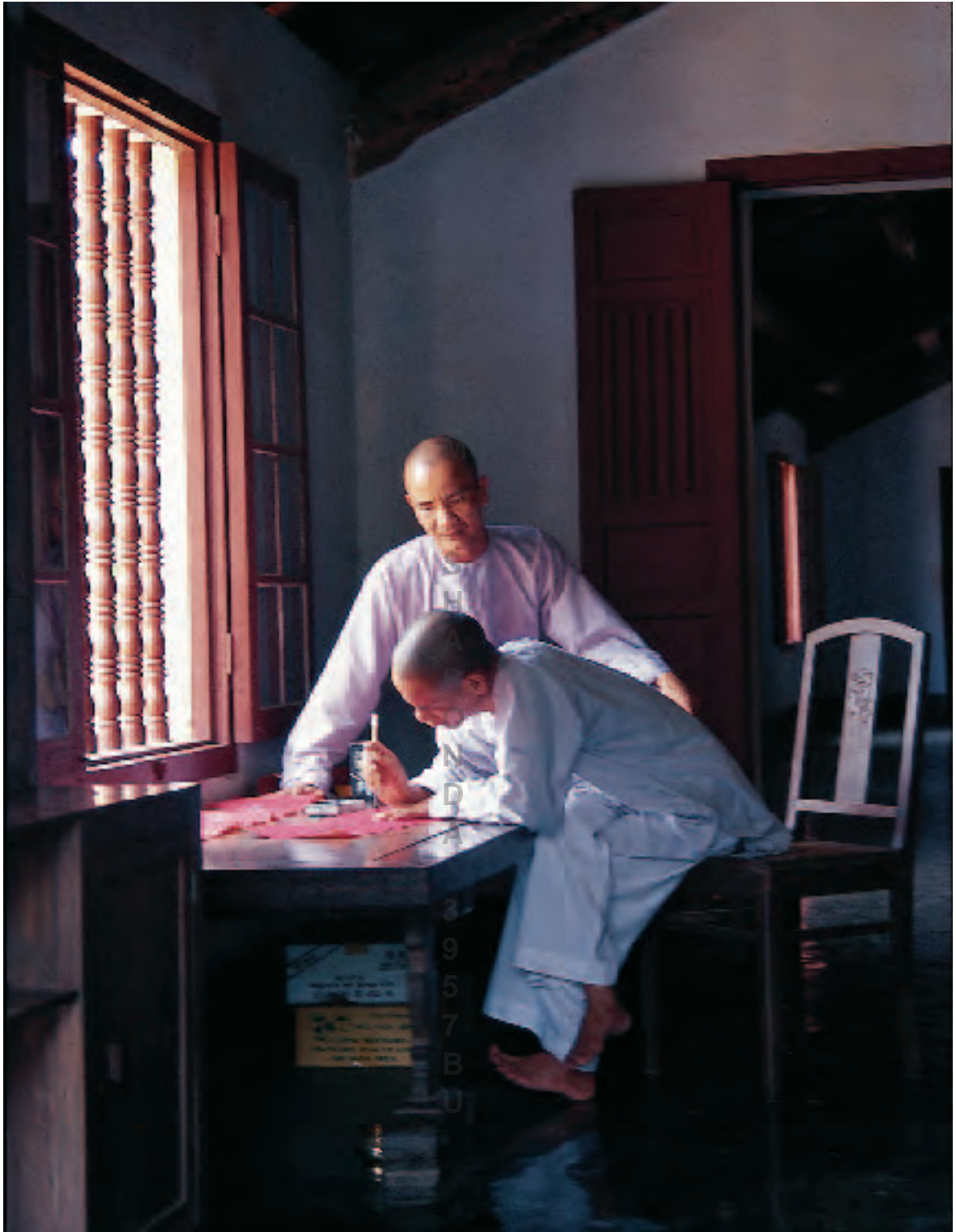
In the long history of Buddhism, some teachers have emphasized the importance of regular meditation and the effectiveness of meditative techniques, saying that they produce enlightenment gradually but inevitably, like the coming of dawn. Others have stressed that enlightenment can occur as a sudden awakening to one's true nature, like a flash of lightning, anywhere and at any time. The enlightenment experience (called **satori**, or *kensho*) brings an awareness of the unity of oneself with the rest of the universe. The enlightened person knows that human distinctions and separations—mine, yours; this, that; one, many—are distinctions that societies and individuals' minds create and then project onto other people and things. Such distinctions are not ultimate, though, for all human beings consist of the same basic energy of the universe, appearing in many varied shapes. This experience of ultimate unity brings new insights and emotions to the art of living: less anxiety over attaining goals, less concern about death, and an appreciation for the preciousness of everyday life.

The most fundamental Zen technique for reaching enlightenment is regular "sitting meditation," called *zazen*. In Zen monasteries, *zazen* is normally done for several hours in the morning and evening. It involves sitting in silence with one's back straight and centered, keeping the body still, and taking deep and regular breaths. These are just simple techniques for quieting the mind and focusing on the moment. The mind becomes more peaceful, and ideally, with long practice, a state of simple awareness takes over as one's "true nature" is revealed.<sup>19</sup>

The **koan** is another technique for attaining awareness. Its origin is uncertain, but the name derives from the Chinese *gong-an* (*kung-an*), translated as "public discussion." The koan is a question that cannot be easily answered using logic. It demands pondering. Consider, for example, the question, Why did the monk Bodhidharma come from the West? An appropriate answer could be, "the bush in the garden"—or any response that mentions an ordinary object. The meaning of this apparently odd answer is that Bodhidharma's whole purpose was to make people wake up to the wondrous nature of even simple objects in everyday life. Sometimes a good answer to a koan need not be a verbal response but rather an appropriate action, such as lifting up a hand, taking off a shoe, holding up a flower, or even raising an eyebrow.<sup>20</sup>

Manual labor is also essential to Zen training. In a Zen monastery, work in the garden and kitchen and the repair and cleaning of the monastery are techniques to combat the inadequacy of words to describe reality. Zen, influenced here by Daoism, maintains that words are often barriers that keep us from immediate contact with the true nature of things. Silent meditation blended with direct experience of the physical world can take us beyond words and thoughts to experience reality itself.

As teachers, monks pass on the traditions they received from their own teachers, including knowledge of the arts. Here a monk in Vietnam teaches calligraphy. ▶



## DEEPER INSIGHTS



## Buddhism and Japanese Arts

Many people assume that Buddhism has had a role in shaping the arts of Japan. As a matter of fact, what we think of as “Japanese style” is a mixture of Shinto (see Chapter 7), Buddhist influences (especially Zen), and traditional Japanese attitudes toward nature. Over the past three hundred years, these arts have taken on a life of their own, carried on by laypeople and practitioners of several branches of Mahayana Buddhism.

**HAIKU**

A *haiku* is an extremely short poem. In Japan, longer Chinese poetic forms were telescoped and refined. The model haiku is a short poem written in three lines. The ideal traditional haiku should mention or suggest the season, and, like a good photograph, it should capture the essence of a moment before it passes.

Matsuo Basho (1644–1694) is considered the greatest of Japan’s haiku writers. The following poem is widely quoted and considered to be his masterpiece:

Old pond:  
A frog jumps in.  
Sound of water.

Why, we may wonder, is this poem held in such esteem? On first reading, it seems simple, insignificant. But on closer inspection, it reveals intriguing balance and contrast. There are many possible interpretations. The old pond suggests timelessness, but the splash is momentary, representing every daily event when seen against the backdrop of eternity. Or the frog could represent a human being; the pond, the mind; and the splash, the sudden breakthrough to enlightenment. Perhaps the frog signifies the Buddhist monk in meditation, while the pond suggests all of Buddhist teaching. Or maybe the frog symbolizes the poet himself and the splash the poet’s insight. Thus, the imagery can be taken both literally and in several equally valid symbolic ways.

**TEA CEREMONY**

The making, drinking, and offering of tea to guests has developed into a fine art in Japan, called *chado* (or *sado*, “the way of tea”). Bringing guests together for a ritual

tea ceremony in Japanese is called *cha no yu* (“hot water for tea”). The drinking of tea was first used in Chinese monasteries for medicinal purposes and as an aid for staying awake during meditation. There, tea drinking also developed some ritual elements. Tea drinking was then carried to Japan and was practiced assiduously by both Zen monks and lay disciples. Under the tea master Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591), the tea ceremony took on its current highly stylized form.<sup>21</sup>

The essence of the Japanese tea ceremony is the gathering of a few guests, the preparation of green tea, and the offering of tea and sweets. The tea ceremony normally takes place in a tea pavilion, whose design is inspired by a rustic country hut, often mentioned in Chinese poetry. The purpose of the ceremony is to create and enjoy together an atmosphere of harmony and beauty, where each object, action, and word contributes to the tranquil experience.

**CERAMICS**

Bowls used in the tea ceremony look deliberately natural, almost as if they were dug up out of the ground. They often look rough and unfinished, with earth-colored glazes dripping down their sides. The rims sometimes are not quite even, and the colors are not always uniform. Sometimes there are even bubbles and cracks in the ceramic. All this is deliberate. The accidents of firing the bowls in the kiln are appreciated, as are the subtle shades of earth tones that are produced. The aim is, paradoxically, to create pieces that exhibit deliberate naturalness and a calculated spontaneity.

**IKEBANA**

The word for Japanese-style flower arrangement—*ikebana*—means “living flower.” Flower arrangement can be traced back to the offerings of flowers placed on altars in the temples of China and Japan. But *ikebana* grew into a unique art form of its own, and examples of *ikebana* now are found in restaurants, offices, and homes.

*Ikebana* is quite different from Western flower arrangement, which tends to be dense, symmetrical, and colorful. *Ikebana* is the opposite. The arrangements are airy, asymmetrical, and generally of no more than two



*Ikebana suggests a bit of nature brought into a home, tearoom, or temple. It reminds viewers of Buddhist teaching on the impermanence of all things.*

colors. Effective ikebana is temporary art, lasting but a few days and changing every day. Thus, some see ikebana as a manifestation of Buddhist insight into impermanence. Ikebana is Buddhist sculpture.

#### GARDEN DESIGN

In China and Japan, gardens have long been an essential part of architecture, planned along with the buildings they complement. Garden designers are ranked as highly as poets and artists. Some gardens are created for strolling, others for seated contemplation from under an eave. They are not essentially Buddhist, of course, and not all monasteries have a garden. But they are found frequently enough in Buddhist environs for us to say that gardens have been used to present Buddhist ideals.

A famous example is the rock garden at Ryoan-ji, in northwest Kyoto. Ryoan-ji garden, enclosed on two sides by a low earthen wall, consists of five clusters of large boulders set in raked white gravel. The rocks and gravel suggest mountain peaks rising through clouds or islands in a river. The fascination of the garden is the relation between the clusters of boulders. Viewed this way, the boulders seem more like ideas in a great mind. The only vegetation in the garden is the moss at the base of the stones and the trees beyond the wall. Really more like an X-ray of an ideal garden, Ryoan-ji would seem to be unchanging because of its stony nature; but it changes a great deal, depending on the season, the weather, the light, and the time of day.

#### CALLIGRAPHY AND PAINTING

Calligraphy (Greek: “beautiful writing”) is a highly prized art form in China and Japan. Because the characters used in Japanese and Chinese writing are closer to pictures and to drawing than they are to alphabet letters, they have a great range of vitality and beauty. The Zen ideal is to produce what is spontaneous but also profound, and because writing is done with an inkbrush, great expressiveness in darkness, weight, movement, and style of characters is possible. Furthermore, the ink cannot be erased, and the result is thought to be the immediate expression of the writer’s personality and level of awareness. When fine calligraphic talent is employed to write a striking phrase or poem, the result is doubly powerful. The supreme example of Zen simplicity in art is the *enso*, a black circle, almost always done in a single, quick stroke on paper or a piece of wood. The empty circle represents the emptiness of all reality.

Elements that are typical of Zen design include simple elegance, asymmetry, the use of stone and wood in their natural state, and the near emptiness that is characteristic of the rock garden. Over the past one hundred years, Zen has had global impact as well—in architecture, art, interior design, and fashion. It is apparent, for example, in the domestic architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and his followers, which popularized the use of large windows and natural stone. It seems even to have influenced retail chains such as The Gap and Banana Republic, where we see natural wood floors, uncluttered space, and clothing in muted earth tones.



## VAJRAYANA BUDDHISM: THE “DIAMOND VEHICLE”

Mahayana Buddhism in India developed practices and beliefs that have sometimes been called esoteric (hidden, not openly taught), such as the use of special chants and rituals to gain supranormal powers. When some of these traditions entered Tibet, Indian Mahayana Buddhism blended with Tibetan shamanism to create Tibetan Buddhism, a complex system of belief, art, and ritual. Although Vajrayana actually includes other forms of esoteric Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism is its most prominent expression.

The name *Vajrayana* means the “vehicle of the diamond” or “vehicle of the lightning bolt.” The name suggests strength, clarity, wisdom, and flashes of light, all of which are associated with the enlightened awareness that this vehicle seeks to transmit. Vajrayana is considered by some to be simply a special form of Mahayana. But most consider Vajrayana to be a third branch of Buddhism, because of its complexity and unique elements.

### Origins, Practice, and Literature of Tibetan Buddhism

The pre-Buddhist Tibetan religion worshiped the powers of nature. As was the case with many native religions, these powers were often envisioned as

The most prominent missionary of Vajrayana was Padmasambhava, known in some areas as Guru Rimpoche (“precious jewel”). Here, the abbot of Kurjey Lhakhang in central Bhutan dresses as Guru Rimpoche and parades among the faithful as part of the celebration of the Guru’s birthday.





demons that had to be appeased. Shamanistic rituals involving animal sacrifice and the use of bones, dance, and magical incantations were intended to control the demonic powers.

This Tibetan religion was challenged by a new religion, a special type of Buddhism practiced in northeast India, named Tantric Buddhism for its scriptures, the Tantras (“spread out”). Tantric Buddhism opposed the original Buddhist detachment from the world and its negative attitude toward bodily pleasure. The Tantras taught that the body and all its energies could be used to reach enlightenment. For Tantric Buddhism, enlightenment is an experience of ultimate oneness that occurs when a practitioner unites all opposites. Sexual union is a powerful experience of unity, and Tantric Buddhism uses the imagery and (rarely) the practice of sexual union to help attain enlightenment. In its imagery and belief system, Tantric Buddhism shows influence from Hinduism—particularly its tendency to pair a male and a female deity and its love of multiple deities. Vajrayana believes the divine Buddha nature expresses itself in a multitude of male and female deities.

A form of Tantric Buddhism first entered Tibet in the seventh century and was spread by Indian missionaries. Tradition holds that a king named Song-tsen-gam-po (active c. 630) became its patron and made it the national religion. In the beginning, native priests fought against this new religion, but a legendary Buddhist monk named Padmasambhava, who came from India in the late eighth century, reconciled the two religions and turned the native demonic gods of Tibet into guardian deities of Buddhism.

The resulting religion blended shamanistic interests, the sexual imagery of Tantric Buddhism, and traditional Buddhist elements such as the chanting of sutras, meditation, the ideal of nonviolence, and the search for enlightenment.

Long trumpets, bells, and drums often accompany chanting in Vajrayana ceremonies.

Monks thus were called upon not only as teachers but also as doctors and shamans; they were expected to bring health, control weather, and magically protect worshipers from death. A Tibetan spiritual teacher is often called **lama** (a Tibetan translation of the word *guru*), and this title is thus frequently used as a title of honor for all monks.

Although the Indian ideals of the wandering holy man and cave-dwelling solitary did not die out in Tibetan Buddhism, they were not well suited for a climate as severe as that of the cold and barren Tibetan plateau. More compatible, it seemed, were the large monastic complexes that had grown up in late Indian Buddhism. The Tibetan version of such a complex often looked like a fortified hilltop castle and was in effect a complete city for sometimes thousands of monks, containing libraries, prayer halls, kitchens, storage areas, and large courtyards used for public performances. A written form of the Tibetan language was created for the translation of Buddhist scriptures from India. It also made possible the writing of scriptural commentaries and other treatises.

Over time, the practice of celibacy declined, and the heads of Tibetan monasteries frequently passed on their control to their sons. The consumption of meat and alcohol became common as well. A reform movement, however, emerged under the monk Tsong Kha-pa (1357–1419), demanding that monks be unmarried and that strict monastic practice be reinstated. His sect, as a result, came to be known as Gelug-pa, meaning “party of virtue.” (It is also commonly called the Yellow Hat sect because of the tall, crested yellow hats that the monks wear during religious services.) This sect grew powerful. It helped create many of the greatest monasteries, full of art and complete sets of Buddhist scriptures, and it provided Tibet with its political leadership for several centuries. The executive head of the Gelug-pa is called the Dalai Lama (“ocean superior one”).

It became a common belief in Tibetan Buddhism that certain major lamas are reincarnations of earlier lamas, who in turn are considered emanations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. (A belief in reincarnation thus solved the problem of transmission of leadership, which in a celibate monastic order cannot pass to a son.) The lineage of the Dalai Lama, for example, traces itself back to a nephew of Tsong Kha-pa, the first of the line of succession. Each Dalai Lama is considered to be an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, the heavenly bodhisattva of compassion. When a major lama dies, his reincarnation is sought, found, and trained. The current Dalai Lama, for example, was found in eastern Tibet. A delegation of monks, after consulting a state oracle about the place of rebirth, took objects (such as prayer beads) that had been used by the previous Dalai Lama and mixed them with similar objects. The boy who was recognized as the current Dalai Lama selected only those objects used by the previous Dalai Lama, helping to prove his identity. (The movies *Kundun*, *Seven Years in Tibet*, and *Little Buddha* vividly portray the selection of the Dalai Lama and other Vajrayana practices.) The current Dalai Lama fled from Tibet in 1959 and lives in northern India.

The literature of Tibetan Buddhism consists of two large collections of writings. The Kanjur is the core, made up of works from the Tripitaka (mostly Mahayana sutras and the vinaya, with Tantric texts). The second part, the Tenjur, comprises commentaries on scripture and treatises on a wide variety of disciplines, such as medicine, logic, and grammar. The collection exceeds four thousand works.

### Ritual and the Arts

Vajrayana Buddhism is interested in the acquisition of both internal and external powers and holds that such powers may be attained through proper ritual. The ritual allows the individual to become identified with a particular Buddha or heavenly bodhisattva, thus giving the individual the power and protection of that heavenly being.

Because correctly performed ceremony brings identification with a powerful deity, ceremonial objects play significant roles. We noted earlier that some devices, such as the mantra and mandala, were used in Mahayana practice. These devices were subsequently adopted by Vajrayana. But in Vajrayana these objects and techniques take on special importance. Among the significant ritual objects is the **vajra**, a metal object somewhat like a divining rod or scepter that represents a stylized bolt of lightning. The vajra is associated with diamond-hardness, power, and insight. It is held in the right hand and suggests kind action. A bell is held in the left hand and symbolizes wisdom. When used together, one in each hand, they represent the union of wisdom and compassion. The vajra and bell are essential to Tibetan Vajrayana ritual in a way that other religious objects (mentioned in the following paragraphs) are not.

Another important Tibetan Buddhist object is the prayer wheel, which comes in all sizes—from very tiny to as tall as a two-story building. A prayer wheel is a cylinder that revolves around a central pole. Inside the cylinder are pieces of paper inscribed with sacred phrases. It is believed that the turning of the written prayers creates as much good karma as if one were to recite them. Believers often carry small prayer wheels and turn them as they walk, while the devout push or pull large prayer wheels at temples and in public places. Some prayer wheels are placed in streams, where the flowing water turns them. The same principle applies to the wind blowing through prayer flags, which consist of square or triangular pieces of cloth containing inscriptions.

Certain ritual objects evoke awe at first because of their connection with death. They are meant to inoculate the believer against the fear of dying by forcing the individual to accept death long before it comes. For example, human thighbones are used to make small trumpets, and half of a human skull, decorated with gold or silver, might be used as a ceremonial bowl. Paintings and statues of fierce deities often have a similar function.

Music and dance, used by shamans to protect against demons, also play an important role in Tibetan Vajrayana. Drums, long trumpets, bells, and



Costumed monks dance before a huge *thondrol* (Buddhist tapestry), here portraying Guru Rimpoche in his many manifestations. The tapestry is unfurled for a few hours once a year at Bhutan temple ceremonies. Viewing the thondrol is said to liberate one from the cycle of rebirths.

cymbals are used to accompany a deep, slow droning chant. The effect is hypnotic and evokes the sacredness that underlies reality.

In Vajrayana as well as Mahayana, a mantra is chanted or written to bring power and wisdom through repetition. The most highly revered mantra in Tibetan Vajrayana is *Om mani padme hum!* (literally translated, “Om—the jewel—oh lotus—ah!”). One translation employs Tantric sexual symbolism: “The jewel is in the lotus.” The jewel and lotus represent sexual opposites, and the mantra represents sexual union—symbolic of enlightenment. In yet another symbolic translation—“The jewel *is* the lotus”—the jewel represents the divine Buddha nature, and the lotus represents the everyday world of birth and death. Hence, the mantra means that this world of suffering is the same as the Buddha nature and that the enlightened person sees that they are the same. However, it is also possible to interpret the mantra as merely a prayer to the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, who may be pictured holding each of the two objects. The mantra then would be “Hail to the jewel-lotus one!” No matter what the origin and meaning of the mantra, the ordinary believer simply thinks of it as a powerful prayer. In addition to this mantra, there are many others, each of which is believed to be sacred to a particular Buddha or bodhisattva or is believed to be valuable for obtaining a certain result.

Symbolic hand gestures (**mudras**) on statues of the Buddha are common throughout all forms of Buddhism. For example, the right hand extended with the palm outward and the fingers pointing up is a mudra of blessing; if the palm is open but the hand is turned downward, the mudra symbolizes generosity. In Vajrayana, a large number of mudras have evolved to convey more esoteric meanings, such as the unity of opposites. Mudras also help distinguish individual Buddhas and bodhisattvas within the large pantheon of deities. Moreover, mudras can be performed to a chant, with the two hands simultaneously forming mudra after mudra to create a harmonious balance of opposites.

The mandala that is used in some forms of Mahayana takes on great variety and complexity in Tibetan Buddhism. We might recall that a mandala is a sacred cosmic diagram, often used in meditation. It may represent in symbolic form the entire universe, the palace of a deity, or even the self. A common design is a circle within or enclosing a square, or a series of circles and squares that grow smaller and smaller as they come closer to the center of the design; another form looks like a checkerboard of many squares. A mandala usually appears as a painting on cloth, but it may take many forms. For some ceremonies, monks create a mandala in sand and then destroy it at the end of the ritual, expressing vividly the Buddhist teaching that everything must change.

Any painting on cloth is called a *thangka* (pronounced *tan'-ka*). In addition to mandala designs, a wide variety of subjects can appear on thangkas. Common images are Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and guardian deities, painted in both benevolent and terrifying forms (the terrifying forms both frighten away demons and chasten the believer). The female deity Tara, who represents mercy, appears in two major forms (white and green) and in several minor forms. We also find frequent representations of the monk Padmasambhava and other noted teachers. The existence of so many celestial beings and saints—with their attendants and symbolic objects—provides artists with a multitude of subjects to paint and sculpt.

### PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: THE MONKS AND THE POND

On a recent trip to Southeast Asia I heard of an old and beautiful temple, entirely made of teakwood and known for its wonderful carvings. Tourists rarely visited it, I was told, because it was far off in the countryside. I would have to cross a river and then walk a good distance to the temple. It was suggested that I go with a guide.



The Vajrayana tradition encourages monks to create and meditate upon elaborate paintings of Buddhist teachings, including the intricate form known as the mandala. Here, a twenty-first-century Vajrayana monk silently works on a mandala in a shopping mall.

All began according to plan. My guide was a woman who was also a teacher. We took a small bus to the river, where we waited for a ferryboat. People around us carried baskets of produce, and many had bicycles. It was a humid, brilliantly sunny day. We stood patiently under the black umbrellas we had brought for protection from the sun. At last a wooden ferryboat arrived, people wheeled their bicycles aboard, and the boat crossed.

Luckily for my guide and me, an enclosed horsecart was standing under a tree at the other side of the river. Its driver was pleased to see us. We negotiated a fare and jumped in back. The horse ambled pleasantly along the dirt road, moving in and out of the shadows of the trees at each side; but because of all the potholes, the cart bounced wildly, and we had to hold on to the sides of the cart to avoid being thrown out.

Soon I began to hear the sound of chanting over loudspeakers. (One cannot escape electronically amplified sounds these days, even in the countryside.) Coming around a bend in the road, I could see a white pagoda and white stucco temple at the base of a hill. It must be a temple fair, I thought. But as we drove closer, I saw that the temple was deserted. Instead, people were crowded together on the nearby hillside. Could it be a special ceremony?

"May we stop and look?" I asked.

The driver came to a halt near the temple. We jumped out of the cart and started walking quickly up the hill. As we came close to the top, we were astonished to see a woman lying on the ground, the people surrounding her closely. Her long black hair was in disarray, and she was in a state of great emotion. Her eyes were unseeing. She seemed to be in a trance. It was then that we saw, in the crowd behind her, four men holding a very thick and powerful-looking snake. We advanced no farther. The woman on the ground was talking excitedly. The people stood motionless but attentive, listening to her. Everyone seemed calm and unafraid. After a few minutes, monks began walking among the people.

Protected by the arms of another, this entranced woman is believed to be speaking the words of the snake.



"What's happening?" I asked my guide.

"It's a miracle," she said. "A miracle!"

"And what is the woman saying?"

"The snake is speaking through her. He is saying, 'Do not harm me. I only need for you to dig a pond for me here at the temple. I will live in the pond and protect you.'"

"And what are the monks doing?"

"They are taking up a collection to make the pond."

I was silent. We returned to the horsecart and continued on our way to the teakwood temple. Along the way I thought of the decorative snakes that adorn the handrails of so many temples in Southeast Asia. I recalled the story in the Jataka Tales of a snake whose heroic willingness to die had actually saved its life. And I recalled the story of the snake Muchalinda, king of the cobras, who had protected the Buddha at the time of his enlightenment. Even more, I thought of how varied the expressions of Buddhism are, ranging from complex philosophies to unexpected forms of popular practice. One has to be ready for everything.

At last we arrived at the famous wooden temple. After all the excitement at the first temple, this was an oasis of peace. On one side of the building, an old monk sat comfortably beside an open window, reading a local newspaper. Near him five children recited the alphabet out loud together. Passing several large statues of the Buddha, I walked to the other end of the temple. There, four monks sat on the wide wooden floor, studying scriptures in a pool of sunlight.



Three young monks study scripture with their teacher on the porch of an old teak temple not far from Mandalay.



## RITUALS AND CELEBRATIONS



### Buddhist Meditation

Because meditation is a core practice of Buddhism, many kinds of meditation have developed. Some of them have made their way to the West, where they have occasionally been modified.

In the Theravada tradition, one approach to meditation is especially significant. It is called *Vipassana* (“insight”), because it emphasizes being fully attentive to the present moment. This attentiveness, sometimes called *mindfulness*, is primarily accomplished by sitting quietly and paying attention to one’s exhalation and inhalation. The same type of meditation may also be done while walking. The meditator walks extremely slowly on flat ground, being aware at each moment of the motion of the right, then left, foot. (In Sri Lanka and elsewhere, some monasteries have special walking tracks for this type of meditation.)

Seated meditation, particularly cultivated by Chan and Zen, is the most significant form of Mahayana meditation. Like *Vipassana*, it begins with a focus on breathing. It may then include reflections on a question given by a master or on the meaning of a line of poetry. It may also involve the silent repetition of a single meaningful word or phrase.

The Vajrayana tradition, with its love of art and ritual, has developed many complex meditations. Vajrayana meditation tends to make use of ritual objects (bells, candles, butter lamps), images, mandalas, Sanskrit words (mantras), hand gestures (mudras), and visualization exercises. Frequently the meditation involves reconstructing in one’s imagination the image of a favorite deity. The meditator then takes on the identity of that deity for the duration of the meditation. Other meditations involve contemplating the moon, clouds,

or water. Some meditations make use of imaginative techniques; the meditator mentally creates a lotus, a moon disc, a written Sanskrit syllable, an altar of deities, colors, or rays of light, often imagining these in a certain order.

All three traditions also have some form of what can be called a meditation of compassion. The meditator reflects on the many different kinds of sentient beings—human, animal, and insect. The next step of the meditation is to recognize that all of these beings are struggling to survive, that all are trying to avoid pain, and that many are suffering. The meditation ends when the meditator projects outward the wish that all sentient beings may be well and happy. This wish is sometimes accompanied by a mental image of light and warmth radiating outward.

Beginners who are interested in Buddhist meditation can try simple seated meditation. A quiet spot is best, and the meditator should sit on a cushion or sofa, with legs drawn up. (If that is not possible, then one may sit on a chair, with the feet flat on the ground.) Some people like to face outside, looking into a garden. The back should be straight, the position comfortable, and the breathing deep, slow, and regular. The eyes may be either open or closed. The meditator should remain as still as possible and focus on each breath as it goes in and out. Thoughts need not be banished, but should simply be “watched,” like seeing clouds passing. One can start by meditating a short amount of time—even as little as five minutes per day. Soon it will be possible to meditate for longer periods once or twice a day. Many report that the exercise leaves them with a greater sense of inner peace and often even oneness with their surroundings.

## BUDDHISM AND THE MODERN WORLD

Although Buddhism originated in India and then spread primarily through Asia, it has now become a worldwide religion. Buddhist temples and meditation centers can be found in many countries, particularly in the industrialized countries of Europe and the Americas. Part of the attraction of Buddhism is that many of its essential teachings seem to agree with modern values. Some people appreciate what they see as its emphasis on awareness, self-reliance, and insight. Others think that Buddhism fits in well with the



views of modern science. Still others are attracted to the Buddhist ideal of nonviolence as a standard for civilized behavior in a multicultural world—an attraction that was magnified by the Dalai Lama's selection in 1989 for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Critics point out that the modern world has adopted what it likes from Buddhism and ignored the rest. The modern world, for example, has not been quick to embrace the celibacy of the Buddha or of Buddhist monks and nuns—who traditionally represent the core of the religion. The modern world believes in recycling, but not in reincarnation. And the modern world turns a blind eye to the actual practice of many Buddhist believers, whose real-life Buddhist activity is performed in order to “make merit,” gain health or wealth, and have good luck. Critics scorn the modern “cafeteria approach” to Buddhism. The contemporary world, they explain, has adopted only the elements it likes—meditation, Zen design, and the exoticism of Tibet—and with these it is now creating a new kind of Buddhism in its own image. Buddhism, they say, is becoming a yuppie supermarket of meditation cushions, gongs, and Dalai Lama posters.

All of these complaints have some truth. And yet . . . Buddhism is forever changing. In its long history, as the ship of its teachings has sailed from one cultural port to the next, some of its goods have been tied to the mast

Is a new form of Buddhism being born among European and American converts to the religion? The Dalai Lama's sermons in New York City's Central Park attracted audiences in the tens of thousands.

while others have been tossed overboard. This fact is even truer today, and it makes studying the interrelation of Buddhism and the modern world all the more fascinating.

Buddhism's first contact with the West occurred in the late eighteenth century, when translations of primarily Theravada material were carried to Europe from Sri Lanka and Myanmar by English colonials. Because so many of these colonials were missionaries, they were especially impressed by Buddhist moral teachings. Thus, the view of Buddhism that they spread emphasized the religion's admirable ethical system.

The opening of Japan to foreigners in the second half of the nineteenth century created a second wave of interest in Buddhism. French, English, and American people began to read about Japanese culture and to see photographs of early Buddhist temples and examples of Buddhist-inspired art. Foreign interest dovetailed with anti-Buddhist government actions in Japan after 1868, which forced many Buddhist temples to sell some of their art. Japanese art was then collected widely in Europe and America, both by private collectors and by museums.

Just as many see Buddhism's influence on Japanese art, so Buddhism has influenced Western art via Japan. There is no doubt that the Japanese influence on Western art has been extraordinary since Japan opened to the West. French art of the late nineteenth century was invigorated by the discovery of Japanese prints and scrolls, which flooded into France after 1880. Asymmetry, a love of nature, and an appreciation for the passing moment—features of much Japanese art—began to appear in the work of the Impressionists and Postimpressionists, particularly Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901), and Claude Monet (1840–1926). (One of van Gogh's self-portraits was almost certainly influenced by pictures of Buddhist monks that he had seen.) Monet's Japanese-style water garden, with its pond of water lilies at Giverny, near Paris, is a good example of the influence Japan had at the turn of the century in France.

Haiku and other forms of Japanese poetry began to influence Western poetry at the same time. We see this particularly in the Imagist school, which produced short poems that depended on a few strong images presented in simple language. Poets who exemplified this style include Ezra Pound (1885–1972), e. e. cummings (1894–1962), H. D. (Hilda Doolittle, 1886–1961), and William Carlos Williams (1883–1963).

A third wave of Buddhist influence came in the decades just after World War II, when U.S. soldiers returned from the American occupation of Japan. The great interest of the time was Zen (perhaps only loosely understood), which influenced the poetry of the Beat movement and the lifestyle of the counterculture. The novels of Jack Kerouac (1922–1969) show a Zenlike love of the spontaneous. His book *On the Road*, about a cross-country trip with friends, inspired readers to make similar explorations. Zen love of the moment is also evident in the jazzlike poetry of Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997) and the ironic poetry of Lawrence Ferlinghetti

## WOMEN AND RELIGION



### Women and Buddhism

In Southeast Asia, it is quite common to see a sign in English reading “No ladies beyond here” in front of the sanctuary area inside Buddhist temples. At the famous Golden Rock Shrine in Myanmar, only men may “earn merit” by applying gold leaf to the large boulder that is believed to hold a hair of the Buddha. And while women may shave their heads and become nuns, their status is generally lower than that of male monks, and they are not allowed to be fully ordained. These examples and others reveal that women have second-class citizenship in several Buddhist traditions.

Yet anyone who travels in Buddhist countries sees that women play a large role in the religion. Typically, most worshipers are female. Women are in frequent attendance at temples, except in monks’ quarters. They typically clean the shrines and tend to the offerings, such as flowers and candles, and they help prepare meals for the monks. It is primarily women who get up long before dawn to cook the extra rice and vegetables that their family will donate to the monks each morning in order to “earn merit.” All in all, Buddhism as an institution could not exist without women.

Ambivalence about women has existed in Buddhism from the very beginning. Initially, the Buddha did not allow women to join the Sangha; because monks must be chaste, he taught that the presence of women within their community would encourage temptation, even scandal. But the Buddha’s aunt, who was also his step-mother, petitioned him several times to allow her

to enter the Sangha. Finally, the Buddha relented, allowing her and other women to enter the order. However, after his death, debate over allowing women into the Sangha reemerged. Some monks even argued that women had to be reborn as men in order to become monks.

Some Buddhist traditions, particularly the Mahayana traditions in Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam, have always ordained women. In contrast, the Theravada traditions in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia once ordained women, but the practice eventually died out. Traditional Tibetan Buddhism did not ordain women. Change, however, is occurring. Although women are not yet fully ordained in the Theravada tradition of Thailand, they are being ordained in Sri Lanka. Recently, the Dalai Lama has promoted full ordination of women in Tibetan Buddhism.

Women have also begun to play a major role in institutional Buddhism. A Taiwanese female monastic, Master Cheng Yen, began the influential Tzu Chi Foundation to help the needy. It has grown to become a worldwide social welfare agency. Western women who have become Buddhist nuns—among them, the teachers and writers Pema Chodron, Tenzin Palmo, and Karma Lekshe Tsomo—have been particularly outspoken in demanding major roles for women in Buddhism. With few exceptions, men still remain the actual leaders in Buddhism. But theoretical acceptance of equality is widespread, and real equality is coming.

(b. 1919). San Francisco, where many of the Beat writers were based, became an early headquarters of Zen thought and practice in America, as it still is today.

Zen centers, often under lay leadership, were established at this time in major cities in North and South America and Europe. These centers have allowed westerners to learn directly about Zen through both instruction and meditation. Some centers have also opened bookstores, vegetarian restaurants, and retreat centers.

A fourth wave of Buddhist influence is more recent and involves several types of Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism has established communities of immigrant Tibetans and converts in many places in the United States (California, Colorado, New York, Hawai’i) and in Europe (Switzerland, France, Great

Britain), and Tibetan Buddhist art is now regularly acquired and exhibited by museums. Forms of Pure Land and Nichiren Buddhism have made many converts, particularly in large cities of North America. And Asian immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia have all begun their own temples and celebrations where they have settled.

From the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, Buddhism outside Asia was primarily made up of ethnic Buddhists (mostly immigrants) and so-called elite Buddhists (non-Asian intellectuals and academics). These two groups have interacted and been joined by a large middle-class following. A new type of Buddhism is emerging from the interaction of the three groups: "engaged Buddhism." This movement comprises a wide variety of people who, as Buddhists, work for social betterment. A broadly based Western Buddhism, in Europe, North America, and Australia, is taking on such a life of its own that it is beginning to be called the "fourth vehicle" (*yana*) of Buddhism.

Ironically, even as it gains followers in the West, Buddhism has been weakened in many countries and regions that have been its traditional home. When Communist governments took over Mongolia (1921) and China (1949), Buddhism was severely repressed, and many temples and monasteries were destroyed. This pattern continued when Tibet was taken over by the Chinese government (1959). The Dalai Lama went into exile and at least a million Tibetans are thought to have died in the ensuing persecution. In China, several thousand monasteries were destroyed, particularly during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), causing both human suffering and an incalculable loss to the world of art. In recent years a modest amount of rebuilding has occurred in all these regions, with the financial support of Buddhists from abroad. On the one hand, governments fear that monasteries can become centers of antigovernment activity; but governments also recognize the importance of Buddhist sites both to the inhabitants and to tourists, whose goodwill (and foreign exchange) they wish to encourage. In Sri Lanka, the separatist movement in the north leads Hindus and Buddhists to fight against each other, straining the tradition of nonviolence in both religions. In Myanmar (Burma), the government officially supports Buddhism, yet Buddhist human rights activists have been jailed.

On the other hand, relations with the non-Buddhist world have brought new vigor to Buddhism in its traditional areas. For example, we now see emerging what has been called "Green Buddhism." Although early Buddhism does not mention explicit environmental ideals, it does include principles that fit in well with environmentalism. Among these are harmony, frugality, compassion, reverence, and respect. Trees, in particular, play an important role in Buddhism. The Buddha was born, meditated, was enlightened, and died under trees. For centuries, monks in Southeast Asia have regularly set up meditation huts and small temples in wilderness forests. In Thailand, monks have played leadership roles in protecting forests. Monks use their moral authority to encourage villagers to plant new trees and to limit tree



burning. Temples receive small trees from the Royal Forest Department and donations from town-bound supporters who want to earn merit by improving the natural environment. Monks have even temporarily “ordained” trees by tying orange robes around those that they hope to save from loggers.

Buddhism is clearly entering a new phase in its long journey. In part, Buddhism can predict what that phase will bring: the one constant, as always, is change.

Following his shadow, this lone monk with his eating bowl slowly places one foot in front of the other as he engages in walking meditation.

## READING

### THE DHAMMAPADA: “WE ARE WHAT WE THINK”

*The Dhammapada is a devotional text that explains the Buddha’s teachings in ways that are easy for people to understand. It is particularly popular among Theravada Buddhists. This section deals with the first step on the Noble Eightfold Path, “right understanding.”*

## 184 CHAPTER 4 BUDDHISM

We are what we think,  
 All that we are arises with our thoughts.  
 With our thoughts we make the world.  
 Speak or act with an impure mind  
 And trouble will follow you  
 As the wheel follows the ox that draws the cart.

We are what we think.  
 All that we are arises with our thoughts.  
 With our thoughts we make the world.  
 Speak or act with a pure mind  
 And happiness will follow you  
 As your shadow, unshakable.

“Look how he abused me and beat me,  
 How he threw me down and robbed me.”  
 Live with such thoughts and you live in hate.

“Look how he abused me and beat me,  
 How he threw me down and robbed me.”  
 Abandon such thoughts and you live in love.

In this world  
 Hate never yet dispelled hate.  
 Only love dispels hate.  
 This is the law,  
 Ancient and inexhaustible. (Chap. 1)<sup>22</sup>

## TEST YOURSELF

- Siddhartha's encounters with an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a wandering holy man, which prompted him to leave his luxurious and care-free life, are called the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - temptations
  - Four Passing Sights
  - Enlightenment
  - Awakening
- After Siddhartha spent an entire night meditating under a full moon, he finally achieved insight into release from suffering and rebirth. Buddhists believe that he reached a profound understanding, called his \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Dharma*
  - stupa*
  - asceticism
  - enlightenment*
- At the core of what is generally regarded as basic \_\_\_\_\_ are the Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha.
  - suffering
  - Enlightenment
  - Buddhism
  - existence
- According to Buddhism, reality manifests three characteristics: constant change, lack of permanent identity, and the existence of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - truth
  - suffering
  - death
  - deprivation
- According to a view common to all forms of Buddhism, reality manifests three characteristics: constant change, a lack of permanent identity, and the existence of suffering. This view is the foundation for the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Four Noble Truths, Noble Eightfold Path
  - Tripitaka, Maitreya
  - Vehicle of the Diamond, Dharmakaya
  - Tendai, Jodo
- In Buddhism, as in Hinduism, \_\_\_\_\_ suggest(s) decay and pain.
  - change
  - Four Noble Truths
  - samsara*
  - reality
- Liberation from decay and pain is called \_\_\_\_\_.
  - nirvana*
  - samsara*
  - moksha*
  - Awakening
- The key notions of \_\_\_\_\_ Buddhism are *trikaya* (the “three-body doctrine”), *shunyata* (“emptiness”), and *tathata* (“thatness”).
  - Ahimsa
  - Theravada
  - Mahayana
  - Vedic

9. In \_\_\_\_\_ Buddhist countries, one great celebration (Vesak) recalls the birth, the enlightenment, and the death of Buddha. It is celebrated at the time of the full moon in May.
  - a. Western
  - b. O-Bon
  - c. Mahayana
  - d. Theravada
10. In Tibetan Buddhism, the executive head of the Gelug-pa is called the Dalai Lama, which means "\_\_\_\_\_."
  - a. the Awakened
  - b. ocean superior one
  - c. heavenly bodhisattva
  - d. compassion
11. Think of a social group you are a part of, such as a family, business, or student organization. How do you think the group dynamic would change if its members lived in accordance with the ideas of anichcha and anatta? Why?
12. Consider the following statement: "Buddhism has no real deity." Using what you learned in this chapter, why might you agree or disagree with this statement? Address the different branches of Buddhism in your response.

## RESOURCES

### Books

- Dalai Lama. *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*. New York: Broadway, 2005. An argument for a constructive dialogue between religion and science.
- Faure, Bernard. *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003. An exploration of the role of gender in Buddhism and the extent to which the religion liberates or limits women.
- Friedman, Lenore. *Meetings with Remarkable Women: Buddhist Teachers in America*. New York: Random House, 2000. Portraits of the author's encounters with seventeen women teachers, giving insight into the growth of roles for women in modern Buddhism.
- Gross, Rita. *A Garland of Feminist Reflections*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. A collection of essays by a foremost expert in both Buddhism and feminist thought.
- Gunaratana, Bhante H. *Mindfulness in Plain English*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002. A good guide for the practice of Vipassana meditation, presented by a monk of Sri Lanka.
- Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Wherever You Go, There You Are*. New York: Hyperion, 1995. Short meditative chapters about topics such as patience, doing chores, and breathing—meant to help bring mindfulness to everyday life.
- Lopez, Donald, Jr. *Buddhism and Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. A critical analysis of claims that Buddhism and science are compatible.
- Nanayon, Upasika. *Pure and Simple: The Buddhist Teachings of a Thai Laywoman*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005. A collection of the writings by the late Thai teacher of Buddhism.
- Thich Nhat Hanh. *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*. New York: Broadway, 1999. A compelling introduction to Buddhism by a renowned Vietnamese Buddhist teacher.
- Williams, Paul. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*. New York, Routledge, 2000. An exploration of the history, practice, and philosophy of Indian Buddhist tradition.

### Music/Audio

- Chants and Music from Buddhist Temples*. (Arc Music.) A diverse compilation of recordings, including Buddhist chants from temples in China, India, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Thailand.
- Japanese Traditional Music: Gagaku and Buddhist Chant*. (World Arbiter.) A remastered release of an original 1941 recording of Japanese court music and Buddhist chant performed for the Imperial Household.
- Nirvana Symphony*. (Composer Toshio Mayuzumi; Denon Records.) Modern classical music inspired by Buddhism.
- Tibetan Master Chants*. (Spirit Music.) A recording of the deep-voice chanting of one of the world's foremost Tibetan chant masters, including the mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum."



**Film/TV**

*Buddha Wild: Monk in a Hut.* (Carpe Diem Films.) A group of Thai and Sri Lankan monks discuss their commitment to Buddhism and its way of life.

*Kundun.* (Director Martin Scorsese; Buena Vista.) A colorful biography of the current Dalai Lama, focusing on his escape from Tibet.

*Little Buddha.* (Director Bernardo Bertolucci; Miramax.) A film that interweaves two stories: the historical life of the Buddha and the modern search in Seattle for the reincarnation of a lama.

*10 Questions for the Dalai Lama.* (Rick Ray Films.) A documentary that examines some of the fundamental questions of our time, filmed with the Dalai Lama at his monastery in Dharamsala, India.

**Internet**

BuddhaNet: <http://www.buddhanet.net/>. A large variety of Buddhist information and resources, including a worldwide directory, e-library, online magazine, and notice board.

Virtual Religion Index: <http://virtualreligion.net/vri/buddha.html>. The “Buddhist Studies” page at the Virtual Religion Index site, containing individual sections devoted to general resources, the life of the Buddha, and Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism.

Wikipedia’s Buddhism Portal: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portal:Buddhism>. The “Buddhism Portal” page at Wikipedia, offering links to subcategories such as culture, branches of Buddhism, deities, festivals, history, philosophical concepts, practices, temples, terms, and texts.

**KEY TERMS**

(Buddhist terms are often anglicized in English pronunciation. For the following terms with two pronunciations, the second is the anglicized version.)

**Amitabha Buddha** (*ah-mee-tah'-buh*): The Buddha of the Western Paradise, a bliss-body Buddha in Mahayana.

**anatta** (*un-nah'-tuh*): “No self”; the doctrine that there is no soul or permanent essence in people and things.

**anichcha** (*uh-nee'-chuh*): Impermanence, constant change.

**arhat** (*ahr'-hut, ahr'-haht*): In Theravada, a person who has practiced monastic disciplines and reached nirvana, the ideal.

**bodhi** (*boh'-dee*): Enlightenment.

**bodhisattva** (*boh'-dee-suh'-tvah, boh-dee-saht'-vuh*): “Enlightenment being”; in Mahayana, a person of deep compassion, especially one who does not enter nirvana but is constantly reborn to help others; a heavenly being of compassion.

**Dharma** (*dhur'-mah, dar'-muh*): The totality of Buddhist teaching.

**dhyana** (*dee-yah'-nuh*): “Meditation”; focusing of the mind; sometimes, stages of trance.

**dukkha** (*doo'-kuh*): Sorrow, misery.

**Guanyin**: A popular bodhisattva of compassion in Mahayana.

**karuna** (*kuh-roo'-nuh*): Compassion, empathy.

**koan** (*koh'-ahn*): In Chan and Zen Buddhism, a question that cannot be answered logically; a technique used to test consciousness and bring awakening.

**lama**: A Tibetan Buddhist teacher; a title of honor often given to all Tibetan monks.

**Maitreya** (*mai-tray'-yuh*): A Buddha (or bodhisattva) expected to appear on earth in the future.

**mandala** (*mun'-duh-luh, mahn-dah'-luh*): A circular design containing deities, geometrical forms, symbols, and so on that represent totality, the self, or the universe.

**mudra** (*moo'-druh*): A symbolic hand gesture.

**nirvana** (*nir-vah'-nuh*): The release from suffering and rebirth that brings inner peace.

**samadhi** (*suh-mah'-dee*): A state of deep awareness, the result of intensive meditation.

**samsara** (*suhm-sah'-ruh, sahm-sah'-ruh*): Constant rebirth and the attendant suffering; the everyday world of change.

**Sangha** (*suhng'-huh*): The community of monks and nuns; lowercased, *sangha* refers to an individual monastic community.

**satori** (*sah-toh'-ree*): In Zen, the enlightened awareness.

**shunyata** (*shoon'-ya-tah*): The Mahayana notion of emptiness, meaning that the universe is empty of permanent reality.

**stupa** (*stoo'-puh*): A shrine, usually in the shape of a dome, used to mark Buddhist relics or sacred sites.

**sutra** (*soo'-truh*): A sacred text, especially one said to record the words of the Buddha.

**tathata** (*taht-ha-tah'*): "Thatness," "thusness," "suchness"; the uniqueness of each changing moment of reality.

**trikaya** (*trih-kah'-yuh*): The three "bodies" of the Buddha—the Dharmakaya (cosmic Buddha

nature), the Nirmanakaya (historical Buddhas), and the Sambhogakaya (celestial Buddhas).

**Tripitaka** (*trih-pih'-tuh-kuh*): The three "baskets," or collections, of Buddhist texts.

**vajra** (*vuhj'-ruh, vahj'-ruh*): The "diamond" scepter used in Tibetan and other types of Buddhist ritual, symbolizing compassion.

Visit the Online Learning Center at [www.mhhe.com/molloy5e](http://www.mhhe.com/molloy5e) for additional exercises and features, including "Religion beyond the Classroom" and "For Fuller Understanding."

P  
R  
I  
M  
M  
,  
S  
H  
A  
R  
O  
N  
D  
A  
  
3  
9  
5  
7  
B  
U