

Dharma as Man

A Myth of Jesus in Buddhist Lands

Lindsay Falvey



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*Deeply knowing that all is
connected erases selfishness, for
when all becomes self, nothing is self –
and that relationship is love.*

Acknowledgements

In this story, Dharma is a man searching for and finding insight and then trying, often without success to convey his experiences to others. He does it by using the ideas of his time, just as the Buddha does in his story, and which the modern storyteller explains sometimes in up-to-date terms. Thus Dharma speaks of gods but doesn't advocate belief in them, let alone see himself as one. Jesus is named Dharma to convey his life and teachings as being a presentation of the truth. In the same way so are other characters and places in the story named in Sanskrit, Pali or Thai to reflect similar meanings of their Hebrew, Greek or Latin origins, as listed below. Or they may be the name of a character from the Buddha's story for a similar role in the Jesus story.

Characters (persons and personalities)

Angel = Deva Disciples= Sangha Governor/Pontius = Rajapaala Herod = Suukaputra Hero = Viira Jesus = Dharma John the Baptist = Devapatha Judas = Devadatta Mary (mother of Jesus) = Maya Mary Magdalena = Jaayaa Matthew = Kaantadeva Nicodemus = Vijaya Peter = Mucchada Pilate (Pontius) = Zalya. Prophet = Duuta	Rich official = Magha Sage = Muni Simeon = Asita Son of Man = Purusha Places Bethlehem = Rotigaya Desert = Bodhgaya Gethsemane = Somataila (also Suan Mokh) Golgotha = Vajrasana Heaven = Nirvana Hell = Samsara Jerusalem= Samdhipuri Nazareth = Raksabisala
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The rationale of the book and how to read it is amplified in the Author's Comment (page 236). It shows the need to reflect on one's own culture before practising another, and so is sympathetic to Western Buddhists. Superscripts within paragraphs direct the reader to the endnotes where such terms and names are explained in summary, and which in turn refer to the glossary. Superscripts at the end of a set of paragraphs refer to the relevant sections of the gospels interpreted in those preceding paragraphs, as explained in the Author's Comment.

Sanskrit (and some Pali and Thai) names and places are summarised in endnotes at their first point of usage in the text. They refer the inclined reader to the Glossary for further explication. These are worth considering as they follow the tradition of the gospels where names of persons and places have meanings that add depth to the story and introduce spiritual concepts uncommon to Western religious dialogue. For Sanskrit and Pali terms I have relied on 'The Spoken Sanskrit Dictionary' - <http://spokensanskrit.de>.

For all of these sources I give thanks. They are the foundation on which I have built the heart of Dharma's story, and around which is placed the story of an Indian father talking to his son.

The persons to whom I am indebted in this project are many, some preferring to remain publicly unacknowledged. Others to whom I owe the greatest debt include: Jerry Murray, Jivata, Robyn Porter and René Salm for both their detailed criticisms and comments and their willingness to engage in a dialogue about the work. Many have also assisted the final product by commenting from a variety of perspectives, ranging from spiritual to literary to artistic, and I gratefully acknowledge the respective inputs of: Geoff Anderson, Murray Clapham, Christopher Falvey, Leslie Falvey, Simone Falvey, Trevor Gibson, Wayne Haslam, Peter Jamvold, Tony Loquet, and many others. To all I say, 'the interactions of all of us have produced this final text, and I thank you all. Where I

have retained points with which you disagreed, please accept them as my own feelings, erroneous as they may turn out to be’.

Drawn to this project by past conditioning from study and earlier writings (e.g. *The Buddha’s Gospel* 2002; *Religion and Agriculture* 2005; *Agri-Dhamma* 2000; *Reaching the Top?* 2007), I delayed until I was able to engage with the idea behind it. First I sought a combined narrative of the life of Jesus as a starting point. I quickly found ‘One: The Unified Gospel from the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John: Divine Version’ by Zegarelli (2006). My interpretive story roughly follows that storyline and is complemented by references to the Gospel of Thomas (from Patterson and Meyer’s translation in ‘The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version’ edited by Miller, 1992, Polebridge Press). From that order of texts, groups of my paragraphs between end-of-paragraph superscripts have been inspired by the biblical sections referred to in the endnotes to present a continuous story.

As I also consider that readers deserve acknowledgement by an author of his biases and conditioning, I admit to the following: I see that whether details of Jesus’ life are historically true or not is far less important than the message of the story. It is a tale that demonstrates genius in its combination of concepts extant at the time. Through history there have always been persons who understood the intent of such myths and saw the same stories in other cultures. Thus I have done little that is new. I have just translated the story into another context in the hope that it is less cluttered by institutional and literal interpretations.

And a final benediction:

*May this book provoke your practice and inspire your insight.
But if it doesn’t, may it prove to be a good read.*

LF

Dharma as Man

A Myth of Jesus in Buddhist Lands

One Great Story

The dry evening air of rural India sang subtly to the sitars of a million invisible insects. Their music was paced by drumming frogs in the tropical orchard that separated the extended family's houses.

He lived in one of the houses with his mother as he had for his thirteen years. She was an ordinary middle-caste woman of 50. She provided him with clean, nutritious foods and instruction in the complex manners of their tribe. Following the tradition of elderly men, his father had moved to his own hut across the orchard on his 72nd birthday to focus on spiritual matters after his sixth cycle of life. His small abode was but 50 metres through the mango trees. His wife brought him his meal each day which was perfect for the old man for he could see his beloved companion while remaining free to contemplate without the kitchen cackle constantly in his ears.

Their son was good-looking boy. He enjoyed most things he did, although his friends thought him bookish and prone to solitary moods. It was these traits that led him to read the great epics of the tribes with their tales of the gods and their adventures. One evening, he called on his father for what was usually a glass of water and a chat about his school day. But this evening, the old man began differently. An alert boy, he realised something important was to be said. He attended his father with the greatest respect as their tribal manners required, and he heard his father say, somewhat formally ...

'Viira, let me tell you a story. It is our story, and everyone's. It is a story about spirit. Not the spirit of ghosts and superstition but of

our higher nature. Do you follow? It is a story from a distant part of what was once our wide land and of our wide-hearted people. You surely know that our India once extended to meet the lands of the Greeks and Romans, but perhaps you don't know that I once trod those lands as a young man seeking meaning and finding it in the stories of our far-flung cousins ...'

His voice faded out and he was silent for minute or so, smiling to himself, and then resumed softly.

'The story is not long compared our great Mahabharata and not so complex. But its essence is the same. There is really only one great story told in different ways all over the world.'

The son looked directly at his father, taking in all of him, and marvelled how this old man when young had travelled more than anyone in their whole state, even to the dry lands of Arabia. And he saw the spirit of a younger man alive deep in those ageing eyes and was glad to be the son of his old age.

'Stories, stories – don't let me repeat myself, it is an annoying trait of age! The story is important for anyone who wants to be really human. I mean a god-human rather than just an animal-human that follows instincts and whims. Our tiny brains can't know reality except through direct knowledge. We get glimpses of it in the stories of our deities in their multitudes of names and forms. It is one way that our tribe understands our divine nature. Another way is stories without images. And among such stories, one combines the two best stories such that each explains the other more fully. Do you follow?'

Father and son sat on the veranda. Chickens pecked at the ground and cows wandered past as the light faded.

'I wonder if my older sons would have once listened to me as attentively as this Viira?', he silently mused, and decided no – no, they would have been obedient boys but Viira was different and he himself was different now that his working years were behind him.

He knew that he was old, but more than that, he had seen life's mysteries and had found them to be comforting. It was this quiet confidence that inspired his young son. And with that confidence he asked,

'Respected father, if the story is the same as our Mahabharata it must be about living as gods'.

'Ah, yes indeed it is Viira', replied the father, 'but not just a boring old story with a moral. It is purified from superior stories like fine ghee from the best butter'. Settling deeper into the sofa he continued, 'you know, its only a recent thing to consider sacred texts as historically true.'

'Our ancestors knew that spoken stories were better and more enjoyable. They were less concerned about historical detail. That's why stories about great men are scant on details. Only what supports the ecstasy is included. Our tribe has long loved talk of such higher states, something outside our everyday existence. That's what ecstasy really means in this hybrid language we speak today. Do you follow?' And the boy nodded, for he knew such things beyond his years. 'For many people, reading and rereading reveals multiple layers of meaning.'

Observing an eyebrow begin to rise, the old man explained further.

'You are a great reader Viira. You know yourself that when you read more than two stimulating books in the same period there is an interaction of ideas in your mind that is wonderful. So it is with

the ecstasy that comes with deeply reading of scriptures. Opposites dissolve and complex matters become clear. The feeling is what they describe around the world in such words as bliss, wholeness, insight, heaven, shalom, dhyana and so on.'

'But that doesn't make scriptures magical. They are just peaks of different cultures. In fact our tribes are both readers and story-tellers. We are not unique, but it is worth remembering that for millennia, we have retold stories of prophets – duuta as we used to call them.'

'Can we start the story now?' asked the boy uncharacteristically interrupting.

The father was unphased, continuing without a discernable break.

'In a minute my son. Let me just finish on this point about the duuta. I want to show that our limited minds need stories to open beyond everyday modes of survival. This higher learning is as valuable today as it was three thousand years ago. In one ancient story, a duuta is said to have eaten a sacred scroll and found that his bitter life became as sweet as honey. You are old enough to know that it is not true, so what does it mean? Just that his mental state transformed when he internalised the scripture's meaning. And that's the point of all worthwhile books. Written words are nothing in themselves. Making idols of scriptures is no better than making offerings to idols. The insights of the sages of all ages come from contemplation of the integrity of all things. Integrity is what the scriptures are all about.'

'That's enough preaching!' the father said suddenly as if to himself. 'Now we should begin our story. It will take several nights to finish.' This seemed a superfluous fact as the boy already knew that

the story of the Ramayana itself took days to perform. And that wasn't nearly as long as the great Mahabharata.

He turned to observe his pensive father. He saw his face was beaming with the joy of recollection. And then his old voice began in a measured rhythmic tone that his son so loved. His story-telling voice.

'As I said, there is only one great story. It is repeated over and over in different times across diverse cultures. It features contrasting characters doing distinctive things. But underneath the story is always the same. The stories are based on a hero – yes a hero, just like your name means Viira. And the hero transcends normal life. Of course there are always those who insist that their hero is the greatest. But men of insight know that all heroes see the same reality. It is natural that they describe it differently as they are all conditioned by their society, place and time. That is all that differs, the perspective not the essence. Do you follow? The story is the same from Persia to Peru, from Nepal to Norway, from China to Chile and do you follow, from Israel to India.'

'Our story takes place when the great religions were evolving. It is set in a dry and remote region of what was then the world's most extensive civilisation. It traces the conditions that created a truly great life. It describes a humble man, born of the virtuous Maya¹, who grew to become the hero known as Dharma² who followed his spiritual forebear Devapatha³. His small group of followers whom he called his sangha⁴ shared adventures in our capital city of Samdhipuri⁵ and other localities including the Bodhgaya⁶ desert. It culminates in the tension at Suan Moksa⁷ and the incredible events of Vajrasana⁸.'

'And as with all such stories, each name, place and event has multiple levels of meaning. Each is part of the message, for the

story's terroir guides us to reconsider our own words. Of course I will read you the tale in the English we speak today for it is a consolidation of all we have from various versions of the stories. It was once in our oldest language. The first great language of the world, and there are hints of it even in today's telling. You can see it in the names of people and places, and in emotions and mental states that have no equivalents in English. You will see the meanings in such words more than others might for you know our noble Sanskrit. The story is as timeless as it is universal. It begins before any other story, and in the end goes beyond time. It is the perfect story for us.'

And the two forsook tradition and nestled close together in the veranda sofa. Their glasses of water stood on the round tea table in front of them. Each felt that his expectation from the gospel of Dharma would be fulfilled. Fulfilled, because the father knew his son, and the son knew his father.

Our Hero Enters Our World

'I remember the first time I heard the story. After that I was never again the same man. Now that I am old, the story has made itself clearer to me. The great man Dharma, whose story it is, was such a hero. He makes the tales of the bravest men of battle seem like garden gossip. The story has been cobbled together from memory and folk tales, from wishful belief and even from blind worship. His life story is a sutra⁹ and the thread running through the story connects the highest human accomplishments and stitches them together. That is the reason for the story after all is said is done. Do you follow?'

'Here it is', said the old man, as he slid a tattered book from the tea table and opened it at the first page. 'It is written by different people from different perspectives, some from personal experience. It combines five versions into one simple tale. As befits all great men, the story begins before his birth. It begins in the right way, for all good things begin the right way. That is why the story starts with the music of the universe. Listen.'

And with that, the father began reading as if he was softly reciting a mantra, a melodious chant to which he was habituated. And the boy sighed inwardly with the security of knowing how greatly he was loved. The story began ...

From the beginning of time, and even before that, the truth existed. It was and always remains the way all things interact. It produced everything conceivable to humans and everything else as well. The truth was variously called Brahman, divine, logos or gods. It was spoken of across cultures and continents in terms of a hero whose exploits echoed across the ages. One of those echoes is what I write here for all to read.¹⁰

Realisation of ways to know the truth came into a tribe's consciousness in the form of a great man. Even though it was and is ever present, we consistently failed to recognise the truth. We even failed to see it in the form of this great man. Even when he walked amongst us, most of us from his homeland failed to recognise him. But those who did see the truth in him were transformed like him. They were as if their old mind had died and a new one had arisen in its place.¹¹

In this way, the truth was given flesh for it was explained and it was lived-out by this man who was one of us. He was filled with such love and compassion that contact with him made us into better people. At the same time, philosophies offered across the eons became clear through his graceful life. He was a demonstration of what we all could be, of what we should aspire to be.¹²

He lived in the days of when tribes were fragmented. Tribal leaders were but vassals of the great Maharaja¹³, the Emperor of the Known World. The emperor's power was such that he allowed the minor tribes to follow their own religions. One tribe followed its gradual understanding the human psych through priestly study and rituals much the

same as today. One such hereditary priest developed such insight that he divined an event that was occurring. His wife was likewise from a line of priests, and they were both old. They lived a harmonious and ethical life having long accepted that they could not have children.

One day while he was burning incense in the temple on behalf of we lay folk outside, the old priest felt that he and his wife would have a son. He was sure that this son would become an important man aware of the higher things of life. Not being addicted to sensual pleasure, he would assist others to find ways to the truth. After such a stupefying experience, the priest sobered and began to doubt, asking himself, 'how can we two old people produce a son?' But the vision had so affected him that he was unable to speak for months. When he came out of the inner temple he was only able to gesture the worshipers to silence.¹⁴

On arriving home, his wife immediately told him that she was pregnant. Joyous that their social affliction had disappeared, she went off to their remote mountain retreat to care for herself. But readers, don't tangle the thread of the sutra; don't get ahead of the story! She was not to be the mother of the great hero, but of Devapatha¹⁵ who would pave the way for the hero.¹⁶

By coincidence, the hero was conceived about six months later by the old woman's cousin, and in a manner that befits all great men across the ages. His young mother's name was Maya¹⁷ - a portentous name from the goddess who in ancient tradition could reveal supreme reality. And this is the gift she brings to this sutra. But at this stage of the story she was mortified to find herself pregnant for she was very

young and not married. A vague dream that her son would be a great dharmaraja¹⁸ who would be called Dharma¹⁹ and rule over all truth was of little consolation.²⁰

Maya was destined to marry a good man whom she knew well. When he learned that she was pregnant, he ignored the tribal custom of humiliating her publicly and decided to be rid of her quietly. But then he too came to realize that something unprecedented had occurred and that Maya's son would release people from their own mental prisons. And acting on his intuition, he married his pregnant fiancé.²¹

At this point, it is only fitting to recall that as with all heroes these events had long been foretold in our tribe's scriptures. They say, 'a young woman shall give birth to a son, who will be called a dharmaraja, which means "the truth reigns with us". He will be a cakravatti²².'²³

Since these two women were kin, Maya went to join her elderly cousin in her mountain retreat. On hearing Maya's voice she was excited, and content.

She exclaimed 'you and your child are indeed blessed, for my babe kicked for joy within me at your arrival. At last the prediction of a dharmaraja is fulfilled. But why do you come here?'²⁴

And Maya spoke as if in a trance:

'I rejoice with delight in my whole being as I am one with all things. Despite my lowly status I feel part of something magnificent. It arises from living in accordance with nature. More than that, I feel there is a power in this child I carry. A

power that will scatter the scornful, reduce the rulers, heighten the humble, feed the famished and ignore ignorant wealth. This is the compassionate power of our myths as portrayed by our great poets’.

Maya stayed with her elderly cousin for three months, leaving for home just before her cousin gave birth to a boy. Eight days later as was the tribal custom, the rites of scarification and naming were to be performed on the baby boy. However, when the elders automatically named him after his father, the new mother objected.

‘No’, she said with quiet emphasis, ‘he shall be called Devapatha.’

The elders argued that no ancestor had ever had such a name. They appealed to the dumb father who responded by writing ‘his name is Devapatha’. Then he regained his voice.²⁵

Of course all this precipitated much chatter in the village. People asked each other what type of child this Devapatha would become as he was no doubt special. All of this caused his father the priest to exclaim ecstatically.

‘What a blessing! Our redemption has been told in ancient teachings of the duutas²⁶. They tell how we can be freed from concerns when we recall our complete integrity with all things. It is what we call a promise from a father to his children. For when we are free of fears we may apply ourselves to living integrally with all things. Ah, my newborn son, you will see all this more clearly than we do. You will prepare the way for liberating those trapped in

repetitive behaviours. You will bring peace to those are depressed and fear death.’²⁷

As Devapatha grew into a man strong in body and spirit, he lived mainly in the desert. Until he determined that he was ready for his life’s task.²⁸

But let us return to the main thread of the sutra, that of the dharmaraja. In Maya’s ninth month, the great Maharaja of the Known World required everyone to be registered according to the paternal line. Maya and her husband had to enrol in the city of his ancestors known as ‘Rotigaya’²⁹, a name symbolic of essential sustenance. While there Maya gave birth to her son. She nurtured him in the customary manner in a cosy bed in a feeding trough in the barn, which was the only accommodation they could find in the confusion caused by the census. Though it was the winter solstice, they were warm inside.³⁰

The local puppet king of the day was nominally of the tribe. He lived in a grand palace in their capital city of Samdhipuri and we called him Suukaputra³¹ behind his back. Corrupted by power, he had become vain, greedy and two-faced. When seers from the tribe’s spiritual cousins in Persia arrived seeking the ‘new king’ as they called the dharmaraja, it was logical that they arrive at the palace. They spoke with Suukaputra.

‘Our intuition tells us of the birth of a dharmaraja under the star of the winter solstice. We wish to pay our respects to him’.

Concerned with this news, the king mistook a dharmaraja³² for a cakravatti³³ and began to fear for his throne. And as fear and superstition often travel together, he called the chief priests and scholars together and demanded to know where an anticipated king might be born. They settled on the city of Rotigaya on the basis of old scriptures. The verses they chose said, 'Rotigaya will produce a conqueror who will give the bread of life to all.'³⁴

So the king told the Persian seers to come back to him after they had been to Rotigaya. He lied to them when he said it was 'that I may go and bow before him'. Following their intuition the seers soon found the barn bathed in the soft light of the winter solstice star, and inside the infant dharmaraja and his mother Maya. Prostrating themselves, they offered the traditional gifts for a great leader, tokens of gold, perfume and incense. Afterwards, the seers knew they should return directly to their own lands rather than reporting back to the king.³⁵

Around this same moment, some local shepherds who had been guarding their sheep shared an apparition of a deva³⁶ who in bright light spoke to them.

'I bring good news of a dharmaraja's birth in a Rotigayan barn'.

Thereupon, the shepherds imagined countless other divine beings that with the deva wished 'peace on earth and goodwill between men' as a foretelling of the dharmaraja's role. Once the vision vanished, the shepherds lost no time in going to Rotigaya to see the dharmaraja.³⁷

Arriving to the barn, they found Maya and her husband with the infant dharmaraja lying in the makeshift cradle of the feeding trough. They marvelled to all who would listen of their vision about the baby as they returned to their sheep. All who heard were amazed, as was Maya who continued to wonder what it all meant.³⁸

'Look', said the father closing the book. 'The moon is high and all our houses are in darkness. I will stop here and continue tomorrow evening, my dear Viira.'

And the boy took the book from his father's hands and gently laid it on the round tea table. He then obediently rose and bowed before his aged father – and then he did something completely outside tradition. He tentatively embraced his father. It was an embrace inspired by the melody of the ancient words he had savoured as they flowed as sweet warm milk from his father's heart.

Growing in Spirit

Through the tropical twilight over the dusty garden, the old man on his veranda noticed movement through the mango trees. He then saw the young figure move silently to sit with him.

'Ah, my Viira! Here we are again, the same as yesterday. On the same talpa as we used to call our sofa. Are you ready to read on?'

'Yes, yes, yes', said the young Viira.

He squirmed closer to his father and sank deeper into cushions still warm from the day's sun. And the father began reading, quickly moving into a rhythmic melody ...

Following the custom of the tribe, the baby was ritually scarified on his eighth day. He was then named Dharma, the name dreamt by Maya his mother some eight months earlier. After her ritual period of purification, Maya and her husband took the young Dharma to the city of Samdhipuri. There they arranged for the ritual dedication of a new son to the tribe's god, a rite sealed by an animal sacrifice.³⁹

All this was observed by an old spiritually aware man named Asita⁴⁰ who had long felt that he would not die until he had seen a dharmaraja. His intuition had brought him to the temple that day. Taking Dharma in his arms, Asita spoke.

'Now I may die in peace. I've seen the man who will save our tribe from itself. He will show everyone what is real. He will conquer what constrains us. He will be a great muni⁴¹ who knows the integrity of all things.'⁴²

In a similar fashion, a wise old woman from a related tribe came forward. She had spent most of her 84 years as a widow and was always at the temple.⁴³ She also rejoiced adding that now the city of Samdhipuri⁴⁴ may redeem its name of 'peace'.⁴⁵

Of course, Dharma's parents marvelled at such exuberance. Some of the words were also addressed to them, such as Asita's cryptic prediction.

'Although he will be great and help some to know real life, he will be rejected by many. You yourselves will suffer as part of his magnificent quest'.⁴⁶

After these heady moments, Dharma's father felt they should live outside that kingdom until the death of the puppet ruler Suukaputra, who intended to kill any dharmaraja.⁴⁷ The young boy remained for some years in the neighbouring kingdom, which some storytellers claim was foretold as the place where a dharmaraja would arise.⁴⁸

This puppet king was the same one who had two years earlier told the Persian seers to return to him with news about the newborn dharmaraja. Once he finally realised that they had gone home without calling by the palace, he had angrily ordered the slaughter of all infant boys in the Rotigaya area. The storytellers here tie the sutra to ancient words that spoke of 'high places whence was heard inconsolable weeping for dead children'.⁴⁹

After Suukaputra died, Dharma's father brought his family back to his tribal lands. But he soon learned that the new despot was the son of the puppet king, also nicknamed Suukaputra. For safety's sake, the father avoided his family hometown and settled in rough terrain near a large lake.⁵⁰

Continuing their virtuous lifestyle, the story is often told that the family became part of the town of Raksabisala⁵¹. But in fact this name was inserted later in an attempt to obscure Dharma's association with a spiritual group of a similar name that sought self-understanding through awareness. Dharma himself referred to the town as Upadana^{52,53}

And at this point two of the storytellers shift their focus to trace Dharma's pedigree. This occurs in the stories of all great men. Within a succession of fathers and sons, one

genealogy refers to only four mothers, all in the earliest past. In another family tree, no mothers occur at all. Both only trace the line of Dharma's father despite earlier emphases that he had not slept with Maya. But such details are unimportant. The storytellers were just linking Dharma to past great men in the tribe's search for its origins as a symbol of the quest for man's inner divine nature. And that is a much longer story. It is a story of tribal evolution from human to animal sacrifice, from multiple gods to one god, from a belief that the divine was separate from us to knowing that it is within each of us. These genealogies positioned Dharma the son of Maya, after three sets each of the auspicious number of fourteen generations,⁵⁴ as the personification of the divine in man, that is in each of us.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, another storyteller emphasises the deep spiritual understanding of young Dharma. He tells us that Dharma was at one with all things and that he knew that all worries were brought into existence by the mind. He knew that, put simply, 'if this occurs then that follows - if this does not occur that does not follow'. Such insight inspired all great men who sought to dispel the angst, fear and suffering of everyday life. It was this insight that Dharma was to bring to his world.⁵⁶

But let us delve deeper into his childhood. The young Dharma grew strong and healthy with a natural wisdom. This is told to us when, at the customary age of twelve, he joined his parents on their annual pilgrimage to the city of Samdhipuri. It was the festival that ritually symbolised release from self-imposed bondage. At the end of the festival, his parents left for their home in Upadana unwittingly forgetting the adolescent Dharma. They just assumed that he

was somewhere in the travelling group among their relatives and friends. Eventually noticing his absence, his parents went back to Samdhipuri to look for him.⁵⁷

Three days later they found him. He was in a learned discussion with religious teachers impressing everyone present. While his parents were also amazed, Maya admonished him in her relief. The young master replied, 'you should know that Dharma is always with the truth'. But they did not understand his meaning.⁵⁸

So Dharma dutifully returned to Upadana with his parents. But Maya pondered on these matters and the other curious events in the life of her son. And all the time, Dharma added to his wisdom as he lived in harmony with all things and all men.⁵⁹

'Time for sleep, my young hero. In fact, the hero here is you, and me and every man. Do you follow? Tomorrow evening we will move into Dharma's adult life and you will see how special he became. But now, sleep well and dream of the higher state that we can all attain.'

And again the boy bowed before his father, and then rushed at him with a warm embrace.

Symbols of Transcendence

Next night began as had the two previous with the old man sitting pensively on his veranda as the evening cooled. The boy emerged from the mango grove to join him on the sofa, which between themselves they called the talpa according to their ancient language.

The old man broke the silence.

'Do you remember where we were up to? Do you follow? Had the boy Dharma visited the temple in Samdhipuri yet?'

'Yes he had father', said the boy excitedly. 'He had surprised even the temple elders with his knowledge!'

But then the boy saw that his father knew where they were up to and was just preparing him for the next instalment. He smiled the smile of a boy who has shared an adult joke.

'So let's continue, Viira', said the father taking up the battered book from the table. He returned his son's knowing smile with one of endearment.

'We leave Dharma's childhood and find him as a learned searcher of the deepest truths of the universe ...'

The next phase of the sutra begins with Devapatha. His birth formed the early part of the story just before that of Dharma himself. Devapatha had grown into a prophet, or a duuta in the language of the day. He spoke of the way to truth and light but had given up living alone. Even though he enjoyed many moments of the heavenly bliss of enlightenment in his solitary life, he saw his role as helping others to understand that truth.⁶⁰

Around this time, the Maharaja of the Known World placed a governor over the region. The governor had minor agent kings manage four subregions for all matters except religion, which continued independently through the tribe's priests. It was in that context that Devapatha explained his insights from the remote dry lands where he lived as a simple sadhu⁶¹. He dressed scantily in camel hair cloth held together by a leather belt and ate what nature offered, such as insects and honey. He wandered the region talking of the discovery of reality in terms of one's mind dying to old views and being reborn to a new spiritual understanding. He revised cleansing rituals of immersion in water to be a metaphor for washing off past illusions and emerging as if reborn to the harmony known then as heaven or enlightenment.⁶²

Quickly attracting a following for his immersion rite in the local river, Devapatha was soon drawing city dwellers from Samdhipuri. Some even thought he might be a dharmaraja or even a cakravati who could free them from the occupying authorities. Such claims caused the religious hierarchy to investigate him. But he assured them that he was not a dharmaraja or even a reincarnation of one of the tribe's past

heroes. He was just a man who was sometimes enlightened, who could sometimes see the truth.⁶³

Some of the very pious⁶⁴ privileged class also quizzed him about his rite of immersion.

He replied, 'the rite symbolises our ability to transcend everyday anguish. But soon another, to whom I can't hold a candle, will demonstrate this more clearly. He will separate the nonsense of piety from the essence of life like a thresher separates chaff from wheat.'

But the pious men wanted a clearer answer to bring back to their peers. Devapatha obliged them by referring them to their own scriptures where it says, 'a lonely deva from the desert will prepare the path. He will explain the truth in terms that bridge past divisions. He will simplify the complex so that all may understand life'.⁶⁵

Still they paid him no heed. So when he next saw these self-righteous prigs and their followers continuing to come to his rite, he denounced them. He called them life-sucking vipers seeking outward symbols without any inner change of heart, and as relying on hereditary rights rather than seeking the truth.

Then Devapatha said, 'just as the axe is left in the orchard ready to cut down trees that do not produce good fruit, so I perform this rite with water in anticipation of a great teacher who will cut through fruitless falsities to clear a way to the truth, to Dharma'.⁶⁶

Those listening asked what this all meant and what they should do.

He replied in practical terms: 'whoever has surplus clothes or food should share with someone who has none'.

When some tax collecting agents for the foreign overlords asked a similar question, he told them to cease collecting more than was required. When soldiers asked, he advised them to withhold unnecessary force and extortion of money from the populace. And he explained the consequences in his favourite metaphor.

'Suffering pursues the evil-doer, as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the draught ox'.

In these and many other ways Devapatha encouraged ethical living as part of the knowing the truth.⁶⁷

Meanwhile, Dharma had grown up and his inquisitive nature had led him to deeper questioning of the nature of things. He found Upadana⁶⁸ to be comfortable and secure – yet he felt there was more to life. So it was that one day, Dharma left Upadana saying it was too cluttered and that its culture encouraged everyone to cling to things and ideas.

He found himself at his cousin Devapatha's place at the river. There he sought to join in the immersion rite. Devapatha was reluctant, claiming that it was really he who should receive the rite from Dharma.

Dharma insisted. 'Let me join, for it is the same truth that we both cultivate. I continue to pursue it ever more deeply.'

Devapatha performed the ritual. And as Dharma rose from the water, Devapatha was so moved that he interpreted a bird of peace swooping down as a blessing on Dharma. And he knew in his heart that Dharma would clearly demonstrate ways to the truth.⁶⁹ It was a deeply emotional experience for both of them, a confirmation of their spiritual path.

He related this to Dharma. 'I see that you are well advanced in the path and embody the truth called dharma. You have to be the one I have often spoken of. That dove diving down to bless you tells me you are a dharmaraja.'⁷⁰

Dharma used that same rite to begin his teaching career. It was his first symbol of the transition from everyday angst to the freedom of reality. We can trace it to that day when Devapatha pointed Dharma out to a couple of his sangha⁷¹. He called Dharma the personification of the truth.

'Long have I waited for someone like him to fulfil my humble explanations and symbolic rites'.

As Devapatha said this, the two approached Dharma and stayed with him the rest of the day. And so began the long story of Dharma and his followers.⁷²

At this stage, Dharma knew many periods of deep contentment. He lived in the natural way that is truth. Yet he felt drawn to the Bodhgaya⁷³ desert to further deepen his insight through solitary retreat, fasting and meditation. When in the desert for forty long days, doubts and fears arose in his mind. Such distractions were known by his tribe in an anthropomorphised form as Mara. The storytellers also

suggest that in another part of his mind the Bodhgaya animals and devas offered him reassurance.

Three doubts afflicted him in that wasteland. The first was hunger, which led him to worry about the veracity of scriptures that said necessity is always provided for. He readily resolved his doubt by recalling that such literal interpretations were the attachments of ignorance. In the second distraction, he hallucinated that he was on a high building from which he wanted to jump to test the teaching that the truth protects from harm. He dismissed this by recalling that tests of faith based on unreasoned belief were inferior to real experiences of the truth in everyday life.

His third uncertainty arose from his realization that he could enjoy power and wealth now that he had insight into how things really worked. He quickly banished the idea by recalling the emptiness of all things and his contentment of living within reality.

As his mind settled he felt that his personification of evil as Mara⁷⁴ was demanding proof of his contentment. In response he simply touched the soil of Bodhgaya to show his oneness with all things. And so the image of Mara left his mind as he deepened his meditation. Overcoming these doubts and fears of his mind, Dharma was at peace, and remained so for some time. And the storytellers of his time say that the devas of the cosmos attended to him. He was at one with all things. ⁷⁵

Dharma remarked. 'From my insights at Bodhgaya, I know it is not just transcending Mara that leads to the heavenly state of insight. It is also transcending the conceptions of God!'

'Enough for tonight young man', said the father.

His attention was arrested by his father's choice of the title young man rather than son as was his habit and as was the custom of respectful fathers in their part of India.

'That last part was just like our Tibetan cousins when their experts debate scripture. And Mara is very adept even if he is evil. Alas we cannot rely on scriptures unless we are wise, and then we don't need them!' He mused out loud, and laughed.

'We leave Dharma as a hero who conquered many of his fears. He had realised that they were of his own mind's making, just as he saw that the gods were also his mind's creation. Do you follow?'

And then he added cryptically, 'off you go, sleep well, and maybe some of the gods will tend your dreams.'

Viira combined the formal bow with his embrace tonight, and then walked slowly back to his mother's hut. Laying on his sleeping mat, he wondering how gods could appear in dreams if they were not real and why his father had called him a hero last night. Dharma was the real hero, he mused. He could hardly wait until the next night.

Explaining Old Stories

The old man was arranging himself comfortably on his veranda sofa. His young son arrived, freshly washed, groomed and cool for their evening story. Touched by such eagerness, the father recalled his own first contact with the great stories.

'Oh Viira, its good to see you so keen!' exclaimed the father.

To which he replied, 'come on, what happens next after he conquers Mara, who represents his fear?'

Taken aback by the boy's concise recollection and understanding of allegory, the father prepared to read. But he paused reflectively as if to continue the conversation, but then simply said,

'Dharma now understood himself quite well, and sought to deepen his understanding much more ...

Dharma's awareness was replenished from his solitary meditation. After that, he returned to the region above the lake where people enjoyed his explanations in their temples. One day while following this lifestyle, he wandered into the town where he had grown-up. Entering the temple, he read aloud from the scriptures. It was the passage which goes, 'I explain the way of release from self-made prisons, of sight to the spiritually blind, of peace of mind in contentment'.⁷⁶

Then he closed the book and sat down. Everyone in the temple stared at him. Without hint of arrogance he then said,

'You can see this truth in earnest seekers like me.'

Most of the town was impressed by his graciousness. But as everywhere, some preferred to gossip. It was they who whispered about his common origins and queried his authority. Sensing this, Dharma anticipated demands for miracles, so he quashed their comments by saying.

'No man is seen as wise in his hometown.'⁷⁷

He went on to quote from old tribal stories. He reminded them of how ordinary persons became heroes by facing and transcending their own demons. In this way he implied that the usual understanding of life was in fact wrong and this was the cause of suffering. Such heresy proved too much for pious locals who began jostling him. At the brink of an embankment over which some seemed to want to push him, his demeanour defused them. And he walked freely back through the crowd. Taking the hint, he left his hometown for

the lakeside where he freely explained his discoveries with renewed authority.⁷⁸

It was there in the temple of one of the lakeside towns that an abusive madman berated Dharma. He ranted and complained that Dharma's approach would change his whole mentality. He didn't want that even though it had led to his madness and to being ostracised. He said he preferred his melancholy mindset to the unknown peace that Dharma spoke of. Dharma rebuked him firmly. Instantly the madman became calm, amazing himself and all present. Such events ensured that Dharma's fame spread quickly through the region.⁷⁹

And such fame led to more sick persons being assembled in the hope of cures. By sunset when Dharma visited them his mere presence relieved their fears. Some sufferers realized the impact of their past ignorance, ill will and obsessional behaviour, and became content. But many spectators in their ignorance claimed such changes to be miracles.⁸⁰ So Dharma advised those who had realized that it was their false views that created their problems to keep their own council in such moments.⁸¹

Next day, he sought a solitary place to meditate as was his wont. But the hordes found him and demanded that he remain to help them. He responded.

'There are yet many whose eyes only contained a little of the dust of delusion. It is they whom I must introduce to reality.'

And so he continued on his way. As he travelled, he spoke in temples for these were the places of local congregation. In

such unattached wandering he was able to continue his meditation practice which further strengthened his awareness. But he nevertheless still experienced moments of conflict and doubt.⁸²

It was after one of his meditations, while strolling the shores of the lake that he expounded the means of self release to an eager crowd. Noticing two fishermen cleaning nets, he discerned that these ordinary family men were, like him, close to understanding reality. In fact he recognised one of them who had earlier sought him out at Devapatha's suggestion. This man introduced his brother, Mucchada,⁸³ to Dharma. And recognising Mucchada's charismatic qualities, Dharma bid them join him, as did two other brothers who were also mending their nets. And so the sangha⁸⁴ of Dharma began with these four ordinary fishermen.⁸⁵

Soon afterwards, Dharma stepped into Mucchada's boat which they manoeuvred out from the beach so that he might address the larger crowd on the shore. To make a point, Dharma suggested that Mucchada take the boat out further where he would catch plenty of fish. This seemed silly to the fisherman who had worked through the night catching little. Nevertheless, impressed by Dharma's certitude, he did as suggested. The catch was so large it could only be landed with the aid of another boat!⁸⁶

Overwhelmed, Mucchada prostrated himself before Dharma as a flawed man unworthy of such a presence. But Dharma simply told him not to be so superstitious.

'Live in reality and you will be content. Others will join you in that contentment'.⁸⁷

Deeply impressed by these events, the four fishermen forgot the day's fishing and followed Dharma. Others were similarly attracted. Even a man from the desert communities from which Dharma and Devapatha had arisen joined them. This caused Dharma to invoke the mythical terms of that age to show that contentment deepens with practice.

He told them, 'you will see much more than this, as if devas would fill the skies as they rejoice in us living within the natural flow of all things, which is the way to the truth'.⁸⁸

The sutra moves on to use a local wedding feast to emphasise the ever deepening nature of contentment. Dharma was invited to join the celebration, along with his sangha and his respected mother Maya. Through this means, the storytellers again allegorise the transformation of a man's ordinary self into something vastly superior. The story goes like this: Dharma and his sangha asked for more wine and Maya informed them that the host had already run out.

Dharma replied offhandedly, 'so what! There are much more important things in life'.

Not divining any deeper meaning but knowing her son's special nature, Maya advised the servers to indulge him. So when he asked for the large ablution jars to be filled with water and that a sample of the liquid be taken to the head server, it was done. On testing the water, the head server not knowing its origin tasted fine wine. Surprised, he whispered to the bridegroom.

'Usually the better wine is served first and after the guests are jolly, the poorer wine. It seems that you have kept the good wine until last.'⁸⁹

While it is like a miracle, the story also emphasises the ever-deepening contentment of insight. As is the custom in biographies of great men, it offers a homely finale with Dharma and his entourage travelling down to the lake for a few days holiday. As his fame was now expanding quickly, he was able to explain his simple message to crowds in local temples as he wandered. Among those who heard him, many found release from their anguish, which was popularly represented as miraculous healing of diverse psychoses. Crowds followed him constantly and, now in his thirtieth year, he began to teach with urgency.⁹⁰

Again it was time for the annual feast of release from self-imposed bondage. As for most cultures, such an important fête coincided with the beginning of the agricultural year.⁹¹ Dharma went to Samdhipuri to pay his respects. His insight was ever becoming deeper, as he told to anyone who would listen. He used the religious words of his time, which relied on metaphoric rather than literal meanings, although many then and later mistook his meaning.

He was misunderstood at a temple, for example, when he expressed his revulsion at the exploitation of the simpleminded pious folk by vendors of sacrificial livestock and money changers. In that case, he accosted those who should have known better. His lesson was that release from bondage relies only on oneself and not on temple rites. So he twisted some cords into a little whip and dramatically

chased the merchants out of the temple scattering their animals and coins as he boldly declared.

‘You ignorant and greedy lot divert others from transcending your deluded view of reality!’

The more learned of his followers then recalled an ancient description of enlightenment as consuming zeal.⁹²

After his outburst, Dharma was immediately composed again. When the merchants demanded to know by what authority he interfered with their business, he replied calmly. He said that if the temple was destroyed he would recreate it within three days. The merchants took this as nonsense but, as is clear later in the sutra, this is a storyteller’s hallmark of a forthcoming climax. A climax to which Dharma was orienting himself in an even more graphic way, as some of his sangha recalled later when it all made more sense.⁹³

It was in Samdhipuri during the feast that a cult was seen as forming around Dharma’s words and actions. He discouraged this by saying that such credulity was just one more example of the delusion of unconsidered everyday lives.⁹⁴

The next event recorded by one of the storytellers concerns Vijaya⁹⁵, a teacher in an elite sect. Vijaya sought Dharma out during the night to avoid his visit being known by his fellow elites.

He said directly, ‘I know you are an enlightened man from your actions and words’.

'I know enlightened moments and I practice to know more. Indeed one who comprehends reality is like one born anew. His old worldviews are replaced by clear insight'. Dharma replied with quiet confidence.

And when Vijaya confused this with physical rebirth, Dharma corrected him.

'The water immersion rite symbolises death to the old and birth to the new. So what is born of flesh is only flesh but enlightenment is born of a new spirit. Spiritual teachings are seldom to be taken literally'.⁹⁶

'Like the wind which comes and goes to who knows where, and is only noticed by its effects, so enlightened persons are known from their effects'.

Vijaya was further confused so Dharma continued.

'If you, a leading teacher do not understand these things, how can you expect to know the insights of those who have experienced enlightenment? All of our myths are full of this same message. We have such metaphors as lifting ourselves up, of shedding our old skins, of liberation from slavery, of crossing the river, of emerging from the desert. All point to the same potential for each of us to rise to a state of awareness of the myriad interactions that are reality'.⁹⁷

One of the storytellers explained this revelation further. He takes the most powerful positive feeling of love expressed as a deep caring for the welfare of another as if they are part of us. Its zenith is the brilliance of rejoicing in awareness of all life's interrelationships where we are one with all things, free

of worldly concerns. By comparison, its nadir comes of rejecting that illumination and being continually anxious. While the light is ever present, most prefer their familiar darkness as if the results of their ignorant actions will not affect them. But those who make the effort to seek enlightenment find it and live in contentment.⁹⁸

Next Dharma is portrayed with his small sangha performing the water immersion rite. Devapatha had continued his own rites but had offended the traditionalists who adhered to the detailed vinaya⁹⁹ rules of a similar ablution rite. In their objections they also noted that Dharma was attracting ever greater crowds. Devapatha reminded them that the act of immersion was but a symbol of inner transformation, of enlightenment. And he again said that Dharma himself was the incarnation of enlightenment.¹⁰⁰

And gazing into the hazy distance of the desert from whence he had come, Devapatha spoke prophetically.

'I am like the best man at a wedding who delights in mudita¹⁰¹ on hearing his friend, the bridegroom accept his bride. Dharma is here and my role is done. An enlightened man is unaffected by worldly concerns, but is an exemplar of his higher state, even if no one accepts what he says. But whoever does accept it finds that his confidence develops. He finds insight into the life and words of enlightened persons. As I said before, love extends to all things as all is related. Whoever develops this insight will understand true life. Who doesn't will continue their angst-ridden lives.'¹⁰²

Soon after these events, Devapatha was jailed. He had denounced the local puppet king, Suukaputra II, for his poor

moral example. The king had taken his brother's wife as his own queen and offended his symbolic role of cakravatti. The new queen was embarrassed and wanted such a critic out of the way. While the king might normally have acquiesced, he now hesitated because of Devapatha's popularity and the respect which his spiritual vigour engendered. So he kept him in prison and even went to talk with him occasionally.¹⁰³

'I have read for a long time tonight', said the father. 'But you arrived early so we have begun Dharma's sharing of his experiences as he continues his practices.'

'We have also read something missed by many people over the centuries. It is this. When Dharma began his preaching, it was described not just as preaching his ideas, but as something like an address to the nation. Our ancient language used the term that was usually applied to the great power, the King, making a formal statement to his subjects.¹⁰⁴ This is much more than preaching. Do you follow? There was an authority and a power in his words. They are enough for tonight!'

'We could go on a little longer' suggested the keen boy. But his father gently declined.

'We have seen Dharma attract others to follow his obvious wisdom. We have seen him teach the religion of the heart to those who had degraded it into a business. We have seen him develop further than his cousin Devapatha. This is a long distance he has travelled in our story; long enough for one night, Viira! Do you follow?'

And as an obedient son, he bobbed his head in a cursory bow as he dived carefully into those frail arms for a cuddle. Then he dawdled back to his mother's hut and to his sleeping mat.

Living the Truth

Through the mango trees came the boy at a run. He found the veranda empty. He looked around for his father. Fears of something untoward having happened did not even arise in his young yet mature mind. Rather, he rationally observed the shadows. And from them deduced that his arrival was earlier than the previous evenings. So he sat on the sofa to wait.

He soon came out of his small house with the practiced step of a man favouring his failing body. Feeble compared to a few years ago, the boy thought. But both accepted it as the normal ageing process.

Seeing his son he exclaimed, 'so early, you are indeed enchanted by our Dharma!'

To which the boy replied, 'I see him as a mighty hero like Rama and Indra and all the others in our pantheon. Can we start now?'

So the old man eased himself gingerly into the sofa. He took the book that his son passed to him and regained his composure.

Then he said, 'as you will have guessed, Dharma is becoming more confident in his discoveries, and more popular. Insight and popularity are strange bedfellows. Do you follow? Let's read on from last night ...'

Of course Dharma heard of Devapatha's imprisonment. He also heard gossip about the popularity of immersions rites performed by his sangha. Searching for historical links as for stories of all great men, the storytellers seized on the ancient words, 'our ignorant people saw the light of wisdom in the form of a man'. Such references are used as a turning point in a story. In this case, it was from this time that Dharma expanded his public teaching. His essential message was simple. 'Accept release from your troubles by embracing reality. Enlightenment is always in your own hands'.¹⁰⁵

He continued to wander around in the region, one day straying into a neighbouring tribe's town. Being tired by the noontime sun, he rested himself beside a well.¹⁰⁶ When a local woman came to draw water from the well, he asked for a drink.

The woman replied, 'but doesn't your tribe consider any cup we have used to be contaminated?'

Dharma responded. 'Ah! if you only knew of amaritsar¹⁰⁷ the real water of life. Then it would be you asking me for that water!'¹⁰⁸

The peasant woman placed her hand on her hip and addressed him satirically.

'And just how would you get such living water without a bucket!'

Dharma smiled and calmly replied. 'Who drinks from a well is later thirsty. Whoever tastes the essence of life never thirsts after anything again, ever. This is the true amaritsar'.

The woman's demeanour changed immediately. She asked for this superior water. Dharma, respecting local patriarchal traditions suggested that she first bring her husband. She replied that she had none to call husband. Having already divined that she had many men in her life, he praised her honesty.¹⁰⁹

Impressed by his insight, the woman recognised Dharma as a wise man. This realisation challenged her upbringing and her religion. But Dharma allayed her concerns.

'Soon everyone will be able to see that differences between religions are irrelevant. Now they worship what they believe. But their eternal thirst can only be slaked by insight of reality. All sages of all ages have found this'.¹¹⁰

The woman confided that she had heard that an enlightened teacher would come one day. She intuitively knew Dharma was one such teacher. He had as much as confirmed it to her when his sangha returned from procuring food in the town. They were astounded that he should offend their taboo by communing with a foreign woman. But she was soon off to tell her friends to 'come and see this wise man who saw so much about me'.¹¹¹

So a crowd set off to see this wise man. Meanwhile, when his sangha urged him to eat, Dharma used the same rhetoric as he had with the woman.

‘I am perfectly nourished in my contentment’.

Taking him literally, the sangha wondered if someone else had brought him food. So Dharma again had to expand his metaphor in order to explain.

‘I am nourished by acting in accordance with reality. Rather than experiencing it as a cycle of harvests, I know it can be one continuous bounty in which all may share. Sower and reaper are both content. As the old saying goes, who sows may not always reap. You now reap the benefits of insight from seeds sown by others who found such contentment’.¹¹²

From such explanations many glimpsed aspects of the truth. Dharma was therefore encouraged to accept their invitation to stay a couple more days. Many wondered about their own unlikely confidence in this foreigner. They speculated, ‘could he be a truly enlightened man?’ Heading back to his own lands, Dharma was again prompted to recall his earlier observation that ‘one’s wisdom is seldom accepted by one’s own people’. Sure he was a local celebrity there, but that was just because he had produced extra wine for that wedding feast.¹¹³

Celebrities attract crowds. Many had assembled in the hope of relief from their ills, even from severe mental disturbances. And in their hysteria all sought just to touch him or even just his robe. Sensing the size and mood of the crowd, Dharma climbed a nearby knoll. From there, he gently spoke to the assembled masses as if they were all his sangha.

'Who is psychologically independent will find enlightenment;
Who sincerely regrets their ignorant actions will find the truth;
Who is gentle and unassuming will have all they need;
Who is ethically aware will find contentment;
Who is compassionate will receive compassion;
Who is pure-intentioned will know insight;
Who lives in unity will find peace;
And who is deeply content will remain unconcerned at the incomprehension and even hatred of the majority. For the contented know the intuitive oneness with reality. They are not separate from anything else. They are in harmony with their own true nature.'¹¹⁴

'So too can you rest content even when you are ostracised, insulted and seen as anti-social because you follow the way.' Dharma continued. 'For this just confirms the ignorance of those who live in the cyclical suffering of samsara'¹¹⁵. They cannot even dream of the contentment you know. Wise men of past eons have always experienced this. But beware when everyone starts to agree with you. Popularity can be a near enemy'¹¹⁶ of wisdom'.¹¹⁷

Dharma emphasised the point. He observed that when someone is successful in their search for wealth, they have what they sought and yet are not content. Those who think they are satisfied now will soon want for more. Those who laugh with delight in some thing will later weep with grief for it when it breaks or dies.¹¹⁸

He went on teaching in metaphor and allusion. His own ever deepening insight impelled him to remind whoever would

listen about the higher potential he found himself experiencing. In one metaphor he likened his sangha to common salt.

‘Salt is useful when tasty but useless when it has lost its saltiness. Just as the vast ocean has one taste of salt, so our diverse insights have one taste of liberation.¹¹⁹ So keep yourself salted by associating with fellow-travellers on the path to enlightenment. The time to act is always now!’¹²⁰

Dharma knew that words of the spirit are not always clear to the ears of the world. So he went on.

‘An enlightened man lights the world wherever he is. He is like a city perched on mountain that can be seen from all around. Just as you don’t place a lamp under basket but raise it up to light the room, so your wise actions light the way for others to see and gain confidence.’

And again to emphasise urgency he added, ‘You’ve got ears, use them! If you commit yourself to the way, more and more insight develops. But if you are half-hearted, even what little insight you have will evaporate.’¹²¹

Then the story presents a critical subtlety in which Dharma contextualises his words.

‘You might think that I reject our historic stories. In fact I am explaining what they really mean. Reality is ever present. Always has been, always will be. This is why whoever violates the natural law that is reality will be the least content and the least comfortable with himself. On the other hand, he who cultivates the wisdom of insight will see how things are

and live in contentment regardless of external conditions. You see how narrow our religion has become compared to what it really means. The rigid righteousness of the religious and the pompous piety of priests trivialises the truth of the teachings'.¹²²

And having said this, he immediately changed tack. He used the familiar religious rules as a basis for illustrating reality in terms of intentions.

He said, 'We are taught not to kill others. It is a good social law, but what do you think is its spiritual intent? It means being sure of our motivations in all types of violence. This includes anger and all emotions that produce the same hellish feelings in us. In practical terms, it is the same as realising that no ritual is of benefit unless your heart is in it. If you are not at ease with all others, it is better to stop the ritual and sort out your differences first. And settle such matters quickly to avoid emotions and thoughts compounding things. If you don't, you will be consumed with accusations and counter accusations that will make your life hell'.¹²³

'Think about the social rule against adultery! It too refers to intention. It simply means that lusting after a woman is effectively adultery. And as we are products of the conditions that surround us, the appropriate practice is to separate yourself from those mental states that do not assist your spiritual development. To do otherwise is to prolong your suffering in your ignorant lifestyles.'

But in saying this, Dharma was careful not to be misunderstood as casting aside persons for whom one was

socially responsible. He emphasised that the law is only ethical when it considers both the intention of the spouse who seeks divorce and compassion for the other spouse. In such ways, he said ethical behaviour produces contentment.¹²⁴

‘Being content also means answering each man honestly and simply. Embellishments and vows are not necessary. Honest speech confirms deep intentions. It is informed by insight which knows that ultimately we control nothing at all. Any illusion of control that we harbour to the contrary is our ego-nature showing itself, that monster we know as Mara¹²⁵. And it is Mara who also tells you to selectively take ancient teachings that suit you. Like when you claim the right to exact recompense in kind from a foe. Rights like that are just social conventions with no basis in reality. Instead, the wise action is to not be psychologically attached to rights, ideas or things. That way whatever an ill-intentioned person takes from you is of no consequence. You could even offer more than he seeks to take. Always go the extra mile. Give to whomever begs or borrows from you and don’t be attached to things or ask for them back’.¹²⁶

‘And when I say that we should not seek something back, I also mean warm feelings and public recognition. Attachment to all such things negates the spiritual benefit of giving. You can see how this works with the pompous rich in our temples who sponsor parades to honour their donations. They have their only reward from that fanfare. Better to give discreetly in wisdom, detachment and compassion’.¹²⁷

Continuing in this fashion, Dharma went on to amplify his insights about compassion. He criticised an ancient proverb

from a period of excessive tribal rivalry which taught that one should love one's neighbours and hate one's enemies.

'Instead I say love your enemies and help those who seek your demise. Do to others as you would prefer them to do to you. We are all intricately interconnected. This means that care for others is the same as care for yourself. This is the meaning of our ancient ethic of ahimsa¹²⁸ – the actions that derive from love for all things. Never by hatred can hatred cease, only by love.¹²⁹ This is reality!¹³⁰

'Reality also shows us that the sun and rain affect all equally. There are no favourites, only those who understand reality and live within it and those who don't. For if you only love those who show you love, you are the same as the basest persons. If you only lend to those whom you expect to pay you back, you are no better than the deluded and greedy. No, as I said before, love those who don't seek your welfare and then you are practising the rhythm of the cosmos, for ultimately there are no favourites.'¹³¹

Dharma was developing more and more confidence from his own experience of reality. This encouraged him in his teaching. He felt that his practices were leading toward the continuous contentment known as nirvana¹³². In seeking to share this with his sangha he instructed them about meditation.

'When you meditate, don't make a show of it or talk about it with others. Those who do this seek others' adulation not the benefits of meditation. Rather, find a quiet place, calm your mind and commune with your inner self. Be fully mindful of any mantras you repeat for they have no inherent virtue

except to help open your consciousness. In this way you develop understanding of yourself and hence other things'.¹³³

His sangha thrived on such insights. One day after observing Dharma meditating they asked him for specific advice on how to establish a meditative frame of mind. He offered them words for self-preparation before each meditation. These words have come down today as the central sutra,¹³⁴ the Sutra of Reality:

'The love and power evoked by living within reality,
draws me to accept its natural and inevitable flow;
it sustains my spiritual nourishment in each moment,
as I regret my ignorant actions and shed selfish attachments,
and practice to not repeat such errors, by living in awareness.
Unattached to what's done to me, I see no fixed self,
nor do I see anything else – for then I am at one with reality.
But if attached to self, I suffer from discord with reality'.¹³⁵

Dharma then emphasised the need for persistence in meditation and ethics in another allegorical story.

'Imagine one night a friend arrives very late at your house. He is tired and hungry from his journey and you have nothing left to eat in the house. So you rush to a neighbour's house seeking some food for you know that in our culture all houses are open when one needs food. But your neighbour says "we are all in bed, come back tomorrow, don't bother me!" Even though he did not open his door at first, he will certainly open it if you persist in your knocking! It is a fundamental of life that if you genuinely persist in seeking to know reality, you will discover it. It is just like when you

persistently knock at that door, it will eventually be opened. Strive on tirelessly in your spiritual life. You will readily find whatever you need as you fit in with reality. This is the expression of love from all life. It will come if you are fitting into what is natural. It is just like a father, no matter how selfish he is, he will never deny food to his hungry son.'¹³⁶

In addition to persistence, Dharma identified humility as essential to developing awareness.

'If you practice fasting in your spiritual activities, don't make a show of it like many who observe the uposatha¹³⁷ ritual. Don't brag about your piety. On the contrary, take care of your appearance for no one need know that you are fasting. It has no social benefit.'¹³⁸

In such words, Dharma was not suggesting the people live separately from society. He was suggesting that they become aware of what they really need, not just desire or think they need.

He explained further, 'your attachment to possessions hampers your spiritual development, so get rid of what is unnecessary. Dispose of it usefully if possible. Possessions only produce more concerns. We are disappointed when they wear out, are broken or stolen. The only things of value beyond the basics of everyday life are spiritual. Trying to develop your spiritual life while remaining attached to wealth is the ultimate conflict of interest. It is like trying to be loyal to two competing groups;¹³⁹ it is impossible'.¹⁴⁰

And hearing him talk of possessions, someone in the crowd sought Dharma's opinion on an inheritance dispute.

He exclaimed, 'I'm not your arbitrator. I simply say be careful lest your attachment to things reduces the value of your life rather than increasing it'.

And as if to clarify his meaning, he told another simple story.

'After a bountiful harvest, a rich man built larger godowns to store his extra grain. He sat back thinking he was now set for a life of leisure in his self-made devaloka¹⁴¹. Then he dropped dead. What value were those things to him then! All surplus savings are without value. Invest in the true value of your spiritual life. For the enlightened life is like a clear eye that illuminates the whole body. But the ignorant life is like a cataract that makes life progressively darker. Cultivate your spiritual life that you may be enlightened all the time'.¹⁴²

Dharma continued speaking in these terms directly to his sangha.

'For all of these reasons, I say forget the usual everyday cares. Life is more than concerns about food and clothes when we live within the natural cycles. Just as the birds and flowers find their necessities without the need to hoard to excess, so can we. We are surely more resourceful than birds. For what does worry accomplish? There is absolutely nothing within our control. Popular man-made beauty is vastly inferior to what nature provides every moment of the day. Indeed worry about such matters as food, drink and clothes is the hallmark of samsara¹⁴³, the unenlightened state that contrasts with nirvana. First know yourself by seeking release from these rounds of frenetic existence fraught with

angst. Calm yourself to see how basic necessities are readily available. Tomorrow will take care of itself if you just deal with each moment. As you act in this way, you will become ever more confident that natural cycles provide all real needs'.¹⁴⁴

'These are simple matters. Sure they are hard to see if one is blinded by worldly judgements and criticisms. In that mode, you judge others and they judge you. Action begets reaction. Likewise if you give joyfully then you will receive more than you give. Whatever karma¹⁴⁵ you do affects your karma and that of those around you. Criticise others and you will find yourself criticised more than otherwise. It is as simple as that. As I have said before, the golden rule of all ethics is to not treat others in any way that you would not like to be treated yourself.'

'But so often we all act contrary to this rule, even hypocritically when we delude ourselves that we are helping others. It is like offering to help remove a speck of dust from your friend's eye when your yourself are standing in a dust-storm.¹⁴⁶ Surely we must cure our own blindness first before we can hope to help others. Just as the blind can't lead the blind, so we all rely on leadership from acaryas¹⁴⁷ or gurus who are more advanced on the way.'

'By the same token, those gurus must take care not to offer their teachings indiscriminately. For those with much dust in their eyes will not see the truth and indeed aggressively resent it. I think of it as like a caring but simple swineherd who casts pearls before his beloved swine. Disappointed that the pearls are inedible, the swine aggressively turn on the herdsman'.¹⁴⁸

One listener asked if he meant that some could never find the heavenly insight of which he spoke. Dharma answered him directly.

‘The gate to enlightenment is always open but it is extremely narrow and its path is steep. It seems hard compared to the popular wide gate with its easy path of everyday life. Only a few find the narrow gate. Of those who do, many are unable to sustain their resolve. There are also those who don’t enter the gate when they have the chance and who will one later day seek its peace. They then find they have no way to access it. It is rather like the patron you once spurned rejecting you when you later ask his help. In this way as I have said time and again, the humble, the meek, the diligent practitioners are the heroes. In this way the least worldly become the most insightful.’¹⁴⁹

And Dharma sounded a further warning on this theme.

‘Be wary of self-interested teachers who use your thirst for truth to their own advantage. For while useful at first, thirst remains a primitive emotion. You can recognise those prickly teachers from their main interests and their ultimate results. Just as you cannot harvest lentils from briars, so value the nourishment of an insightful teacher and reject the thorny self-righteous bigot.’

‘Yes, just as the genetic heritage of a crop enables it to produce quality fruit so pure intentions led to good acts. This is why some in a spiritual group who only follow the outward forms do not develop spiritual depth. The results are clear when life’s tribulations overwhelm them as they

inevitably will for those who live in the delusion that they can control things. Then they complain that they deserve the peace that their diligent erstwhile colleagues enjoy. But they will never be at peace while they remain attached to their delusions'.¹⁵⁰

'For to remain entrenched in delusions while belonging to a spiritual development group is foolish. It is like building a house on unstable sands only to see it collapse with the first storm. The diligent practitioner wisely builds his house on foundations down to bedrock and enjoys its resilience to all weathers'.¹⁵¹

By now, Dharma had wandered around most of his immediate region. He had deeply impressed many with his authority being based on experience rather than the dogmatic theology of the paid priests. His own experience of enlightened moments was growing and with it his influence. However, at the same time a deluded popular following was projecting its wishes onto him as some sort of divinity.¹⁵²

Some called him a heavenly avatara¹⁵³ for he came down to their level. Others called him a guru¹⁵⁴. In their cosmology they saw him as coming from above to help when suffering in this world had become acute. Others called him a just messenger, a wise philosopher, or just teacher. Yet others referred to him as a purusha¹⁵⁵, by which they meant 'son of man'. But the Upanishads see purusha is the city of supreme reality where enlightened ones dwell – just like the intent of the city named Samdhipuri. But his sangha knew him by his true name¹⁵⁶, Dharma. They were beginning to glimpse the deeper meaning of that name and its implications of responsibility to live within reality at all times.¹⁵⁷

'What a teacher!' observed the old man lowering the book.

'He lives his philosophy. Not like modern philosophers who just criticise the writings of others. They seem to believe in a god of arguments, and belief in a god makes them little different from priests. I have heard it said that priests' minds become clouded by the illusion of their proximity to God.¹⁵⁸ That is surely true as Dharma has shown here. We will stop now, Viira. Even though we started early, it is now so late.'

'But we could go on a little', pleaded the boy.

However, his father was adamant.

'We will stop now for I know that you are already developing a rich dream-life from the story. Tonight's words will only add more to that.'

'You are correct my father', replied the well-mannered boy, 'and I love the dreams too!'

'Cherish them for they are the assimilation of the story and its symbols and metaphors. Now Viira, how about one of those bow-hugs you have invented for our nightly leave-taking!'

The boy jumped up, bobbed his head simultaneously with diving gently into his father's fragile frame, arms open and smile wide.

The Great Therapist

As on the previous night, the boy was waiting when his father came onto the veranda. He greeted him boldly from the talpa.

'Father, I am here and ready for more about our hero!'

The father ignored the breach in formality usually maintained between Indian fathers and sons. Instead he beamed, for they were sharing a most important experience. He focussed on managing his ageing body into its imprints on the old sofa. And prepared himself to read.

'We were hearing about his teaching style, weren't we?' he asked rhetorically. 'Now we go on to see other ways he tried to get his message across. Like other wise men, he used healing of ordinary people with debilitating problems to demonstrate his insights. But this is really tricky because our ordinary minds lead us to think it is about controlling the laws of nature. People might actually have been cured of illnesses but that's only a minor part of the story. But I think you will see through it for its real meaning. We must always think about allegory, not just the literal. Do you follow? We must always look below the surface to drink the amaritsar that is the eternal water of truth.'

And as his son passed him the book, the father superfluously asked, 'are you ready to hear what happened next...?'

Next the storytellers consolidate Dharma's greatness with tales of miracles and signs. They begin with him symbolically descending from a mountain where he went to meditate. At the foot of the mountain, he was swamped by a waiting crowd. Among them was a social outcast who begged Dharma to 'make him clean'. Moved by the man's intensity, Dharma touched him and the man pronounced himself 'cleansed'. Dharma told him to go straight to the temple to make the traditional offerings for cleansing.

Instead, the man broadcast his good fortune and Dharma was again mobbed by the masses seeking help. Yet all through this period, he managed to regularly withdraw to deserted places and meditate. In these stories of healing and others of resuscitating the dead, storytellers represent spiritual development as curing suffering or as rebirth.¹⁵⁹

So, after his morning meditations crowds were always waiting. On one occasion, a commander of the occupying army sought him out. His favourite servant had become paralysed and was thought to be near death. When Dharma agreed to help, the commander confessed that he felt unworthy to receive such a holy man in his house.

He said to Dharma. 'Just say the word, and I know he will be cured'.

On hearing this, Dharma turned to face the crowd and spoke in a loud voice.

'Here is a foreigner who understands more than you. You have long been exposed to the way to the truth. But this foreigner has just practised it'.

And Dharma turned back to the commander and said, 'Enough! Your servant is of sound mind.' And the commander soon discovered he indeed was.¹⁶⁰

On other occasions there were tales of rebirth, symbolising the enlightened person being born with a new heart and mind. In one instance, Dharma cooled a fiery fever of the mother-in-law of one of his sangha. In another he revived the dead son of a widow in compassion for the plight of a widow with no sons in that era. In yet another, an official who sought to save his dying son received the insightful response, 'won't you trust the way to the truth unless you have a miracle?' Such events made many question their past view of reality.¹⁶¹

The anxiety induced by everyday life is also illustrated through a sufferer of Tourette's disorder who involuntarily shouted abuse while Dharma was talking. Dharma shocked the man into quietness. This led to all the town's mentally ill being brought to him for therapy. And again the storytellers remind us of this being an ancient hallmark of greatness.¹⁶²

Dharma maintained his morning meditations. His mind became ever clearer although he still struggled with periods of rebellion, depression and indecision. One day, his sangha were waiting for him to finish his meditation before letting people approach him. But Dharma felt he should move on to other towns. He was confident in his insights and now felt he should speak in the capital, Samdhipuri. So, he sent some of

the sangha on ahead. When they encountered a neighbouring tribe that insulted them they sought to retaliate. But Dharma firmly rebuked them for forgetting what he had taught. Realizing the conditions that had led to this impasse Dharma simply chose another route.

As they again journeyed toward the lake, a crowd accumulated as was now usual. Dharma separated himself from them a little by sailing to the other shore. Wryly he commented that most people prefer to wander up and down a familiar shore pining for the other side but never making any effort to get there. 'Rafts¹⁶³ that can float you across are ever available but you constantly reject them.' An educated and orthodoxly pious man who enjoyed the everyday privileges of his office then sought to join his sangha.

Dharma replied to him in words he would long ponder.

'The fox is at peace when she sleeps in her den,
and birds find rest in their nests,
but to his constant dismay, in life everyday,
poor man cannot find peace of mind.'

But when another man also sought to join the sangha Dharma welcomed him with a challenge.

'Follow me!' he said. And then the man um-ed and ah-ed about first observing the rites for his late father. Dharma replied pointedly.

'Let those who are dead to the life of the spirit bury the dead! If you seek the way to enlightened life, it is in following these practices in living ordinary life, its not somewhere else'.

Likewise, yet another man wanted to first organise his farewell party for his 'going forth'. Dharma made his point even clearer.

'If you look back while ploughing, the ox wavers from his straight way. If you look back to your attachments your spiritual life wavers from the Way'.¹⁶⁴

As evening descended Dharma again boarded a boat to separate himself from the crowd. His sangha boarded other boats. As they sailed a storm erupted and the boats took so much water that they were in danger of sinking. Wakened from his peaceful sleep by his hysterical sangha, he admonished their lack of awareness. Then he calmed their minds so that they could see the wind and water in perspective. And they were filled with awe at his presence of mind and constant charisma.¹⁶⁵

His charisma was then the basis of the next story. It again concerned the deranged mental state of all who live in the world of suffering which he called samsara. The story began with their landing at the other side of the lake. An aggressive madman lived there in a graveyard and practised such self-violence that he was greatly feared by all around. On seeing Dharma, he immediately prostrated himself begging for relief from his suffering. Dharma calmed his confused mind and the madman insisted that he did not want cures that would make him emotionally empty, but just a means to live with himself.

The story is embellished by Dharma supposedly transferring the man's unproductive psychoses into some nearby pigs.

Startled by such attention, the pigs rushed into the lake and drowned. This certainly impressed the swineherds! And they told their fellows, who when they arrived saw the local madman sitting sanely with Dharma. The superstitious locals then begged Dharma to leave their area. As they boarded the boats to depart, the cured madman sought to come too, but Dharma told him to return home to live with his newfound peace of mind.¹⁶⁶

Travelling on, Dharma again reached his home region. Here the sutra illustrates the nature of actions and results that we know as karma-vipaka¹⁶⁷. He was speaking to crowds which included the region's elite and pious when a man who had literally worried himself sick was placed before him on a stretcher.

Dharma spoke simply to him.

'Don't worry so much, your past acts are done and cannot be erased. Accept them and their consequences and learn not to repeat them.'

This caused consternation among the pious and the priests for it mocked their power to grant absolution. Dharma intended this reaction to illustrate that the first step towards salvation is realisation that mental problems are self-inflicted. As usual the incident ends with the man rising and walking home to the amazement of crowds who sought further wonders.¹⁶⁸

The simple message of karma is then reiterated through a story in which Dharma invited a social outcast to follow him. It was a tax collector known as Samhita¹⁶⁹ who had been

attached to the cream he could skim off in his profession. Grateful for the mental release he realised from Dharma's kindness, Samhita followed him. Dharma now renamed him Kaantadeva¹⁷⁰ as one loved by the gods. Kaantadeva then offered a feast for his fellow tax collectors to meet Dharma. Of course, the priests and the pious took offence. They would never deign to mix with these corrupt agents of the occupying power. Dharma fixed his gaze on these pious hypocrites as he drilled his words into their consciousness.

'It is the sick who need a doctor not the healthy. Go study the meaning of compassion! Learn its effect in helping those trapped by their karma so that they may understand salvation'.¹⁷¹

Karma also underlies the next story about Dharma's insight and humanness. It begins with the sangha of Devapatha who, like the priests and pious fasted according to the Uposatha tradition. They asked why Dharma's sangha did not do the same. He replied in various ways, first contrasting the celebration at a wedding feast to the austerity that comes later. He meant it as an analogy to enjoying the flow of life when spiritually balanced and retreating to more intensive practices when less balanced. But they missed the point.

Then he talked of auspiciousness and timeliness as spiritual virtues in analogies. He said it was folly to patch old clothes with new material that would later shrink and tear the old fabric. Likewise it was wise to pour new wine into new supple wine skins rather than old dried-out fragile ones. He then quipped that old wine is preferable to austere practices like fasting, by which he meant that mature spiritual development is to be prized over the flesh mortification of

fanatics. He was now fully convinced of the karmic benefit of regular renewal through mediation. Occasional withdrawal from society and not getting caught up in the everyday pettiness of gossip, worries and image were part of his way.¹⁷²

The stories then revert to curing disabilities to symbolise death to deluded life and rebirth to live in reality. Such miracle stories include: a temple administrator's young daughter being brought back to life; a woman afflicted by menorrhagic bleeding being cured by touching Dharma's clothes; two blind men receiving sight; a mute madman being made to speak sanely, and a deaf man with a speech impediment being able to hear and speak clearly.¹⁷³

At this point, a final miracle links Dharma's sutra to a plan to demonstrate his insights. The plan was evolving in his mind as a depiction of death and rebirth. In Samdhipuri at a pool ascribed healing qualities from devas occasionally dancing on the water, a bedridden man aided by Dharma was able to carry his bed home. But it was the holy day when fundamentalists proscribed carrying anything. Dharma thus attracted the ire of the jealous priests.

Appropriately indignant at their hardness, he retorted simply and directly.

'Compassion has no holiday.'

And this further fuelled their hatred of him. But because we can easily get ahead of the sutra, the storytellers at this point bring us back to matters concerning ethics, the sangha and friendship.¹⁷⁴

'OK, Viira,' said the father. 'Enough for tonight!'

He was put off-guard by this use of 'OK'. He had only heard it before among his playmates. Looking up at his father, he bobbed his head before relaxing into their nightly embrace. They extended the moment on their magical veranda of the dilapidated hut.

'I will surely dream of healing and therapies for disturbed people tonight, father. It is a wonderful story. I think that this Dharma is an incarnation of Indra. Is that possible?'

'In many ways, he is', responded the father in admiration.

'For as you know Viira, gods are just inventions of our minds. We use them to help us understand our own psyche. It's just the same as using words to convey ideas. Dharma could have been a real man, but we in our little village can't know. What is important is the way his life story tells us about ourselves. In that way, Dharma is inside us, like Indra.'

'In fact, such words as gods and therapy remind me of what an old linguist once told me. He said that the word therapy comes from our old Indian language describing serious ascetics whose ability to help troubled people impressed the Greeks who described it as bringing the gods back home.¹⁷⁵ This Dharma was indeed a therapist!'

'Go now and dream well my young hero.'

And the boy obediently trotted off to his awaiting mat.

Fellow-Wayfarers

The next evening he came out on his veranda expecting to see his son on the sofa. He was.

They smiled at each other, dispensing with the cultural formalities of millennia. And in doing that they retained the ancient spiritual links of their India. The ease between them was so natural that neither felt they needed to say anything. The father smiled to himself.

After a few minutes, he opened the book and simply said, 'so after the healings we move on to hear of Dharma's wanderings and about his companions ...'

Dharma went around explaining how people could liberate themselves from the stress and suffering in their lives. He saw them as like sheep in their unwillingness to think individually. He went further, even instructing his sangha not to waste time trying to convince such sheep.

‘There is always enough others with only a little dust in their eyes who can liberate themselves from delusions if you just point out the way to them. You know how to point out that way. Just as a son learns from seeing his father do things, so you have learned from me. Just as I help people release themselves from their fears and angst, so will you. The nature of reality is such that whoever lives within it sees causes and effects. Whoever transcends their ignorance and delusion, no matter how un-spiritual or evil they seem to have been, will be as if they are reincarnated. It is not some magic I possess but simply insight that allows wise discrimination.’¹⁷⁶

‘Our tradition tells us to respect teachings from a long and approved lineage, but somehow human failings taint ancient words,’ Dharma also told his sangha.

‘But I am simply telling you what I know to be true. You probably want some confirmation of what I say! Perhaps you would like more accolades such as Devapatha showered on me when I started my public life. But he is just another man like me whose message brought you closer to insight. Better to confirm that what I say is true by your own experience, not by believing all that is said by your gurus, your peers or your scriptures. Or even by what they quote from the

Upanishads¹⁷⁷ or the Vedas¹⁷⁸. Better to test each teaching in your own spiritual experience.

Its not that scriptures are wrong, they are not – but you must test what they mean. So I also say shun no science, scorn no book, nor cling fanatically to a single creed.¹⁷⁹ Then you will be open enough to know liberation. You will find that most people aren't interested in real liberation but just want a quick fix to their troubles. That is why they reject enlightened men in favour of self-serving charlatans who comfort and flatter them. Mark my words. By following such comfortable paths they will only add to their worries. But if you apply yourself to the deeper meaning of ancient scriptures that all true teachers use, you will experience what I am talking about.¹⁸⁰

After an overnight solitary meditation, Dharma selected the twelve most mature in their understanding of what he was saying. They were a group of spiritual friends who gave each other support, an inner sangha that could offer insights and examples to others. The story contains all their names but this is less important than the Order that Dharma established. They were to maintain spiritual support by travelling in twos as they shared the simple facts of liberation. First they went among their own tribesmen seeking those closest to comprehending reality.

Dharma instructed them, 'Show everyone that by living in reality you are content. Show them that this enlightened state is heaven right here and now. Example is always the best teacher because it is grounded in real experience.'¹⁸¹

He continued, 'Travel light, you don't need much money or surplus food and clothes. Where you find people eager for liberation, stay with them as long as you are in that area. Where you find unwilling ears, leave immediately. Don't be despondent even though you know they continue to live in recurring disappointment. Samsara always attracts the majority'.

And the sangha did all this. They encouraged those who were close to realising the truth and helped the mentally anguished to see their self-caused problems.¹⁸²

Dharma then initiated another seventy-two into the sangha in similar words. 'Bhikkhus,¹⁸³ you are the additional hands to help those many. The many who have only a little dust obscuring their sight of reality. So, off you go, seeming to be helpless lambs among wolves. But be confident in your knowledge of reality! Avoid idle wayside chatter. Assume that all people aspire to peace and contentment until they show otherwise. Eat whatever is offered according to your needs. Show that the possibility of liberation is always present.'¹⁸⁴

'But let me warn you. Even though the wisdom of insight is there for all at all times, most will reject it. Even when it stares them in the face. The very persons you might expect to realise the truth often shy away from it. They prefer the suffering they know to the liberation they crave. So don't expect to see regret for past actions or acceptance of karma vipaka¹⁸⁵ or least of all any comprehension of interdependence. Those who reject you will continue in their unsatisfactory lives. Even while they say their lives are

unsatisfactory! They can only change when they internalise what you have said.'

When the sangha of seventy-two returned, they related the healing effects of awareness they had seen.

Dharma observed, 'You now comprehend more than many of the duuta prophets. They sought such contentment but hampered their progress by remaining emotionally attached to cultural beliefs. If there is one truth, it is that no one can reveal the truth to another. We can only assist others to open themselves to reality by encouraging them into a path of appropriate techniques. That is why it is called the patha¹⁸⁶, the way.'¹⁸⁷

And from his specific instruction of the sangha he further extended his approach to the crowds, which continued to grow. Dharma spoke to them generally.

'It will seem hard to understand that dependence on family and friends for psychological wellbeing is a hindrance to enlightenment. Likewise, it is hard for most people to accept that fear of death and grasping at mythological after-lives or reincarnations is a barrier to insight. Overcoming such deep-seated attachments and fears requires great discipline in practices that become one's life. It takes resources, but once begun is so self-motivating that a new life emerges. It is like checking your bank account before starting a large project, or a king ensuring he has the resources to sustain a battle before he begins it. The cost of enlightenment in worldly terms might seem high. But if you earnestly enter the way, costs become insignificant. It is not through intellectual attainment

or priestly position that these insights are gained, but only by living in integrity with all things.’¹⁸⁸

Again likening his sangha to sheep among wolves, Dharma reminded them to remain pure in their intentions. They must always discriminate reality from worldly delusions even though this can offend legal and cultural mores.

‘Don’t worry for you will find yourself ever prepared if you remain mindful and compassionate.’

He went on to describe how families might reject a member who follows the way. And how a spiritual person might be considered antisocial. All this, he noted, was normal.

‘So don’t bother with those who object. Their time for understanding has not yet come. You can take my word for it as I understand more than you do yet.’¹⁸⁹

And further instructing his sangha, Dharma said more.

‘What you don’t yet know will become clear from your own experience. So don’t fret. The darkness is always becoming more enlightened. And don’t fear the angry or the murderers for they are both reflecting and affecting their own karma. Remember that sacrificial animals bought for less than smallest coins are a symbol of death to delusion and rebirth to the spirit. In the same way, your own acts reflect such transformation despite worldly losses and criticism. Within our sangha we know this from our experience. If anyone asks about it tell them according to their ability to comprehend. But if they are uninterested or hostile, don’t bother!’¹⁹⁰

'Personally, I find this simple and powerful reality to be like a fire within me. A fire that can illuminate the world. I wish it were all ablaze with that fire already! But I am yet anguished. I know that I must cultivate more frequent periods of this enlightening fire. And you will experience the same thing. As I have said, it can be divisive if your loved ones are immaturely dependent on you. For most fail to comprehend what is under their noses all the time. They understand the conditions that affect weather according to which way the wind blows. But they refuse to notice the conditions that blow disappointments in their face. Even less do they notice conditions that can ease their suffering.'¹⁹¹

'Let me say it again. If you remain psychologically dependent on your lifestyle, loved ones or anything at all, you will never know real life. You will never know enlightenment or enjoy the calm contentedness that is nirvana. For enlightenment requires a complete psychological reorientation. It is almost as if the old *you* dies. That is the old *you* that lived in the unreal world that the world calls real. And a new *you* is born that lives in the *real* real world. When you talk of your experience to those you meet, just take it as it comes. For the conditions of those who cross your path determine what reaction they will have. All that ensues will follow that universal law of cause and effect that is karma'.¹⁹²

While instructing the sangha in such words, Dharma also continued his expositions to the masses.¹⁹³ And as we have already seen, he encountered opposition. This opposition serves both pedagogic and literary purposes as the sutra mounts towards its didactic climax.

He stopped. And silence was sovereign.

The boy rose, bowed formally and then moved forward to embrace his old father gently yet so warmly that the old man's eyes misted.

And the boy left without a word.

Mara in Our Midst

The silent mood of the previous evening still possessed both of them. The evening warmth matched their contentment making words unnecessary. And so, nestled into the sofa's sagging cushions, the father began ...

In anticipation of its climax, the sutra now emphasises rising opposition to Dharma. First it picks up the thread of Devapatha who, in his prison, had learned of the evolution of his cousin Dharma and his local celebrity status. He quietly asked two of his own sangha to confirm Dharma's progress. They duly questioned Dharma in the midst of one his many interactions with the anxious and afflicted.

Dharma replied, 'Just tell Devapatha what you see and hear among those who consider what I say'.¹⁹⁴

After Devapatha's colleagues had left, Dharma rhetorically asked what people thought about Devapatha.

'Was he like a palm leaf trembling with each breath of breeze? Or was he confident in his own experience? Was he dressed in noble clothes? Or did he rustically live off the land? Was he like a duuta, a messenger? Yes, let me tell you he was much more than a duuta. His role is inherent in his name, Devapatha, the one who shows the path of the angels. He was indeed a man of great insight. And as is not unusual for such persons he suffered violence and was ostracised. His and my insights are the same. Pay attention to what I say!'¹⁹⁵

And they did pay attention, even if they did not comprehend the depth of his words. The marginalised and scorned who had accepted Devapatha's message paid attention. But so did the very pious and the scholars who absolutely rejected his insight that salvation could be in one's own hands. Seeing their objections Dharma called them petulant children, and went on.

'You labelled Devapatha mad because he would not eat and drink like you. And when I eat and drink socially, you criticise me as a drunken glutton who befriends the dregs of society. But wisdom is always vindicated by her works.'¹⁹⁶

This served as an introduction to Dharma accepting a dinner invitation from one of these very pious men. At dinner, a socially outcast woman whom we have come to know as Jaayaa¹⁹⁷ arrived uninvited and weeping. With her hair, she proceeded to wipe Dharma's feet dry of her tears and then kissed and rubbed them with cream. The pious host self-righteously thought that Dharma really should not allow such an unclean woman to touch him. Intuitively knowing his thoughts, Dharma engaged his sangha rhetorically.

'If a creditor forgives two debts one ten-times larger than the other, which debtor will be the more grateful?'

Receiving the obvious reply Dharma turned and said to his very pious host.

'I entered this house as your guest. I received no customary water to wash my feet, no kiss of greeting, no symbolic anointing with oil. That's right, none of your pious practices of respect. Yet Jaayaa, this woman you scorn, has done all this and more. She feels grateful for her liberation, as if a great debt has been forgiven.'

And the other guests muttered about the arrogance of treating ordinary folk as if they are holy. Dharma ignored them and quietly told Jaayaa to continue in her new-found peace.¹⁹⁸

Next day a religious scholar manoeuvred through a crowd to debate Dharma. He asked what one must do to be enlightened.

Dharma asked him back, 'What does your religion teach?'

The scholar replied cleverly that one must love God and one's neighbour as if they are oneself.

'Correct, do that and you are on the enlightened path', Dharma replied.

But thinking he had a winning tactic in the presence of the diverse classes, castes and tribes, the scholar went on.

'But who is my neighbour in this case,' to which Dharma at first sighed, and then replied with a story.

'Suppose a man is mugged and left for dead in the gutter. At different times, a priest and a temple official come across the injured man and both avoid him for the man is not of their group or they fear that to touch him would soil their religious purity. Next a man from another tribe arrives; let's call him Ahimsa¹⁹⁹, who compassionately tends to his injuries, takes him to town and pays for his care. Which of these three was neighbour to the injured man?'

The scholar had no way to answer anything but, 'Ahimsa, the one who showed compassion'.

Dharma said pointedly to him, 'And you too should practice as Ahimsa did and learn compassion before you talk of enlightenment! Compassion is nothing less than the

expression of knowing all as being interconnected. That is what loving one's neighbour as oneself and what loving God means.'²⁰⁰

Dharma travelled on to the next village. Among those who listened to him was the same Jaayaa who had recently anointed his feet. Her sister soon appeared complaining that she had to do the work of two because her sister just hung out listening to Dharma. Dharma mirrored her nature back to her.

'You always worry about what needs to be done. Yet all is well and always is for those who comprehend reality like your sister. Who needs more?'

And then widening his comments to all present, he said.

'Awaken to reality all of you who are anxious and suffer disappointments and worry, and then you will be at peace. Don't seek more than you need. Don't seek power or status. It is as simple as that if you will but practice.'²⁰¹

Through these times opposition to Dharma continued to increase. One such instance was when he and his sangha felt peckish and picked some grains to eat as they walked past a ripe crop. Some of the very pious men reproached him for harvesting on a holy day when no work should be done. Dharma was fed up with such religiosity and shot back at them.

'Your own scriptures refer to great men eating holy bread in the temple. Anyway, how do you explain priests working on holy days. You don't even know the meaning of your own

religion! I am talking of something much more important than your ossified vinaya rules. If you knew the wisdom and compassion that all religions teach, you would not have criticised my sangha's actions.'

'*Holy*²⁰² days exist to help us become *whole* as a symbol of release from our everyday world. They are not holy because of some artificial calendar!'²⁰³

Of course, this only made relations with the established sects worse. So when on another holy day Dharma taught in the local temple, he was watched closely. In helping an incapacitated man, Dharma turned the tables by remarking to the congregation.

'If you would rescue one of your sheep from harm regardless of the day, why not help a human being!'

And to counter the mischievous intent of the very pious men, Dharma then angrily expostulated.

'Surely you know that doing good is never against any real law. The only real law is that of natural reality. What we do when we live in that reality is naturally good. But your slavish self-righteousness is the opposite!'

And the very pious men, having publicly lost face now conferred on how best to destroy him. So he left immediately with hordes following in the hope of his help. But Dharma did not want his whereabouts known for the time being. One of the storytellers tells us that this is consistent with the words of one of the great prophets, a devaduuta. However, the sutra actually tells the real story underneath the simple

saga it is relating. What the duuta actually said was, 'The enlightened man is content in natural reality as it is content in him. They are intimately interconnected and his every act is within reality and hence is good, just and gentle, bringing personal peace.'²⁰⁴

But this good man Dharma was annoying those who pretended to be good. And when he sought to rest, the crowds pressed on him. Neither he nor his sangha had time or space even to eat normally. Some thought he was overdoing it. Nevertheless, he helped those with deep problems. And his every act was more ammunition for the very pious pretenders to appeal to the superstitious crowd.

For example, they claimed, 'He can drive out those devils of the ill because he is possessed by the chief of devils, Mara himself.'

At the same time others demanded a heavenly sign of his integrity. With the tide turning against him, Dharma addressed all present.

'If you believe in such things as demons, then tell me why evil would seek to destroy evil? Surely such an evil would only seek to increase itself. No, all I am doing is helping these anxious people. Helping them to see clearly that, when they clash with such realities as universal interdependence and impermanence, they cause their own suffering. But if you want it put simply in personal terms, remember Devapatha's words. He said "suffering stalks the evil-doer, just like the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the draught ox".'

And to emphasise his point in front of the very pious men Dharma added more.

'If you are not practicing to see reality, you cannot help others. In fact you are working against the real needs of everyone.'²⁰⁵

Warming to his theme, Dharma went even further.

'The path to enlightenment does not wipe out regrets for past errors. In fact memory of such errors provides a ready reminder for continued self improvement. If you continue to be attached to mundane pleasures or blind beliefs you will ultimately suffer disappointment. The greater the delusion, the greater the anguish. As I have said before, intentions are what count. And intentions are only pure when they accord with reality. You can see it in actions, just as you get to know that a rotten tree produces little and poor fruit while a healthy tree produces abundant and fine fruit. So often, the impure intentions of a speaker, even when they sound as sweet as honey, are soured by his actions.'²⁰⁶

But his listeners seem not to have understood. He had clearly said that blind belief is anathema to comprehension. Yet some very pious men and the scriptural scholars asked him for a sign from the gods. Dharma groaned from the depths of his being, and exploded.

'Signs! Signs! You want signs! You've had signs before you every minute of every day! Even the Upanishads and Vedas are full of them! You know the myth of the man swallowed by a whale don't you? How he was regurgitated safe and sound three days later. All of these! All I tell you! All say the

same thing. That is what enlightenment is like – coming from a dark place into the light. Like dying to a deluded lifestyle and being reborn into reality. You want a sign! I will give you a sign. Just you wait and see! Simple as all this is, it is greater than the greatest wisdom you’ve ever dreamt. Greater than your wisest king, greater than all cakravati.’²⁰⁷

‘The signs are ever present. They are all within the conditioned existence of the universe. This is why we can so easily fall back from our release into even greater suffering if we do not cultivate new habits. We must be wary of negative conditions. But the usual way of man is to avoid change. That is why a society based on such denials will become more and more desperate. The more they try to sustain something, the more disappointed and anxious they will become.’²⁰⁸

As with great men through history, Dharma found that his spiritual charisma attracted emotionally indulgent persons. So it was in a crowd when a woman praised the womb and breasts that produced Dharma.²⁰⁹ This irrational worship offended the message he propounded that day, as he told her.

‘I am but a man. My mother is like any other woman. You should praise the insight that allows us to see reality. That allows us to find peace. Don’t praise men or women’.

And as he continued speaking, his mother and brothers in fact arrived. But the crowd was too dense for them to see him. When Dharma was told that his family was there he replied with a broad gesture.

‘This wide sangha of men and women is my family. Whoever seeks enlightenment is my family.’

His family thus grew. And he continued wandering and talking in parables about liberation from angst and pain. Such as the liberation that Jaayaa had earlier experienced. From about this time she seems to have accompanied Dharma and his inner sangha everywhere.²¹⁰

He told one of his poetic parables from a boat moored a little out from the lakeshore crowds. It concerned a man sowing his crop.

‘Some seeds sour in sodic swamps
or shrink in shrub’s sieved shade
others starve on stony streets,
but some self-sow in soil.’²¹¹

And then he said, ‘Whoever is ready to shed their deluded existence is this soil. The seed is the glimpse of reality. Act now, for later it will only be more difficult!’

Explaining the parable for those who were still perplexed, Dharma likened the seed to the sparks of insight that we all experience at times, and the swamps, dark areas and stony streets to the everyday attachments that condition us to ignore reality.

‘But with appropriate cultivation and nurture, a seed will thrive and grow to the light, to enlightenment.’²¹²

Some of his sangha asked why he spoke in such parables. He explained to it them.

'You in the sangha were among those who first saw the interdependence of all things. Others however, have erected huge psychological barriers to that truth. They don't see the connections. Yet they subconsciously know that their worldview is baseless. Such stories penetrate the consciousness better than rational arguments. This has long been known. It is written about by our antecedent duutas. But perhaps you also didn't understand their words! We are indeed fortunate to have experienced conditions that favour our seeing reality. For many across of the eons have heard the same message yet never internalised it.'²¹³

Dharma continued with agricultural metaphors that appealed to the peasants. He talked of separating weed seeds from an infested wheat harvest to symbolise the coexistence of samsara and nirvana. He explained that they were just different states of mind, not different places. The same thing as hell and heaven.

'The suffering and angst we experience is our hell. It is caused by our own deluded actions. That is living in samsara. Yet at the same time and place we could have been in nirvana experiencing heavenly contentment.'

'It all begins with a tiny seed', he said returning to the metaphor to explain how each person can cultivate insight. 'A tiny seed which grows into a huge tree, the tree of enlightenment. Or you can see it as the specks of yeast used to leaven a whole loaf. The leaven of heaven.'

By such analogies Dharma communicated more widely. And people listened. They saw him as a wise man, one whom

they had long awaited who would explain the mystery of enlightenment through parables.²¹⁴

Dharma then consolidated his recent words.

‘Enlightenment can be seen as a treasure more valuable than any other thing. Or it can be seen as a fine pearl that is beautiful yet small. Or it can even be seen as a full fish net from which unwanted fish are discarded, for the enlightened have perfect discrimination.’

He then confirmed with his sangha that they had understood all that had been said. After that he left the area.²¹⁵

Silence.

Knowing the story had finished for that night, Viira spoke quietly.

'You know father, sometimes I know enlightenment like Dharma speaks about.'

'I am sure you do', said his father. 'We all know it at times. Most of us dismiss it because we want other things. Dharma is talking about practicing to make those moments of insight happen more often. Do you follow? Usually it is only old men who talk of such matters. But there are some who manage to live the full life by becoming wiser each day. You are already one of those Viira. You will always be content. Even when your peers misunderstand you and argue against your lifestyle.'

And as if to confirm his developing wisdom, the boy simply nodded as if he already knew.

'Father, I have had the right conditions to come to this point. Having you as a father to relay ancient wisdom to me is one condition that I value. Other people are not so lucky. Shouldn't we spread our joy to them rather than rest in our own contentment?'

'Spoken like a true Bodhisattoa²¹⁶, Viira', replied the father. 'We will come to this in Dharma's story too. Meantime, sleep well.'

And he passed the book to his son, who placed it back on the tea table. They parted with their now usual warm embrace.

Returning Home

It was still light when the old man came to sit on his veranda the next evening. Soon after the boy came bounding up with an energy that made his father laugh out loud.

'I enjoy your joy when you run like that, Viira! Come, sit and we will start early for the next part of the story is long.'

He wiggled in next to his father who already had the book open and just as the story was about to continue, Viira spoke.

'Father, I remember you said the storyteller combines a few stories into one. And that he shortened some repetitive bits. But he seems to have also interpreted it for us.'

'Smart lad! He has indeed, for the storyteller himself was a duuta. But it may be more than one storyteller, maybe even hundreds of them. Perhaps they are like Dharma in the story. That is how the story can be put into terms that we can still understand today after two thousand odd years.'

The father lowered his eyes to the book and continued the story ...

As we have seen before, Dharma was initially appreciated in his hometown of Raksabisala. But they soon turned on him, prompting Dharma to make an observation so often rejected by even the mild mannered of the world.

‘In their delusion, those attached to us sometimes seem to be jealous of our contentment. Or at least threatened by it.’

And the irony of his own apt name for the town, Upadana, caused him to laugh. He liked a good laugh. In this case though, the people’s attitude meant he could not help much. Nevertheless, he continued to explain the same simple insight of liberation from anxieties, in case someone might recall it later and begin their path to liberation.²¹⁷

Meanwhile, Devapatha remained imprisoned. As we heard, it was a political arrest for having denounced Suukaputra II’s bigamous marriage. But his treatment in prison was not as bad as it might have been. This was because the king recognised him as an insightful man whom the people revered. However, the new queen had other views. She wanted Devapatha dead.

So the queen, knowing man’s nature, organised for her nubile daughter to dance before her husband at a critical time. That time was when the king had important dinner guests. The queen knew that the sensuous dance would move him to offer her daughter any gift she might asked of him. And at her mother’s instigation she asked for the head of Devapatha on a dinner platter!

Distressed yet not willing to lose face in front of his guests, the king acquiesced. He had Devapatha's severed head delivered to the girl who passed it on to her mother. News of the event reached Dharma quickly. Thereafter, the king himself kept hearing rumours that Dharma was Devapatha reincarnated or an ancient duuta reborn. All of which made the king curious to see Dharma.²¹⁸

In the meantime, Dharma's sangha returned to regale him with tales of their missions. In an attempt to escape the demanding hordes, they again sailed across an arm of the lake. But the crowds anticipated their destination and were waiting. Dharma was moved for such 'sheep without a shepherd'. So he again talked of the heavenly contentment that is accessible to all who seek enlightenment.

Tired, Dharma found himself caught between compassion for the hungry crowd and his sangha's demands for him to rest in the mountains. He shared the meagre food that his sangha had brought. This caused others to bring out their packed food and share it. Eventually all were well content from the spirit of eating and sharing together. By the time the storytellers had embellished the event, a hoard had been fed from a few loaves of bread and a couple of fishes.²¹⁹ They hailed Dharma as a devaraja.²²⁰ But in his own mind, he was demonstrating the relationship of their existential hunger to the satiation of living in the truth.

Sensing the crowd's euphoria, Dharma sent his sangha off by boat to meet him later. He dispersed the masses and retreated to a mountain to meditate. It was dark when he returned to the shore. He spied the boat being swamped by waves fanned by a strong wind. The sangha were deeply

afraid, not even noticing that their boat had already been blown back close to shore. So Dharma calmly walked along the shore toward the boat. This caused his terrified sangha to see him as if walking in the lake.²²¹ Mucchada, jumped into the water in his panic.

Dharma grabbed him and in frustration lectured him.

‘Maintaining an awakened state is our mission. Then we know no irrational fears like this!’

But it seems his sangha were far from aware at this time. When the wind dropped they were surprised to find that they were safe at the lakeshore. They had not even comprehended the lessons of interconnectivity from the sharing of bread earlier that day.²²²

Finding Dharma further around the lake and recalling the sharing of the previous day, the crowds pressed him for more. He warned them against superstitious beliefs.

‘These events are not miracles. They do not deviate from the laws of nature. But they may deviate from your false views! If you shed your deluded worldview you would know that all I do is within the laws of nature. And that includes human nature. That is how everyone had enough to eat yesterday. Don’t just seek the bread that quickly goes stale. Strive for the bread of enlightenment, the spiritual nourishment that we all need to become fully human. You say you want to be like me, so just do that.’

But this was all too hard to accept. A few of the more religious lay people recalled stories of one of their great

duuta prophets of ancient times feeding their tribe on sustenance that fell from the desert sky.

And again Dharma counselled them.

‘Don’t just accept such things literally. The story of the food in the desert also refers to the spiritual nourishment. It is the truth that you hunger and thirst after in your personal desert. It is the nourishment for real life.’²²³

Some understood implicitly. But others struggled with the metaphors. They said he must be a devaraja and asked him for this nourishment. So he responded.

‘My life is becoming an example of this. That is the lesson which is before you at this moment. I can feel myself becoming one with all things. I can see the integral nature of all things and thoughts, all actions and actors. Surely if you too follow the same meditation and ethical lifestyle you too will see past the gods and literal interpretations.’²²⁴

Of course, such talk offended the pious. Dharma challenged them to compare his life with his words. If they did what he said they too might comprehend the meaning in ancient stories about calming of the mind of distractions and attachments.

‘I wonder’, he continued, ‘if you literally believe in an ananta,²²⁵ an eternal bread that falls from a deva in the sky. If you do then you must also believe literally that your ancestors in these stories eventually died. But I am talking about nourishment that overcomes the fear of death. It is

here symbolised before you in the flesh. I know it personally. I offer the eternal life that comes with real contentment.’²²⁶

This did little to appease the pious, even those who tried to understand. They soon fell about discussing whether Dharma was suggesting that they eat his flesh. Dharma replied, unwilling to let go of his evolving metaphor. He knew it linked back into the tribe’s past human sacrifices and ritual cannibalism that was still recalled in one of their rites. He also saw it somehow linking forward to an event that was emerging in his mind.

He said, ‘I symbolise the ideal that we may all aspire to enlightenment. So, all who have the same nourishment will live in the light of the eternal moment. This is the meaning of the ancient stories. It is the meaning of what I am saying to you about spiritual food. It is the metaphorical not the literal interpretation that moves the spirit. Overcome your mind’s tendency to grasp onto the literal. This misses the real intent of metaphor. For that is really is just another form of fundamentalism!’²²⁷

Speaking like this led his widening sangha to fall into dissent. Wondering why they were confused, he asked them a question.

‘What if you saw me transcend this samsaric life like some deva in the old religion?’ And offering them an answer he said, ‘It is your mind that needs to transcend the everyday to know reality beyond sensual and intellectual limitations’.

He then returned to his idea of making his life symbolise spiritual evolution by adding a cryptic observation.

‘Some of you will not accept this. Some may even misrepresent me to the worldly powers. But the fact remains, that real life is only lived in constant awareness of reality.’

This was too much for many of the would-be members of the sangha. So they walked out,²²⁸ leaving only the original twelve. Dharma challenged them to also give up. It was Mucchada who replied on their behalf.

‘Dharma, you are reality. We wish to be one with you in that.’

But knowing human nature as part of reality, Dharma observed that this might not be the case for all of them all of the time. He had already assessed the character of a zealous man in his sangha called Devadatta²²⁹. He saw him as suited to his plan for a spectacular karmic demonstration of all the metaphors for spiritual rebirth.²³⁰

From now on it was clear that Dharma more consistently perceived his karma in each event and action. So he was unsurprised by yet another public attack by the very pious men and scholars when they tediously accused his sangha of neglecting ritual ablutions before eating. Mindfully, Dharma used their own words to reframe the question.

‘Why adhere to literal interpretations of spiritual metaphors? Why confuse social with natural laws? Why twist scriptures to your own comfort? You attempt to define reality when it is in fact reality that defines everything. To act out of ignorance is perhaps excusable even if it is tragic. But to deliberately

manipulate others against nature for your own ends is evil, as your own scriptures say. Remember?²³¹

“They speak as if they honour reality, when in their hearts they seek to control so all of their show is void and empty, and their teachings can never be whole.”²³²

Turning to the wide assembly, Dharma used the issue to explain further.

‘Get this right. If you want to talk about mouths, it is not what you put in it that affects your spiritual development, but what comes out!’

Later Mucchada asked for the matter to be elaborated. Seeing that his sangha was not uniform in its comprehension, Dharma made it even simpler.

‘Any religion that defines sin as not following some social convention is false. Sin is going against natural law or reality. That’s all. It is not a set of rules, or a temple law. We know it from our motivations. If they are genuinely based on loving-kindness they cannot be sin. But they are sin if we appear kind yet our motivation originates from a need to be liked, conventions of charity or anything other than love.’

‘Karmic consequences ensue from everything including sin. This is easily seen in such hatred-driven actions as malicious thoughts, murder, rape, theft, lying and so on. But it also applies to subtle thoughts and rationalized self-delusions that we are acting out of love when in fact we are not. This is why we should regularly calm our minds and reflect on our

motivations. In this way we avoid silly social conventions that others think define good and evil.’²³³

And to make it even clearer, Dharma went further.

‘Don’t just accept something as useful for your own growth because your tribe, your family, your guru, your scriptures or your logic says so. Test it in your own spiritual experience.’²³⁴ If it helps you to open up to reality with greater insight, then accept it and continue such practice.’

His sangha were concerned that the pious elite of the town felt their status was being challenged. But Dharma did not seem at all fazed and said so.

‘In acting out of accord with reality their own karma vipaka will be their own hell. Don’t worry about others who follow them. They prefer delusion to awareness. Those pious are just like the blind leading the blind.’²³⁵

The sangha tried to separate reality from social conventions, but found the need for constant awareness too demanding. Even Dharma himself soon found his own conventional prejudices challenged. It happened like this. Dharma went to a nearby town to escape the masses. A foreign woman named Kusala²³⁶ pestered Dharma to heal her mentally ill daughter. The sangha advised sending her away. They said she was not even vaguely related to their tribe and was really quite inferior. Dharma ignored her as long as he could until he unthinkingly exploded.

‘Look! I can’t help every stray dog. The children must be fed before the dogs!’

Revealing his social conditioning to see his own tribe as superior, he was greatly humbled by Kusala's reply. She simply said that a scrap from the table would be enough for a dog like her. Dharma instantly saw his habituated conditioning and regaining his awareness, assisted Kusala's daughter to address her angst.²³⁷

Moving through another town his brothers urged him to join a feast. Now more wary of places where the religious elite held sway, Dharma was reticent. He knew they wanted to kill him and he did not want to lead them into such error unless it was unavoidable. In any case, he still had things to do before that.

He said as if to himself, 'My time has not yet come', but no one really understood what he meant.

In any case, Dharma later went to the feast in disguise. He overheard gossip about himself and the people's fear of the pious elite. Then, in the middle of the feast he revealed himself. He walked to the temple and started expounding ancient texts. Again he amazed the religious with his Vedic insights.²³⁸

He responded to their amazement with another view of his insights coupled with an accusation.

'What I teach is just the simple truth of reality. That is all that the muni of the millennia, the sages of the ages, have said. It is in your scriptures. But the truth is often distorted by self-aggrandising teachers and priests. Some of them even plot to kill me!'

Exposed in this public manner, the pious elite protested their innocence. Dharma publicly rehearsed their past accusations about his working on holy days and pointed out inconsistencies in their contradictory laws. He then finished off by telling all and sundry what to do.

‘Don’t judge me my appearance. Listen to what I say and assess it in your hearts righteously.’²³⁹

The chattering classes chattered. They identified Dharma as an enemy of the religious authorities. In their gossip they again asked each other if he could really be a great man considering his local origins. They said such things as ‘anyone who knows such things must come supernaturally not from one of our local villages.’

Dharma heard this and laughed.

‘So what if you know where I am from! What I am saying is more important than where I’m from. You have blocked your own ears with your idle chatter.’

With the people talking about him like a god, the pious and the priests considered having him officially censured. He avoided arrest at this time by saying he wasn’t ready for that yet. And he mysteriously referred to a coming event. He tantalised them further by adding that he would go where they could not follow.²⁴⁰

Renewing his explanations of enlightenment, Dharma then likened the joy of realising the real nature of things to water for a thirsty man. And again the crowd hailed him as a

duuta. Others claimed he was a devaraja. All of which again prompted the priests to call for his arrest.

But when the arresting guards arrived they were charmed by Dharma's charisma. Humiliated, the authorities cursed the guards and the people for such sacrilege. But among the pious was one named Vijaya,²⁴¹ who was to be remembered by future generations for his victory over his rigid conditioning. Vijaya reminded his peers that the same laws that they invoked precluded judgement of a man before hearing him and observing his actions.

His colleagues spat back at him sarcastically.

'Perhaps you too come from the boondocks. No one of consequence comes from such a low caste!'

All this overt aggression left everyone feeling unsettled.²⁴²

Gossip of healing of the ill and disabled continued to surface. The event of sharing food had been embellished into feeding four or five thousand people from a few crumbs and a couple of tiddler fish with baskets of leftovers.

Meanwhile Dharma went on as before. We next find him on a hill outside Samdhipuri where he casually talked with whoever came to a local temple. But the pious and scholars would not let him be. It was as if they sought a firm accusation against him. So they brought a woman accused of the social crime of adultery saying that their law required her to be executed by public stoning. They challenged Dharma to contravene that law.

Ignoring their petulant pestering, Dharma disinterestedly replied to them.

‘So if you are so pure, let whoever has never known lust throw the first stone.’

The words found their mark. They all slowly drifted away beginning with the eldest. The accused woman found herself left alone with Dharma, who instructed her simply.

‘Go on your way. Lust no more for sensuous awakening. Rather seek spiritual awakening.’²⁴³

Already sensitised to his heresies, the pious men were appalled by his more and more direct claims, such as his statement of being the light.

‘I am the light of the world. I am awakened to reality. Whoever follows the same path will no more flounder in the darkness of ignorance, delusion and hatred but have the light of real life.’

Self-righteous to a man, the elite demanded to know who he could call to verify such claims. And Dharma’s reply was compassionate.

‘It is hard for you to verify because you live in darkness. You judge by your laws and mores. You are influenced by your subconscious dependencies. But I have liberated myself from such fetters. You think that two independent witnesses with the same testimony make something true. Feeble human senses do not lead to comprehension of reality. You ask who witnesses my awakening. Everything around you does if you

could only see it. Why, the very earth is my witness.²⁴⁴ Split wood it's there. Lift a stone it's there!

Even if they had still wanted to make a move, the pious were again constrained by the crowds' enchantment of him.²⁴⁵

'In any case you needn't be too concerned.' continued Dharma. 'I will not be around much longer. You continue in your delusions of permanence and so suffer constant anxiety. This is why you cannot be where I am, free from all such pain.'

Some wondered if he meant to suicide. Dharma used the opportunity once again to repeat his essential insight by saying.

'What I mean is that I have transcended the life to which you cling. Unless you too transcend it, life will continue to be as it has been for you. I have said this so often before but it is difficult to convince anyone by words alone. Once you have finally understood me, you will open to reality. Then you will know what I am talking about. But while I'm still around, I feel compelled to keep telling you these things.'

Such words made many think more deeply and to try following his example.²⁴⁶

To those who did follow his example, Dharma offered a word of encouragement.

'You will know the truth and the truth will set you free'.

As they mistook freedom to mean liberation from the controlling army, Dharma clarified it as freedom from recurring suffering.

‘If you die to your deluded views you are reborn. Think of it as the choice between being reborn into hellish samsara or heavenly nirvana.’²⁴⁷

The constant harassing of the pious was now tiring Dharma and he tried once more to explain.

‘What have I done to earn this treatment? I simply offer a means of living in the eternal present.’

But their worldly definitions of eternity caused them to think that he was claiming he would never die. They pointed out that even the greatest heroes of the past all eventually died. So Dharma attempted to clarify their misunderstanding.

‘I was once just the same as you. I did not know the truth. I deluded myself about so much. But I have now seen what all the seers of all the generations have seen and spoken of.’

Some sarcastically asked whether he had met these ancient sages, and he softly replied.

‘The truth existed long before those men and it is eternally present.’

The pious took this as denying the existence of their god. And that was too much! They incited the crowd with cries of ‘heretic’ and encouraged them to throw stones at him.²⁴⁸

But the crowd was half-hearted in their stone throwing and he escaped harm. We next hear of the pious and priestly politicians attempting to trick Dharma into demonstrating his powers of perception. He let out a loud sigh of sore disappointment.

'You know that one day's weather is related to the conditions of the previous evening's sky. But you fail to apply this same fundamental law to yourselves! How you live, how you think, determines your mental state and thus the quality of your life. You want a sign? Just look at our tradition. Its legends are loaded with signs that show how transcending our little lives of longing leads to contentment.'

And as he said this he strolled off to be alone. We next hear of him back at the lake.²⁴⁹

'But we won't hear more until tomorrow, Viira!

'Of course, father', he said rising from the sofa.

'But why does he have to repeat things so often? It's not that I don't like it, in fact I do. It is like so much in our deva books that use repetition to make major points.'

The boy looked at his father who said nothing, and the boy went on.

'I know what I mean! The story is a story of a man. It is not written like a story of gods. And in a story of what a man says, it is usually enough to say things once. But Dharma says the same thing in many ways. Maybe he is just showing us how we usually get distracted from the important things of life?'

'There is nothing for me to answer there!' observed the smiling father.

'See you tomorrow' and they embraced in their now usual non-Indian manner.

Homespun Wisdom

Through the trees and onto the sofa came the eager boy. And out of the house the old man shuffled slowly to the same spot, but with equal eagerness.

The boy slid the book from the table and opened it before placing it on his father's lap.

It was now in his father's hands and without a word between them, he started reading ...

Employing their usual method of escaping the push of crowds, they took a boat across the lake. Hearing some of his sangha fussing about having not brought enough bread, Dharma used the opportunity to warn of the yeast of the pious and priests. The sangha misunderstood and thought he too was talking about bread. Dharma patiently reminded them that food was not the issue but the infectious teachings of the pious and the priests. He told them that these men were like yeast because they used the everyday fears of the masses as a substrate to fuel their own power through religion.²⁵⁰

The storytellers then revert to healings to illustrate aspects of karma. It began with someone in his sangha asking what bad karma had caused a man's blindness. Dharma explained that karma was simply another way of explaining that all things affect all other things.

'Wise men call it universal conditionality.²⁵¹ Everything is dependent on conditions. It isn't the gods punishing someone!' And then he added, 'I see it all as clear as bright daylight, free from the blindness of the darkness of deluded life. In this sense, I enlighten the world while I am in it.'

Of course, after such a metaphor, the storyteller goes on to say that on this holy day the blind man gained his sight. As is now standard in the story, this amazed onlookers. It also offended the pious who predictably argued that even on a holy day doing good was blasphemous work.²⁵²

The pious men then questioned the once-blind man and were taken aback when he said Dharma had enlightened him.

Affronted by this insult to their dignified positions, they denounced him. Dharma found him again and confirmed that he understood seeing properly to mean enlightenment.

As earlier he said, 'I enlighten the world.'

Overhearing this, the pious haughtily asked if he also thought they were blind. And he responded in form.

'You have the chance of seeing the light. But you suppress it. This makes your inner trauma darker than that of the simply ignorant.'²⁵³

The sutra moves on and we next find Dharma strolling among the rocks after his solitary meditation, Dharma asked his sangha what people were saying about him. They replied that some thought he was Devapatha or another devaduuta²⁵⁴ reborn.

'What do you think I am?' he asked them.

'You are an incarnation of enlightenment', Mucchada replied firmly.

Dharma was pleased, and encouraged Mucchada.

'Such insight comes with progress on the spiritual path. That is the basis of the true sangha in mutually supporting each other. The world, karma from past actions and doubt are always there and this can distract us. As you continue, you will assist others who are ready to see reality. You will know when and with whom it is futile to try to explain salvation.

But know this. If you run about telling everyone that I am enlightened, that will surely alarm the priests.’²⁵⁵

It was about this time that Dharma began to confide in his sangha about his idea of a didactic act. He spoke of an illustration of dying to delusory lifestyles and being reborn to live in reality. Mucchada expressed concern for Dharma’s safety, and received a firm reprimand.

‘This is the old unenlightened Mucchada speaking! Make sure you practice to remain aware at all times. Don’t slip back into that emotional clinging.’

And seeing the need to reinforce what he had told his sangha so often before, he spoke to all of them.

‘If you are to achieve spiritual progress, you must practice. Attachment to anything, even your life will only lead to you losing it. All things are impermanent. If you are not attached to things and ideas you are free to enjoy whatever is there at the time. For what is the benefit to a man of gaining great wealth, fame and power if he doesn’t have the freedom from their demands on him. And what is the benefit of material gains if they lead to painful karma vipaka later. I know that you know these things, just as I know you will learn more.’²⁵⁶

A week passed. Dharma again ascended a secluded mountain to meditate. He took Mucchada and three others from the sangha with him. During his meditation, his face was flushed and he mumbled something that aroused the drowsy three. In their stupor they thought he was talking with some others about a spectacular departure from

Samdhipuri. In the spirit of those times, the storytellers tell us that they thought those others were some ancient duutas. Thus they gave them names of duutas who represented the elements of personal practice for insight; ethical practice and meditation.²⁵⁷

Stimulated by the experience, the emotional Mucchada began babbling. Then seeing Dharma serenely at one with all things, the three of his sangha prostrated themselves before him. Dharma told them to keep their ideas about this to themselves until they understood more. Then Dharma began to explain.

‘Duuta come and go in every generation. They may be lauded at first. But they are always later ignored or vilified. This is happening to me. Don’t kid yourselves, this will get much worse.’

Dharma was referring to himself. But the three thought he referred to Devapatha’s imprisonment and death.²⁵⁸

Dharma explained the role of a duuta more clearly.

‘You know how a shepherd always enters the communal sheep pen by the gateway. His own sheep know his voice and they will follow him out quietly. I come like that into a community so that those who feel the truth will follow my voice. Many would-be gurus come and go. But they jump over the pen walls like thieves. They don’t even practise their own teachings. Unlike those false teachers, I offer a fulfilled life for all.’

'You also know the lengths that a good shepherd will go to in looking after his flock. Hired hands never go that far. I look after those who follow my words by helping them to know reality. But a false teacher's motivation is a mundane reward. He fleeces his flock for his own reward, be it wealth or influence.'

'My flock is far-flung. Those who are ready to hear the voice of reality will follow their shepherd. I know that my comfort and even my survival are but part of the natural flow of reality. There is no concept of sacrifice but only normality in this enlightened life. Free of attachments even to themselves, enlightened ones can show others how to become free. This is the sense in which enlightened men are often called liberators.'

In that foreign-occupied land and time, such words were bound to attract attention.²⁵⁹

They did. Next in a temple in Samdhipuri the authorities asked him straight out if he was a political liberator. Dharma replied.

'Look! I have told you a hundred times but you don't listen. Just look at my life and actions. If you are not convinced then you are not of my flock. If you are not on the path to enlightenment you can't see beyond your deluded state. Those who see it will know the meaning of living in eternity. They are not psychologically attached to any of the matters that you think of. Not attached to who calls himself king, to who chooses which god, to who taxes them, to who is rich, and so on. They just live contented lives. I know all this for I

am at one with reality. I know enlightenment. I am liberated from all that nonsense.'

The priests were appalled and suggested that for such revolutionary blasphemy he should be stoned.

'Is stoning your prescribed punishment for acting ethically?' he retorted.

'Stoning is for heretics like you. You act like you are a god!' they replied cleverly.

Dharma saw their tricks of manipulating his words to confuse the people. So he sought to be clear for all present.

'The only gods are those inside our minds. They are mind-made, man-made. Transcending such inventions as gods allows us to see reality. Then we can practice to live in it as constantly as possible.'

This explanation did not convince the priests at all! So Dharma quit the area and set off to where Devapatha had always been welcomed.²⁶⁰

But there were always other religious types. Once when in debate with such a scholar, a man in the audience accosted him begging help for his son who was subject to violent fits. The distraction led Dharma to groan.

'Oh, how often do I need to say it. Don't believe in faith healing and miracles! Cultivate insight so that you too can see the causes and conditions of things more clearly. In that

way you can see how to minimise the causes of your distress.'

But the father was not to be put off and retorted.

'I feel that, but please help me to develop more confidence.'

Dharma saw the glimmer of insight in the father, and also noted the crowd's intense interest. He shouted at the fitful boy who promptly fainted. When he came-to, he was calm. His sangha later asked why they had been unable to help the boy. Dharma reminded them that enlightenment like everything else is transitory. He had discerned what the boy needed at that moment because he felt completely at one with nature. Hearing this, the sangha to a man asked how they might maintain such states of awareness. Dharma told them.

'Keep practicing mindfulness and virtue so that your confidence and insight will grow even more. Then you will do things that seem miraculous to those who tie themselves to the mundane world.'²⁶¹

They moved on to the next town. As they journeyed, Dharma shared his emerging idea of making a message of his life.

'I feel I can demonstrate dying to deluded mundane attachments and rising to a higher spiritual place. I can show it in everyday life, just like that duuta who used the strange incident of his wife's becoming a sacred prostitute²⁶² as a metaphor for our tribe's infidelity to its own insights.'

But the sangha missed the point.²⁶³

But they did maintain their spiritual practice, each in his own idiosyncratic form. And just as holy men are nevertheless men, they fell into dispute about who was the more advanced. Dharma intuited that this was going on and offered help.

‘If you want to be first in this conditioned existence, you will be last in the spiritual domain.’

He then beckoned a child to sit with him and went on.

‘Unless your minds become as open and unattached as a little child’s then you will never progress.’²⁶⁴

The sangha pondered his lesson, and then one of them changed the subject.

‘Bante²⁶⁵, we saw someone else claiming to heal though miracles.’

Dharma couldn’t have cared less. He simply recalled some of his earlier words to them.

‘Don’t worry. If he can assist someone’s spiritual development, his experience is the same as mine. If he can’t help, he is only adding to his own suffering. Whoever helps in explaining reality is already on their spiritual path.’²⁶⁶

‘It’s normal that ignorance leads us to act out of accord with reality. But some are deeply drenched in delusion. It is they who lead others into their delusions. Inevitably it comes back to haunt them, whether they see the connection or not. Such

ones deserve compassion, not pity. Part of our practice is to avoid such unproductive and negative influences. Even if this limits our social acceptability.'

'We should be especially careful not to put those dark delusions into children's heads. It is so easy to do for we are conditioned into it. But this darkness from which we seek to escape is of no use to any one. It is the same old message of enlightenment that we been offered in so many ways, so many times. And it is one that gives that great joy that we call *mudita*²⁶⁷ when someone suddenly sees the light.'²⁶⁸

Of course as elsewhere whenever he spoke publicly, the pious and scholars were listening. This time their demeanour darkened. They arrogantly rejected such noble words from one who associated with tax collectors and social outcasts. Dharma ignored their insults and continued rhetorically.

'How do you think a shepherd who finds a lost sheep feels? At that moment isn't he happier for that one sheep than for the rest of the flock that is safe in the pen? This is the joy I speak of. Its pleasure in another's boon. It's part of the love known as charity.²⁶⁹ It's the real meaning of *mudita*.'²⁷⁰

'This *mudita* joy is not something that can be feigned or intellectualised. It is a true spiritual emotion. It is like a poor woman who drops one of ten coins and after diligent searching, finds it. In her happiness she tells others, who knowing what such a moment is like, join her in her joy. So we rejoice when someone sees the light, for we know that from that time their existential suffering will reduce.'²⁷¹

'All lands have such stories of lost sheep, lost coins, lost homes. They tell us that what we seek is in fact with us already, part of us. It is like the old tale of two sons, one of whom demanded his inheritance before his father died. He then set off on a spree of wine, women and whatever. Eventually, penniless and having squandered himself²⁷², the only job this once coddled young man could find was feeding pigs. And he envied them their food slops. His suffering awakened him to his folly. He recalled his father's full table and reasoned that even being a hired hand there was so much better than eating swine swill. So he returned home begging forgiveness and a job. His father rejoiced at his son's homecoming and arranged a celebration. His brother who had remained at home helping out all the time was miffed at first. But he quickly joined in the joy when his father said, "My son, as you are always here, all that I have is yours. But now your brother who was dead has come to life again. He was lost and has been found." Even greater is the *mudita*, the joy of seeing someone find liberation.'²⁷³

Dharma didn't need to explain that the story was not real, was not about sibling rivalry or social equity, for his parables were now being understood for what they were. So he turned to again include the scholars in the crowd.

'You learned men will surely know other similar stories. Perhaps you don't know their meaning. Do you know this one? An habitual drunkard was sleeping it off one day, so his concerned friend sewed a jewel into his coat. They next met years later and the drunkard was on hard times. He was scratching just to survive. His friend explained about the jewel. "You have enough value in that jewel to be comfortable for the rest of your life." But of course, being

deluded by drink, he had never known it was there with him all the time.²⁷⁴ It simply means that the chance of enlightenment is always with us!’

‘Then there is the one that shows us the ease with which we shed delusions if we maintain a practiced path. It is the old tale of a woman who was carrying a jar full of grain. While she was walking, the jar developed a crack through which the grain dribbled out behind her. She didn’t know it until she reached her house and found the jar was empty.’

‘Or how about the story of the man who had a treasure hidden in his field but didn’t know it. He died leaving the field to his son, who also knowing nothing of the treasure, sold the land to someone else. The new owner ploughed it up to sow a crop, and found the treasure. Many reject the glimpses of insight that are a treasure within them, but then there are those who feel that spark and fan it into light.’

‘Enlightenment is like all these stories. I could go on and on with such allegories. About how we can awaken to reality that is a jewel ever within us.’

But he had also seen that he had to talk more in conventional terms to convey his insights.²⁷⁵

It was such a conventional matter that next engaged Dharma. Someone asked his opinion in a legal dispute, and immediately he saw the chance to further explain the insidious nature of attachment.

‘If someone is in contention with you, solve it quickly. First talk to them with an open heart. If this doesn’t lead to

resolution, then just follow the social rules. If this doesn't bring resolution, separate yourself from the whole matter otherwise it will fill your mind and so take you away from your spiritual path. This is why it is always preferable to be surrounded by spiritual friends. They help you in your development. They are your sangha. For where two or three of a sangha meet, there is always an increase in metta²⁷⁶ that is real love.'²⁷⁷

But such easy forgiveness worried Mucchada. He preferred to have a rule. So he asked how often he should forgive someone who had wronged him. Dharma looked at him closely, and quietly yet forcefully explained in practical terms.

'It is not like that, Mucchada. If you see your fellow in the sangha acting against his spiritual development, compassionately mention it to him. But if you feel someone has wronged you and is remorseful, you will automatically forgive them. You can't feel wronged unless you are attached to things or your idea of yourself. And anyway, where there is true remorse, there is the intention to avoid repeating the act and even to make amends if that would help.'²⁷⁸

And because some people of the time found that parables opened their minds to the counterintuitive, Dharma explained it again in a parable.

'It's like this. A great king once ordered his defaulting debtor to be sold into servitude. The debtor begged for compassion and promised that with time he would repay in full. So the king agreed. The debtor on arriving home demanded money owed to him by one of his servants. When the servant said he

could not immediately repay the small amount owed, he had him imprisoned. On hearing of this the king was incensed. He ordered the debtor whom he had treated compassionately to be tortured until his debt was paid in full.'

But it didn't open all minds. Some mumbled about the king's reversal of his decision, and others wondered why torture was mentioned. Dharma turned to them and explained.

'If you remain aware, you will always see that no one can really wrong you. So why should you even seek anyone's apology. If you have insight you will see it all. Whatever happens results from conditions and circumstances. Don't get confused by the king's reversal in nature. That's not the point of the story. What it means is that the king acted wisely in the first place and this would not lead to future angst. This would have been end of the story. But the debtor acted unskillfully and he created ongoing pain for himself. This is what karma really means.'²⁷⁹

Still the message was not so easily assimilated in the superstitious minds of the ordinary people. This became clear to Dharma when someone asked him how karma had led to a recent massacre. Dharma replied as calmly as a patient parent with a child.

'You think that the victims must have done something wrong. You might as well say that those others who died the other day when a building fell on them somehow deserved it! No, karma is simply the natural consequences of past actions. The slaughter was probably inspired by hatred and greed, that's all. The tower must have had weak foundations

and was going to fall sometime. Both are the result of previous actions, of the prevailing conditions. Understand that your ignorance of the operation of karma is one cause of your own recurrent suffering. You act against nature.’²⁸⁰

‘And this is why I feel a burning need to tell you the way to the truth. I won’t be here forever. So please listen to me!’

‘It is like a fig tree that an owner wanted removed as it had borne no fruit. His gardener advised giving the tree a chance with good water and fertiliser. “If after a season it doesn’t come good, then cut it out”, he said. I am your gardener and my words are the water and nutrients. This is your chance. But many of you cut yourselves out of the truth.’

‘The conditions are here. I am here. Your previous conditioning may prevent you from acting, unless you reflect. It is all karma. Karma is not just following a law or a convention. That would be like an employee who does nothing more than what he is required to do. That deserves no special thanks. No! Do more than drone on through life. Seek to act in accord with the natural flow. Then you will find fulfilment greater than social rewards.’²⁸¹

And to illustrate what he had just said, one storyteller talks of Dharma helping ten outcasts of which only one returned to talk with him. He observed to the crowd that the way was ever present but many reject it, just wanting a quick fix.

‘Many who begin on the path gain some immediate benefit but do not persist. They do not continue to salvation. They are more attached to their familiar cyclical problems.’

Some pious men in the crowd then asked him if he thought that the world could again return to its lost utopia. If that golden age when all men lived in harmony could be reinstated. Dharma replied with the confidence he felt.

'You continue to cling to some past golden age. It is the golden age now! You can live in it anytime. All that is required is the correct view. This is what we call enlightenment. Eden, heaven, paradise, nirvana and so on. And it's here and now.'²⁸²

Turning to his sangha, Dharma spoke confidentially.

'It's all so evident when we have the correct view. For the majority I am afraid it is hidden by their delusion, greed and ill will. Pain and disappointment recurrently affect them and they seek relief in liberating teachings and beliefs. But they find that none sustains them. They talk of being born again. They recite ancient stories that tell of being washed clean. Stories like the one about a great flood. Or the one about a woman trapped in sensual pleasures being turned into a pillar of salt. But they do not think of anything except literal meanings of these ancient parables.'

'But by contract, when a person sees the truth they reject their old ways of thinking. They are attracted to the truth like bees to honey. This can lead to old friends living in different worlds and going opposite ways. Just as birds spy a corpse from a mile away but vultures are the ones who arrive to it, so a glimpse of the truth attracts us to know more of it. And don't wince at such talk. Political correctness and social sensibilities have no place in spiritual matters!'²⁸³

'That's it for tonight Viira. A bit long and repetitive, but it emphasises the theme. It is my favourite section. Can you see a theme developing?' asked the old man.

'Yes, from the beginning it is the same moral. Our minds obscure us from seeing things as they are. And there are ways to help correct this. It gives me a warm feeling to hear this natural truth presented in so many ways.'

His father gazed at him lovingly and smiled.

'Among my twelve sons, you are the wisest and yet you are the youngest!'

He leaned forward for the boy's embrace, for he had grown to expect it now, and he so relished it. Then he sent Viira home to sleep.

The old man stayed on his veranda for another hour or so, fingering the book's pages. If anyone had seen him, he would have looked like any other old man content in his silence. But underneath this placid visage, his mind was asking an unformed question; 'can it be that this Viira is one who will become a truly wise man?'

And with such a happy thought, he fell asleep on the sofa.

Wandering with Wisdom

'Your old father is becoming forgetful.'

The words greeted Viira's arrival the next evening with the dusk descending.

'I forgot to sleep on my mat in the house last night. I fell asleep out here on our talpa!'

The boy showed no reaction. He greeted his father as usual and settled into the sofa for the next instalment. But after a short silence, he spoke.

'Father, I know you are old and will die. It is no problem and I will miss you. I will have my memory of you and that is what the spirit of another really is. I know many people think it is spectres and devas, so I do not tell my feelings to many people. But father, I also have much more from you. This story of Dharma will stay with me always, and each time I think of Dharma I will think of you.'

The father was so moved it took him several minutes before he trusted himself to speak.

'Viira, you will be a wise man. This I see. You speak honestly. You speak emotionally without being controlled by your emotions. These are signs of a wise man. Yes, I will die. I don't know when, but I am old and death is in every breath at my age. But don't worry, I intend to finish the story!'

He laughed as he moved into his reading position. The boy passed the book to his father's waiting hands already open at the next page.

'Dharma has said that he would make an unforgettable demonstration. A teaching of what he had learned as a symbol for all who would seek insight. Do you follow? Part of his method is here in this book even though its mostly fiction. The two of us sharing his story may be what he intended. You have divined the thread through his story already, so let's pick it up ... '

Dharma had wandered across to the other side of the river. It is the same river he had used for the immersion rite. And it is the same river²⁸⁴ once used as a metaphor for death to worldly attachments and rebirth to reality. But that had largely been forgotten.

The pious prigs were still hassling Dharma. Trying to catch him out on a point of religious law, they asked if he thought divorce could ever be justified. Seeing their motives, he quoted their own social rules back to them. But then he offered some obvious facts, such as a couple needing to stay together to raise children and that interfering in a couple's relationship causes social disharmony.

'But', they argued, 'the scriptures also allow for a bill of divorce to be issued'.

Dharma had anticipated this and responded in form.

'Exactly, and that is because you prescribe everything by vinaya²⁸⁵ rules. Damn your pious notions. Use your hearts and minds! You have hidden the keys from those who seek to enter truth. Yet you have never entered yourselves! Like a dog in a manger. You sleep in the feed trough and snap at what comes near, neither eating nor letting the cattle eat!'²⁸⁶

Later, his sangha quizzed him about the interchange. He clarified it in his usual rational manner.

'If you divorce in order to marry someone else, you are by definition adulterous. It's a word! If you want to live in a society that reveres words above intentions you must accept

society's rules. But in the natural order, there are some who should divorce responsibly. There are others who never should marry in the first place if it diverts them from understanding themselves. There are yet others who make good parents and raise open-minded children while living contentedly in the natural order. If a perfect world existed, all parents would be enlightened and so provide the conditions that produce enlightened children.'²⁸⁷

And at that moment, some children were coming towards him. Their parents had brought them in the time-honoured tradition of seeking a benediction from a holy man. His sangha tried to keep the children away. Dharma countermanded them firmly.

'Weren't you listening? Let them come. Children remind us of the simplicity of mind that is found in contentment. They have not yet learned the artificial distinctions that we assume are real. Only when you see unity, integrity and interrelatedness will you understand.'

And raising his eyes to the parents, he said.

'That reminder which children give us is the real blessing, not some auspicious act from each passing holy man!'

And as Dharma embraced the children, he went on.

'They show us that enlightenment is living in the eternal present'.²⁸⁸

As he was leaving, an official named Magha²⁸⁹ ran up to him and anxiously asked.

'Oh perfect one, Oh Arahant!²⁹⁰ What must I do to become enlightened?'

Dharma took a minute to consider how he might help the official while expanding the understanding of those about. He then replied.

'I am not perfect. I am just a man practising ethics and awareness so that I might be more enlightened more often. Just do the same. Treat everyone and everything kindly as if it were part of you, for it is. Calm your mind that you may see how such conditions produce a complete change in your life.'

'Which ethics do you mean?' asked Magha.

And Dharma replied that the basic ethics are the same everywhere. They are essentially based on treating everything with loving-kindness.

'I follow all the precepts, what do I lack?'

And Dharma stared at Magha's stylish clothes as if to emphasise his dilemma and made a simple suggestion.

'Give away your possessions. Start a bit at a time, if it is easier. Finally you will find that it is comfortable to live in complete contentment with no possessions, as I do.'

Having intuited his attachment to his wealth, it was no surprise to Dharma when Magha dejectedly walked off. And

as usual, to emphasise his point, Dharma made up a catchy analogy.

‘It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a man with psychological attachments to enter into a contented state.’²⁹¹

Dharma was now focussing his explanations on his sangha as they learned from his example. But this explanation was hard for them to accept. For surely everyone was attached to something! But Dharma reassured them that commitment to the way of enlightenment brought an automatic loosening of the power of attachments on one’s mind. He went further to personalise it all. He observed how his sangha had already cast off many old attachments yet hadn’t realised it as they became less reliant on such past props.

‘Continuing on that path surely leads to enlightenment’, he said, ‘this is how he who is first in worldly success in wealth, status, power and so on, is in his inner self actually the last.’²⁹²

And to illustrate his first will be last point, Dharma told yet another parable. He spoke of a farm owner who hired men from the morning marketplace for a fair daily wage. Around midday he hired some more men and in the afternoon more again. Come evening, the employer first paid those whom he had engaged in the afternoon giving them the daily wage. Then he gave the same to those hired at midday. Last he paid the same daily wage to those hired in the morning, and they promptly argued that they deserved more. The employer replied that he paid them as agreed, nothing less. And he

noted that it was not fairness but envy that motivated them such that they did not see his generosity to the others.

'Thus the last will be first and the first last. Don't worry about your status in worldly games. And don't get hung up on matters of social equity. That is just one more attempt of the ignorant to control nature. True fairness only exists in the realm of reality.'²⁹³

Yet they nevertheless remained concerned about mundane matters. So Dharma again brought up his idea for a worldly demonstration based on his own life. He predicted that the priests would eventually control him publicly. Then he said, he would have a chance to illustrate death to attachments and rebirth into enlightenment. But they didn't focus on his point for they remained concerned about matters of power and status.²⁹⁴

It was that mood which led to the mother of two of the sangha betraying her sons' attachments to status in the sangha. She asked Dharma for them to be accelerated in their quest for enlightenment as if it was an award. Dharma denounced her saying that neither she nor her sons had any idea of what they were talking about.

'Enlightenment is not a place or a thing that can be grasped. It is a transitory state that we practice to experience for longer periods. Your sons like all of us must practice if they are to develop. Practicing meditation and ethical living enhances our awareness and so we become wiser.'

Of course, the rest of the sangha were annoyed with the two who sought seniority. To forestall unproductive discussion, Dharma reiterated his point for all in the sangha.

‘In the non-spiritual world, everyone craves to be something special. It shouldn’t be like that at all in a spiritual community. If someone in a sangha seeks to be first, he should persistently serve others in their spiritual quest. This is what I am trying to say about forthcoming events when I will be relegated to the lowest social class. I will be like an out-of-caste. From that lowly position I will show how everyone may be free.’²⁹⁵

The storytellers then move on to explain the virtue of persistence in spiritual practice through another healing story. Dharma and his sangha were walking past some men crazed by their inability to see how life worked. They continuously cried out for him to help. The sangha, seeking to protect Dharma from overexertion, hushed them up. However, Dharma hearing their persistent pleas, calmed their anxiety. And one of the men observed of his healing.

‘I once was blind but now I see’.

And Dharma agreed.

‘It is indeed like that. Like going from blind ignorance to brilliant insight. It just requires persistence in our practices. Be diligent, dogged and decisive in your contemplation and your ethics!’²⁹⁶

He then elaborated decisiveness in action and commitment. In his usual style, he did this through a parable. Using a

plausible story of a corrupt administrator who was about to be dismissed, Dharma turned it to his theme.

The administrator realised immediately that his future was bleak. So he called in all the suppliers whose contracts he had inflated and reduced the monies payable to their real amounts. His quick action worked. His employer became more popular even though this confirmed the administrator's past corruption. His employer praised such cleverness in business. As with his parables, Dharma was unconcerned with the social proprieties of the story. He sought to open minds to spiritual matters, in this case the need for decisiveness. But just in case some literal minds attached to the aspects of corruption, he added an ethical teaching about honesty in small matters.

'Whoever can't be trusted with a few coins is unlikely to value the only thing that counts beyond mere survival. That is developing one's mind to see the truth.'

And in case the rich and pious men who were listening missed his meaning, he repeated something he had said months earlier.

'No one can commit themselves to two competing forces. It's either the spiritual life or the money. It can't be both!'

Sensing their discomfort, he emphasised his words in the hope that they might open their minds as he went on.

'Money and religious status are what you now chase. It's the very opposite of practising ethics and calmness for enlightenment.'²⁹⁷

Some of the rich and pious fumed and sought to denounce him. But Dharma spoke on without regard for their power. He boldly stated that the natural law remains the law forever, for it is the truth. Nothing else matters in the end, he said.

‘As Devapatha explained, it is the basic law of the universe of which we are part. Petty additions to rites and rituals might give some priests power over the deluded masses, but they are not that natural law!’

As the crowds were taking an interest in this curious interchange, Dharma sought to include them by inventing a parable about a beggar to illustrate how the law and its explanation are always present. He used the folklore of his time to make the story sink in. The beggar, he said, had barely subsisted at the gate of a rich man, and eventually both of them died. The poor man was comforted by devas in a fairyland heaven. The rich man was tormented by demons in an archetypal hell. The rich man begged for the truth of the teachings to be confirmed to his surviving relatives by a special messenger who could tell them to listen to the wise.

But the reply from heaven was, ‘They won’t listen to the duutas or the Vedanta²⁹⁸ that are ever present. So why would they even attend to someone who returned from the dead!’²⁹⁹

The storytellers, having mentioned coming back from the dead, now present Dharma as more excited. It seems as if he was climbing towards a climax. They go on to illustrate the

power of discrimination between who is and isn't ready to understand the way to the truth in Dharma's next actions.

They portray Dharma entering a town with the crowds clambering to see him. To gain a view of the spectacle, one of the tribe's turncoats who collected taxes for the occupying power had climbed a fig tree.³⁰⁰ Spying him up there, Dharma called out that he would dine at the taxman's house that evening. The crowd clucked at their holy man cavorting with a social outcast. But the taxman was so moved by Dharma's kindness that he volunteered to donate to the poor and to repay any overcharged taxes. Seizing the moment, Dharma spoke to all who could hear.

'It is the same for all of you. The truth of liberation from your repetitive pain is always at hand. Just try to see the truth and persist in your practices.'³⁰¹

To illustrate the point, he told yet another parable. This time he spoke of a widow who demanded that a recalcitrant judge act responsibly in her case. She harangued that judge so often that he eventually acted responsibly and heard her complaint, just to be rid of her.

'So is it', said Dharma, 'when you persist in your meditation, reflection and ethical behaviour. You will gradually become more aware and more enlightened. But make no mistake. This is not the way of your pious superiors. They make a show of meditating and look down on the common people. They are only training themselves to stay as they are, not to change. Rather be like a man who sincerely regrets his past actions and uses their memory to not repeat them. Such humility is a foundation of spiritual development.'³⁰²

Ever tensioning the thread of the sutra, the storytellers come back to Dharma's friends. The epileptic brother of his consort Jaayaa, the woman who had once anointed his feet, was thought to be dying. As Jaayaa's brother, he was a friend of Dharma's and so the story gains added poignancy in its foretelling of Dharma's intended didactic act. On hearing of his friend's demise, Dharma unaccountably delayed visiting. This was easy enough as his sangha did not want him to go in any case on account of the religious elite who were now clearly seeking his blood. But after a couple of days Dharma explained to them that he was going anyway.

'I walk in the light while they stumble in the dark. Let's go and demonstrate more of what enlightenment is about!'

So the sangha went too, some of them fully expecting to die with him. But nothing untoward happened except that they discovered that Jaayaa's brother had not recovered from his fit and was said to have died two days earlier. Dharma first sought out his special Jaayaa and learned of the circumstances of her brother's end. They then joined the others in the mourning ritual as they walked to the tomb. Dharma ordered the stone removed from the tomb despite warnings that it would surely release the stench of his friend's decomposing body. He then called to his dead friend to walk out. He duly did, still wrapped in his burial clothes.³⁰³

Such an event really put the cat amongst the pigeons. Dharma had seen his friend suffer such major seizures before and appear dead, but the others hadn't.³⁰⁴ The pious and the priests did not know what to think. But they knew that

Dharma was a threat to their social control. So they sought out the chief priest whom the occupying powers allowed to control social and religious matters. The chief priest hypothesised that removing such a man would probably address their fears. From that time on, they sought means of disposing of Dharma within the constraints placed on them by their rulers. So Dharma made himself scarce.³⁰⁵

By the next annual festival of self-liberation, Dharma reappeared at Jaayaa's home. She again lovingly rubbed an expensive ointment into his feet filling the house with the fragrance of the unction and her act. This incensed the sangha's treasurer Devadatta. He thought the money could have been better spent for the benefit of the poor. Dharma used the occasion for another lesson, as he was wont to do.

'Let it rest! There will always be some who are poor and many who feel they are. You cannot expect to help them unless you see reality. True compassion is so different from simple pity. The charity of dana³⁰⁶ is really just an expression of metta, not the giving of money. Besides, she needs practice for my burial!'

This final flippancy went over their heads. But his re-entry into public life was sufficient reason for someone to report his presence to the religious authorities. Meanwhile, Dharma prepared to head toward Samdhipuri.³⁰⁷

Sitting in silence, the old man and his young son seemed to share one mind. After a few minutes, each simultaneously reached for the other for their farewell embrace. It was the father who broke the silence.

'We have about a week for the rest of the story and its dramatic ending. I know you will come each evening, but I just want to emphasise how important it is to read the story to the end.'

'I will come each night as I have been, father. I see it is important and anyway, it has become part of my life already. Don't worry, I will be here! And don't worry about my comments about death, I only wanted you to know that I understand how life is and that there is nothing to fear in it. That's all.'

And he rose to depart.

'Such wisdom and compassion becomes you, Viira. You are a blessing to an old man. Go now to your sleeping mat lest your mother think I am leading you astray with ghost tales. That's what so many of them think these stories are.'

And the old man laughed to himself. They parted with the ease they had developed between themselves. The old man reminded himself, 'I must go to sleep on my mat inside, rather than fall asleep on this veranda like a beggar! And again he laughed.

The City of Peace

Come twilight the next night, the two were at their usual place. They were enjoying the prelude to their evening's storytelling when a mango thudded to the ground. Its solid mass meeting the damp earth reverberated like a plucked bass string on a sitar. It resounded in their minds.

'What a superb sound.' remarked the father quietly, 'like a vajra³⁰⁸ flash that awakens us to reality.'

'It sounded like a reminder of the laws of nature, which includes us. Oh father, sometimes I could cry for the people who create their own pain and anxiety by working against nature.'

And the father smiled to himself and said nothing. He just started reading ...

As they walked over the rise, Samdhipuri came into view. Dharma wept. He wept out of compassion for the city whose name was 'peace'. He wept because its meaning had so long been forgotten. He wept because he could discern its bleak future.

As he neared the city gates, he asked his sangha to borrow an unriden donkey. He did this as part of his calculated actions to provide a great teaching of what he had learned. In this case, it was to align with a prophecy that a cakravatti would arrive by donkey to set in motion the unstoppable wheel of change.³⁰⁹ By this action, Dharma began making his great demonstration.

The sangha threw their coats on the donkey's back. They helped Dharma mount the humble beast and set off for Samdhipuri. A small crowd had already gathered hearing that he was coming and they strew his way with their coats and leafy branches as they cheered him on.³¹⁰

Such fanfare made the whole city aware of his arrival. The pious men became anxious and told Dharma to quell the masses. Dharma ignored both their order and the crowd and wistfully commented.

'No one can silence reality, it will always out!'

The pious men saw that they could not expect to control a crowd so ready for hysteria. Dharma spoke loudly to be heard by all.

‘My time has come. It is like the seed of an old diseased plant that must disappear in the soil so that a new plant can emerge. Or if you like, it is like an old diseased plant producing a beautiful flower? However you like to see it, I will show how all men who die to their worldly attachments can live anew in the eternity of enlightenment, in the flower of nirvana. I have set my mind to this, and while I am a little nervous, I will see it through.’

In their euphoria, the crowd felt they understood him in their hearts, which in that poetic language and time was recorded as them hearing the voice of a deva.³¹¹

‘You will see the eternal presence of samsara and nirvana, of hell and heaven. I will show you the means for liberating yourselves in my symbolical death and life.’

By indicating his plan in this way, some in the crowd became confused and they voiced their concern.

‘A real liberator would not die, so who are you?’

And Dharma replied with a confidence that settled the crowd.

‘I have found how to maintain my awareness. You all know enlightened moments. All I have done is practise to know such moments more often. They always come and go like all things do. So too will I disappear. Enjoy your moments of enlightenment. Walk in the light while you have it, before you are again enveloped by the darkness of ignorance. What I am about to do will serve to remind you that you can always be reborn into the light.’³¹²

And having titillated those who attended his words, he disappeared for a while. Meanwhile forces were mounting against him, just as he had anticipated. The storytellers here insert ancient lines about the difficulty we have in heeding the simple message of liberation. In this way, they remind us that we are following the life of a truly great man. But not all were heedless to his message, for some even among the authorities were being persuaded by his sincerity. But of course none of the elite felt they could make their thoughts known in case it threatened their privileged social standing.³¹³

Later Dharma revealed himself to the crowds again, shouting.

‘You see me as special? I guess I am. But only in the sense that I appreciate the facts of reality. If I shine with the light of enlightenment, it is so that your darkness may abate. Believe me, if you ignore reality you condemn yourself to ongoing problems. It is an eternal law that we control nothing. It follows that we should live within the interrelated actions that are all life.’³¹⁴

One of the storytellers here repeats the incident of Dharma ejecting sellers of sacrificial animals and money changers from the temple. After quietening the temple and addressing the sick, the children were filled with awe. The priests were amused at such childish worship. Dharma scolded them using their own scriptures’ references to children’s insightfulness.

He continued relaying his insights in the temple, which only aggravated the religious hierarchy further. But they couldn't do anything while the masses were so enamoured with him. Feeling that he had discerned the prevailing conditions accurately, Dharma discreetly left the city.³¹⁵

Re-entered Samdhipuri the next day, he passed a fruitless fig tree. He likened it to the shallow religiosity of those opposing him. A piety that produces no spiritual fruit. Muchhada asked him to tell them more about these fruits.

'The confidence that leads to wisdom is a fruit, just as the wisdom itself is. Confidence can remove mountainous impediments when you maintain awareness. And it is just the same practices of ethical behaviour and meditation that we have been doing together these three years. This will make you calm enough to develop wisdom. But if you harbour attachments or resentments you will not be calm, nor will you find wisdom.'³¹⁶

And with these words, they arrived at a temple. There, the chief priests and their henchmen confronted him demanding to know if he had any official authority for his various actions and public words. Knowing exactly what was going on, Dharma answered them with his own request.

'I will tell you, if you will first tell me whether the immersion rite of Devapatha was of the gods or of man'.

They were flummoxed by his rhetorical pirouette. They felt they could not say it was of the gods as this would effectively make Devapatha and Dharma into priests. On the other hand they feared the credulous crowds if they said otherwise.

So they said, 'We don't know!'

And Dharma replied pointedly.

'And neither do you know what I am talking about.'³¹⁷

'You priests are supposed to be spiritual leaders. In fact you are more like the son who agreed to work in the family vineyard but then lazily didn't do anything. Meanwhile his brother who initially declined to go to work changed his mind and did the work. This second son is like those who have found their way to liberation by the spiritual acts of Devapatha whom you have condemned.'

'You priests are meant to cultivate the people's spiritual growth like a viticulturist who lovingly tends his vines. But you behave more like evil tenants who would just as soon kill the agents of the owner sent to collect the harvest. I am that agent. How can you imagine that you can escape from your evil karma? Just as the vineyard owner will seek justice and the evil doers will suffer for their greed and ill will, so will you suffer from your own karma vipaka.'³¹⁸

Such clarity worried the elite as much as the priests for it threatened their social positions. Unperturbed by the danger this represented, Dharma went on and quoted an ancient verse from their scripture.

"All the world seeks liberation,
and all can know its foundation stone
of ethics and meditation,
yet bad priests want power alone."

'Do you priests and pious see such verses as referring to you? Can you notice that the people are relieved to know that they can effect their own spiritual liberation? Can you observe how you suffer from your own delusions of power and your religiosity? Accept the truth and all will become clear.'

Some of the priests seemed to want to subdue him but were deterred by the clamour of the crowds.³¹⁹

Turning to the crowds, Dharma elaborated a parable to emphasise the point of what had just transpired. As before, he used a believable and current example of that time.

'A king sent out messengers to invite the privileged to a wedding feast for his son. But they were all too preoccupied to accept, some were even so selfishly engaged that they were rude to the messengers. Extremely miffed, the king sent his guards to remind them of his power. He then redirected his messengers to the streets to invite whoever would come. And they came, well prepared to honour the occasion in the brightly lit palace. Though one who came refused to follow the traditional honouring of the king, so he was thrown out into the dark night.'

Dharma pulled no punches as he labelled the priests as those who had refused the invitation to the feast of liberation. Not only that, they had also obstructed messengers of the truth, and even when they had seen the truth, they had failed to honour it in their lives, he said.

'This is why I don't pay heed to religious authorities. Listen to my clear message. Liberation results from practices.

Whoever thinks they will achieve liberation without practice, will ultimately be thrown back out into their previous darkness’.

And from his insight into human nature he made a further observation.

‘Many are attracted to liberation, but few really follow through, even though it’s readily there all the time. In his deluded state, man cannot bear much reality’.³²⁰

Dharma continued his theme about feasts for this was the time of the main fête. First he illustrated the virtue of humility in a story about a man who took a seat high up the feast table. He was later demoted when more important guests arrived. In that way he showed how seeking status in priestly position and piety does not contribute to spiritual development. And then he talked of another ethical practice, generosity.

‘True dana is giving without expectation of any return. Hosting the poor is better than hosting those who are able repay your hospitality’.

He returned to his story about refusing invitations to a king’s feast for petty reasons. This time he sought to emphasise that enlightenment is easier to consider when one’s physical and material needs have been met. But if rejected then, the taste of the feast of liberation is lost in the fruitlessness of diversions and possessions.³²¹

Seeing his strict practice of truthfulness of speech the pious elite devised a trap for Dharma to offend the laws of the occupying power. They posed a trick question.

‘Our scriptures detail how we should give part of our harvest and money to pay for the temple and the poor. In that case, should we also pay taxes to the foreign Maharaja?’

Dharma saw through their ruse. Requesting a sample of the coin required for the tax, he asked whose image was on it. Of course, it had the Maharaja’s image so Dharma answered their challenge while furthering his message.

‘Pay the Maharaja in his currency. And practice to always be current, in the moment! Then you may be enlightened! Temple tithes are social taxes in any case. If the temple needs money for social services, they too need the currency of the realm. But if you have insight, you give when needed not by rules and convention. And you give what’s needed, which more often than not isn’t money but time, love, comfort and other virtues.’

Once more the elite had failed in their attempt to discredit him.³²²

Then another priestly sect that called itself Anatta³²³, which denied the folk beliefs in an afterlife, arrived to challenge him in front of the mob. The Anatta priest asked who would be husband to a woman in an afterlife if she had married successive brothers as their elders died, as the social law required. Dharma knew they sought to have him proclaim something about an afterlife. Instead he told them how silly their question was. He made it clear that reference to

resurrection in heaven and the like did not refer to any afterlives but were symbols of dying to attachments and being reborn into reality.

‘It’s all in the here and now’, he said.

‘Being married or not has nothing to do with the state of mind that this rebirth refers to. Rebirth is just a way of describing higher mental states. They are like being born again because everything seems different when we see things as they really are. That is why the scriptures, from the Vedas to the Vedanta take pains to describe all things in terms of living in the here-and-now. There is nothing else. There is no eternal soul except the natural flow. Your so called Anatta sect knows this intellectually. But do you know it from experience? Do you know the constant changing in the self?’

‘The sages always say there is no fixed or definable self. If you lived up to your name, ‘anatta’ you would know all this! Your question shows your literalism, just like your opposing sects that promote afterlife heavens.’

And both the Anatta priest and the more open-minded of the learned men from diverse sects present were impressed with his insightful answers.³²⁴

Then a religious scholar asked what was the most important ethical practice. Dharma answered.

‘Seek insight at all times with all your energy. Internalise the knowledge that all is interrelated. Then you will see that harm to anything is harm to yourself’.

On hearing this, the scholar was deeply impressed and replied.

‘You have encapsulated the heart of all the teachings. You have implied the minor role of the rituals and offerings that occupy so much thought by the priests.’

Dharma observed that this scholar was an insightful man and encouraged him in his quest. No one asked any more questions at that time.³²⁵

Later, one of the pious group whom Dharma had impressed took him home for the traditional holy day meal. Confronted with a man with a nervous complaint, Dharma helped him, but first asked rhetorically.

‘Who wouldn’t help their donkey out of a ditch on a holy day?’

Earlier in the day he had done something similar in the temple when he had helped a woman release her mental bonds.

‘Who doesn’t release his draught oxen so that they may find drink and pasture after work?’³²⁶

In his zeal, he seized each opportunity to correct biased teachings. And in doing so, he found himself confronting those who usually lorded it over the common people. He exposed their ruse of using the noble title, *ariya*³²⁷ to link themselves to authority. In the same breath he criticised

those who dressed finely and took the best seats in the temple while riding on the backs of the poor.

‘Yet it is the poor who teach what these hypocrites fail to. Look at this poor widow who gave all of her few coins to the temple fund.³²⁸ What a pure intention! She has given much more than the huge sums that the rich and pious so conspicuously donate. She gave all she had.’³²⁹

Again opponents sought to fault Dharma. They soon found grounds when the sangha again failed to observe the elaborate ablution rituals before eating. Dharma explained their own scriptures to them as referring to purity of intention, not sanitation.

Dharma raised his voice to the gathering crowd.

‘Listen to me! Outward form has no meaning. Transcending such things is our spiritual task. It means nothing to revere silk covers and hand-copied sutras or distinctive robes, or blessing new houses or exorcising evil spirits, or to be called Achara, Bhante or Guru.’

‘In fact, don’t call anyone your teacher, for you must ultimately be your own teacher. You must learn from your own experience in your ethical and mental practice. As I have said before, who seems the greatest in the world is in fact the least in reality. Cultivate humility so that you may learn more in your practices.’³³⁰

Matters were coming to a head. Dharma was observing it all and accommodating these conditions with his statements. Again a pious man invited Dharma to dinner. Again Dharma

did not bother with the tedious ablution ritual. This time when he was challenged, he used the opening to expand on the traps of religion for all to hear.

‘I am not sure if it is hypocrisy or ignorance! You wash the outside and forget the inside.³³¹ In doing this you distract others from seeing the truth of the ancient teachings. In your complex vinaya rules about oaths and discipline, you miss their intent to discipline your minds. If you promote rituals and offerings you forget the metta and karuna³³² that are loving-kindness and compassion.’

‘Talk about throwing out the baby with the bath water! Your rules filter what you think is error and take out the essence of spiritual development. You strain water so you won’t harm a bug yet you swallow buffalos. You erect memorials to duuta who taught liberation, but it was the pious who killed them. Don’t forget that it was the pious who not so long ago sacrificed children to their gods. And today they strut across fields where those corpses lie rotting below just as these pious types are rotten inside. Scholars make the teachings so dead that no one rises to life through them.’

Some of the earnest among the pious understood him. But others strengthened their resolve to be rid of him.³³³

Dharma knew that it was a minority of people who saw reality just by hearing about it. It saddened him for he could see the self-imposed suffering of the majority and their futile attempts to distract themselves from it. He soliloquised.

‘Oh Samdhipuri, you city of peace. Will you again kill those who speak of the way to peace? Oh how I would love to

gather you under the shelter of reality as a hen shelters her chicks under her wings. But you will have none of it! So, I will demonstrate the truth in another way. It is as if you are all drunk yet you were not thirsty. Oh, I ache for you all who are blind drunk, for you came into the world sober and you want to depart from it sober. So shake off your drunken delusion so that you may change your minds and your ways.’³³⁴

While the majority in the crowd enjoyed the warm feeling of listening to him, they ignored the serious stuff of its meaning. But it seems that, among those who listened, were some pious men who were beginning to see his important message. They suggested he tame his words so as to not offend the local maharaja. But Dharma was unconcerned, and replied cryptically.

‘Tell him all can see my message on the third day.’³³⁵

As he was leaving town, his sangha pointed out some ornate votive stones that were a local tourist attraction. In his elevated mental state he linked his reply to other questions about the end of the world and enlightenment in an explicit and longer delivery.

‘Have you found the beginning, so you are looking for the end? You will ultimately see that the end is the same as the beginning. When you know this, you will know all. As for ornate temples, as they are created so they will be destroyed. Nothing is permanent. Nothing is sustainable. It is just a continuous flow of change. You can talk of an apocalypse as the end of the world. It is in a way, but not the way you

think. The end of the samsara world, of the world of suffering, is the only world end of importance.'

'There has always been and will always be those who talk of some fantasy heaven as an after life. Who knows what is out there? But I do know there is nirvana here. That is what the scholars' eschatology means, it is not about some apocalyptic rapture! But I also know that in its ignorance the world will persecute you and me when we reject their false doctrines. But don't worry, the truth will be your freedom when nirvana is your state of mind.'³³⁶

'Let me say it again. Heaven isn't somewhere else, it's here and now. To believe it is in the sky is to believe that birds hover in heaven. Or do you prefer the sea where the fish paddle about in paradise! Listen! I will say it again. The kingdom of heaven is within you and all around you. Living in that knowledge is all that the sages have ever talked about.'³³⁷

'This truth is simple and straightforward. Yet it divides families where some are attached to ignorance, greed and ill will. This can lead to violence and to false teachers. Such confusion is samsara, the everyday world. Even in that confusion, enlightenment can come so quickly and end the old mental state, your old world. But nothing external has really ended. You have just begun to see it as it really is, that's all.'

'They can talk of trumpet blasts, the sun going dark and stars falling from the sky. But these are just the accumulated descriptions of the centuries for this shocking fact of enlightenment which is the perfection of wisdom. Know that

all that appears to have form is in fact empty in itself including feeling, thought, will, consciousness and so on. Consequently, nothing is inherently pure or even inherently wise, everything just is.³³⁸ And with this knowledge, you will know that all pain is gone, gone forever – gate³³⁹. This is the true gate of paradise. But remain mindful at all times and practice, for enlightened moments come unpredictably to all of us. Be ever mindful!’³⁴⁰

Dharma realised that this ancient teaching about mindfulness was difficult for many to grasp. So he set about explaining it later in the temple in the form of parables. He was adamant that none of this message was complex.

‘Mindfulness is like an alert night guard who thwarts thieves. It is like a feast prepared for a master’s homecoming where staff remain awake and aware in case he arrives at any moment. Staff who slack off and start sampling the wine miss the moment. Worse still are those ignorant of the whole event. Be prepared by being mindful at all times. It is like girls awaiting a wedding festival with their oil lamps. Those with fuel in reserve will be ready when called upon to light the way, but those who did not bring extra oil will miss out. So, I say to you, be ever mindful and ever receptive by maintaining the fuel of enlightenment. For no one knows when enlightenment will come to him.’³⁴¹

Somewhere around Samdhipuri, Dharma related yet another parable on the same theme, and then went on to repeat his essential message.

‘A rich man of our Ksatriya³⁴² caste, on departing for a long time on his aristocrat affairs, gave different numbers of coins

to three of his servants. He charged them to look after his affairs and trade well in his absence. By the time he returned, the servant who received ten coins had developed the capital into ten more and the servant who received five had developed it into five more. But the servant who received one coin only had that one coin, for he feared losing it and so did not invest at all. The master rewarded the first servant with management of ten cities, the second with five cities, but in the case of the other servant, he threw him out even without the coin. So be diligent in developing your spiritual readiness by ethical behaviour and mental discipline. If not, you will be like the last servant, who when the time comes, having never developed his practice cannot see reality.’³⁴³

‘You can use our colloquial tongue to describe all this if you like, but it isn’t really necessary. For example, I could say to you that you are the son of man because this higher plane of existence is available to everyone. I could tell you that the experience is like being attended by countless devas hovering in space. It is useful, but only because we have prepared ourselves for such imagery through countless stories. You could also say there is some sort of celestial shepherd who sorts out the mindful from the unmindful like sorting sheep from goats. But that can lead to literalism which the pious and the priests delight in exploiting to bamboozle the people.’

‘No, keep it simple. So know this! Whenever you are mentally composed, act compassionately, with kindness or take joy in another’s boon, you are experiencing a moment of enlightenment. When you are not in this state you are not enlightened. That’s sorting out your own sheep and goats!’³⁴⁴

'He tries every which way to get his ideas across!'

The boy was enthusiastic in his exclamation when he sensed that the evening's storytelling was over.

'Indeed he does', replied the father, 'and it gets better in the coming parts of the story!'

'I like the use of parables and old folk tales to show basic truths, father. But do you think everyone understands that they are all saying the same thing?'

His father shook his head ambiguously in the time honoured Indian fashion. He replied in a sad voice.

'No, most do not understand it. Many seem to deliberately confuse distress and angst with physical suffering in these stories. And many develop such attachment to their own belief that they close their minds to any other discussion.'

'Most people want a magical belief because it substitutes for thinking. Most want to keep living in unreality. It allows them to function in daily life and that's all they seek. That is until the lie is revealed and they fall in a heap. It is just as in the story of Dharma for those who were psychologically ill because their illusions were stripped away. Today we call it a nervous breakdown but we treat it with quick-fixes that just patch up the failed delusions with new ones. Even religious institutions support such delusions from their great power bases. As Dharma said, we must beware of formalised religions, as they usually lose their spiritual essence in their early decades.'

'And also watch out for flustered men who go foof, foof, foof about their busyness all the time and never have enough time to improve themselves. They are like the carpenter whose tools are so dull that his work is tiresomely slow leaving him no time to sharpen them.'³⁴⁵ Not like Dharma who we see honing his life tools in his every act.

Viira rose when he sensed that his father had finished speaking.

'I will be aware of this and so many other things, father'.

And as he embraced his father he continued.

'I see that truth survives so easily in the story that priests, temples and rituals are all unnecessary.'

His father smiled that smile of contentment in his son. And knowing that it meant there was nothing more to say that night, Viira walked off home through the trees.

The old man rose and laboriously moved himself inside.

The Fête of Liberation

What a blessing to know a wise young man! A double blessing to have that young man as one's son! So mused the old man as he laid out a snack he had earlier asked his wife to bring. He thought this must be how Asita felt at seeing the newborn Buddha, or Simeon on meeting the infant Jesus. Two old men who knew the joy of wisdom.

He had just placed the tray of dry bread and fruit drink on the low table as the boy gambolled up keen for the day's story.

'What's this, father? he asked on spying the humble tray.

'It is our opening feast. Would you like some?'

Being a polite boy, he agreed immediately, despite the dry-looking roti and bubbling liquid.

'It is made from dough that has been boiled to kill the yeasts. This is fermented fruit juice. Take a little of each.'

His aged hands shook greatly as he offered the tray to his son, but not a drop was spilled. They silently sipped and nibbled.

'This rude presentation is the annual feast of liberation. We will come to the last of these cycles now. Do you follow? Its symbolism is one more means of relaying the central message.'

After a short pause the old man opened the book and read as if he was part of the story. He began with Dharma's feelings ...

Dharma felt that he had said enough publicly for the moment. He told his sangha that the sacrifice for the feast of self-liberation in two days would revert to be a man. It was an historic reference that went over their heads, back to the tribe's ancient rite of human sacrifice. In recent centuries it been substituted by a lamb.

Meanwhile, the priests continued to seek Dharma's demise. With some tribal elders they went to the high priest to plan his disposal. But they all agreed to avoid overt action during the feast for fear of starting a riot.³⁴⁶

At this point the earlier story of Jaayaa applying expensive oil to Dharma is repeated by one of the storytellers. It serves to re-introduce Devadatta, the sangha's penny-conscious purseholder. For Devadatta is next depicted in discussion with the priests about setting up a means for them to meet with Dharma. The priests offered him money, which he naively accepted for the communal purse and the poor. From then on Devadatta was looking for a quiet place to make Dharma available to the priests. And all of this seemed to fit with Dharma's own expectations.³⁴⁷

Dharma expected the feast of self-liberation to be the culmination of his demonstration. He shared the meal with his sangha in a private place owned by one of his wealthier sangha members. They would not be disturbed there by either the priests or the masses. In this setting, Dharma watched things unfold according to the prevailing conditions. He could feel the anguish that Devadatta suffered in following his own path. And he knew that

Devadatta was the only one with the psychological resilience to act according to his conscience.

Beginning the evening by washing the feet of his sangha, Dharma used the ritual to communicate his intent. Mucchada objected, insisting that it should be he who washed Dharma's feet, not the other way around. Dharma reminded him of the water immersion rites.

'I wash off the old deluded past so that you may see reality clearly'.

Then he spoke as if to no one in particular in a sympathetic tone.

'It is straightforward for some of you. But for the one who anguishes over my words and actions, it will be a difficult dilemma.'³⁴⁸

'I have washed your feet as if I am your servant. It shows that worldly hierarchies are never reflected in reality. Some say that the simple message of liberation, salvation, rebirth or whatever you choose to call it, is inferior to intellectual and technological achievements. But this too is deluded. The simplicity of the message is reality, which is the only thing, neither higher nor lower.'

'Whoever has the same insight is the same as me. The insight is the essence, not me or you. You have heard me explain it many times. It is a dangerous delusion to think that we are independent selves. In reality our actions might even seem to have been predetermined in the sense that we recognise the

conditions that led to them. Conditions are now leading to the first part of my final demonstration.’³⁴⁹

He went off to meditate, and as dusk descended he rejoined his sangha. He was reclining in preparation for the long feast when he expanded on his emerging plan.

‘One of you will seem disloyal yet it is as it must be. My hope is that it will further our demonstration of reality’.

The whole sangha was righteously indignant. They insisted that not one of them should be seen as anything but loyal to Dharma. Mucchada protested the loudest, as usual. But without the rest of the sangha knowing it, Dharma was really sending a message of courage to Devadatta. He had sensed Devadatta’s anguished state of mind over whether he should initiate events that he hardly understood.

Devadatta spoke across the hubbub but only Dharma really heard him.

‘I act according to my conscience as you have taught me, Bante.’

To which Dharma replied.

‘Then you know what you must now do’.

The sangha thought nothing of this exchange. Devadatta held the sangha purse and this seemed to be something like going out to buy more food and wine for their feast. In any case, he left immediately. Later they thought more about it.³⁵⁰

Upon Devadatta's exit, Dharma mused aloud.

'We reach our highest potential when we cultivate living in reality rather than fighting the inevitable. My life has been a challenge in seeking to know and become one with reality. Now I am often just that, one with reality. It is wonderful, so wonderful that I know everyone would want this liberation from their fears and pain if they could only know it. So events are unfolding for an auspicious demonstration for all.'

'They will take me from our sangha. When that happens remember our overriding precept to love and support one another, just as I have loved you all. This is how people will see that you know the truth. The enlightened person sees all as interconnected. That is why we automatically love all, care for all and cultivate means of understanding the countless interactions that are life and all things.'³⁵¹

And then, as if to highlight the impermanence of even enlightenment itself, one storyteller reintroduces the argument within the sangha about who was the greatest. Dharma patiently pointed out that his serving them showed the virtue of humility to see oneself clearly. Then he went on, now verging on hyperbole.

'If you do this, you will see the motives of others regardless of their culture. You will foresee outcomes that follow from others' motivations. We are one in this enlightened state that offers such insight.'³⁵²

The prescribed time had arrived for the rites associated with the feast of self-liberation. Rites whose meaning had long

been buried by the codified rules of the religion. Dharma sat to the table and spoke more formally.

‘We are taught that this flat-bread symbolises the haste of our tribe’s exit from exile. Really its absence of yeast symbolises the dryness, the flatness, the tastelessness of samsara. Our suffering as slaves of self-delusion in samsara! We liberate ourselves by leavening the same ingredients of life to live in nirvana. In that sense, this bread feeds the new me, the new you, for we often dwell in the heaven that is nirvana. I have confidence that I shall soon consume no more of this samsara! Each time you eat such flat bread remember our past unleavened lives.’³⁵³

He then likened the wine to the perfect life.

‘As the wine is the fruit of the vine, so enlightenment is the fruit of our practices. Remember our aspirations to the perfect life each time you taste wine. I will eat and drink with you again soon.’

Their intimacy brought them into song before they dispersed. And Dharma prepared to go to the mountain to meditate as usual.³⁵⁴

Mucchada voiced the ambiguity that Dharma’s words had produced in their minds. He asked him where he was going. But the answer was obtuse. Dharma just said he was going alone.

‘You will also journey to that higher plane often. Even if your confidence may sometimes falter’.

Mucchada was indignant and replied.

‘The others might have a crisis of confidence but I never will! Why, I would die for the truth that you have taught us!’

And Dharma turned to look at him with a love that was palpable and spoke in a kindly paternal voice.

‘Mucchada, you are intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended. You will surely have a crisis. I can see from your personality that you are determined to live in reality as constantly as possible. But I can also see that you will falter. Who know when and how often? It could be three times before the rooster calls you to breakfast!’

All of the sangha then joined Mucchada in affirming their strong confidence in the reality they had experienced according to Dharma’s advice.³⁵⁵

‘All I can say is, be confident’, said Dharma, ‘just as you were when I sent you off without money or a change of clothes to explain reality to others some months ago. But this time you would do well to take some spare cash for the truth may be less welcome now that the authorities seek to flex their muscle.’

Someone in the sangha observed that they had only a couple of swords to defend themselves if a skirmish developed. But Dharma was not interested in fighting the authorities. He said he was more concerned with defeating the delusions of samsara to live in nirvana.³⁵⁶

‘This nirvana is like a huge house. There is room for all. All are welcome and one can live in that heavenly palace always.’

And then one of the sangha observed that many people seem to want a heavenly place in which a god lived. Dharma reminded them of what they had long discussed.

‘We’ve been together long enough for you to know that such belief is blind. It is unsupported by experience and useful only as an interim psychological prop. It is useful for those who will not examine themselves or life. But it is self limiting and doesn’t lead them see reality. God, Brahman and all such talk is just one way of conveying the counterintuitive fact of reality. It is counterintuitive to us because of our usual deluded worldview.’

He paused and smiled at them all, and then went on in his kindly tone.

‘The concept of a god is like a simple raft you make to cross a river. Once you are across you discard the raft rather than lug it across the wide land beyond.³⁵⁷ Carrying a belief in a god very far at all can thus be a grave hindrance. If you must believe in something, have trust in your own experience. Have confidence in the interdependency of all things and practice to live more and more in that reality. This is enlightenment, heaven, the realm of God and devas, salvation, liberation, nirvana and all the positive words used in all the sects that populate our religious countryside. With such realisation is complete contentment.’³⁵⁸

'That's it. Contentment comes with realisation, not with trust in a god or a person. Some people claim me as special and want to worship me like they do a god or an icon! But I tell you, even if someone should seize the hem of my garment and follow me around every moment, yet is not practising for realisation, he won't find it. Anyone who is covetous in his desires, harbours ill-will in his heart, entertains undisciplined thoughts and actions or is scatter-brained is far from contentment. But someone who is a remote from a priest or guru and yet is one-pointed in mind and restrained in his senses is at one with me in contentment.³⁵⁹ Whoever sees that truth sees me. They see what I am saying.'

'Follow the ethical precepts. They lead to the same contentment. They lead to metta, karuna, mudita and upekka³⁶⁰, that is to love, compassion, joy in others joy and equanimity. For by acting in that way, your personality will change and, with a calmed mind you will see reality. It's simple.'

One of the sangha asked the obvious question.

'If it is so simple why doesn't everyone see it?'

And Dharma laughed as he replied.

'It is indeed as simple as 1,2,3,4. Just as our duutas so often taught us by numbers.'

*"One - man produces his own hells;
Two - craving is their cause;
Three - suffering ends when craving chills;
Four - Right Paths this way explores.*

From Four Truths to eight limbs aligned,
he sees his insight grow
to wisdom, moral life, clear mind,
beyond world's *status quo*."

And Dharma's eyes sparkled as he looked up and spoke.

'The peace that comes from seeing correctly is a peace unknown to the worldly. I feel that my demonstration of immanence is imminent. Then all who have eyes to see will see the truth in living action.'³⁶¹

In this euphoric state, Dharma exhorted his sangha.

'Strive on in your practices. With calm minds you will change the way you see the world. No one of you is independent of the other or of any thing. All in this conditioned existence is by definition dependent on all other things. Those who insist that they exist in isolation increase their anxiety whenever their view confronts reality. Reality always wins! This is why we talk of love as metta. It is shorthand for the surety that all things are parts of all other things. Seen correctly, kindly treatment of other things is effectively being kind to oneself, which is the way of nature.'

He paused, seeking a means to convey the special nature of humans in this interwoven web, and having found one continued.

'From knowing interconnectedness we desire to help our fellows know this release from the rounds of repetitive disappointment. It is not about hating samsara but about seeing it clearly. Not rejecting the world but living in it

wisely. The ultimate expression of human love is foregoing the empty joy of an hermitic lifestyle to show others the ever present option of liberation. That is being *in* not *of* the world. As if you are just a passer-by. This is why our forebears defined a dharmasatva³⁶² as love incarnate. That is living in the love of nirvana in the same place that is samsara for most others. This is why I say: love one another.’³⁶³

‘But to live *in* the world and not be *of* it is to be despised as stupid for not ever craving after more materials, status and money. I have been treated mildly compared to others. But I expect more attacks on me very soon. It is nothing really. It is worse for those who see the possibility of liberation yet reject it. It is they who hate dharmasatvas most. Ironically such are found among those who take an interest in temples and religions. They even convince each other that it is a religious act to denigrate those who are liberated from their angst. This is the great shame of formal religion. It does not conduce to liberation.’³⁶⁴

Dharma went on, anxious to relay as much of his insights as possible. He now felt that his time was limited as events were unfolding as he had foreseen. He spoke of going away. He said he was unsure whether he should relay such deeper insights in case the sangha were not yet mature enough to comprehend them.³⁶⁵ He spoke of the self-condemning actions of most people. And he spoke of the natural inclination to truth that resides deep within us all. But the sangha mainly picked up on his emphasis on leaving and returning later. And that is what they asked about.

‘You will grieve at my going but you should be joyful at my return. Be like a woman in childbirth who knows great pain

but forgets it all on seeing her child. For I will show everyone about being born into reality. It may be hard but with the peace of enlightenment in your hearts it will quickly pass.’³⁶⁶

His emotions were now fully engaged as he ecstatically avowed aloud.

‘Possessed of a power greater than any earthly power, I see life as it really is. It is made up of the countless interactions that define all things. And I know the eternity of dwelling in the state for it is the way things have ever been, even before the world existed. All who have shared such experience know the fearless power of contentment, even he who will be seen as disloyal by those of limited understanding. Of course the world shamefully mistreats us. We appear to them to be sociopathic. In a way we are when we display no interest in what the world values.’

‘In perfect harmony with all things I am ready for what is coming. I will make it a demonstration of dying to delusion and rising to reality.’³⁶⁷

'What is this final demonstration, father?'

'It will come, Viira.'

He understood why, for no part of the story had been pre-empted thus far. That is, except for the dry roti and fermented fruit juice this very night. He pondered a little on that snack. He knew his old father was also making a demonstration, like Dharma. But he left this thought unspoken to express another emotion.

'I must go now to think these things into my dreams. Thank you for being such a good father to me.'

And they embraced silently and each turned in the direction of his sleeping mat.

Rolling the Wheel of Truth

Next evening, they arrived at the veranda at same moment. They arranged themselves on the sofa without a word. Then the boy noticed something different. Yes, that was it, the low table from which they had eaten the hard bread and sour juice was different. It was now a table made from a familiar object of their rural Indian town. The wheel of an ox-cart.

He commented. The father replied.

'In fact it is not new. It has a nostalgic symbolism for me. It was given to me at a time I came to understand the story. I had one of your older brothers lift it here this morning. It is appropriate that we have it before us tonight, just to rest our mugs of water on. It is a symbol of all that we are reading. Let's let the story tell us ... '

After that intense evening, Dharma took his sangha to one of his favourite morning retreat sites. It was an oil-tree grove known in the writings as Somataila³⁶⁸ but which Dharma referred to as Suan Moksa.³⁶⁹ It was where his most liberating insights had come to him. Telling most of the sangha to wait at the entrance to the orchard, he walked on a little with Mucchada and a couple of others.

In his efforts to concentrate, beads of sweat fell from his brow. To emphasise his concentration the storytellers tell us that it was as if a deva had come to care for him.

When he had finished his meditation and was again calm, he found Mucchada and the others had dozed off. Waking them he used the moment to remind them of his teachings.

‘Eternal vigilance is the fuel of liberty! Diligence is the essence of the spiritual life. You think your intentions are pure and willing but your motivation is weak!’³⁷⁰

He then walked back into Suan Moksa to meditate further. He knew something was occurring in the conditions that surrounded him, and he reflected on his possible reactions. Then, sensing the arrival of Devadatta, he again roused the sleepers to greet some guards sent by the priests.

Dharma asked who they sought in this liberating Suan Moksa. When they said his name, he told them who he was. Some of them bowed in respect. But this is not why they had come, and Devadatta assumed control by greeting Dharma as a friend, thereby confirming his identity. Divining that

this was a prearranged sign for the guards, Dharma laconically observed the situation.

‘So a sign of friendship begins the process!’

He then quickly clarified his sentiments for Devadatta’s sake.

‘I know you are only doing what you must!’³⁷¹

Impetuous as ever, Mucchada quickly slid a guard’s sword from its scabbard and wielding it, sliced off the guard’s ear. This was not part of Dharma’s plan at all, and he cried out.

‘Stop! stop! Whoever takes up the sword dies by the sword. Haven’t you remembered anything? In any case, this is just karma vipaka at work. It is the prevailing conditions. Don’t you see that I could have avoided all this if I had really wanted to?’

And according to the storytellers, he healed the severed ear while turning to them to speak to all who had come with Devadatta.

‘Guards coming to this calm Suan Moksa is a show of force. Yet you could easily have arrested me in the temple any time you liked. Ponder that. We are all products of our previous actions and the conditions they create.’

The sangha now ran away in fright. And one storyteller inserts another image of the teaching of liberation from attachments. His metaphor for rebirth as a shedding of the past is a young men deftly slipping out of his garments when a guard detained him by holding onto his robe.³⁷²

As they led Dharma in shackles off to the high priest, Mucchada mixed in with the crowd that followed the fracas. Night fell and it grew cold. Mucchada sought to warm himself at a fire in the outer courtyard of the priest's compound. Someone recognised him as one of the sangha, but he denied it. This occurred two more times. Then Mucchada heard a rooster's crow. And Dharma, who was inside with his accusers, also hearing the cock, turned and briefly locked eyes with Mucchada's, which welled with remorseful tears as his delusion lifted.³⁷³

Inside the high priest's palace Dharma was being questioned about his views. In return for a cheeky reply that anyone who had come to hear him could answer their questions, he earned a cuff on the ear. So he was taken off to another high priest for a hearing in the presence of other priests, scholars and elders. As they made spurious accusations against him he remained silent. Finally the high priest ordered him to say whether his talk of liberation meant that he saw himself as a god free of normal human conditions. Dharma replied with complete presence of mind.

'You seem to think so. You can see that I am different from you!'

Unperturbed, his questioner pressed for clarity, and Dharma again replied.

'How can I say I am a god. That's your language not mine'.

The exasperated high priest claimed this as a victory. He denounced him as a sociopath seeking to destroy the people's religion. He shouted his judgement loudly.

'He deserves to die.'

And this licensed the guards to ridicule and abuse him physically as they took him off to the occupying power's governing Rajapaala³⁷⁴ elsewhere in Samdhipuri.³⁷⁵

Meanwhile, Devadatta had become confused. He thought had acted according to his conscience. But now he was less sure. He knew that he held the sangha purse because of his attention to worldly detail, and he tried to develop insight just as diligently the others. But now he had no spiritual friends at his side. In the garden, Dharma had told them all to ponder. And he pondered on having accepted the coin of the priests as a donation for the sangha. But now he wondered if it might be seen as payment for his services.

He went to return the money, but when they rejected it, he became mightily depressed. He felt tricked, humiliated and spiritually alone. In his depression without the support of the sangha, he became deranged and hanged himself. The priests hurriedly separated themselves from all this by using the money to purchase a burial ground. And that field became known as Blood Plot from that day, which the storytellers claim was foretold by the duutas.³⁷⁶

By now a crowd had gathered around Dharma as they transported him the short distance to the official's quarter. Being a feast day and with a public frenzy encouraged by the priests, the first signs of hysteria were soon evident. In such

an atmosphere Dharma was delivered to the local Rajapaala of the occupying power, a generally good and disciplined man, Zalya³⁷⁷ by name.

The chief priests added theatre by travelling the short distance in their huge-wheeled ceremonial wagon drawn by two white cows. They egged the fickle crowd on but avoided entering the Rajapaala's premises themselves lest they defile their elevated status by entering a non-believer's house. It was one of their hundreds of sectarian vinaya rules. So Zalya came out to their huge-wheeled wagon to ask what they accused Dharma of. The priestly deceitfully made claims that would involve the public.

'He is a criminal and so comes under your power not our priestly rules. He has fomented mischief among the people, opposing the paying of your Maharaja's tax. He claims to be a great raja³⁷⁸ himself, a cakkavatti in fact.'

Zalya tried to brush them off saying that they could handle such a petty matter without involving him. But they insisted that the crime merited death, which only the representative of the Maharaja could administer. So Zalya perfunctorily questioned Dharma, asking if he was really a raja. Dharma maintained his complete presence of mind when he answered.

'Anatta. There is no raja, no self!³⁷⁹. You have said these things, not me. For me there is no me, no I.'

Then the priests and hangers-on accused him of so many other crimes that Zalya asked him if he had more to say. Dharma remained silent. His demeanour so impressed Zalya

that he declared him innocent. The priests were now livid in their desperation. They added more and more accusations until Zalya sought a way out of the mess.

He eventually found it on hearing of Dharma's family origins. So he sent him to the local puppet ruler for that area, the one whom they called Suukaputra II³⁸⁰ behind his back, who happened to be in Samdhipuri at the time.³⁸¹

Suukaputra II while being of the local tribe owed his post to his highly astute ability in the power games of the occupying Maharaja. His warped form of insight was earlier implied in his sympathetic treatment of Devapatha, even though he regretfully decapitated him. For this reason, he was most interested to meet this Dharma of whom Devapatha had spoken.

But Dharma kept his own council. And so amidst jeers and insults, Dharma was brought back to Zalya with the chief priests continuing to coerce the crowd from their elevated huge-wheeled wagon. The storytellers then anecdotally tell of the two leaders, Zalya and Suukaputra II ending their long-term antagonism as a result of their encounter with Dharma.³⁸²

Zalya this time treated the matter formally. He demanded to know if Dharma saw himself as a liberating king. Dharma simply asked whether this was his own question or one posed for him by the priests. Zalya wanted to be fair, and countered.

'Am I from your tribe? It is your own tribe that asks me to condemn you!'

But Dharma was in character for his demonstration and quietly explained.

‘I am not interested in your world of politics, tribes and religions, but of the higher life of enlightenment. That life is like a kingly realm. I am just fanning the fire that I have lit within myself.’

Zalya was deeply moved, but nevertheless continued.

‘Careful now! You make it sound like you are claiming to be a king.’

Dharma sighed purposefully.

‘You can say what you like. I live like a king in the truth. All who know reality see that my words are true.’

Profoundly impressed, Zalya asked, as if to himself,

‘Ah, but what is truth?’

And he then confronted the priests in their pompous wagon amidst the baying crowd. He told them that while they had accused Dharma of many things, he continued to find him innocent and that their suggestion of execution was preposterous.³⁸³

But when politics and religion mix the outcomes are often unfortunate. In this case, a strange tradition perverted justice. All of these events were taking place at the time of the grand feast of self-liberation, in which a local custom

intervened. Tradition apparently demanded a magnanimous Rajapaala to release a tribesman who had been arrested during the year.

Zalya, from his official balcony, made the usual offer, suggesting the crowd choose between Dharma and a resistance fighter called Putrapitaa.³⁸⁴ He fully expected the crowd to ask for Dharma's release for he was clearly innocent, was known to be popular and was certainly in the minds of all present. But the chief priests on their platform in their wagon worked the crowd as masters, playing on the guilt, false hopes and superstitions that they and their religion had infused into the mind's of the masses.

They instead asked for the release of the resistance fighter. Zalya was torn, for he felt that Dharma was a truly great man. So he asked the crowd what he should do with this innocent man Dharma. With priests egging the crowd to shout 'execution, execution', Zalya pronounced magisterially.

'I found him innocent, how can I order execution. I shall have him whipped for his part in this disturbance and then released like any petty offender.'³⁸⁵

Dharma was duly whipped. But the soldiers charged with the duty were excited by the mass hysteria and went overboard. They placed a mock crown made of briars on his head and a cloak of office over his shoulders so that they could laughingly call him king. Zalya presented him like that to the crowd again affirming his innocence.

'Here is a great man, a bodhisattva³⁸⁶. He is one of your own.'

The chief priests from their high wagon began a chant that the hysterical crowd quickly picked up.

'Execute him! Execute him!'

Even though they were on the official balcony, they felt the mob's threat. Intimidated, Zalya turned to Dharma and heard him speak in a low calm voice directed to him.

'You are caught by your karma to accede to the rabid priests. They use religion to control the people. But their karma vipaka will surely be greater than yours for their hearts are full of hate and their motivations are made of malice. They are driven by the anger that their karma has led them to. This is the meaning of the very kamanuja³⁸⁷ that they preach but do not understand. It is the younger brother of karma.'

Zalya sighed in resignation to his own weakness in the dilemma. He still sought to release to Dharma quietly. But the crowd under the influence of the chief priests claimed that anything short of execution would insult the Maharaja himself. They were now saying, 'he claimed to be Maharaja!'

So after going inside for a pause, Zalya brought him out again, as if he was presenting a dignitary.

'Here is your liberating king.'

He spoke in a voice that showed his respect for both Dharma and a deeper meaning of the words.

‘Shall I execute your king?’

The manipulated crowd uncharacteristically avowed that their only king was the Maharaja that Zalya served. And seeing he was defeated in public by the priests and that a riot had commenced, Zalya ostentatiously washed his hands in front of them as he spoke as if in an official announcement.

‘I wash off the delusion that you wrap yourselves in. I hereby command that your symbol of priestly power be the vehicle of execution. Yours was a people we all respected and a religion we protected. It has now produced an outstanding man whom everyone acknowledges as special. He explains what your religion means to you and to others, even to me. How could your religion possibly require you to kill him? So, I command that your high-wheeled wagon be destroyed as it destroys him. May such vile religiosity disappear from this realm.’

And so in sealing Dharma’s fate, Zalya made the chief priests complicit. Their ceremonial wagon was dismantled there and then and one of its huge wheels rolled to where Dharma was being held.³⁸⁸

Zalya pondered these events, including his own wife’s dream that Dharma should be treated fairly. And all these events etched Dharma’s words deeper into the mind of this educated foreigner presiding over a minor tribe in a marginal part of a great Empire. He recalled word for word what Dharma had said.

'They attack me because they fear all things that offend their idea of self. But as no separate self exists, of whom should we be afraid? You may claim that your self is consciousness or some body part. But reflect on these things and you will soon see that there is no independent self. They fear me because I expose the fiction of an independent self that we have each created, and on which we have formed our society. They, like you, are always fearful.'

In the hands of common soldiers, Dharma was again roughed-up and insulted. Then he was dressed in his own clothes and forced to head towards the place that since then has been called Vajrasana.³⁸⁹ He was forced to carry the huge wooden wagon wheel on his back. Later he was to be attached to it and exposed in the hot sun after having been being beaten and dehydrated.

History knows that priestly wagon wheel in two ways. First, it recalls Devapatha's dictum that 'suffering stalks the evil-doer, just like the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the draught ox'. And second, it depicts the rounds of rebirth that occur every moment in every deluded mind as Dharma had so often taught. From this time on it became known as the Wheel of Dharma or dharmacakra.³⁹⁰ This linked birth of an idea to sensations, volition, desire, attachment, action, disappointment and death of the idea back to rebirth of another idea and a new cycle.³⁹¹

Such a powerful chapter filled him with complex feelings. His father knew the reaction and let him be. So they sat in silence until Viira spoke.

'Father, I see that Dharma is both the medium and the message in his teaching system. His life is becoming a teaching in itself.'

'And now I also see the meaning of the wheel that is this table in front of us. It has eight spokes like the eight part teaching of Dharma. Around the circumference are twelve figures, the number of his sangha. Between the spokes is the ancient teaching of the links in the chain of causality beginning with ignorance and flowing through to an action or thought's death and rebirth.'

'And here,' the boy's excitement made his father's eyes shine. 'Here are images of the realms of gods that align to mental states.'

And after a while he went on further.

'And the centre of it all is in the hub. Those three figures of a cock, a snake and a pig are our symbols of the greed, hatred and delusion that poison everyday existence. It is not a table. It is a school, father!'

'It has had many owners over the centuries. One day it will be yours, Viira.'

And as tradition prescribed, the son prostrated himself in front of his father. It was an ancient sign of thanks, acceptance and respect. And surely each emotion was in the heart of this wise young man.

'Go now. Our story will continue in this powerful manner. Go, sleep well and may your dreams be as your life. There is no greater

contentment than aligning one's mind with reality. I am sure Dharma could have used those very words if he spoke this hybrid English that we do today!'

The young boy bowed before his father in full traditional style. Then he embraced him as firmly as he dared with full affection. Both embrace and affection were returned in equal measure. He walked slowly through the mango grove. The old man rested on his veranda for an hour or so. He gazed at the stars. He listened to the night insects and frogs. As he felt the abating humidity on his thin dry skin, he enjoyed its easing of aches in his old joints.

Death to Delusion

When he arrived the next evening, his father was not on the veranda. Neither did he emerge from his house at the usual time. Concerned and curious, the boy knocked respectfully and entered his father's hut. He had seldom been inside before. On the floor he saw his father lying on his sleeping mat.

He simply made a sign of respect and then checked for a pulse or breath. He found both. His father then opened his eyes and smiled. In the laborious process of helping him get up, the old man spoke.

'Viira, this is my introduction to the next part of our story.'

One day someone will find me really dead. No doubt they will make a fuss. They will probably project their own fears of mortality onto the event and learn nothing about life from it. Your response was that of a sage. You do not fear death or dead things. I expected as much!'

'No father, I see it as part of life. Just like on the wheel of life on this cart-wheel table. I know that dead relatives live on in memory but nowhere else. But not even my revered mother wants to hear this.'

His father's eyes ranged around the air as he clearly recalled past days.

'Ah, your mother. She is a good woman. She knows how to raise children to be healthy and to let them learn according to their abilities. She has been a good wife to me. She may not think deeply on the things that you do. Yet she has steered you into your

inquisitive life that has led you to wisdom. Respect her always for that, Viira.'

Viira bowed as was fitting when direct advice was given to a junior and replied.

'I do and I will. I just hope that others may see the truth, especially those close to me.'

Hearing this, the old man opened the book as he made an observation.

'You have expressed the only regret of all wise men. Now, let's see how Dharma deals with these same matters ...'

Dharma accepted his role as a condemned criminal. He struggled under the weight of his wheel in the crush of the crowd. In their deluded state, they thought that his treatment seemed somehow just and could therefore be their entertainment also. Of course there were some sensitive souls who wept out of sorrow at the injustice. And Dharma, true to form, used their tears as a basis for a teaching within this grand theatre.

'Don't weep for me. Weep for such deluded times when evil becomes entertainment. You must be resolute in seeking conditions favourable to liberation.'³⁹²

Amongst other outcasts and criminals bound for execution, Dharma arrived at Vajrasana. He refused a pain-numbing drug for what was to ensue. He wanted to remain as alert as possible. As the executioners began attaching him to the wheel and orienting it to catch the hot sun, he spoke quietly to each of them.

'I can see that you are only doing what conditions have led you to do. I don't hold it against you. Remember what I have said when you come to your senses later. Perhaps you will recall the teachings about the conditions that set up all events.'

He baked on the wheel under that clear tropical sun. It burned the memory of his teachings and his life into history in the form of that dharmacakra, as the wheel was henceforth called. During this time, the soldiers divvied up his few clothes in his shade. Atop the wheel Zalya had ordered

attached the sign, 'Dharma, The Great Liberator', written in the tribe's own language.

Of course, the priests objected to these words and wanted it changed to read 'Dharma, who claimed to be the Great Liberator'. But Zalya was adamant and said.

'I have written the truth and so be it!'

The fickle public continued to curse Dharma. They mocked the loss of power they had earlier projected onto him. The priests and scholars likewise ridiculed him, and this encouraged the soldiers to follow suit. Even a criminal being executed beside him was scornful of Dharma's apparent impotence. But another criminal spoke insightfully to him.

'We deserve our fate but you don't. I now know something of the peace you said is ours when we see things correctly. I hope to retain that as I pass into death today.'

And they each hung in their various ways in that hot sun, which without water and after beatings and other deprivations, was well known to kill men within a day.³⁹³

After three hours in the hot sun, apparently in extremis, Dharma cried out in the words of an ancient scripture.

'I must strive to maintain my mindfulness. I must retain my mindfulness!'

And it seems he did because he noticed his mother Maya and his consort Jaayaa with one of the sangha standing below. He

reminded them as he had said before that they were all one family in the truth.

And as if he had completed his task, he cried out.

‘I thirst for all to understand this death to delusion!’

Mistaking this for literal thirst, some soldiers proffered a wine-soaked sponge. Dharma sucked at the wine, and then gasped his last words.

‘I am one with all things. I am done. Now I die to this deluded world of samsara.’

And his body went limp.³⁹⁴

The storytellers cement Dharma into the world’s grand narratives by including the traditional signs of a great man’s death. They tell of the temple curtain that hid the sacred relics of duutas and devas tearing itself in two, of the earth quaking, of dead heroes coming to life and so on. And in a less poetic form, they tell us that one of the hardened foreign soldiers looked up at Dharma on the huge wheel confessing that, ‘Truly, this was an enlightened man.’

And the people, suddenly came to their senses. They saw what they had done in their mindlessness. They berated their ignorant delusion as they dejectedly deserted the Vajrasana site. Only Maya, Jaayaa and a few others remained.³⁹⁵

Executions at this major feast time were problematic for the priests with their myriad vinaya rules. They could not in any way accept death associated with the coming holiest day.

They therefore asked Zalya to take down all those of the tribe who had been executed.

Dharma appeared dead so no coup de grace was needed although one soldier gave him a cavalier stab with his spear. And as this is a serious moment in the sutra of a truly great man, the storytellers give details of eye witnesses and historic prophecies.³⁹⁶

At this point in the story the father had seen others become upset by the senseless violence, so he watched carefully for a reaction. What he saw was compassion and joy. He knew that his son had understood the meaning in all its levels.

After some minutes, the boy spoke as if to himself.

'It is wonderful to think he could see the reactions of others and make himself the teacher when most would see him as the victim. What wisdom! And it is compassion because he does it to teach about seeing reality. He is teaching how all become enlightened. He is a bodhisattva.'

'My son, there is little more I can say. You know more than I did as a boy and you will know more than I have as a man. You know too that this is just a story, like other great stories. Once we enter the stream of understanding of such matters, we are only drawn on to deeper understanding. There is no returning to that angst-ridden state of the usual everyday life.'

'You will also have divined the end of the story. While it is not much longer, we will save it for tomorrow night. Sleep well my hero.' And as he rose from the sofa he could not conceal his pain. The boy said nothing. He just carefully embraced him, carefully with great respect, and with love. And they each retired to their respective huts and mats.

Reborn in Reality

After having seen his father's pain last night he was surprised to see him already on the veranda. He looked refreshed.

'Father, you are more eager than I am!'

He spoke in the jocular manner of equals, which would normally have been poor manners for a respectful son. His father smiled.

'You may be right, my son, my hero. You may just be right. I am keen to finish the story and other things. It gives me such pleasure to see your joy in the story. I thank you Viira for this pleasure.'

Not knowing how to respond in words, the boy simply bowed. Then he sat with his father and passed him the book. His father spoke.

'I offer no further explanations of the story. You know it all intuitively. You are a naturally spiritual person. You enjoy a state of oneness with life that few discover and even if they do it is usually only after middle age. That is why you are well named a hero, Viira. A hero just like Buddha, Jesus and Dharma.'

'You will know the meaning of the final words here as you will understand coming events in our own lives. There is just one thing that you may already know but I must say. It is this. Truly wise men live ordinary lives. They are a beacon to the ready access to wisdom that is open to all. They do not hide away in monasteries, even if they go there sometimes to study themselves. That's it, that's all I wanted to say. Now let's return to Dharma's story ...'

There was a rich sympathiser who had long supported Dharma. He had done so secretly in order to retain his social position. Being influential in the local power groups, he quietly asked Zalya for Dharma's corpse. Zalya was surprised that Dharma had died so quickly and first checked this. The captain confirmed the events and so the right to the body was given over.

Then Vijaya re-enters the story. He was the local religious leader who had earlier sought out Dharma for a personal teaching. Vijaya brought a large quantity of herbs, perfumes and linen to wrap Dharma's body. With the aid of Maya and Jaayaa and some others, he treated the body with these unguents. They then placed it into the rich sympathiser's personal tomb (the current fashion for the rich). Together they manoeuvred the usual heavy stone seal across the entrance, finishing just at dusk.³⁹⁷

Wary of the situation, the chief priests lobbied Zalya to post a guard on the tomb in case the sangha might spirit the body away as a relic. They well knew the value of relics in promoting the religious superstitions that underpinned religious control. It was part of their own stock in trade.

But they need not have bothered. Two days later, when Maya and Jaayaa came to again anoint the body, the great stone seal had been moved, apparently by an earthquake. Entering the tomb, they found no body. Instead a dazzling young man ironically asked why they sought a living person in a place for the dead.

The guards could not fathom these goings-on and did nothing.

The women heard a voice, as if from a deva.

'Don't be so surprised. Remember all the discussion about a great demonstration. Don't think of death in the usual sense. It was all about being dead to the world of delusion, to samsara. Dharma lives in nirvana.'³⁹⁸

'Just look where the body was lying. It's not there, is it? Now go tell the sangha'.

And so Maya, Jaayaa and the other women rushed off with the news. But none of the sangha believed them, all having forgotten Dharma's allusions to this image of rebirth. So Jaayaa spoke privately with Mucchada, for she was aware how Dharma felt about Mucchada's potential. She was able to convince him to at least visit the tomb.

When he did, Mucchada saw the burial linen. He understood the women's story but still was unsure, for it just looked as if someone had removed the body. He had no recollection of Dharma's words about a demonstrative teaching for all to see. And to add further confusion, it seems that some other women also saw Dharma on the road to the lakeside.³⁹⁹

But at the same time, Jaayaa who had remained at the tomb when the others had left, saw Dharma. Whether her loss led her to imagine comforting devas, or whether such events occurred is not of concern to the storytellers at this point. They tell of her grief bursting forth in words.

'I cannot find my lord, my love, my teacher'.

Then she saw a gardener. But when he spoke her name tenderly, she knew it was her Dharma.

'Don't be so attached to me, my love. I live now but will really die sometime! Remember that all this is to remind you and everyone that you are the means of your own salvation. Go tell the others.'

And again she hurried off, this time joyfully. In mourning, the sangha dismissed her wishful thinking, but somehow the story nagged at their foggy minds.

With stories about Dharma not being dead beginning to circulate, the guards told the chief priests. Of course, the priests immediately charged them say that the sangha had stolen the body in the night.⁴⁰⁰

Next the story tells of two of the sangha walking to a village outside Samdhipuri. As they desultorily discussed Dharma's execution, a stranger joined them and asked of their sadness. They conveyed their despair about their loss. They hardly looked at the stranger though he offered them many wise words.

'You have heard the message in so many forms. It is the same in all the scriptures, from the Vedas to the Ecclesiastes.'

Impressed by such confident knowledge that they were now missing, they invited the stranger to dinner. When he broke bread in a familiar way they looked more closely. They saw Dharma. Then he slipped away that night. The two hurried

to tell the rest of the sangha, who again dismissed it as their minds' playing tricks on them.⁴⁰¹

Eventually the sangha had to wake up to themselves. This occurred after the festival of self-liberation had finished. They were huddled inside a house in fear of the mood of the mob they had witnessed three days earlier. Dharma nonchalantly entered the house and spoke.

'The peace of liberation be with us.'

They were beside themselves with shock.

'Why do you still trust in your false perceptions? Think on what I told you only a few weeks ago and up until last Thursday! Yes, it's me. In the flesh. And I'm hungry too!'

He picked at the food left on the table while they adjusted to this jolt, then he went on.

'You see. The teachings of our forebears, the great duutas, tell of a liberator who would be executed and then would come back to life three days later. This is what I have done, at least in the minds of those who are blinded to reality. It was a practical demonstration of dying to delusion. Dying as a symbol of what we all must do in getting over this painful realm of samsara. Then we are born into the enlightenment that is nirvana.'

'You often know this experience, so share it with whoever is ready to hear. Maintain your own practices to keep your mind awake as often as possible.'

Then he breathed conspicuously, as if to unify all traditions across that great Indian land through the meditation method based on following the breath.⁴⁰²

One of the sangha had been absent that night. When he heard of all these events he proclaimed his doubts. Who wouldn't! – he said.

'Unless I see again the wounds that I saw inflicted on that day, I can't believe it!'

Within the week, Dharma met him and proffered his side where he was stabbed by the soldier when considered dead. He showed him other wounds from that day, and of course that convinced him. But Dharma was not satisfied.

'Demonstrations, proof and belief are the refuge of the lazy mind. That is why we practice to gain experience. Experience is the basis of development, not belief. Mindfully continue your practice!'

Later sharing dinner with the whole sangha, Dharma continued this line.

'Your fear blinded your mindfulness when you first heard of my body disappearing. Guard against that! Be ever mindful as you go to help others wash away the attachments that cause suffering. Help them to see that death to delusion leads to being reborn into the here and now of nirvana. Those who are ready to see this simple truth will be evident if you are mindful. They will be like us in the ways they can interact with reality.'⁴⁰³

Dharma went off alone again for some days. Meanwhile, some the sangha returned to fishing on the lake for this is how they lived and it allowed them time to reflect. After a fruitless night's fishing, a figure on the shore suggested throwing the net out the other side of the boat whereupon they made a huge catch. Mucchada on realising it was Dharma jumped into the water to wade to shore. Dharma already had a fire and food and invited them to breakfast, breaking the bread in the characteristic way he had done on that night of the feast of liberation.⁴⁰⁴

After breakfast, Dharma became very serious. He asked Mucchada straight out if he felt truly one with him. Mucchada affirmed that he did, so Dharma spoke directly to him.

'Care for those who follow like lost sheep. Help them come to their own insight. It is like life. When we are young we think we have free choice to go where we want. But when we become older we see that our choices have been predetermined by the conditions established by our own and other's past actions and other factors. You know all about establishing conditions that are favourable for maintaining awareness. That way you may help others to the same realisation of reality.'⁴⁰⁵

Again the story allows irony as it depicts Mucchada's pride in this special attention. He noticed another member of the sangha in conversation with Dharma and felt jealous. He demanded to know what they were talking about. Dharma smiled and reprimanded him.

'Remember the cock, Mucchada! Just be aware and trust your intuition not your emotions.'

Dharma then told all of them to meet him at a mountain where he often went to meditate. There he encouraged them all as if he was a general commissioning his troops.

'Live the enlightened life that others may see its virtue. Tell whoever is ready to hear. It is all that I have done these past three years. Remember, all is interconnected. You, me, others, all things are part of the whole. In that way, we are never parted.'⁴⁰⁶

'One final word I offer you. And remember that no word of mine or anyone else is sacred! We just use words to communicate. The danger is that our minds cling to concepts and we think they are real. This is the final delusion to transcend. Even the things we think are insights of higher mind states turn out to be unreal.'

'Consciousness, free-will, sight, hearing, taste and so on. They are not real. Freedom, salvation, wisdom or spiritual attainment? You will find they too are but a stepping stone toward reality. The enlightened mind dwells in heaven. That is all it is. All other talk about gods and rebirth are just means to help us see. But it takes an open and calm mind, and not one that blindly believes what a priest says. More's the pity, but conditions produce such anomalies. So my final word to you is this.'

'Practice, and with mindfulness strive on!'

Their minds had been conditioned by the past three years with Dharma and their own practices. They had overcome their lapses of awareness surrounding Dharma's simulated death and rebirth and understood all he said. It was neither a stumbling block nor foolishness to them. They followed him as he walked away from them. But then they let him go his own way.

So, he parted from them. They were neither sad nor surprised. They were just content in their awareness that they had learned of themselves from a master. A master who was one like their own scriptures described in images of devas. Now they were able to live their own enlightened lives. Having thus gone, from that moment on they referred to him as tathagata,⁴⁰⁷ for he had travelled to the highest reaches of absolute reality.

And the sangha paid homage to his spiritual development by emulating him wherever they wandered under Mucchada's general direction. And so they lived and spread the message of universal liberation that is Dharma.⁴⁰⁸

Thus are tied-off the threads of this wonderful sutra of a great man, such as the world only recognizes occasionally. One storyteller claims to have seen these things first hand, and to only having written down a fraction of what he saw. He also tells us that he did this so that all may know that liberation is ever available to us. We just have to act within reality to dwell in the eternal present that is nirvana.⁴⁰⁹

The End

He pronounced 'the end' loudly and with satisfaction. And he had finished this last paragraphs in a strong voice. But the son could discern that he was using his reserves of energy. He waited quietly before engaging his frail father.

'Father, I have read that much of the world uses this same language as us, English. And that most do not take an interest in their spirits or their own minds. I find this sad. They have so much yet are poor in spirit, so why do they not seek understanding?'

He knew the answers but was giving time for his father to recover.

'Viira, you know the treasure of life. Share it with whoever is ready. Don't be disappointed that there are few. Do you follow?'

His short reply cost him breath. He finally went on.

'I am now 82 years of age. I have lived through the wars. I have lived through the privations of man's deluded actions. I have also seen deep beauty in all of it. I will die very soon, I know. Really die. Not like Dharma!'

They both smiled at his quip. Viira moved close to this thin leathery man he loved. 'I am young for the son of an old man. I am so blessed to have it this way. We are a lifetime in years apart yet share the same spirit of living in reality, just like Dharma.'

'Just like Dharma', agreed his father. 'Go now. Come tomorrow night to discuss more. Goodnight my hero of the Dharma'.

He embraced his feeble father carefully and guided him to his door before making for the mango grove.

Conditioned Life

Next evening they were back on the veranda before dusk. The old man spoke, rested from his exertions of the previous evening, tired of body while strong in mind.

'You remember Viira that I said there is one great story repeated through history in all cultures. History has no goal, it just is what we think might have happened and it is always changing. This version is from one of our cultures. Our great land has given birth to most of the world's enduring religions. Perhaps that is why it seems easy for us to comprehend the story. Others must go through mental gymnastics to enter ancient myths and multiple deities. Maybe that's why they often say such stories are out of date. And this leads them to miss these expressions of the same truth. Do you follow? To know that devas are not really gods but just ways of expressing aspects of our minds may be second nature to us, but it is hard for many others.'

'A couple more things before I retire early tonight. First, Dharma's story has been and will be told in a myriad ways. It will always be recast to suit the times and peoples to balance their intellectual and material lives. Already it exists as a Japanese comic book hero story. A Japanese Viira!'

'Over the years I have learned that historical detail is never the point. It matters little whether or not there really was a man called Dharma born in a remote region to a virtuous mother named Maya and who followed his cousin Devapatha. Nor is it critical who his sangha was or whether the events of Vajrsana took place in Samdhipuri or at all. What is pivotal is our understanding of the central message. Do you follow? The message is that we produce

our own problems so long as we live unconsidered lives. It puts our frenetic lives based on work, wealth and status in context.'

'Our great land was once even larger. Some say we were once one with the ancient Pharaoh culture.' And he wistfully drifted off to the silence of his memory of his travels as a young man before resuming.

'Certainly many of our symbols and metaphors come from there. You know how we use the Lotus flower to symbolize purity and rebirth? Well, maybe it will surprise you to know that when a tomb was opened recently, one of the symbols was a lotus flower morphing into the head of the Pharaoh. They are our forebears, at least spiritually, for they knew of personal rebirth in this life. Of course, the majority then as today grasped at a literal continuation of life that avoided death and so missed the point. But the lotus is the sutra of psychological rebirth that runs through so many of these stories across the epochs and across our great land.

'Alas Viira, as for the Pharaohs, so I know that many take Dharma's story literally. Others, like the priests in the story use this tendency to maintain their power over the masses. You can see it in all religions. Even Dharma's teachings have been manipulated into a lineage traced to Mucchada. That powerful institution remains the most successful of all man's creations. But it lost its heart and its spiritual purpose before it began. Perhaps if Dharma spoke today said he might say, "liberation is in your own hands, not the hands of the priest, not those of religious institutions, nor that of the printed word, but in your own practice to see reality." In this and all ways, my son, Dharma is truth, Dharma is reality.'

And with these words, he moved as if to rise from the sofa. He fell back panting. Regaining his breath after a few minutes, he spoke again.

'It seems I am weaker than I thought Viira. I must ask your help. Embrace me in that lovely way that we have discovered. At the same time you can help me to my feet.'

Viira sprang to assist his father. Without words he guided him inside the hut to his sleeping mat and helped him lay down.

'I will be fine here. Thank you my hero, my Viira. You will have a fine life no matter what happens. Now leave me to my peace and visit me here inside my hut in the morning. Good-bye my Dharma among men.'

He walked around the cart-wheel table with the book on it. They hadn't opened the book that night and now a scrap of paper was on top of it held there by a stone in the practical way of their simple life. His father's next lesson he supposed and smiled to himself. Then thinking of the book and the story, he dawdled home, for it was yet early.

After his usual routine the next morning, he called past his father's hut on his way to school. He walked around the little table on the veranda as he passed in a homage to the story and then passed inside the hut. His father was on the sleeping mat where he had left him last night.

This time he had neither pulse nor breath. He knew he would find his name on the paper stuck to the table.

He sat there on the floor for a quarter hour or more. He shed a tear to himself. He understood the nature of attachment and had long foreseen this day. It was a tear of compassion and gratitude for a father who had waited to give the most precious gift in the world to his son. The gift of Dharma.

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Glossary:

Some Etymologies of Names and Places

In this glossary, the meaning and origins of personal and place names are explained in the context of the story about Dharma's life and its parallels with the Jesus story. Unless specified, names are taken from the Sanskrit language, sometimes with the Pali equivalent.

Acarya or in Pali **Acariya** means 'teacher' and is traditionally used in Buddhism to refer to one of the two teachers of a novice monk (the other is called upadhyaya). It finds its way into various other tongues in such forms as the Thai อาจารย์ (ajahn), the Burmese 'saya', Chinese 阿闍梨 or 阿闍梨耶 ('asheli' or 'asheliye'), Japanese 'ajari' or 'ajariya' and Vietnamese 'axàlê' or 'axàlêda'. It has these and other specific meanings in Jainism. In Hinduism it has connotations of a divine instructor somewhat related to Avatar (see entry).

Ahimsa may be translated as 'harmlessness', an ethical discipline of many spiritual practitioners of Indian traditions over the millennia. It is based on conscious avoidance of doing harm to any living being. The practice, like all others, can become obsessive and deviate from its spiritual intention of altering one's mindset to see oneself as part of all living beings. For example, in the story, Dharma criticises compulsive rule-following in the words, 'you strain water so you won't harm a bug yet you swallow buffalos in your delusion', which is adapted from Jesus' 'you strain a gnat and swallow a camel'. In Christian traditions, the concept of *ahimsa* is included in 'loving one's neighbour as oneself' and aspects of the concept of grace. However, contrary to much well-meaning espousals in modern environmental discourse, its underlying Christian assumption of dominance over nature, and even stewardship on behalf of another party (God), creates a barrier to the integrity of the *ahimsa* approach.

Amaritsar may be rendered 'pool of immortality', or as 'the water of eternal life', or similar poetic forms. It refers to the state of 'living in the eternal present' or enlightenment or heaven and is one of the many metaphors used to express the highest state of wisdom. In Dharma's story, he uses the term with the woman at the well to emphasise his primary concern with spiritual matters. Today *Amaritsar* is better known as the name of a holy Sikh city, and was once even a beer brand in Thailand (in the anglicised form of the Thai, *amarit*) picking up on its popular translation as the 'fountain of youth'. The mythical 'fountain of youth' of Western culture likewise once referred to the idea of the sweetness of living in eternity in everyday life; hence the other translation, 'the nectar of eternity'.

Ananta means eternal, unending or ceaseless, or in some cases, infinity. In Dharma's story it is used as the name for the 'bread of life' or 'spiritual nourishment'. This is used as a pun where Jesus relates the Old Testament miracle of a substance falling from the sky to nourish the hungry tribe. Thus he describes the concept of living in the eternal present as ultimately more nourishing even than food. Of course, it does not imply that food is unnecessary. Rather it likens the mind-focussing effect of hunger and starvation to the hunger for enlightenment vested deep within each person yet hidden by fear of death.

Anatta or **anatman** is the ancient Indian concept of 'no-self' or 'no-soul', which is the complete absence of any continuing, sustained, discrete personality beyond death. It is fundamental to Buddhism. A multitude of explanations has been developed over the centuries that have aimed to penetrate these two of man's deepest-set delusions - a discrete self and an afterlife. What we normally see as our 'self' is seen by seers as an agglomeration of constantly changing physical and mental constructs. This seems to be one of the most difficult concepts for unenlightened minds to grasp. Nevertheless, the scriptures repeatedly have the Buddha emphasise that there is no definable 'self'. Clinging to the idea of immutable self or soul produces angst, just as does refusal to see all things as impermanent, a variant of the same insight. The Indian doctrine is more fully developed than that in the Jesus story of the Sadducees group (called *Anatta* in Dharma's story) because of their attachment to other social rules. The intellectual life of Jesus' era was Greek and the Sadducees were influenced by such thought and hence maintained that the soul was a fiction of the simpleminded.

Arahant is often translated as ‘accomplished one’ and refers to the perfection of wisdom which is enlightenment. It is an archetype used in Buddhism to refer to spiritually attuned persons who dwell in a state of nirvana (see entry). However, as an archetype, the description is an aspiration to encourage those following the Buddhist teachings in the form of the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in which the Buddha is often represented as superhuman – that is as an *arahant*. In Dharma’s story, he points out that he is not enlightened in the sense of the ideal, but that he does have enlightened moments and that we should all strive to increase the frequency of such moments.

Arya or **ariya** is usually rendered as ‘noble’ in Buddhist books. Its origins include virtuous, kind, and honourable. In the fifth century the Amarakosa defined *arya* as someone of noble heritage who was of mild behaviour and sound conduct. As such it became a prefix for naming illustrious persons. Western usage of the word, Aryan has produced confounding modern meanings from a supposed proto-Indo-European race whose imagined descendents were superior to other races, such as British in India and Nazis in Europe; such usage is best ignored. The word *arya* is also commonly employed in Buddhist texts to emphasise important teachings, such as the Noble Eightfold Path (the *aryastangikamarga* or *ariyamagga*). The Buddhist Mahavibhāsa mentions noble ones (*aryas*) as those who know the four Noble Truths (*aryasatyani*), one of the common formulations of the Buddhist insight about life.

Asita means incomparably proper, or of correct proportions in spirit and physique. In Dharma’s story, *Asita* is a kind of Buddhist Simeon – Simeon being the wise old man who, on seeing the potential of the baby Jesus, feels he has been so blessed that he can hope for nothing more. According to Buddhist legend, *Asita* was a sage and chaplain to King Suddhodana until with the king’s permission he renounced the world to meditate. From his calm mind he discerned that a Buddha would be born in the form of Siddhattha Gotama, the son of King Suddhodana. *Asita* the wise man then declared that Siddhartha would become either a great king or a great holy man, the second option of which worried the king as he had no other heir. So the king made sure that his son was furnished with all sensual pleasures and saw no disturbing aspects of life, so that he might never seek to become a holy man – but he did see such things and did become a holy man (Sn., pp.131-36; SnA.ii.483ff.; J.i.54f)! In Dharma’s

story, *Asita* is a fully aware man. In the sense used in this book, we may also say that he was mindful. Both 'awareness' and 'mindfulness' feature frequently through the text in the sense of such Pali citations as: 'the watchful one has no fear' (*natthi jagarato bhayam*, Dp 39); 'of those who are ever watchful, disciplined day and night, intent upon nirvana, the innate purulents (*āsavā*—the great fetters of ignorance, lust, and ego) come to an end' (Dp 226); 'a guarded [protected] mind conduces to great advantage' (*cittam guttam [rakkhitam] mahato atthaaya samvattaati*, AN).

Avatar is derived from the word 'descend' and refers to a person being seen as a deity that has descended from the heavens to help those lost in the delusion of the everyday world – hence 'incarnation from above'. It has connotations of wisdom, compassion and peace incorporated in the mode of helping, and is clearly a metaphorical term that has been appropriated for literal beliefs on occasion. In the Hindu tradition from which Buddhism derives, Rama and Krishna may be described as avatars or apparitions of God as a recognition that theistic approaches lead man to define God in anthropomorphic or at least in material terms, such as in the Christian tradition where God 'became flesh and dwelt among men'.

Bante is generally used to mean teacher, with a similar modern meaning akin to guru (see entry).

Bhiksu or **Bhikkhu** refers to an 'one who lives from alms', which in the Indian tradition has come to mean a mendicant monk who owns only an alms bowl and robes, and who relies on others for all basic needs, including food. The word *bhiksu* originated from one meaning 'beggar' and refers to the monk's lifestyle of living from what is offered to him as one part of his practice of detachment. Of course, the approach is highly stylised today with permanent buildings and regular and often excessive donations. The meaning of the word *bhiksu* was progressively refined in Buddhism to counter tendencies to mere outward conformity, such as in the Dhammapada 266,267 – 'not therefore is he a *bhikkhu* merely because he begs from others; not by adopting the outward form does one truly become a *bhikkhu*; he who wholly subdues evil both small and great is called a *bhikkhu* because he has overcome all evil'. In the story, Dharma commissions his disciples (*sangha* – see entry) as did Jesus in words reminiscent of the Buddhist concept of 'going forth' in the Pabbajja sutta in the Sutta-Nipata, III, 1 – 'on going forth, he avoided evil deeds in body, abandoned verbal misconduct, purified his livelihood and wandered for

alms, endowed with attractive demeanour, while remaining mindful and confident’.

Bodhgaya is the place of awakening of the Buddha, a city located in the northeast of India in the province of Bihar, itself a word deriving from the Sanskrit ‘wihara’ meaning temple or pagoda. In Dharma’s story, when at *Bodhgaya* he is in the process of deepening his insight and experiencing a sustained period of the enlightened state after he overcomes his psychological conditioning. While they differ in the doubts expressed, the stories of overcoming such mental constraints are remarkably similar for both Jesus and the Buddha. In Dharma’s story, the three temptations of Jesus are expressed in Buddhist terminology rather than inserting the three temptations of the Buddha.

Bodhisattva can be rendered as ‘one whose essence is perfect knowledge’ or ‘enlightened being’ and is an archetypal personality for one who is often acting in an enlightened manner. In some Buddhist traditions, the *bodhisattva* is said to be an arahant (see entry) who has foregone his full enlightenment in order to assist others on that path. The intent is the same – a definition of the traits that a spiritual practitioner cultivates through his mental and ethical practice. And with such practice, wisdom develops and hence the same intention may also be discerned in usages such as wise man or sage. See also the entries for dharmaraja and dharmasatva.

Cakravatti combines the words *cakram* which may mean ‘wheel’ and *vatti* which may mean ‘blow’ (as in breath or wind). Interpreted to mean the omnipotence of a king who ‘blows the wheel of the world around’, it usually refers to the universal king of Indian legend who governs righteously. From that meaning, the term is easily morphed to include high spiritual development as a characteristic of the *cakravatti* which could also be rendered as dharmaraja (see entry). The story here seeks to separate these two terms to highlight the confusion between liberation as worldly versus spiritual concepts, as pervades both the Jesus and the Buddha stories.

Charity is used to express the highest form of love as a spiritual love that includes care for another as oneself, joy in their joy, feeling with them and imperturbability, known in Buddhist terms as the Brahmavirahas or the four spiritual virtues. Derived from ‘caritas’, charity may share roots with the karuna (see entry), which is often rendered as compassion. In

Dharma's story, it is used to express *mudita* (see entry) as one other aspect of the indivisible expressions of all of these spiritual virtues. The concept is explained from a Christian perspective using the word *charity* by C.S. Lewis in his 'Four Loves'.

Dana means 'generosity' or 'giving' and is used in Buddhism as a practice that leads to one of the ten paramitas (the others are: morality; renunciation; insight; diligence; forbearance; truthfulness; determination; loving-kindness [*metta* – see entry], and equanimity [*upeksa* – see entry]) It is characterised as unattached and unconditional generosity, giving and letting go, and as such as a means of reducing psychological attachment. By giving, acquisitive impulses that ultimately lead to further suffering, are eliminated.

Deva means 'god', 'divine being', 'deity' and the like.

Devadatta in the Buddha's story was his cousin. According to legend, he was a genuine spiritual seeker who developed some understanding of the nature of reality but did not overcome his envy of his cousin's advanced spiritual development. He nursed his envy into dubious actions that caused a schism in the sangha (see entry) community. The schism was subsequently repaired when *Devadatta's* followers returned to the Buddha's path, which *Devadatta* also eventually sought to do. In Dharma's story, *Devadatta* is the equivalent of Judas in the Jesus story. In this text, he is introduced as a 'zealous man' in reference to Judas possibly having been, with another of Jesus' disciples, a member of the Zealots.

Devaloka is used here in its common meaning of 'world of the gods', from *deva* meaning gods or deities and *loka* meaning world or realm.

Devapatha here means 'path of the gods' or 'divine path preparer' and refers to John the Baptist in the Jesus story. In Dharma's story as for Jesus, *Devapatha* is his slightly older cousin who has had similar spiritual practice and training and who initiates a method of spiritual development that Dharma continues, just as John does for Jesus in that story.

Dharma seems to have originally meant the essence of the natural order of things and as such the fundamental law of everything in the cosmos and beyond. It also seems to have been used to describe that the highest life for a human was to live in accord with that natural order and in

particular the natural conditions that could be discerned by man. As such, it meant that the purpose of life – one’s duty (another meaning of *dharmā*) – was to live in accord with that which is reality. Over time the meaning of the word became refined to mean the truth about the natural conditions as revealed in scriptures, particularly in Buddhism. However, other more mundane usages include its use to just mean ‘religion’. Here the hero is named *Dharma* in the sense of perfect understanding and living within natural cycles. This aspect of natural cycles underlies the symbol of *dharmā*, which is the wheel or dharmacakra (see entry), as then applied to the perfect ruler, a cakravatti (see entry).

Dharmacakra means wheel (*cakram*) of *dharmā* (fundamental basis of reality - see entry) and represents the universal law in Hinduism and the path to enlightenment in Buddhism and Jainism. The oldest symbol of Buddhism, it is represented as a wagon or chariot wheel with eight spokes representing the eight practices that lead from the deluded everyday existence to enlightenment (The Noble [Arya - see entry] Eightfold Path). Its design contains many other didactic forms, including the links in the chain of causality that shows how ignorance of reality leads to attachment and clinging to these ideas and things as if they are permanent so that when they prove to not endure (which is portrayed generally as death) disappointment in ignorance leads to the birth of a new idea of things in which one invests oneself, only to repeat the cycle again. It also portrays these psychological states in forms understood by the populace of that era, such as devas (see entry) and other heavenly beings. At the centre of the wheel are usually depicted a cock, a snake and a pig, which refer to greed, hatred and delusion, the three poisons of everyday existence. Acting under the influence of these ignorant emotions, the death and rebirth cycle of suffering continues always, until the suffering perhaps prompts some insight, which can be further cultivated by following the Noble Eightfold Path. Here in Dharma’s story, the wagon wheel (*cakram*) becomes a critical symbol of the cycles of nature that define all things and in which it is man’s duty (*dharmā* - see entry) to abide.

Dharmaraja is a composite word from *dharmā* (see entry), which may be interpreted as absolute truth or reality, and *raja*, which may be interpreted as king or ruler. Thus *dharmaraja* may here be interpreted as ‘the truth that reigns over all things’. It is also used in ancient Indian texts, including those of Buddhism now popular in the West, to refer to a

righteous king who governs for the welfare and spiritual benefit of all in his realm and lives an exemplary life that merits his elite status.

Dharmasatva is an invented word that mimics the Buddhist bodhisattva (see entry), replacing 'bodhi' (enlightened) with *dharma* (truth, in the sense of living in accord with the underlying order of nature – see entry) while retaining *sattva*, which may be rendered as 'a being'. Bodhisattva means something like 'one whose essence is perfect knowledge' and is best understood as an archetype to correct any selfish motivations in spiritual aspirations by placing the spiritual welfare of others ahead of one's own 'final release' – itself a confused concept that has not crossed cultural boundaries easily. *Dharmasatva* may thus be rendered as 'one who lives in accord with the natural flow or cycles'. The symbol of a *dharmasatva* would be the wheel of dharma, the *dharmacakra* (see entry).

Duuta means a prophet or a seer in the sense of an insightful person who from his understanding of reality sees the consequences of trends in a society and who may even seem to predict general outcomes that are widely trusted. However a fundamental difference exists between the Hebrew and Buddhist scriptures as a consequence of the different verbal symbols used to discuss mental states. Because Judaism (and Christianity) seek to relate most concepts in theistic terms, *duuta* are charged to speak on behalf of God and usually in social and historical contexts. In Buddhism, which has no need to write in theistic terms, such insightful persons simply live good lives and help others to see the possibility of a higher state of existence.

Gaté or **Gata** means gone, departed or in the same sense, 'arrived at' and is a critical mantra in the Buddhist Maha Prajna Paramita Hridaya sutra, more commonly known as the Heart Sutra. The Heart Sutra confidently juxtaposes counterintuitive statements as an expression of transcending dualistic thinking. Its depth of meaning has been a source of insight to many across the millennia. In Dharma's story, the storytellers are making a bilingual pun with the initial *gaté* referring to the absence of the pain and suffering of the continual disappointments and losses of everyday life – it is gone. But in the very next sentence they are using the English meaning of *gate* as in the 'door' to release from that suffering, which is the essence of Dharma's teaching.

Guru is a modern transfer from Sanskrit to English and other languages. It can be rendered as 'respected teacher', and in that context is an

everyday term in the Thai language for example, where '*gruu*' once meant 'teacher' in a temple, as it continues to be nowadays in schools. Another component of its ancient meaning is also master, especially a spiritual master. This sense adheres to the past notion that a teacher must have become a master himself before he can start to teach others. In its adjectival form, *guru* has connotations of weightiness in such forms as 'heavy with spiritual wisdom'.

Ittivuttaka or 'as it was said' refers to one part of the Buddhist scriptures (Tripitaka). The version used here is adapted from the older English (Woodward) translation which reads: 'Even if a monk should seize the hem of my garment and walk behind me step for step, yet if he be covetous in his desires, fierce in his longing, malevolent of heart, of mind corrupt, careless and unrestrained, not quieted but scatter-brained and uncontrolled in sense, that monk is far from me and I am far from him. What is the cause of that? Monks, that monk sees not dhamma. Not seeing dhamma he sees not me. Monks, even though a monk should dwell a hundred yoyanas away, yet if he be not covetous in his desires, not fierce in his longing, not malevolent of heart, not of mind corrupt, not careless and unrestrained, composed, calm, one-pointed in mind and restrained in sense—then indeed that one is nigh unto me and I am nigh unto him. What is the cause of that? Monks, that monk sees dhamma, Seeing dhamma he sees me.' Ittivuttaka III:5:3. In Dharma's story, the teaching parallels Jesus' 'he who sees the father, sees me' (for example, John 14:9) and related words.

Jaayaa means woman or wife, and in Dharma's story is used to depict the woman who reappears through the story in a specially close role that is recognised by Dharma's mother Maya (see entry) as his consort. She is effectively one of the sangha (see entry) for she appears at critical points through the narrative, at times even telling members of the sangha what they should do. The parallel is Mary Magdalene in Jesus' story.

Kaantadeva means 'one loved by the gods' or 'pleasing to the gods' and in the story indicates the transition of an avaricious character (Samhita – see entry) to one whose actions are in accord with the natural flow, which condition is the 'abode of the gods' or heaven. This is Matthew of the Jesus story, who before contact with Dharma was known as Levi (Samhita – see entry).

Karma means simply action or deed and is used in Indian religions to refer to the cycle of cause and effect. If understood as all of one's actions, conditioning and conditions it may be seen as producing the life we lead. To live wisely is to understand that we create our own world. Popular understandings of *karma* as punishment, reward and reincarnation are simplistic, and can even be dangerous when they add to the very delusions that the explanation of *karma* aims to dispel.

Kamanuja means the younger brother (*anuja*) of *karma* (see entry) and is a specific term used to describe anger as an expression of other conditions established from karma and which produces subsequent conditions in us and others. The term seems to have been first used in early Hinduism to explain anger in the Hindu scriptures, such as in the Bhagavad-Gita.

Karma-vipaka refers to the result of karma or actions in Buddhist teachings which are founded on a deep insight into the unconscious actions of the mind. Thus it may be said that *vipaka* is the fruit of *karma* in the mode of 'as you sow so shall you reap' of the Christian tradition (Galatians 6:7) and as indicated in such earlier Buddhist lines as 'according to the seed sown, so is the fruit you reap' (A.N. VI.63 Nibbedhika Sutta).

Karuna is usually rendered as compassion and is also the Jain concept of love, including mercy and the special kindness extended to those who suffer. In Buddhism it is partnered with wisdom as a description of the actions of enlightened persons. As such, enlightenment can be called 'wisdom tempered with compassion'. It is one of the four Brahmaviharas along with metta (see entry), mudita (see entry), and upeksha (see entry), and is expressed in the concern that all sentient beings be free from suffering.

Ksatriya caste was those born to be noblemen, aristocrats and warriors who were responsible for government and defence in India in the time of the historic Buddha, from whose legends it is held that this was the caste of his birth. While this is not really relevant to Dharma himself, inclusion of the reference in the story is intended as a small homage to the Buddha legend. The caste is allocated to another figure in Dharma's story because Dharma's own origins are more obscure and less elevated, since he is a caricature of Jesus.

Kusala and its opposite *akusala* respectively mean skilful and unskilful and are usually applied to mental states and actions, so named because

they either assist or hamper spiritual development. In Dharma's story, he is challenged at one point by his own unskilful action (*akusala*) but rapidly catches himself and acts with compassion, which is skilful (*kusala*). The concept is more sophisticated than simple categorisation of acts as good or evil (or sinful) as may be commonly understood. However, a deeper understanding of sin as acting out of accord with the natural flow of reality includes the same insight, which is that unskilful or sinful action retards one's development of the insightful states otherwise described as heaven.

Magha can be rendered as wealth among some other meanings. It is the name given to the rich young man in Dharma's story because it is a parable about attachment to wealth, and about the surpassing value of enlightenment. These are the themes of the *Magha Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipata*, one of the oldest of Buddhist scriptures, which deals with a rich young man who habitually donated to worthy causes and sought further guidance about this practice from the Buddha. The Buddha told him how to give, to whom and then described the perfect life of enlightenment, which convinced the young man to give himself to the dharma (see entry). While that story ends differently from that of Jesus (and hence Dharma) and the rich young man (*Magha*), it contains the same message that attachment to material possessions precludes spiritual development.

Maharaja means simply 'great king' from *maha* for great and *raja* (see entry) for king. The term is used here to indicate a king with majesty over other realms where local rulers may have styled themselves as kings but were in fact tributaries to the *maharaja* or else, as in Dharma's story, who were appointed agents with local powers and obligations to maintain the peace. The *maharaja* in Dharma's story is the equivalent of the Roman Caesar of Jesus time in that story. The meaning of *maharaja* may have been confused by the political manipulation that accompanied its English usage when local rulers in colonial India were puppet rulers for imperial benefit. The meaning intended here is closer to the original.

Mara is commonly portrayed as a demonic character who symbolises our attachments and delusions. The word seems to derive from such meanings as 'hindrance' and has been anthropomorphised in simple Buddhism to explain the doubts that the Buddha must have harboured in his quest for enlightenment. In that guise, *Mara* entices to distract the would-be Buddha away from spiritual practice. It is instructive to recall that in early Buddhism, *Mara* was more of nuisance value than absolutely

evil like the devil and this allowed a light-hearted view of human foibles. *Mara* is used in Buddhist teaching to symbolise such diverse ideas as: unskilful [(non-) kusala (see entry)] emotions, death in the ceaseless cycle of birth and death, all conditioned existence, and even as a god himself when using Vedic thought to explain complex concepts. In that latter guise, he is similar to the concept of the Devil in the story of Jesus' three temptations (for example, Matthew 4).

Maya is the Indian (Hindu) goddess of self-concealment, which means that she has the power to reveal supreme reality to us and thereby release us from the finite world of names (*nama*) and forms (*rupa*) - *namarupa*. Hence *Maya* is often translated as illusion, meaning the illusion that we labour under when we mistake forms and names as having substance. Where *Maya* means illusion, she is accompanied by two other Hindu goddesses, *Shakti* which means activity and *Prakriti* which means nature, all three being essential to life, but especially *Maya* who allows our everyday functioning, as well as revealing its illusory character when we access reality. *Maya*, as the source to overcome such delusion, is thus the name of the mother of the Buddha. As the source or mother of such liberation from self-delusion and suffering that the Buddha revealed, *Maya* is the mother of Dharma, which in the Jesus story is Mary.

Metta (the Pali word is more common than the Sanskrit **Maitri**) is usually rendered as 'unconditional loving-kindness' and is one of the four fruits or abodes of enlightenment [the others being *karuna* (see entry) or compassion, *mudita* (see entry) or altruistic joy, and *upeksa* (see entry) or equanimity]. *Metta* is also expressed in the attitude for all sentient beings to be happy, which is cultivated through meditation both to emulate enlightened behaviour and to calm a distraught mind as an antidote to anger. A secondary benefit is that others feel more comfortable and calm around a *metta*-ful person. Love that cares for another person independent of all self-interest is often likened to a mother's love for her child as mentioned in all great religions, such as the Buddhist *Karaniya Metta Sutta* (Sn 1.8), which has been adapted to fit the tune of the Christian hymn by Charles Wesley where the Christian version of *metta* is 'love divine all loves excelling'. The words for the Buddhist sutta (Sanskrit, sutra - see entry) set to Wesley's Christian tune are presented in an endnote⁴¹⁰.

Mucchada means brick and is here used in the same sense as rock, the meaning of Peter in the Jesus story. Just as the Jesus story uses the pun as

a basis for the line 'on this rock I build my church', so *Mucchada* in the meaning of brick can be seen to symbolise the solidity of the underlying character in the sense of 'you are a real brick and will be a foundation for furthering my teachings'. As Peter is an important character in the Jesus story, so *Mucchada* is important to Dharma's story as a searcher of truth who displays human weaknesses yet has potential skills of leadership.

Mudita refers to the Buddhist definition of the high spiritual virtue of being joyful at another's joy. It is much more than simply sharing their happiness vicariously. It is being genuinely and emotionally moved by another person's happiness, the ultimate of which is realising reality. It may also be rendered as 'altruistic joy' and is usually classified with the other abiding spiritual fruits of compassion (*karuna* – see entry), loving-kindness (*metta* – see entry) and equanimity (*upeksa* – see entry).

Muni means a sage, a wise man or an enlightened person. It is a title used for the Buddha in such forms as *Shakyamuni*, meaning the sage from the Shakya clan. It potentially refers to all who experience significant enlightened moments and are able to maintain awareness frequently such that they can discriminately offer advice to others.

Nirvana, also known by its Pali equivalent *nibbana*, is derived from the ancient words of an era before the Buddha that referred to 'blowing out' as in extinguishing a fire. It is used to signify the extinction of the delusions of an independent self and of permanence, which produce the cycle of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) that characterizes unenlightened or non-heavenly life. The concept is widely misunderstood, even within Buddhism, as the Thai monk Buddhadasa⁴¹¹ sought to clarify: 'Everybody can experience *nibbana* in this life. Even in our daily life, while one is working. It is not only limited to when one sits and closes one's eyes in meditation. One can taste *nibbana* in every breath that one breathes, because there are many levels of *nibbana*. *Nibbana* does not occur when one eliminates *kilesa* (defilements that obscure the mind from reality) and becomes an arahant (see entry).'

Patha means path or way as well as road or course in the sense of a direction of travel. It is widely used to describe dynamic and progressive spiritual development in the same sense that the quest is used in Celtic grail myths, which describe the same spiritual development. Of course, the similarity of the English *path* to the Sanskrit *patha* suggests its Indian origin. The similar English word *pad* meaning 'to walk' likewise overlaps

with the usage in Sanskrit-derived languages such as Thai where *patha* is rendered closer to *pad*.

Purusha is commonly said to mean man or 'soul of man', or as rendered in Dharma's story 'son of man' to introduce the terminology of the Jesus story. However, it may in fact be derived from *pura* meaning 'city', and *shayan* meaning 'supreme reality'. The connotations of idyllic peace being the state of living in supreme reality link *purusha* poetically to the name of the main city in Dharma's story, Samdhipuri (see entry) where *samdhi* means peace, just like salem in Jerusalem. Another explanation for the 'son of man' term is based on the probable language of Jesus, Aramaic, in which 'bar nasha' could have meant either 'son of man' or just simply, as Dharma says often 'I am a man'.

Putrapitaa, means 'son of the father', which is the meaning of 'Bar-Abbas' in the Jesus story. Depicted as a 'robber', Barabbas was more likely a minor messianic figure who led one of the many resistance groups of Palestine at the time. 'Robber' was a Greek euphemism for such persons who were routinely as classified criminals because they committed or incited crime. The early church scholar Origen notes that documents up to the third century referred to this figure as Jesus-Barabbas, and so juxtaposed him against the other Jesus as an alter ego to show that the messiah would not be a temporal but a spiritual liberator. The artifice is useful within the Christian tradition, perhaps more than in this story of Dharma, although it does serve to contrast the 'son of the father' euphemism for God with the non-theistic insights of Dharma.

Raja means king. The word has also passed into English in this form.

Rajapaala means a governor on behalf of whoever is in authority, in this case the ruling foreign power. It refers to the official position of Pontius held by Pilate (Zalya – see entry) in the Jesus story.

Raksabisala is here intended to mean 'care for the sprout', which is a possible meaning of the word for the town of Nazareth included in the Jesus story. Nazareth may also be interpreted to mean preservation and such meanings may provide a reason for the town name being added into the Jesus story. An alternative explanation is that it is an attempt to separate Jesus from the original spiritual meaning of the Natsarenes, which was a probable name of the first Gnostics. The Gnostic spiritual practices were similar to those of Jesus' essential message that no priests or temples were required for one's personal development and

understanding of the dharma (see entry). The invented town of Nazareth at the time of Jesus is examined in detail in René Salm's detailed 'The Myth of Nazareth'.

Rotigaya means 'house of bread' from *roti* for bread and *gaya* for house and is used here as a Sanskrit equivalent of the town of Bethlehem, which means the same thing in Hebrew. Curiously, some Arabic interpretations render it as 'house of meat' rather than 'bread'.

Sadhu means 'good man' or even renunciate, and refers to those who renounce normal lifestyles to live apart from or on the edges of society to focus on their spiritual practice. The word comes from root *sadh*, which means 'reach one's goal', or 'gain power over', and is the same as in the word *sadhana* used to refer to 'spiritual practice'. Even in modern India, the term *sadhu* is used in Hindu culture for those who renounce material and sensual attachments and live in caves or forests, or just wander about. There are said to be up to five million *sadhus* in India today who are, in general, respected or even revered for their holiness. Here in Dharma's story, Devapatha (see entry) is seen as a renunciate in his austere desert-dwelling lifestyle.

Samdhipuri can be rendered as 'city of peace' from *samdhi* meaning peace and *puri* meaning city. In Dharma's case it is the main city of the area where he practised, and it symbolises the objective of his teachings – finding the personal peace of liberation. In the Jesus story, the central city with the same connotation of peace is Jerusalem, where salem (or shalom) refers to peace.

Samhita can be rendered as attached or 'connected with' among other meanings and in the context of Dharma's story refers to an agent who was attached to the percentages he could extort for his own benefit using his power in collecting official taxes. In the Jesus story, this is Levi who was attached to the cream he could skim off in his profession who, after contact with Dharma, was called Matthew (Kaantadeva – see entry).

Samsara is a relative term used to contrast with nirvana, and may thus be rendered as 'unsatisfactory worldly life' as opposed to the utopian heaven of nirvana, with both being alternative mental states in everyday life. Its origins suggest a meaning of 'flowing together', which explains the intent of its use mainly to describe the experience of human existence as 'everyday disappointments' or the 'realm of suffering' where events seem to flow together to thwart one's comfort. Such pain is understood in

this conception as ignorance of the way things are in life causing us to view natural flows of events as unwelcome and unexpected intrusions into our lives.

Sangha can simply be rendered as 'group' and in Indian religious terms means both a group of followers and, as in some Buddhist definitions, the spiritual practitioners who support each other in their development. The word is widely used and is becoming better known in English without translation. In Dharma's story, his *sangha*, like that of his cousin Devapatha (see entry), is his closest followers, or disciples as in the Jesus story.

Somataila is a combination of words *soma* meaning extract or essence and *taila* meaning oil to give the sense of extracted oil, such as comes from an oil press. 'Oil press' is a meaning of the Hebrew word 'Gethsemane', the name given to the garden where Jesus agonised over his future and was arrested by the authorities. So in the Dharma's story, he agonises and is arrested in the garden of *somataila* (although for his own reasons, he refers to it as Suan Moksa – see entry). This compressing to life's simplest essence is contained in both the Buddha's and Jesus' stories, as here in Dharma's.

Suan Moksa may be translated as 'garden of liberation' from the Thai word *suan* for 'garden' and the Sanskrit *moksa* for 'liberation'. It is included in homage to the namesake forest temple in Surat Thani in Thailand created by the Thai Buddhist monk Buddhadasa as a place for essential Buddhism to be learned by Thais and foreigners. It was Buddhadasa who pioneered much of the Buddhist-Christian dialogue of which this story of Jesus as Dharma is a product. However, Buddhadasa's generous discussions of the consistencies between the two have often been misunderstood. Here *Suan Moksa* refers to a favourite place of mediation of Dharma, also known as Somataila (see entry) or in the Jesus' story as Gethsemane. At this point in Dharma's story the name of the garden *Suan Moksa* indicates that he was liberated from the rounds of repetitive ignorant behaviour of ordinary men and thus able to see the conditions leading to the events emerging around him.

Sutra means thread in the sense of linking incidents into a storyline in a way somewhat similar to the dual usage of the word 'yarn' in English. The thread of the Sanskrit word itself may be traced into English in such words as suture via the Latin *sutura*. In Dharma's story, the *sutra* of a

truly great life is a thread of special events which at the same time link the transcendent message of the story itself.

Suukaputra means son (*putra*) of a pig (*suuka*) and is used in Dharma's story mainly to represent the character of Herod (*Suukaputra* II) in the Jesus story. It follows the suggestion that Herod (*Suukaputra* II) could, in a Greek (the language of the Jesus story) pun be rendered to mean 'son of a pig'. This ancient pun may arise from family factional problems surrounding *Suukaputra* II's succession, which had led him to execute his two sons. This in turn is supposed to have inspired the Emperor Augustus' pun that it was preferable to be Herod's (*Suukaputra* II's) pig (hus) than his son (huios), possibly intending an incidental insult to Jews in the service of Rome, such as Herod (*Suukaputra* II).

Talpa is simply the equivalent of a sofa, couch or bed, as might be used by an Indian family to sit on their veranda once the heat of the day has passed.

Tathagata is usually translated as 'thus gone' or 'he who has completely gone' from the words *tat* meaning absolute and *gata* (see entry) meaning gone to or arrived. It may be better rendered as 'he who has arrived at the absolute'. The term refers specifically to the Buddha after he was enlightened, and using the metaphor of going and arriving at the same time pertains to enlightenment as not being 'there' or 'here' because such dualism has been transcended. In Dharma's story, he is recognised as an enlightened man at this point, but it is clear from the story that he had earlier experienced periods of enlightenment.

Upadana is the term used to describe clinging and attachment, constant actions of the deluded mind according to Buddhism. Here Dharma refers to his home town and its life as *upadana* as a result of his experience of the higher life. The name implies that Dharma was giving up clinging when he later left the town. The word itself is etymologically related to *upadi* meaning fuel, which explains the intent of the concept as being removal of the fuel that produces attachment. The fuel is ignorance, and Buddhist practices assist in seeing and overcoming ignorance.

Upanishad refers to the mystical spiritual explications of the Vedic (see entry) scriptures known simply as the Vedas. As the Vedas are probably the world's most ancient scriptures, the *Upanishads* are likely the oldest commentaries, and form part of the Vedanta (see entry) or 'end of the Vedas'.

Upekṣa or **Upekkhā** is the Buddhist concept of equanimity. It is a characteristic of the enlightened mind and a state cultivated through meditation as part of the developmental practices of Buddhism, and other Indian-derived traditions. As one of the so-called divine abodes with *metta* (see entry), *karuṇā* (see entry) and *mudita* (see entry), *upekṣa* complements and interacts indistinguishably with the others in the wise mind. Sometimes confused with indifference, *upekṣa* actually refers more to equanimity when one's fortunes change. For example, the evenness of mind that is *upekṣa* transcends the ego's craving for stability, pleasure and recognition.

Uposatha was the Vedic (see entry) traditional days for fasting. Here Dharma is implying that the ancient practice had been debased. It was being used by this group as a ritual to show off their piety, and to justify a sumptuous banquet hosted at the end of the fast.

Vajra was probably the thunderbolt that Indra used as a weapon in early Indian religion and which later also came to mean diamond or adamantine hardness. In Buddhism both thunderbolt and diamond are used to describe moments when enlightenment occurs. In tantric Buddhism the *vajra* has been developed into a ritual metal object that reminds us of skilful means. In the text here, it refers to a lightening flash of insight, which is unexpected and profoundly altering.

Vajrasana may be rendered as 'diamond lightning throne' or 'seat of breaking through' and so on from the words for adamantine hardness (*vajra*) and seat (*asana*). It refers to the place under the Bodhi tree where, in the Buddha story, he resiliently sat and 'broke through to enlightenment'. In the Jesus story, equivalence may be drawn with the site of execution, Golgotha, and so in Dharma's story, this place of his supposed execution is the culmination of his teachings about dying to delusion and being reborn to reality.

Vedas refers to the most ancient of the world's scriptures, which formed the basis for the later development of Hinduism and its creation, Buddhism. Recited by Brahmin priests and used as a basis for deep reflection, the *Vedas* reveal much of the integral thought of early civilisation in science, philosophy, spirituality and religion, fields that were not artificially separated until recent centuries.

Vedānta can mean 'the conclusion of the Vedas' (see entry) or an 'appendix to the Vedas' and refers to the spiritual tradition explained in

the commentaries on the Vedas known as the Upanishads (see entry). It is derived from *veda* meaning knowledge and *anta* meaning conclusion.

Viira means hero, or with the shortened 'i' as *vira* can also mean 'an eminent man'. The story of Dharma is of an eminent man and of a hero, but so is the surrounding narrative of the Indian son and his old father. As the son is an unusual young man with great potential, he is given this name 'hero' in the same manner as Dharma in the story that his father reads to him. In this way, we are, as Joseph Campbell insightfully observed, all heroes when we transcend the everyday deluded life.

Vijaya can be rendered as victor, conqueror, triumph and the like. It is used in the spiritual sense to mean victory over the conditioned view and arrival at the perfect view of all reality, which is enlightenment. Here it refers to a parallel character in the Jesus story, Nicodemus, which also means conqueror. The symbolism in this and other names adds another layer to the story about a man who is both formally religious and a genuine seeker of the truth. Having found a path within his own tradition, he then sought to progress beyond it as he conquered his delusions and attachments.

Vinaya refers to the code of behaviour for Buddhist monks as derived from the first centuries of Buddhism. It is traditionally ascribed to the Buddha himself as a means of promoting harmony in the sangha (see entry) in support of spiritual development. The *vinaya* is thus one of the three groupings of Buddhist scriptures. Another approach might have used the Hebrew word 'mitzvot' for the 613 commandments that the pious followed in Judaism, but *vinaya* is preferred here because Dharma's story takes place in ancient India. So in this case *vinaya* refers to the rules for which the intent has long been forgotten and which are obeyed just as an outward form of being part of a special group. A form of being 'holier than thou'. This is the case with many rules that are obeyed without reflection on their benefit and intent as can occur in any religious order. Rather than rules, these are perhaps better rendered as guidelines for cultivating a change in habits that is accompanied by a mental shift that opens the mind.

Vipaka is used in Buddhism to describe the results of karma (see entry) or intentional actions. Intention in this sense is not the same as what we think of as conscious decision-making, but refers to deeper mental actions that Buddhist practices seek to bring to the awareness of the

practitioner. In that sense, the A.N. VI.63 Nibbedhika Sutta has the Buddha say 'intention is karma; having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind'. Thus *vipaka* is the fruition of karma in such familiar metaphors as 'according to the seed, so is the fruit; who does good will gather good, who does evil, reaps evil' in the words of the Samyutta Nikaya.

Zalya means 'javelin', which is a possible meaning of the Roman name [Pontius (rajapaala – see entry)] Pilate in the Jesus story. In Latin *pilatus* means 'armed with a javelin' from the word *pilum* for javelin. So in Dharma's story, the good but worldly-compromised governor of this insignificant outpost is given a name similar to that of the equivalent man in the Jesus story.

Endnotes

Endnote superscripts at the end of a paragraph refer through the following details to the relevant gospel sections used for the 'translation' of all paragraphs since the previous endnote superscript.

- ¹ revealer of reality – see Glossary
- ² truth – see Glossary
- ³ divine path preparer – see Glossary
- ⁴ likeminded group or followers – see Glossary
- ⁵ city of peace – see Glossary
- ⁶ place of awakening – see Glossary
- ⁷ garden of liberation – see Glossary
- ⁸ passing to heaven or seat of enlightenment – see Glossary
- ⁹ a story with a theme, like a yarn – see Glossary
- ¹⁰ Luke 1:1-4; John 1:1
- ¹¹ John 1:10-13
- ¹² John 1:14-18
- ¹³ king over other rulers – see Glossary
- ¹⁴ Luke 1:5-22
- ¹⁵ divine path preparer – see Glossary
- ¹⁶ Luke 1:24-25
- ¹⁷ revealer of reality – see Glossary
- ¹⁸ truth reigns over us – see Glossary
- ¹⁹ truth or reality – see Glossary
- ²⁰ Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:26-32
- ²¹ Matthew 1:19-24
- ²² divine earthly king – see Glossary
- ²³ Matthew 1:22
- ²⁴ Luke 1:39-45
- ²⁵ Luke 1:47-64
- ²⁶ prophets or seers – see Glossary
- ²⁷ Luke 1:65-79
- ²⁸ Luke 1:80
- ²⁹ bread-house – see Glossary
- ³⁰ Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:1-7
- ³¹ son a pig – see Glossary
- ³² truth reigns over us – see Glossary
- ³³ omnipotent king – see Glossary

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- ³⁴ Matthew 2:1-6
- ³⁵ Matthew 2:7-12
- ³⁶ angel or divine being – see Glossary
- ³⁷ Luke 2:8-15
- ³⁸ Luke 2:16-20
- ³⁹ Luke 2:21-24
- ⁴⁰ a clairvoyant sage – see Glossary
- ⁴¹ a sage – see Glossary
- ⁴² Luke 2:25-32
- ⁴³ The Jesus story contains many Indian overtones that are included without modification in Dharma’s story. The infant Jesus’s presentation at the temple is one – apparently not a Jewish custom of the time, it was a normal Indian custom. The Lalitavistara relates the presentation of the young Gautama (who became the Buddha) to the temple by his parents.
- ⁴⁴ city of peace – see Glossary
- ⁴⁵ Luke 2:36-38
- ⁴⁶ Luke 2:33-35
- ⁴⁷ As with many parts of the story, such events are common to the myths of heroes – infanticide was common and used in the stories of such other leaders as Augustus, Krishna, Moses, Perseus, Oedipus, Romulus and Zeus.
- ⁴⁸ Matthew 2:13-15
- ⁴⁹ Matthew 2:16-18
- ⁵⁰ Matthew 2:19-22
- ⁵¹ caring for the sprout – see Glossary
- ⁵² psychological attachment– see Glossary
- ⁵³ Matthew 2:23; Luke 2:39
- ⁵⁴ the number 14 is auspicious in Semitic texts, representing David
- ⁵⁵ Matthew 1:1-16
- ⁵⁶ John 1:3-5,9
- ⁵⁷ Luke 2:40-45
- ⁵⁸ Luke 2:46-50
- ⁵⁹ Luke 2:51-52
- ⁶⁰ Mark 1:1; John 1:6-8
- ⁶¹ renouncer – see Glossary
- ⁶² Matthew 3:1-2,4; Mark 1:6; Luke 3:1-3
- ⁶³ Matthew 3:5-6; Mark 1:4-5; John 1:19-21
- ⁶⁴ ‘Pious’ is used in reference to Pharisees in the gospel stories in the spirit of the accepted storyline. In fact it is now thought that the Pharisees were a genuinely spiritual group with much in common with Jesus’

message and that the emphasis in the story that has arrived to us is exaggerated.

⁶⁵ Matthew 3:3,12; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6,16-17; John 1:2,7,22-26

⁶⁶ Matthew 3:7-11; Luke 3:7-9

⁶⁷ Luke 3:10-14,18

⁶⁸ psychological attachment – see Glossary

⁶⁹ Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:28

⁷⁰ John 1:15,32-34

⁷¹ followers or disciples – see Glossary

⁷² John 1:29-31,34-39

⁷³ place of awakening – refer to Glossary

⁷⁴ anthropomorphized traits of delusion, greed and delusion; an evil god – see Glossary

⁷⁵ Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13

⁷⁶ Luke 4:14-19, which is itself taken from Isaiah 61:1

⁷⁷ Luke 4:20-24; Thomas 31

⁷⁸ Luke 4:25-32

⁷⁹ Luke 4:33-37

⁸⁰ Miracles form an important part of myths and have long been understood in their context; modern day literalism weakens their spiritual import to both those who accept them at face value, and to those who dismiss them as naïve superstitions; here they are offered as sometimes explainable natural events in a similar manner to early Buddhism, but it must be noted that Buddhism later utilized similar mythical devices as an effective means of opening minds to what appear to be non-rational truths to busy minds.

⁸¹ Luke 4:40-41

⁸² Luke 4:42-44

⁸³ brick – see Glossary

⁸⁴ followers – see Glossary

⁸⁵ Matthew 4:18,21-22; Mark 1:16,19-20; Luke 5:2; John 1:40-42

⁸⁶ Luke 5:3-7

⁸⁷ Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:8,10

⁸⁸ Matthew 4:18,20; Mark 1:18; Luke 5:9-11; John 1:43-51

⁸⁹ John 2:1-10

⁹⁰ Matthew 4:23-25; Luke 3:23; John 2:11-12

⁹¹ Passover in the story; such major religious holidays (also Easter and the water festivals of Buddhist countries such as Songkran) supplanted those that marked the beginning of the agricultural year when the major religious celebrations of the early agricultural societies took place.

⁹² John 2:13-17

⁹³ John 2:18-22

⁹⁴ John 2:23-25

⁹⁵ conqueror – see Glossary

⁹⁶ John 3:1-7

⁹⁷ John 3:8-15; Thomas 1

⁹⁸ John 3:16-21

⁹⁹ Practical rules intended to further spiritual development in the Buddhist tradition but if followed without thought become mere form without substance or benefit – see Glossary

¹⁰⁰ John 3:22-28

¹⁰¹ joy in another's joy – see Glossary

¹⁰² John 3:29-36

¹⁰³ Matthew 14:5; Mark 6:17-20; Luke 3:19-20

¹⁰⁴ *evalgelion* in the Greek of the New Testament, *cf. evalgelium* for the edicts of Roman Emperors

¹⁰⁵ Matthew 4:12-17; Mark 1:15; John 4:1-3

¹⁰⁶ The parallel Buddhist scripture (Divyavadana 217) tells of Ananda, the Buddha's favorite disciple, asking water from a girl from the Matangi caste. She demurred saying her caste was prohibited from approaching holy men, to which Ananda replied, 'I didn't ask about your caste, I asked for a drink!'

¹⁰⁷ nectar of immortality – see Glossary

¹⁰⁸ John 4:5-10

¹⁰⁹ John 4:11-18

¹¹⁰ John 4:19-24

¹¹¹ John 4:25-29

¹¹² John 4:30-38

¹¹³ John 4:39-45

¹¹⁴ Matthew 5:1-10; Luke 6:17-21; Thomas 54, 68-69

¹¹⁵ everyday disappointments – see Glossary

¹¹⁶ The concept of 'near enemy' is that of an apparent quality which appears similar to, but in fact is more an opposite of, a virtue. For example, 'love' or 'loving-kindness' as used in scriptures refers to an unconditional integrity with all things whereas conditional love that is selfish or has aspects of attachment is its 'near enemy'. The concept is useful in explaining Buddhist concepts in English to Westerners.

¹¹⁷ Matthew 5:11-12; Luke 6:22-23, 26

¹¹⁸ Luke 6:24-25

¹¹⁹ Words from the Buddhist sutta, the Udana 5.5 Uposatha Sutta (The Observance) ‘just as the ocean has a single taste - that of salt - in the same way, this doctrine and discipline has a single taste - that of release’

¹²⁰ Matthew 5:13; Mark 9:49-50

¹²¹ Matthew 5:14-16; Mark 4:21-25; Thomas 32-33

¹²² Matthew 5:17-20

¹²³ Matthew 5:21-26; Luke 12:57-59

¹²⁴ Matthew 5:27-32

¹²⁵ delusional hindrances – see Glossary

¹²⁶ Matthew 5:33-42; Luke 6:29-30; Thomas 95

¹²⁷ Matthew 6:1-4

¹²⁸ doing no harm – see Glossary

¹²⁹ From the Dhammapada 1:5, which says, ‘Hatred is never conquered by hatred, only by love. This is an eternal law.’

¹³⁰ Matthew 5:43-45; Luke 6:27-28,31; Thomas 6

¹³¹ Matthew 5:46-48; Luke 6:32-36

¹³² heaven – see Glossary

¹³³ Matthew 6:5-8

¹³⁴ Other interpretations are many: one that is perhaps a step closer to the original than that in the text is from Francis McNab in his ‘Preaching the New Faith’ goes; “Good caring presence within us, around us, and above us; hold us in a sense of mystery and wonder. Let the fullness of your goodness be within us and around us; Let all the world know your ways of caring and generosity. May we find we have all we need to meet each day without undue anxiety. Overlook our many stupidities, and help us to release everyone from their stupidities. May we all know we are accepted. Strengthen us that we will reach out to the best, always with the faith to rise above the ugly realities of our existence. And we celebrate the gifts you have given us – the rich kingdom of life’s possibilities and the power to do good and the triumphs of good and the moments when we have seen the glory and wonder of everything. You are life’s richness. You are life’s power. You are life’s ultimate meaning – Always – and for everyone – and for evermore.”

¹³⁵ Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:1-4

¹³⁶ Matthew 7:7-10; Luke 11:5-12; Thomas 92,94

¹³⁷ traditional days of fasting – see Glossary

¹³⁸ Matthew 6:16-18

¹³⁹ Jesus is here quoted as saying, ‘No man can serve two masters ...’; the Buddhist parallel is the Dhammapada 5:16 verse, ‘One way leads to worldly gain and the other to nirvana ...’. The Gospel of Thomas 47 uses the words, ‘You can’t mount two horses or bend two bows’.

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- ¹⁴⁰ Matthew 6:19-20,24; Luke 12:33
- ¹⁴¹ world of the gods – see Glossary
- ¹⁴² Matthew 6:22-23; Luke 11:34-35, 12:13-21; Thomas 63
- ¹⁴³ everyday disappointments – see Glossary
- ¹⁴⁴ Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-32; Thomas 2,3,36
- ¹⁴⁵ actions (and their myriad consequences) – see Glossary
- ¹⁴⁶ There are various Buddhist references to blindness and eyes, although this point is made directly in the Dhammapada 18:18, viz: ‘The faults of others are more easily seen than one’s own ...’ and in the pre-Buddhist Mahabharata (I, 96:1), ‘You see the mistakes of others even if they be as small as a mustard seed, but you strive to overlook you own failings, be they as large as a Bengal quince!’
- ¹⁴⁷ revered teacher – see Glossary
- ¹⁴⁸ Matthew 7:1-6; Luke 6:37-42; Thomas 26,34,93
- ¹⁴⁹ Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:22-30
- ¹⁵⁰ Matthew 7:15-23; Luke 6:43-45; Thomas 45
- ¹⁵¹ Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:46-49
- ¹⁵² Matthew 7:29
- ¹⁵³ incarnation from above – see Glossary
- ¹⁵⁴ respected teacher – see Glossary
- ¹⁵⁵ spirit of man – see Glossary
- ¹⁵⁶ The words also pay homage to Thich Nhat Hanh’s poem, ‘Please Call Me By My True Names’, which integrates some of the same elements, especially universal inter-penetration and compassion.
- ¹⁵⁷ see Thomas 13 for ‘just messenger’, ‘wise philosopher’ and ‘teacher’
- ¹⁵⁸ in Cormac McCarthy’s ‘The Crossing’
- ¹⁵⁹ Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-15
- ¹⁶⁰ Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
- ¹⁶¹ Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-30; Luke 4:38-39,7:11-17; John 4:46-54
- ¹⁶² Matthew 8:16-17; Mark 1:21-18,31-34
- ¹⁶³ In the Alagaddupama Sutta, MN 22, the Buddha is ascribed the words, ‘my teaching is like to a raft for the purpose of crossing a river’.
- ¹⁶⁴ Matthew 8:18-22; Mark 1:35-39,4:35; Luke 8:22,9:51-62; Thomas 86
- ¹⁶⁵ Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41
- ¹⁶⁶ Matthew 8:28-35; Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39
- ¹⁶⁷ results of prior actions – see Glossary
- ¹⁶⁸ Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26
- ¹⁶⁹ attached to things or avaricious – see Glossary
- ¹⁷⁰ pleasing to the gods – see Glossary

¹⁷¹ Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:14-17; Luke 5:27-32

¹⁷² Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39; Thomas 47

¹⁷³ Matthew 9:18-34; Mark 5:22-43,7:31-37; Luke 8:41-56

¹⁷⁴ John 5:1-18

¹⁷⁵ ‘Therapy’ seems to have meant the treatment of disease since at least the sixteenth century, and is assumed to have Greek origins. However, its more modern extension into psycho-therapy offers a curious closing of an etymological circle. The Greek is said to mean ‘bringing the gods back home’ to symbolize a return to normal states of mind. Such a meaning may in fact be derived from contact with Buddhists in Egypt before Jesus’ time. Thundy in his 1993 ‘Buddha and Christ’ shows a linguistic transition from ‘Theravada’ Buddhists known to be in Alexandria who were revered for their insightful healing abilities. Philo the Hellenized Jew who was concerned with such matters also referred to the Therapeutae in terms that sound much more Buddhist, or at least Indian, than Middle Eastern.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew 9:35-38; John 5:21-30; Thomas 73-75

¹⁷⁷ mystical scriptural explications of the *Vedas* – see Glossary

¹⁷⁸ India’s and world’s oldest scriptures – see Glossary

¹⁷⁹ Words of advice to the true seeker of truth by the Muslim rationalists, the Faylasufs. From Rasai’l (1970) I, 42 quoted in Majid Fakhry ‘A History of Islamic Philosophy’, London. Page 187. The insight derives from the Koran 2:109 as noted by Ibn al-Arabi (in Nicholson, R.A. (1922) ‘Eastern Poetry and Prose’, Cambridge. Page 148. “Do not attach yourself to any particular creed exclusively, so that you may disbelieve all the rest; otherwise you will lose much good, nay, you will fail to recognize the real truth of the matter. God, the omnipresent and omnipotent, is not limited by any one creed, for, he says, ‘Wheresoever ye turn, there is the face of al-Lah’ (Koran 2: 109). Everyone praises what he believes; his god is his own creature, and in praising it he praises himself. Consequently he blames the beliefs of others, which he would not do if he were just, but his dislike is based on ignorance.”

¹⁸⁰ John 5:31-47

¹⁸¹ Matthew 10:2-8; Mark 3:13-19,6:7; Luke 6:12-16,9:1-2; Thomas 113

¹⁸² Matthew 10:9-15; Mark 6:10-13; Luke 9:3-6

¹⁸³ those who live from alms – see Glossary

¹⁸⁴ Luke 10:1-9

¹⁸⁵ results of past actions – see Glossary

¹⁸⁶ path or way – see Glossary

¹⁸⁷ Matthew 11:20-27; Luke 10:13-20, 23-24

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- 188 Luke 10:21-22,14:25-33; Thomas 55
- 189 Matthew 10:16-25
- 190 Matthew 10:26-33; Luke 12:2-9
- 191 Matthew 10:34-36; Luke 12:49-56
- 192 Matthew 10:37-42; Thomas 101
- 193 Matthew 11:1
- 194 Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23
- 195 Matthew 11:7-15; Luke 7:24-28; Thomas 78
- 196 Matthew 11:16-19; Luke 7:29-35
- 197 close female companion – see Glossary
- 198 Luke 7:36-50
- 199 cares for all, or does not harm – see Glossary
- 200 Luke 10:25-37
- 201 Matthew 11:28-30; Luke 10:38-42; Thomas 90-91
- 202 *Holy* once had a connotation of the divine’s separateness from us, as in the Hebrew *kaddosh*. In this Buddhistic representation of whatever is divine being a description of a mental state, we may conceive *holiness* as a reuniting (rather than separateness) with our divine nature, to become *whole*.
- 203 Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5
- 204 Matthew 12:9-21; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11
- 205 Matthew 12:22-30; Mark 3:20-27; Luke 11:14-23
- 206 Matthew 12:31-37; Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:10-12
- 207 Matthew 12:38-42; Mark 8:11-12; Luke 11:29-32
- 208 Matthew 12:43-45; Luke 11:24-26
- 209 The event is one of the many parallels in the Jesus and Buddha stories. The Buddhist text apparently includes a pun on the words ‘blessed’ (nibutta) and nirvana (nibbana) and so allow the realization that blessedness only exists in the release of nirvana ‘the insight to reality’ as Dharma puts it.
- 210 Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:1-3,19-21,11:27-28; Thomas 79,99
- 211 Matthew 13:1-8; Mark 4:1-8; Luke 8:5-8; Thomas 9
- 212 Matthew 13:9,18-23; Mark 4:9,14-20; Luke 8:8,11-15
- 213 Matthew 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-13; Luke 8:9-10
- 214 Matthew 13:24-43; Mark 4:26-34; Luke 13:18-21; Thomas 20,57,96
- 215 Matthew 13:44-53; Thomas 8, 76
- 216 enlightened being – see Glossary
- 217 Matthew 14:3-4; Mark 6:17-18; Luke 3:19-20,9:7

²¹⁸ Matthew 14:1-2,5-12; Mark 6:14-16,19-29; Luke 9:7-9

²¹⁹ A parallel with the Buddhist story from Jakata 78 in which the Buddha fed 500 of his disciples from meager portions of bread in his alms bowl, with 12 baskets of leftovers.

²²⁰ Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14

²²¹ The gospel story has a parallel in the Buddhist scripture, the Mahavagga, where Kassapa is influenced to accept the Buddha's teachings after he sees him seemingly walking on the floodwaters while meditating. In the second part of the story, Mucchada's (Peter) panic and sinking in the water from lack of awareness has it parallel also in Jataka 190 where the Buddha's disciple, Sariputra, sinks when turbulent waters distract his concentration.

²²² Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:15-21

²²³ John 6:22-33

²²⁴ John 6:34-40

²²⁵ eternal; unending – see Glossary

²²⁶ John 6:41-51

²²⁷ John 6:52-60

²²⁸ The words, 'they walked out', are the same as describe the 5000 who could not accept the Buddha's words, as related in the fantastic Lotus Sutra (Saddharma Pundarika Sutra).

²²⁹ god-given –see Glossary

²³⁰ John 6:61-71

²³¹ Matthew 15:1-7

²³² Matthew 15:8-9

²³³ Matthew 15:10-11,15-20;Mark 7:15,17-23; Thomas 14

²³⁴ 'Test it in your own experience' is an important aspect of individuation taught in Buddhism, as in the Kalama Sutta in the Anguttara Nikaya.

²³⁵ Matthew 15:12-14; Mark 7:16

²³⁶ skilful – see Glossary

²³⁷ Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30

²³⁸ John 7:1-13

²³⁹ John 7:14-24

²⁴⁰ John 7:25-36

²⁴¹ victor – see Glossary

²⁴² John 7:37-53

²⁴³ John 8:1-11

²⁴⁴ ‘The earth is my witness’ are the words ascribed to the Buddha in his enlightenment myth in response to Mara’s (see Glossary) demand to know who had witnessed the event.

²⁴⁵ John 8:12-20; Thomas 77

²⁴⁶ John 8:21-30

²⁴⁷ John 8:31-36

²⁴⁸ John 8:37-59

²⁴⁹ Matthew 16:1-4; Mark 8:11-12

²⁵⁰ Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 8:13-21; Luke 12:1

²⁵¹ Perhaps the central teaching of Buddhism for explication to Western mindsets, universal conditionality is a translation of *paticca samuppada*, where *paticca* means ‘because of’, or ‘dependent upon’, and *samuppada* means ‘arising or origination’. Also commonly rendered as ‘Dependent Arising’ or ‘Dependent Origination’.

²⁵² Mark 8:22-26; John 9:1-16

²⁵³ John 9:17-41

²⁵⁴ divine prophet – see Glossary

²⁵⁵ Matthew 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21

²⁵⁶ Matthew 16:21-28; Mark 8:31-38,9:1; Luke 9:22-27

²⁵⁷ Moses and Elijah in the Jesus’ story are usually seen as depicting the law and the prophets; here the point of the law is indicated to be ethical behaviour and the prophets to be the practices of meditation to gain insight.

²⁵⁸ Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36

²⁵⁹ John 10:1-21

²⁶⁰ John 10:32-42

²⁶¹ Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:38-42,17:5-6

²⁶² This refers to the Old Testament story of Hosea and his concern over Israel’s flirtation with pagan gods.

²⁶³ Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:44-45

²⁶⁴ Matthew 18:1-5; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48

²⁶⁵ teacher – see Glossary

²⁶⁶ Mark 9:38-41; Luke 9:49-50

²⁶⁷ altruistic joy – see Glossary

²⁶⁸ Matthew 18:6-11; Mark 9:42; Luke 17:1-2

²⁶⁹ spiritual love – see Glossary

²⁷⁰ Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:1-7; Thomas 107

²⁷¹ Luke 15:8-10

²⁷²The Greek word translated as 'property' for what the son had squandered is more like 'essence'; the son had 'squandered his essence', himself and so was as if dead, and then it was like coming back to life when he returned.

²⁷³ Luke 15:11-32

²⁷⁴ A popular Buddhist parable from the Lotus Sutra, Chapter 8

²⁷⁵ Thomas 97,109

²⁷⁶ loving-kindness – see Glossary

²⁷⁷ Matthew 18:15-20

²⁷⁸ Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4

²⁷⁹ Matthew 18:23-35

²⁸⁰ Luke 13:1-5

²⁸¹ Luke 13:6-9,17:7-10

²⁸² Luke 17:11-21; Thomas 113

²⁸³ Luke 17:22-37

²⁸⁴ Rivers are one of the common metaphors across cultures for transcending the everyday delusions of life in such forms as the rivers Jordan, Styx, Ganges and so on in religions and myths, where the waters also have a creative power for rebirth and hence are associated with mothers and fertility, for example, Maenam Chaopraya in Thailand (Holy Mothers of Waters); the myths incidentally indicate our evolving spiritual consciousness.

²⁸⁵ Practical rules intended to further spiritual development in the Buddhist tradition but if, as often, followed without thought, become mere form without substance or benefit – see Glossary

²⁸⁶ Matthew 19:3-8; Mark 10:1-9; Thomas 39,102

²⁸⁷ Matthew 19:9-12; Mark 10:10-12; Luke 18:18

²⁸⁸ Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17; Thomas 22

²⁸⁹ wealthy – see Glossary

²⁹⁰ accomplished person – see Glossary

²⁹¹ Matthew 19:16-24; Mark 10:17-25; Luke 18:18-25

²⁹² Matthew 19:25-30; Mark 10:26-31; Luke 18:26-30

²⁹³ Matthew 20:1-16

²⁹⁴ Matthew 20:17-18; Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34

²⁹⁵ Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45

²⁹⁶ Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43

²⁹⁷ Luke 16:1-15; Thomas 47

²⁹⁸ addendum to knowledge – see Glossary

²⁹⁹ Luke 16:16-31

³⁰⁰ This is the sycamore tree that Levi (later Matthew) climbed in the Jesus story – the sycamore tree is a *Ficus* spp. (fig) and was a pre-Christian times symbol of rebirth based on its self-sowing along the Nile as it flowed through the desert.

³⁰¹ Luke 19:1-10

³⁰² Luke 18:1-14

³⁰³ John 11:1-44

³⁰⁴ see earlier note concerning miracles

³⁰⁵ John 11:45-57

³⁰⁶ giving or generosity – see Glossary

³⁰⁷ John 12:1-11

³⁰⁸ thunderbolt lightning

³⁰⁹ The wheel of change is what cakravati (see glossary) set in motion as great kings – here Dharma is usurping the symbolism as part of his metaphor for the life-changing effect of his experiences

³¹⁰ Matthew 21:1-9; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-38,41-44

³¹¹ Matthew 21:10-11; Luke 19:39-40; John 12:16-30

³¹² John 12:31-36

³¹³ John 12:36-43

³¹⁴ John 12:44-50

³¹⁵ Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:11-12,15-18; Luke 19:47-48

³¹⁶ Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:13-14,20-26; Thomas 48, 106

³¹⁷ Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:28-33; Luke 20:1-8

³¹⁸ Matthew 21:28-41; Mark 12:1-9; Luke 20:9-16; Thomas 65

³¹⁹ Matthew 21:42-46; Mark 12:10-12; Luke 20:17-19

³²⁰ Matthew 22:1-14; Thomas 64

³²¹ Luke 14:7-24

³²² Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26; Thomas 100

³²³ absence of a separate self –see Glossary

³²⁴ Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40; Thomas 113

³²⁵ Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34

³²⁶ Luke 13:10-17,14:1-6

³²⁷ noble – see Glossary

³²⁸ The Buddhist scriptural parallel is found in the Kalapanamandinaka 4:22 where a widow offers her only two coins and is observed by a wise man who sings her praises above the affluent donors who otherwise dominated the show.

³²⁹ Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-44; Luke 20:41-47,21:1-4

³³⁰ Matthew 23:1-11; Mark 7:1-16

³³¹ The ritual of washing is variously used by Jesus, and thus Dharma in the this story, and reflects parallels from Buddhist texts, such as in the Udanavarga (33:13) ‘man does not purify himself by washing as most people do in this world’.

³³² compassion – see Glossary

³³³ Matthew 23:13-36; Luke 11:37-53; Thomas 89

³³⁴ Thomas 28; Matthew 23:37-39

³³⁵ Luke 13:31-35

³³⁶ Matthew 24:1-9; Mark 13:1-11; Luke 21:5-15; Thomas 18

³³⁷ Thomas 3,113

³³⁸ The words of the Buddhist Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra or Heart Sutra are echoed here: ‘form is only emptiness; emptiness is only form; feeling, thought, choice, consciousness are the same as this; all things are by nature void, not born or destroyed, not stained or pure ...’

³³⁹ gone – see Glossary

³⁴⁰ Matthew 24:10-42; Mark 13:12-33; Luke 21:16-36,17:35-36; Thomas 61

³⁴¹ Matthew 24:43-51,25:1-13; Mark 13:34-37; Luke 12:35-48,21:37-38; Thomas 21

³⁴² aristocrats and warriors – see Glossary

³⁴³ Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-26; Thomas 41

³⁴⁴ Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 19:27

³⁴⁵ in Cormac McCarthy’s ‘The Crossing’

³⁴⁶ Matthew 26:1-5; Mark 14:1-2; Luke 22:1-2

³⁴⁷ Matthew 26:6-16; Mark 14:3-11; Luke 22:3-6

³⁴⁸ Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; John 13:1-12

³⁴⁹ John 13:13-20

³⁵⁰ Matthew 26:20-25; Mark 14:17-21; Luke 22:21-23; John 13:21-30

³⁵¹ John 13:31-35

³⁵² Luke 22:24-30

³⁵³ Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:14-16,19

³⁵⁴ Matthew 26:27-30; Mark 14:24-26; Luke 22:17-18,20

³⁵⁵ Matthew 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34; John 13:36-38; Thomas 13

³⁵⁶ Luke 22:35-38

³⁵⁷ Here Dharma is using words from the Buddhist scripture, the Alagaddupama Sutta, MN 22, in which the Buddha is ascribed the words, ‘my teaching is like to a raft for the purpose of crossing a river’,

which refers to the integral teachings of means of seeing reality clearly and living accordingly, which leads to the joy of nirvana.

³⁵⁸ John 14:1-14

³⁵⁹ Ittivuttaka III:5:3 – see Glossary

³⁶⁰ equanimity – see Glossary

³⁶¹ John 14:15-31

³⁶² one who lives in accord with the natural flow – see Glossary

³⁶³ John 15:1-17; Thomas 42

³⁶⁴ John 15:18-27,16:1-4

³⁶⁵ The story of the Buddha portrays him as reticent to relay his insights because they would not be understood.

³⁶⁶ John 16:4-33

³⁶⁷ John 17:1-26

³⁶⁸ extracted oil – see Glossary

³⁶⁹ garden of liberation – see Glossary

³⁷⁰ Matthew 26:36-41; Mark 14:32-38; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1

³⁷¹ Matthew 26:42-50; Mark 14:39-45; Luke 22:47-48; John 18:2-9

³⁷² Matthew 26:51-56; Mark 14:47-52; Luke 22:49-53; John 18:10-11

³⁷³ Matthew 26:58,69-75; Mark 14:46,54,66-72; John 18:12-18,25-27

³⁷⁴ governor – see Glossary

³⁷⁵ Matthew 26:57-68,27:1-2; Mark 14:53-65,15:1; Luke 22:63-71; John 18:19-24

³⁷⁶ Matthew 27:3-10

³⁷⁷ javelin – see Glossary

³⁷⁸ king – see Glossary

³⁷⁹ no self – see Glossary

³⁸⁰ son of a pig – see Glossary

³⁸¹ Matthew 27:11-14; Mark 15:2-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-32

³⁸² Luke 23:8-12

³⁸³ Luke 23:13-15; John 18:33-38; Thomas 10

³⁸⁴ son of the father – see Glossary

³⁸⁵ Matthew 27:15-23; Mark 15:6-14; Luke 23:16-22; John 18:39-40

³⁸⁶ enlightened being – see Glossary

³⁸⁷ younger brother of karma – see Glossary

³⁸⁸ Matthew 27:24-26,28-29; Mark 15:15,17; Luke 23:23-25; John 19:1-16

³⁸⁹ diamond throne – see Glossary

³⁹⁰ wheel of life – see Glossary

³⁹¹ Matthew 27:27-33; Mark 15:16-20,22; Luke 23:33; John 19:16-17

³⁹² Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26-31

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- 393 Matthew 27:33-44; Mark 15:22-32; Luke 23:32-43
- 394 Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:25-30
- 395 Matthew 27:51-56; Mark 15:38-40; Luke 23:45-49
- 396 John 19:31-37
- 397 Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42
- 398 Matthew 27:62-66,28:1-6; Mark 16:1-6,9; Luke 24:1-8; John 20:1
- 399 Matthew 28:6-9; Mark 16:6-8; Luke 24:9-12; John 20:2-10
- 400 Matthew 28:10-15; Mark 16:10-11; John 20:11-18
- 401 Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:13-35
- 402 Luke 24:36-49; John 20:19-23
- 403 Mark 16:14-18; John 20:24-29
- 404 John 21:1-14
- 405 John 21:15-19
- 406 Matthew 28:16-20; John 21:20-23
- 407 he who has arrived at the absolute – see Glossary
- 408 Mark 16:1-20; Luke 24:50-53
- 409 Mark 16:1-20; John 21:24-25
- 410 He who'd practise loving-kindness/ That's expressed as peace and calm/ Must to pride and gain be mindless/ Straight and meek, cause no thing harm.
 Living simply in contentment/ Frugal with all passions quelled/ Without impudent resentment/ Not by greed's dependence held.
 In every act he impresses/ Takes all care to stay aware/ on the path between excesses/ he maintains the mantric prayer.
May all that breaths, both large and small/ All forms, seen or unrenewed/ Know happiness and peace in full/ be of wholesome heart imbued/ deceive no being, nor despise/ show no anger, hate or wrath/ neither allows ill-will arise/ as each treads its higher path.
 As mothers' love nought can excel/ May each for all beings care/ Let such unbounded love indwell/ And through all the worlds be shared.
 Through waking hours, ever mindful/ In Truth's home he thus abides/ No strong views, to virtue faithful/ As his perfect vision guides.
 By sense-desires pulled no longer/ By habits captured never/ so grows metta ever stronger/ Freed from cyclic births forever.
 (the Karuniya-metta Sutta rendered in English set to the Charles Wesley tune expressing the same sentiment of unconditional love as in Christian terms of 'Love Divine All Loves Excelling')
- 411 Buddhadasa (1998) Nibbana Here Now. Sukkapapjai, Bangkok. Pp30.

Author's Comment:

How to Read this Book

Who would want to read a rendition of Jesus' life in Buddhist terms? A wide and disparate audience I am told. Perhaps it is those who recall our underlying culture and seek clarity in place of belief. Or perhaps it is those who have not been offered any understanding of their own cultural origins, and who seek some spiritual dimension to life. While I cannot distil it down much further, I expect that readership will range from confident Christians to bemused Buddhists, which means both theists and atheists, and both those who like spiritual parables as well as those who just like a good story. Some have called it the greatest story ever told – it isn't, but it is a version of a universal human story, and as such may well be widely read.

It is the same story told by different cultures. It doesn't belong to Christians any more than to Buddhists or to any other '-isms'. In fact the gospel story so differs from Church doctrine that it could well be of a different religion – Jesus-ism. Such a thought may make some Christians wary of a rendition of 'their' familiar story into Buddhist language. Likewise, Buddhists attached to 'what the Buddha said' may shy away from sharing enlightenment with a 'lesser' religion. For while both groups revere 'their' respective didactic fables, such fixed views might see this book as only entertaining fiction. This would lay it open to judgement in terms of fashions in storytelling style. And I suppose in that way it would disappoint. Its didactic fable style, optional footnotes, glossary and references seem misplaced in a novel. So such a story might suit neither cross-carrying Christians nor belief-based Buddhists, neither secular sophists nor authoritarian atheists. So, such a story might be widely ignored.

Widely read or widely ignored, our highest human potential is described in its pages. That is why I think it is an important book. It owes its origins to two motivations. The first is personal edification, which includes deepening of my own understanding. The other is my increasing awareness of a rise in unthinking replacement of a belief-based 'Buddhism' for the West's own cultural foundations. Exotic icons, colourful rituals, mind-diverting practices and ascetic ethics easily appeal to those without foundation in their lives. But I foresee such beautifully graven Buddha-images falling as their clay feet crumble under the heavy projections laid on their shoulders. Well has it been said that to reject one's cultural foundations is often naïve and usually dangerous to one's mental wellbeing.

Our cultures grow out of a Judeo-Christian tradition. Whether we like it or not, we derive much from the Bible, and even from the myth of Jesus in the gospels. Anyone who has studied the gospels with an open mind cannot help but be impressed by their multi-layered depths. Their allusion to Old Testament passages and quotidian terms to convey their spiritual message is a masterpiece in communicating the non-rational truths that so often escape formal religion. But learning from such genius requires us to have a level of biblical literacy and history that is as uncommon today as ever. No wonder its message is confused. The approach that I have taken here is to use Buddhist language and concepts to interpret the gospel story. From that perspective, it might be seen as an attempt to clarify the confusion that surrounds the gospels and Jesus.

Using another tradition to clarify confused truths is an old technique that has remained in fashion. It is essentially similar to that employed by Benedict XVI when he invokes the Old

Testament prophet Zechariah's description of an agricultural god. The god, Haddad-Rimmon, dies and rises again like everything in nature, which the Pope uses to prefigure Jesus' death and resurrection. In presenting such an image as this, he is surely not suggesting that Christians swap to a god of ancient Palestine! Neither am I suggesting any similar swapping of teams. My approach is more akin to the Dalai Lama's suggestion that most Westerners do better to deepen understanding of their own spiritual tradition than to blindly adopt Buddhism. And in saying that, the Dalai Lama makes skilful use of Christian allusions to explain Buddhist concepts to the West.

So, this book is not a defence of one or other religion. Rather, it is an explanation of Christianity through Buddhism. Its message is rationally simple yet experientially demanding. And it is not amenable to institutional control. Perhaps that is why its various iterations across the millennia have been sidelined, suppressed or ignored as heretical or synchronistic. Why should it be any different today? My response is that I think it can be – because we have wide access to other knowledge, other traditions and other worldviews. Also, we now acknowledge that we enjoy unprecedented material wealth yet feel insecure. We suffer ever-increasing psychological or spiritual poverty, in my view because we ignore the way things really are. That is what this ancient story is about. It is the same story that is the life myth created for Buddha and for Jesus, and for other seers.

Life myths share a common mental developmental purpose. Of course, we should not be surprised that their commonality is disputed by belief-based adherents. Let me explain this from one instance that predates our current explosion of books on Buddhism. Bryan de Kretser's 1954 doctoral thesis published later as 'Man in Buddhism and Christianity' by Preethipura, Sri Lanka

presents such a conservative Christian defence. It says 'Christ is God's response to man's quest. He is the Word expressing the inner character of God Himself. He brings Truth and He Himself is the Truth. He is not controlled by 'Dhamma', He is Dhamma, and 'Dhamma' is, because He wills it to be, He alone, as God, reveals the Truth of God to man. This is Revelation. Man cannot discover it for himself. It is experienced only where the Personal God has decided to reveal Himself to man, in Jesus Christ' (Page 82). I respect the teachings on which such statements are made. But I reject the blind belief and the dogma. I find liberation in the unity that arises from the interpretation of the Jesus myth in Buddhist terms.

The interpreted Jesus' story is also a challenge to some Westerners who follow Buddhist practices. Yet, it is not such a challenge to those who are not from Judeo-Christian societies. To me this suggests that in accepting Buddhism, some Westerners feel they must reject Christianity and even Judaism. They act like reformed smokers who criticise their erstwhile peers. A purpose of my interpretation is to encourage a wider spirituality consistent with the intent of both traditions. To any who feel antipathy to the idea of this interpretation, I offer two, perhaps helpful, observations. First, there is a useful Buddhist development practice to examine matters that produce an antipathetic response in us. Such examination can help us see unacknowledged attachments and ill-will. Second, it is useful to recall that the objections commonly made to the Jesus story rely on church and literal interpretations more than personal examination. And seeking the 'truth' through more accurate translations is not a spiritual quest for most of us. Common Western translations of Buddhist scriptures interpret foreign concepts in modern terms, a practice not widely done for the Jesus of the gospels. So we are usually stuck with updated Buddhism being compared with out-of-date Christianity. My

interpretation incidentally aims to enable more balance in integrating stories and teachings.

In fact it proves easier to integrate the two stories in their later embellished forms than in their purer earlier iterations. In the case of the gospels, a distillation of the earliest words known as 'Q' or even the oldest of the gospels, Mark, is remarkably similar to essential Buddhism. But just as Buddhism has accrued layers of symbolism from the cultures it has passed through, so have the gospels been modified for purposes that do not concern us here. Neither do theological and historical searches for the Buddha or Jesus concern us. Rather we are dealing with the spiritual essence that pervades both the early and embellished stories, both of which reflect genius. This means, for example, that when interpreting the gospels in Buddhist terms, such excesses as mis-ascription of maliciousness to the earnest Pharisees is unimportant. We are not concerned with Pharisees but the attitude they display in the story. So we know that they are not the evil pious prigs mentioned in Dharma's story. But we know that pious prigs are anathema to spiritual development, as the translation here presents it.

Such 'translation' from Buddhist revelations into the Jesus story is easier than explaining Buddhism in Christian terms – as the Thai monk Buddhadasa once so generously attempted. It is easier simply because the absence of any god in Buddhism removes convoluted belief-based arguments and justifications. This in no way negates the utility of belief and myth in assisting mental breakthroughs. In that way, belief may be seen like a Zen koan. Indeed such use of Jesus' story might be spiritually valuable to the West – but it is not about to happen. Buddhadasa's brave attempt to render Buddhism into Christian terms in his 1967 Sinclair Thompson Lectures at Payap University used 'pattica samuppada'

- a central insight of Buddhism of causality or conditionality - as the Buddhist 'God'. But he seems to have been either misunderstood or misinterpreted by his fervid audience.

Misinterpretation plagues spiritual discussion. It is sometimes even aggravated by impure cultural and institutional motivations. My studious friend René Salm has highlighted this in terms of watchfulness and prayer ('mindfulness' in Buddhism). In early Christianity, watchfulness and prayer were synonymous. Where Mark has Jesus say 'beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come', he was not referring to his return 'in glory', but to the benefit of developing awareness - mindfulness. In the Buddha's life myth, his final words are something like 'with mindfulness, strive on'. Jesus in his life myth sees himself similarly - not as a saviour or as one who would return after death. Such ideas, from the last judgment to a physical heaven and hell to resurrection of the dead were just some of the aberrations of Judaism of the time. And Jesus railed against these in favour of the present where heaven can be experienced 'in the midst of you', as noted for example in Thomas 1 and Luke 17: 21.

This concept of mindfulness comes from the Semitic root *natzar* meaning 'to watch or guard', and is a possible origin of Jesus' followers being known as *Natsarenes* ('watchers'). They 'guarded' themselves against excess and passions, just as in Buddhism. And just as in all spiritual traditions, for liberation is possible only when lusts are neither sought nor indulged. Only then can we resurrect ourselves through watchfulness and discipline. The strange notion of Jesus' resurrection probably began at the Pentecost gathering of the disciples and proved congenial to Paul. In his Church-building zeal, he would have found it supportive of his doctrine of vicarious atonement - Jesus saves us just as he was himself saved, if we will but believe it. Thus the original idea of

the more arduous spiritual resurrection was driven out by Paul's easy path of belief-based salvation. That may be why the Gnostic teaching of seeking one's own salvation without a 'redeemer' was deemed heresy. As Benedict XVI observes in his 'Jesus of Nazareth', there is no need for any apocalyptic interpretation in Jesus' words.

Such examples relate to the spiritual context of the message and its congruence with Buddhism. In terms of temporal context, it seems likely that the iconoclastic Jewish sects of Jesus' time were pursuing separated and disciplined lifestyles. Far from being marginal groups, they were the culmination of centuries of Jewish insights independent of temples or priests. Jesus and John the Baptist may have belonged to such a group. This would explain their esoteric and scriptural knowledge, their lifestyles and their rejection of the socially respectable beliefs in resurrection. Furthermore, it would explain the hands-off approach ascribed to the ruling powers, for contrary to many fanciful beliefs, the area was under the beneficial peace of Roman rule. It was less oppressive than all contemporary alternatives.

In this world, 'Jesus-ism' and 'Paul-ism' were two of many sects when chaos accompanied the decline of Roman protection after CE70. Like others, they saw themselves as the interpreters of the truth of 'Israel' and gave new interpretations to ancient teachings. But because sages know that patching an old garment with new cloth tears the old fabric, so the new fabrications aimed to replace the old rather than just patch it. And in Judaism it did, such that one definition of Torah is said to be 'the constant re-interpretation of Torah' or if you like, a continual conversation on personal spiritual development. But at the same time, Jesus' teachings seem to have been marginalised by Paul's version. And this easy interpretation combined with political expediency to find a

religion for the populace in the interests of stability and control produced a religion that was to become powerful and expansionary, Christianity.

Christianity was thus from its beginning distant from the teachings of Jesus. Distant from the human existential quest played out by that gifted Jew, which was so similar to that which had occurred in Bihar in India 450 years earlier. Now we are distant in both time and space from those insights, and we write and read in such different tongues from the lost languages of Buddha and Jesus, and from those of our own ancestors. Thus we are doubly distant from the original teachings. And we are agents of this powerful and erroneous meme for secondhand self-transcendence. And make no mistake, we are its agents whether we like it or not, whether we rebel against it or not, whether we practice some other culture's religion or not. Just read any major Western newspaper where we are conspicuously espousing a package of world-solving advances that assume Christian values.

These same values continue to pervade us when we adopt a foreign spiritual tradition. We seem prone to fall in love with the exotic while failing to see its underlying sameness of intent. Just as surely as our Western tradition is mired in the mud and blood of bitter struggles, so are all the others. In all cases the earnest seeker looks beneath such superficial abuses of traditions to see their real intent. And when we do this, we see the same motivation in all traditions – the 'perennial philosophy' of Aldous Huxley if you like. It is from that basis we can 'translate' others' metaphors into our own language and vice versa, which is what this book does.

So, in this story, the spiritual intent of the Jesus story is 'translated' into Buddhist and Indian concepts. In so doing it arrives at a clearer image of what the story is really about. It retains the whole

story and renders Jesus as Dharma, a man searching for and finding insight and then trying, often without success to convey his experiences to others. He does it by using the ideas of his time, just as the Buddha does in his story. Thus Dharma speaks of gods but doesn't advocate belief in them, let alone see himself as one. Jesus is renamed Dharma to convey his life and teachings as being the truth. In the same way so are other characters and places in the story named in Sanskrit, Pali or Thai to reflect similar meanings of their Hebrew, Greek or Latin origins, as listed below. Or they may be the name of a character from the Buddha's story for a similar role in the Jesus story.

Superscripts within paragraphs direct the reader to the endnotes where such terms and names are explained in summary, and which in turn refer to the glossary. Superscripts at the end of a set of paragraphs refer to the relevant sections of the gospels interpreted in those preceding paragraphs, as noted elsewhere.

Characters (persons and personalities)

Angel = Deva
Disciples = Sangha
Governor/Pontius = Rajapaala
Herod = Suukaputra
Hero = Viira
Jesus = Dharma
John the Baptist = Devapatha
Judas = Devadatta
Mary (mother of Jesus) = Maya
Mary Magdalena = Jaayaa
Matthew = Kaantadeva
Nicodemus = Vijaya
Peter = Mucchada
Pilate (Pontius) = Zalya.
Prophet = Duuta

Rich official = Magha
Sage = Muni
Simeon = Asita
Son of Man = Purusha

Places

Bethlehem = Rotigaya
Desert = Bodhgaya
Gethsemane = Somataila
(also Suan Mokh)
Golgotha = Vajrasana
Heaven = Nirvana
Hell = Samsara
Jerusalem = Samdhipuri
Nazareth = Raksabisala

Rendering a well-known story through another culture's concepts, especially a story that is the psychological mortar of many people's defences, is bound to attract criticism. The product may well deserve criticism, but the process should not. Consider this. It is often forgotten that the written words of both Jesus' and the Buddha's stories are not in the languages they spoke and were written well after they had died. Jesus may have spoken in Aramaic and the Buddha possibly in Kosala or Magadhi Prakrit, but their stories are recorded in Greek and Pali. Both may well have been illiterate in any case. So scriptures about their lives and teachings are always second-hand interpretations in second languages. To interpret them into another set of concepts or language as done here is little different; that is unless one has a superstitious belief in words.

The process I have followed is not new. It predates the Jesus story and is also part of it in the person of Philo. An Alexandrian Jew, Philo wrote commentaries on the Jewish scriptures in the style of allegory popular at the time, including stories of Jesus. He rendered biblical names and concepts into Greek philosophical terms. So 'psyche' became the 'soul' element of the term 'Israel'. Even more obviously, the 'logos' of John's gospel would have been seen by such a Greek intellectual as the Stoic concept of 'logos' or as the 'spirit of life'.

Philo was searching for deeper meanings than the literal and in translating from one conceptual base into another; he was remaining true to the underlying intent. What were charming stories in the Bible were seen by Philo to have the same meaning as the Greek myths. He examined them to remain true to their allegorical intent while diligently seeking the common thread of the stories. A 'thread', an important tradition-transcending term that simply means a 'sutra' as such stories are called in Indian

traditions. Some may say that threads integral to individual gospels or links from the New to the Old Testament may be lost in such an approach. Perhaps that is so, but I am talking of an ultimately strong and unifying thread of transcendence more than of a literary or doctrinal device.

Crossing traditions is also used to insightful benefit in Neusner's 'A Rabbi Talks with Jesus' to highlight deep teachings of each tradition. Both Philo's and Neusner's approaches inform my book. I employ concepts from Buddhism to explain the intent of Christianity. Again, I admit, this is not new. It was Alfred North Whitehead who said, 'The Buddha gave his doctrine to enlighten the world: Christ gave his life. It is for Christians to discern the doctrine. Perhaps in the end the most valuable part of the doctrine of the Buddha is its interpretation of his [Jesus] life'.

So without false modesty, I offer this interpretation of Jesus' life using Buddhist concepts. I see essential Buddhism as a clear exposition of universal spiritual concepts. It is my hope that Westerners attracted to Buddhism will understand that they can beneficially cease their futile attempts to reject their Christian heritage. In fact, if they refuse to acknowledge their cultural conditioning they will struggle to understand Buddhism. For Buddhism has many forms, which are but cultural assimilations of the essential teachings as they progressed across Asia. A Buddha today might say, 'not by magic mantras, not by colourful ceremonies, not by marathon meditations, not by respect of any image of me or any archetypal Bodhisattva will you find enlightenment, but by reflection on yourself as part of all things'. Certainly the hero of this story, Dharma, would say it. And I think this is what Jesus was saying too.

A Note on Historicity

Dharma as Man highlights the underlying sameness of spirit in two of the world's spiritual allegories. It is not an attempt to revise history for that has been better done elsewhere. Ever since the West has reconnected to the East, similarities between Hebrew, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and other traditions have been noted by the curious, from Schopenhauer¹ to Schmidt.² Across decades, many have argued that the New Testament displays Indian origins, and our secular age allows these to now be weighed.

Incidents relating to walking on water provide one example. Klatt³ enumerates coincidences to claim Buddhist origins of the Christian stories, such as: Buddha and Jesus are alone and engaged in their spiritual practice of walking up and down on the water, which is described in identical terms in the Pali and Greek. After emphasizing that the water is rough, both narratives shift to focus on a disciple. The boat is described as full of men who are astonished at an unknown man walking on water, who then identifies himself (as Buddha or Jesus) by the words 'it is I'. Those on the boat want him to board, which he then does. In the same vein, Jesus' baptism by John and his subsequent encounters in his desert meditation are shown to follow identical patterns to make the same points in a story about the Buddha. *Dharma as Man* uses such coincidences, but only where they suit the flow of the story.

¹ Schopenhauer (quoted in Zacharias P. Thundy (1993) *Buddha and Christ. Nativity Stories and Indian Tradition*. Brill, Leiden.)

² Perry Schmidt-Leukel (2004) *The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2004*

³ Norbert Klatt (1982) *Literarkritische Beiträge zum Problem Christlich-Buddhistischer Parallelen*, Köln. Quoted in Gruber, E.R and Kersten, H. (1995) *The Original Jesus: The Buddhist Sources of Christianity*. Element, Dorset.

Word coincidences also present arresting similarities, as do other congruent teachings and parallel parables, life and miracle stories. Such subjects have been canvassed by various scholars, three of which are listed below.^{4,5,6} Such researchers present verse after verse from scriptures – verses beyond platitudes and such banalities as ‘all religions teach us to be good’ – and suggest that Indian concepts travelled to the Middle East with trade long before Jesus, or Alexander – which archaeological artefacts also seem to confirm, even back to Egyptian times.

Gruber and Kersten⁷ bring together German research often excluded from the English language system. So does a review article by Lindtner⁸ of two books relating Buddhism and Christianity.⁹ Beginning with Müller’s 1882¹⁰ observation of the similarity of Buddhist works and the Bible, Lindtner traces that lineage through Garbe and Haas¹¹ to the opposing views of Winternitz¹² via Tuxen’s¹³ parallels and on to those of Schomerus,¹⁴ which form part of a general rejection of historical commonalities. But that past great theological fatherland was

⁴ René Salm (2004) *Buddhist Christian Parallels: Compiled from the Earliest Scriptures*. <<http://www.iid.org/publications/rfinal.pdf>> <<http://www.iid.org/books.php>>

⁵ Amore, R.C. (1985) *Two Masters, One Message*. Kuala Lumpur.

⁶ Gruber, E.R and Kersten, H. (1995) *The Original Jesus: The Buddhist Sources of Christianity*. Element, Dorset.

⁷ Gruber, E.R and Kersten, H. (1995) *The Original Jesus: The Buddhist Sources of Christianity*. Element, Dorset.

⁸ *Comparative Gospel Studies in Review* - <http://www.jesusbuddha.com/review.html>

⁹ (i) Michael Fuss: *Buddhavanam and Dei Verbum*. Brill, Leiden 1991. Pp. xvi & 479. (ii) J.Duncan M. Derrett: *The Bible and the Buddhists*, Sardini 2000. Pp. 131.

¹⁰ Max Müller’s (1889) *India - What Can it teach us?*, London, p. 284.

¹¹ Richard Garbe (1914) *Indien und das Christentum*, Tübingen.

Hans Haas (1922) *Bibliographie zur Frage nach den Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum*, a 45 page appendix to “Das Scherflein der Witwe” und seine Entsprechung im Tripitaka, Leipzig

¹² M. Winternitz (1935) quoted from Derrett, op. rec., p. 21.

¹³ Poul Tuxen (1928) *Buddha: Hans Lære, dens Overlevering og dens Liv i Nutiden*, Copenhagen

¹⁴ H.W. Schomerus (1935) *Ist die Bibel von Indien abhängig?*, München.

diminished with so much other cultural awareness in the subsequent decade.

The same blinkers shielded pre-war theological halls in the UK; Rhys Davids¹⁵ concluded that identical spiritual insights had developed independently from similar experiences. The sentiment seems to be faithfully retained by many Western Buddhists today despite the bounty of Buddhist-Christian parallels listed in Klatt's¹⁶ bibliography. Now our era is reopening Müller's¹⁷ 'historical channels', such as Fuss's¹⁸ view of the 'eminent theological enrichment' arising from open consideration of similarities between Christianity and Buddhism', in that case between the 'White Lotus Sutra' and the missionary aspects of the gospels.

Yet works that kick against the pricks of logic and feeling such as that of Thundy¹⁹ are still often seen to be akin to the Darwinian heresy. He suggests that New Testament authors wrote under Buddhist influence, making him one with Schopenhauer's²⁰ utterance that 'the New Testament must be in some way traceable to an Indian source'.²¹ Such a consideration then stimulates wonder about links with Gnosticism.^{22,23}

¹⁵ T.W. Rhys Davids (1906) *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion*. The Hibbert Lectures 1881, London.

¹⁶ Norbert Klatt (1982) *Literarkritische Beiträge zum Problem Christlich-Buddhistischer Parallelen*, Köln.

¹⁷ Max Müller's (1889) *India - What Can it teach us?*, London, p. 284.

¹⁸ Michael Fuss: *Buddhavacanam and Dei Verbum*. Brill, Leiden 1991. Pp. xvi & 479.

¹⁹ Zacharias P. Thundy (1993) *Buddha and Christ. Nativity Stories and Indian Tradition*. Brill, Leiden.

²⁰ Abelsen, Peter (1993). *Schopenhauer and Buddhism*. *Philosophy East & West*, 44:2 p. 255.

²¹ Schopenhauer (quoted in Zacharias P. Thundy (1993) *Buddha and Christ. Nativity Stories and Indian Tradition*. Brill, Leiden.)

²² René Salm (2004) *Buddhist Christian Parallels: Compiled from the Earliest Scriptures*. <<http://www.iid.org/publications/rfinal.pdf>> < <http://www.iid.org/books.php>>

²³ René Salm (2008) *The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus*. American Atheist Press, Cranford, New Jersey. 375 pages.

However, seeking historical parallels is beset with temptations to exaggerate as a counter to the belief-bases of entrenched religions. So, while Gruber and Kersten²⁴ present a credible thesis in the main, Kersten's earlier work²⁵ about Jesus living in India commits the sin of exaggeration, as Klatt²⁶ and Lang²⁷ have noted. Lindtner²⁸ suggests we know less about Jesus than we do Donald Duck, a sobering idea inspired by Drews'²⁹ confrontation with the Catholic-Protestant environment of his Kharlsrue University, which still attracts belief-based debate.³⁰

Where theology discounts intellectual and spiritual experience, the quasi-academic debate continues, leading to the commonly quoted English-reading world's Borg³¹, which according to the German reviewer misses much from von Brück and Lai's tome.³² Amore's³³ readable but conclusionless summary remains the most popular English version.

Conze,³⁴ that doyen of Buddhist interpretations to the West, pointed out 'verbal coincidences' such as between the Buddhist

²⁴ Gruber, E.R and Kersten, H. (1995) *The Original Jesus: The Buddhist Sources of Christianity*. Element, Dorset.

²⁵ Holger Kersten (1994) *Jesus Lived in India: His Unknown Life Before and After the Crucifixion*. Element Books, UK.

²⁶ Klatt (1988) *Lebte Jesus in Indien? Eine religionsgeschichtliche Klärung*, Göttingen.

²⁷ David M. Lang (1957) *The Wisdom of Balahvar*, London.

²⁸ *Comparative Gospel Studies in Review* - <http://www.jesusisbuddha.com/review.html>

²⁹ Arthur Drews (1910) *Die Christusmythe I-II*, Jena.

³⁰ Peter de May (undated) *The Influence of Metaphysical and Epistemological Presuppositions on Jesus Research Then and Now: Reconsidering the Christ-Myth Debate*. www.kuleuven.be/theometh/peter/papers/demey.doc

³¹ Marcus Borg (1998) *Jezus: gezocht en onderzocht. De renaissance van het Jezusonderzoek*, Zoetermeer. English original (1994) *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship*.

³² Michael von Brück and Whalen Lai (1997 and 2000) *Buddhismus und Christentum. Geschichte, Konfrontation, Dialog*. München. 805 pages. Reviewed in *Buddhist Studies Review* 16/2 (1999): 259-263.

³³ R.C. Amore (1978) *Two Masters - One Message*, Nashville.

³⁴ Edward Conze (1959) in R.C.Zaehner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the World's Religions*, London, p. 293.

‘Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines’ and the ‘Book of Revelations’ among which is the seven seals on the book. This provides a clue as the number seven suggests a Mediterranean more than an Indian tradition, and surely this must encourage curious minds to consider a two-way interaction between spiritually aware groups from Alexandria to India. From such considerations, Derrett³⁵ hypothesizes two-way collaboration between Buddhists and early Christians.

But, dear reader, Beware! Such curiosities are pointless. For what does it matter who said what first? What matters is the meaning of the message. And in *Dharma as Man*, the essential message that Dharma relates is the same as that in all enduring spiritual and psychological teachings. If there is an historical reason for this, it does not have to be that this is somehow ‘the Truth’ to believe in. It is more likely a common understanding of the functioning of our minds, and hence it appears through history wherever wise men met – and they probably did actively seek to meet each other. From that perspective, everything becomes clearer, including history, science and philosophy. I commend the thought-experience; it is the great path to the experience of oneness.

LF, 2009



³⁵ J.Duncan M. Derrett: *The Bible and the Buddhists*, Sardini 2000. Pp. 131.