

BOOK REVIEWS

The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therīgāthā. By Susan Murcott. Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1991. pp. 1x+219. \$15.00 (paperback).

The First Buddhist Women: Translations and Commentary on the Therīgāthā is a study of the *Therīgāthā*, a collection of the poems or verses of elder enlightened nuns. The *Therīgāthā* is included in the *Khuddhaka Nikāya*, the fifth part of the second "basket" of the Pali canonical scriptures, the *Sutta-piṭika*. According to Susan Murcott, *Therī* means "women elders," or "women who have grown old in knowledge," and *gāthā* means "verse," "stanza," "song." The *Therīgāthā* are the enlightenment poems or verses of the first Buddhist nuns in the sixth century B.C.E. in ancient India.

In the preface of the book, Murcott mentions that she spent fifteen years researching and retranslating the text. The book reflects the author's considerable efforts. It is valuable for contemporary readers, and is easily accessible for general readers as well as academic readers. The chapters follow arrangement of poems and stories according to the roles and relationships of the women in the *Therīgāthā*.

In the introduction, Murcott provides an overview of the *Therīgāthā*, the *saṅgha* of nuns, the oral tradition of the *Therīgāthā*, Dhammapala's commentary on the *Therīgāthā* in the fifth century C.E., the translations of the *Therīgāthā* into English, and the question regarding authorship of the poems. She also explains that her book contains sixty-one of the seventy-three poems from the *Therīgāthā*. Twelve poems are excluded for various reasons: several of the twelve poems are tedious and mechanical in the original and in the translation. Two of the twelve seemed almost identical, and two very long poems of the

Therīgāthā are generally said to be later compositions from the third century B.C.E.

In the first chapter, "Mahapajapati Gotami and Her Disciples," Murcott presents the life-story and poem of Siddhartha Gautama's foster mother or the first Buddhist nun, and the establishment of the *saṅgha* of nuns. This chapter also includes stories and poems of Gotami's followers, the "Five Hundred." Seven poems are by the seven nuns who had been members of Siddhartha Gautama's harem. The last section in this chapter provides stories and poems of Gotami's daughter, Sundari-Nanda, and Gotami's nurse, Vaddhesi.

Chapter Two, "Patacara and Her Disciples," considers stories and poems of Patacara, the finest teacher, and her disciples. In chapter three, "Wanderers and Disciples," Murcott selects stories and poems of a unique group of Buddhist women of the *Therīgāthā*: wanderers, ascetics, novices, ordained nuns, hermits, almswomen, and disciples. In this chapter the author briefly discusses the ancient tradition of the wanderer, the ordination of women, and the discipleship of women in the *saṅgha* of nuns.

Chapter Four, "Wise Women and Teachers," deals with stories and poems of three renowned and wise nuns: Dhammadinna, Khema, Uppalavanna. Chapter Five, "Mothers," offers stories and poems of five women who became Buddhist nuns due to grief over the loss of their children. These poems show that the mothers did not see themselves as victims, but turned their tragedies into steps towards spiritual understanding and freedom after meeting the Buddha. Chapter Six, "Wives," contains stories and poems of enlightened nuns who had failed at their marriages or had become disgusted with their domestic lives.

Chapter Seven, "Old Women," provides stories and poems of Buddhist nuns who joined the *saṅgha* of nuns because of their friendship. This chapter also includes poems of three women who were biological sisters: Cala, Upacala, Sisupacala. Chapter Ten, "Buddhist Nuns and Nature," presents stories and poems which show some kind of association between a nun and a tree, or a nun and the moon. The author says that there are few nuns' poems related to nature because nuns lived near villages in order to observe the rules prohibiting nuns' independent wandering.

Chapter Eleven, "Dialogue Poems," gives beautiful examples of the Pali Buddhist dialogue poems from the *Therīgāthā*. The first poem is a conversation between Mara and Vijira. The second is a dialogue between the enlightened nun, Subha, and a lecherous man. The last poem of Sundari in this chapter is the most elaborate example of a dialogue poem including several of the seven speakers.

In Chapter Twelve, "The Legacy of the First Buddhist Women," and the Appendix, "Rules of the Nuns' *Saṅgha*," Murcott discusses the legacy of the first Buddhist nuns' life-stories and poems 2,500 years

later. In the appendix she briefly provides discussion on the eight extra rules and the precepts for nuns.

As mentioned in Murcott's introduction, there are two complete English translations of the *Therīgāthā*. Caroline Rhys Davids' translation of the *Therīgāthā* was published in London in 1909 as *Psalms of the Sisters*, and the English is quite outdated. Another version in English of the *Therīgāthā* was a translation by K. R. Norman, issued as a part of the Pali Text Society's translation, *The Elders' Verses II, Therīgāthā*. Both translations are hard to understand for the general reader because of the inaccessibility of the language and the intensive scholarly work. As Norman points out in his introduction to *The Elders' Verses II, Therīgāthā*, he has "produced a literal, almost word-for-word translation" to convey his understanding of the Pali. Although I cannot check the original Pali *Therīgāthā* because I do not know Pali, I feel that these two translations of the *Therīgāthā* are too inaccessible for general readers.

However, in *The First Buddhist Women*, Murcott attempts to break the boundaries of the language and deliver the messages of the *Therīgāthā* poems to a wide audience rather than just the scholarly reader. In her commentary, she also brings to light many women's issues, as vital today as they were twenty-five hundred years ago during the time of the Buddha.

On the whole, this book is very highly recommended. As Murcott writes, it is "a labor of love" and "a record of my discovery." Through her commentary and skillful translation of the *Therīgāthā*, Susan Murcott succeeds in sharing with today's readers "how one world religion acknowledged from its very beginning the authority and equality of women in spiritual practice" (p. 10).

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Contentment and Suffering: Culture and Experience in the Toraja
by: Douglas W. Hollan and Jane C. Wellencamp. Columbia University Press, 1994

Embarking upon an exploration of the eastern Indonesian Sa'dan Toraja, Hollan and Wellencamp employ a "person-centered" ethnographic approach in their quest to describe a unique highland Southeast Asian culture. Drawing broadly upon a substantial ethnographic literature, a cursory examination of local ritual, and in-depth interviews with eleven respondents, the authors seek to elicit the structure of Toraja

culture as mirrored in the perceptions and experiences of their informants. *Contentment and Suffering* only partially achieves its ambitious goals. In discussing the Toraja penchant for order, concern for transgression as the trigger for community misfortune, and conceptualization of the importance of ancestors in the life of the living much of the core of Toraja culture is thoughtfully elicited. Often, however, the reader senses a greater distance between the investigators and the culture under study than is often the case with standard ethnographic methodology. Subjects are interviewed at length and in private suggesting an extrinsic analysis in the midst of a symbolically vital ritual, robust subsistence farming, and symbolically laden art and architecture. In analyzing the local penchant for order (pp. 45, 207), concern with reciprocity (p. 47), and avoidance of moral error (p. 141) the book strikes to the core of local culture. Yet with its titular focus on suffering, the authors' configuration of a dour, repressive Toraja culture does not ring true. Contemporary Toraja energetically pursue wealth, status, and educational achievement with a passion and exuberance that suggests neither passive contentment nor resigned suffering.

Contentment and Suffering makes little reference to considerable work on nearby Bali, where Mead and Bateson in pre-war years and Suriyani and Jenson (1991) have related child-rearing techniques to cultural configuration and ritual performance. Manifesting a unique approach to the study of a distant culture, this book elicits much that is essential in the life and thoughts of the inhabitants of the Toraja highlands. Yet the methodology employed seems at times to interfere with rather than illuminate the depiction of local society. The reader remains inevitably distanced from Toraja village culture, which is refracted through a series of key interviews. We never really find the opportunity to meet the informants, who provide answers to questions, but never emerge as discrete individuals. *Contentment and Suffering* effectively explores many important aspects of Toraja culture, such as the significance of dreams, inclination towards dyadic reciprocity and implications of personal transgression for community well being. Yet the experience of culture, either through the lives of the eleven key informants or the perceptions of the authors, remains elusively beyond our grasp.

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The Blooming of a Lotus: Guided Meditation Exercises for Healing and Transformation. By: Hanh, Thich Nhat. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993.

Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Blooming of a Lotus: Guided Meditation Exercises for Healing and Transformation* is spiritually refreshing. Soaking up the wisdom of the thirty-four guided meditation exercises was truly joyful. To my surprise, I discovered that the technique of guided meditation was advocated by the Buddha. In the *Sutra for the Sick and Dying*, (*Majjhima Nikaya, sutta 143*), Śāriputra used guided meditation to console the dying Anāthapindika. Thus, it has a long, reliable tradition. What is most appealing about Nhat Hanh's style of writing is his lucid presentation of elusive Buddhist concepts in everyday language. In his skillful hands, the subtle doctrines of *anatta*, *anicca*, and *paticcasamuppada* are easily grasped. Perhaps the book resonates with ordinary people because the author conveys the Dharma through the idiom of songs and poems. The structure of the meditations themselves is simple. There are "Guiding Sentences", "Key Words", and "Commentary" by Hanh. Keeping the lines brief and the images sharp, Hanh achieves both a mnemonic device and internalization of the content.

Thematically, the meditations concern largely the basic Buddhist notions of no self, impermanence, and inter-causality. Without a context, these concepts are too abstract to be understood. However, Hanh makes them intelligible by applying them to concrete situations involving one's self, parents, and couples. Hanh concentrates on the three unskillful roots or poisons that lead to non-beneficial acts: ignorance, anger, and greed. In particular, the specific meditations prescribed for the reduction or elimination of anger, fear, and sexual craving, are down-to-earth and immediately applicable.

Thich Nhat Hanh's observations about no abiding self are very relevant. It is a mistake to think of *anatta* as a metaphysical quibble that preoccupies daydreaming philosophers. The essential point of the truth of no self is to enable one to transcend ego in order to escape suffering. For Hanh, the simple act of full prostration demonstrates this profound reality: "In this position (prostration), it is very easy to surrender all thoughts. You can surrender yourself and every thought about yourself. Surrender yourself until you are nothing." In the act of full prostration, one is overwhelmed by a sense of deep humility, so much so that one forgets one's self, if only for a short while, and all the troubles inflicted by ego-clinging recede. Thus, the teaching of *anatta* is not an axiom, but an actual, lived experience.

Hanh's handling of the problem of impermanence is revealing. For the enlightened, the transiency of all things is liberating. Hanh discusses the instability of sensations and emotions. Three sensations are possible: unpleasant, neutral, and pleasant. With mindfulness, one is not con-

trolled by these sensations. For example, "when (neutral) feelings are recognized in mindfulness, they usually become pleasant feelings." One of the most common complaints of today's Americans is malaise or ennui. Could this not be a potential remedy? Also, emotional states change drastically. Happiness disappears as rapidly as it arises. Why be attached to something so fleeting? Hanh says, "we are not just our emotions. Emotions come and go, but we are always here." The solution to emotionalism is *upekkha*, or equanimity. Only with mindfulness can one be emotionally balanced and serene.

Interdependence is given a thorough treatment. The inspiration stems from the expansive vision of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. Eschewing arid logic, Hanh invigorates interdependence with poetic imagery. Identification of phenomenon with phenomenon is creatively captured as being "in touch with the cloud in the flower/...knowing that without the cloud/there would be no flower." Perhaps the all-embracingness of *Hua-Yen* Buddhism could contribute to the Deep Ecology movement. Indeed, there is no trace of speciesism in the statement "No human species/without other/species." Actually, Hanh urges that environmentalists use the *Diamond Sūtra* as their Bible.

Giving his book a contemporary feel, Hanh includes meditations on interpersonal encounters, whether it be with one's self, one's parents, or one's lover. Beginning with ourselves, Hanh exhorts us to direct *metta* to our own bodies, for "our own skandhas must be in harmony before we can live in harmony with others." This insight is consonant with the latest self-esteem raising movement, for how can we be compassionate to others if we loathe ourselves? Another facet Hanh discusses is anger against parents. This is removed by imagining one's parents as vulnerable infants. Moved with pity, one's remorse and anger diminishes. We are told that "When we truly see and understand someone's suffering, it is impossible not to accept and love them...Tolerance and calm are two signs of authentic love." This theme is reinforced in the grief one experiences when one's spouse dies. One succumbs to anger and accusation out of selfishness. However, understanding acceptance is more wholesome. Contemplating one's "Beloved alive/smiling" then "Seeing beloved/dead/Smiling," one is awakened to impermanence and to a sense of deep appreciation for the present moment.

In addition, Hanh has practical strategies for coping with anger, fear, and lust. Contrary to conventional thinking, anger is not externally induced. From a Buddhist viewpoint, "the main root of our suffering is the seed of anger in us." That is, anger is not an outside force, but rather lack of mindfulness. This is no less true of doubt or fear. Denial and repression do not work. Realistic grappling with them is the only solution. "Buddha taught that rather than repressing our fears and anxieties, we should invite them into consciousness, recognize them,

welcome them." Practicing meditation empowers one to overcome one's entangled thoughts. Thoughts of sexual craving would be an illustration. Sexual excess damages everybody involved. In the words of the meditation, "Suffering from/craving sex/Letting go," and "Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I vow to cultivate responsibility." Against sexual licence, Hanh reminds us that too much lust hurts ourselves, as well as others.

In conclusion, *The Blooming of a Lotus* is a valuable guide book for spiritual integration. The guided meditations exemplify important Buddhist themes that illuminate one's life situation. Thich Nhat Hanh continues to make the ineffable wisdom of 2,500 years of Buddhist awareness available to us all. For this kindness we are most grateful.

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All the Mothers are One: Hindu India and the Cultural Reshaping of Psychoanalysis, by Stanley N. Kurtz. Foreword by S. J. Tambiah. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992. xv + 306 pages. Cloth: \$45.00.

When Stanley N. Kurtz, then a Harvard doctoral candidate in anthropology, set about trying to understand the recent emergence in India of a new goddess called Santoshi Ma, he was at first stymied. The Western scholarly tools of historical and soteriological analysis, the very lens through which he at first attempted to comprehend Santoshi Ma worship, kept leading to exasperating anomalies.

For example, when Kurtz asked one woman informant about her worship of Santoshi Ma (which means "Mother of Satisfaction" or "Mother of Contentment"), he was given a vivid description of what the informant claimed was a Santoshi Ma shrine in Jammu in North India. He soon discovered, however, that this shrine was in fact the chief pilgrimage site of another goddess, Vaishno Devi (p. 3). Many similar anomalous responses to his straightforward queries continued to thwart Kurtz's investigations into the worship of Santoshi Ma. Nevertheless, like any good doctoral student anxious to lay claim to some new piece of yet-to-be-plumbed subject area, he doggedly persisted in search of the precise social and historical conditions out of which the "new" goddess arose. Then, finally, in the manner of the poor ignorant farmer fervently worshipping a simple stone until the hidden god of the stone was compelled to emerge (pp. 1-2), Kurtz had his epiphany.

The reason I could not distinguish a specific social or ideological identity for Santoshi Ma is that she is not in fact a separate and distinct divine being. Although she has a particular name and form, these things are of limited significance and do not correspond—as Western thought usually takes them to—to a unique and stable identity.

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It was only after having seen and thus dissolved Santoshi Ma back into her source that I was able to make sense of her. . . I realized that my real problem was the classification of all goddesses—or rather, the classification of the everchanging manifestations of the single great Goddess (pp. 4-5).

Strangely enough, after realizing the inadequacy of historical and sociological analysis for comprehending Santoshi Ma worship, Kurtz settled upon the equally Western analytical tools of structuralism and psychoanalysis! He defends his choice of methods by arguing that one cannot realistically hope to fully take over the "native point of view"; nor, on the other hand, can one force the native view into one's own, culturally-biased theoretical structures. Rather the investigator must acknowledge and play out "the genuine tensions and contradictions between the points of view of observer and observed" (p. 6). Hence, Kurtz claims that his "structuralist psychoanalysis," for all its admitted Western biases, is capable of being reformulated by what is learned in the field.

And this is what he sets out to do in this book which encompasses Hindu childrearing practices (Chapters 3 and 4); the relationship of these practices and the kinship system in which they are embedded to Hindu myths and rituals (Chapter 5 and elsewhere); a new classification system of Hindu goddesses (Chapters 2 and 5); and the positive formulation of a uniquely Hindu developmental psychology (Chapters 5 and 6). The last three chapters are applications of the Hindu psychology developed in the first six chapters and include: (1) a reinterpretation of five previously published clinical case histories (Chapter 7); (2) a critique of earlier cross-cultural uses of psychoanalytic theory by Obeyesekere and Spiro (Chapter 8); and (3) a general statement of the principles of a new, culturally sensitive comparative psychoanalysis (Chapter 9). All of these matters, the theoretical discussions as well as their practical applications, are discussed with constant reference to previous psychoanalytic literature on Hindu culture from which Kurtz attempts to ferret out the Western biases that, as he contends, subtly, or not so subtly, have colored the interpretation of the data.

The primary bias Kurtz discovers in these previous studies is Western individualism. Although this reviewer is not familiar at first

hand with the literature upon which Kurtz attempts to build, and, when necessary, reformulate a "non-ethnocentric, broadly psychoanalytic theory of Hindu development" (p. 60), his arguments concerning the bias of individualism are persuasive.

According to Kurtz, several psychoanalytic investigators have maintained that Hindu biological mothers are "overindulgent" in their physical ministrations to their children, leading to the child's prolonged "narcissism," which, in turn, is sustained by the larger group of in-law mothers. But in Kurtz's reading of the data, "Full participation in the group. . . is not a narcissistic union with the mother writ large. Rather, it is a *developmental achievement* that signals the abandonment of early pleasures" (p. 75). (Emphasis added.)

Kurtz reinterprets the Hindu mother's constant, supposedly "overly indulgent" physical contact with her child coupled with her emotional distance as a key mechanism by which the child is pushed towards the larger group of in-law mothers (p. 41). When, for example, the child's paternal grandmother enters the room, the biological mother defers to the in-law mother as the child's primary caretaker. Teasing is also frequently used by the biological mother so as to prod the child to forego exclusive fixation upon her and to begin instead to participate more in the group. These culturally distinctive kinds of interaction serve to lead the child, in Kurtz's view, toward a voluntary sacrifice or renunciation of purely selfish desires (pp. 80-81). In this manner, the child becomes "incorporated" by the larger group and, in turn, incorporates the group's identity into himself. (It should be noted here, as will be discussed below, that Kurtz writes almost exclusively about the male child.)

Kurtz argues that this voluntary renunciation, or, psychoanalytically speaking, symbolic self-castration, is the Hindu counterpart of the Western defense mechanism of repression (p. 173). Moreover, this specifically Hindu form of sublimation leads, in the normal course of maturation, to the establishment of "an ego of the whole" (p. 101), and not to the specifically Western form of individuation. Individuation, he contends, is based on a process of mirroring and empathy between mother and child, as these processes typically play themselves out within the Western nuclear family (pp. 283-284).

But the situation is quite different in Hindu India. Instead of a pre-Oedipal phase, Kurtz discovers an "*ek-hi*" phase (deriving from the Hindu phrase, "*Mā sab ek hi hai*," meaning, "All the mothers are simply one and the same") in which the child begins to move "away from the natural mother and toward a more mature immersion in a larger and fundamentally benevolent group of mothers, a group in which all the mothers are, ultimately, 'just one' (*ek-hi*)" (pp. 92-93). Instead of a "negative Oedipus complex" fraught with homosexual implications, he discovers a "Durga complex," in which the male child's identification

with (and incorporation by) the group of women caretakers is later transferred to the group of men (pp. 168-169). The *ek-hi* and Durga phases are explicated in some detail with respect to Hindu childrearing practices, the kinship system, the pantheon of Hindu goddesses and their interrelationships, myths and rituals, clinical case histories and previous psychoanalytic literature. While much of this material will be of specific interest to the specialist, Kurtz deserves praise for the accessible way in which he organizes and analyzes this vast array of multifarious information.

In short, where previous psychoanalytic investigators found Hindu childrearing practices to be pathogenic—involving an undue prolongation of primary narcissism, contradictory messages from the natural mother (physical closeness combined with emotional distance), and an “abrupt” and “traumatic” immersion into the group of men—, Kurtz discerns a uniquely Hindu path of development by way of the caretaking of multiple mothers in an extended family and leading to a voluntary sacrifice of selfish (*kām*) love as the child moves toward a selfless of divine love (*prem*). In one of the clinical cases, Kurtz in fact argues that the psychological maladjustments of the client, a forty-year-old lecturer in philosophy, may well have been accentuated by the absence of in-law mothers to counteract the “intrusive seductiveness” of his mother (p. 214). In other words, the client’s problems, Kurtz contends, were accentuated by the *deviations* in his upbringing from the normative Hindu extended family and from the expectation of caretaking by many “mothers”.

All of these points are cogently set forth by Kurtz. However, his use of psychoanalysis, even in the flexible form which it assumes in his hands, may be uncongenial to some readers. There are, however, several aspects of psychoanalysis that may explain its continued usefulness in the field of psychological anthropology: (1) it is a dynamic psychology, capable of explicating psychic processes; (2) it is well-suited to explaining intra-psychic conflict; (3) it posits a specific series of psychosexual developmental stages that can be applied cross-culturally, *e.g.*, as Kurtz applies them to Hindu childrearing practices; (4) it gives prominence to the concept of the unconscious; (5) the individual psyche and culture are placed in a dynamic relationship to one another, these two being the key terms of psychological anthropology; and, as a more specific application of this dynamic relationship, (6) the meaning of symbols is centrally emphasized, such that private meanings can be linked to the myths and rituals of a culture. It so happens that there are few psychological systems that are so readily adaptable to the purposes of psychological anthropology.

Although Kurtz’s use of psychoanalysis is admirably free from jargon and draws freely upon the latest developments in psychoanaly-

sis, one cannot help but sense the revenant of the progenitor of this dynamic psychology, Sigmund Freud, hovering about the periphery of this investigation and making its lingering presence felt in at least two ways: (1) Although the work deals largely with the reclassification of Hindu goddesses, the childrearing practices, clinical data, and Hindu myths and rituals Kurtz draws upon almost exclusively concern Hindu boys and/or the male point of view, and, specifically, the issue of symbolic self-castration (so much so the this writer kept looking back at the title of the book to see if it was in any way qualified by the words "boy" or "male"); and (2) there is also the unspoken but clear implication of reductionism, namely, that divine images, rituals, and myths of Hindu culture are not just analogous to Hindu childrearing practices but are generated directly out of the latter.

Kurtz is aware of the first limitation and puts it down to the fact that psychoanalysis of Indian culture has hitherto almost exclusively focused on the male child and it is, after all, this previous literature he must draw upon in order to "culturally reshape" psychoanalysis (p. 175). He consciously attempts to overcome this bias, Kurtz explains, by including two women clients among the five clinical case histories evaluated in Chapter 7. But these two case histories are largely overshadowed by the male perspective that otherwise dominates this book, *e.g.*, by the myriad theoretical discussions of symbolic self-castration (see pp. 10, 135-143, 150-169, 216-219, 236, 279-280). Consequently, there is an enormous gender gap in the Hindu developmental psychology presented here.

As to the specter of reductionism, Kurtz has nothing specifically to say. But this work, after all, is one of psychological anthropology, and the author need only, for the purposes at hand, cursorily discuss Indian philosophy and theology, *e.g.*, the typically Indian theme of unity within diversity, as it

recapitulates, reinforces, affirms, and celebrates an earlier process in which the Hindu child moves beyond an exclusive attachment to the natural mother and toward a mature sense of the immersion in a diverse, yet unified, group of mothers in the Hindu joint family (p. 12).

The specter of reductionism can only be dispelled, then, if at all, by directly engaging Hindu philosophy on the level of its truth claims. But this is the separate and distinct task of those who would make use of Kurtz's study, *e.g.*, for the purposes of inter-religious dialogue. While it is not the task of the psychological anthropologist to do so, without such parallel investigations, the overall impression of this study is psychoanalytic and/or structuralist reductionism.

Kurtz admits that many of his conclusions are tentative and subject to revision (pp. 60, 175). One cannot help but feel, moreover, that a further step might yet be taken beyond the peculiar, if intriguing idiom of psychoanalysis. Kurtz accepts the main contours of the psychoanalytic language: the dichotomy between the pleasure and the reality principles; the concept of sublimation; the Freudian psychosexual stages of development; and the symbolic equivalencies between stages of psychosexual development, on the one hand, and culturally-rooted myths and rituals, on the other. It is, in particular, these symbolic equivalencies—even when carefully adapted by Kurtz to his Hindu context (p. 141)—that, in the final analysis, can never be proven and will only completely convince those already converted to the Freudian canon and its commentarial literature, or else to one of the canon's various modifications, extensions, or reformulations.

Given these reservations, this book is a noteworthy contribution to the fascinating way in which divine and human images of motherhood are dynamically related in Hindu India. The author is able to open a window upon a world view quite distinct from our own, yet cohesive, and in no sense "pathogenic," except to those investigators who have not yet clearly spied out the Western bias of individualism in their tacitly applied "universal" path to psychological maturity and wholeness. In contrast, by the light of his "epiphany," Kurtz suddenly became aware of his own bias, and this revelation enabled him and his readers to experience, however vicariously, a uniquely constructed human cosmos.

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Tibetan Buddhism from the Ground Up: A Practical Approach for Modern Life. By B. Alan Wallace with Steven Wilhelm. Boston: Wisdom Publications 1993. Pp. x, 214. Paper: \$14.

"Turn adversity into the path." Cultivate a "warrior's attitude" towards spiritual transformation. Such virile interpretations of Buddhism, synthesizing the bodhisattva and the tantric paths, are sometimes surprisingly apt and up to date. They help to explain the attractiveness of Tibetan Buddhism to many Westerners.

The author, B. Alan Wallace, lived as a monk in the Tibetan tradition for fourteen years. He is trained in modern physics, and has studied Buddhism at Stanford University. This book is the expanded version of a series of lectures.

This is not a "contribution to scholarship"—in fact, as scholarship it lags well behind the field. Nonetheless, it has great value even for

someone well versed in buddhist doctrine. It contains advice for actual meditation practice, and describes discursive exercises that would be useful in the classroom. Clearly, the author knows that one cannot understand buddhist topics—especially such topics as the nature of mental mind—without sustained contemplation.

The book is especially good at explaining buddhist Dharma in modern terms, with special reference to scientific theories. The prose is clear, and the arguments well-reasoned in the traditional way. For example (pp. 45-46): suffering comes from inside the mind, not from the environment. Place a normal, healthy person in physical isolation. Although the environment may be comfortable, even pleasant, the subject will become bored, restless, frustrated, and eventually unhappy. Then the author discusses his experiences in meditation retreat. I especially appreciated the discussions of matter, energy, materialism, nature, and consciousness, and the critique of materialistic science as a good theory, but dogmatic in rejecting other possible explanations of reality.

Other problems, however, are not dealt with satisfactorily. For example (p. 78), what happens to the arhat after death? If he “simply vanishes”—never being reborn—then Buddhism may be interpreted as nihilistic. According to Tibetan Buddhism, the author says, the arhat is no longer compelled to be reborn again, but he may do so out of compassion. He may take rebirth in order to dispel the “final veils” that prevent the complete awakening of a Buddha. This line of argument is mere theology—and not very good theology, considering the subtlety of the issues involved.

The work would gain greater precision by the study of a detailed *Abhidharma* or “definitions” text. For example, the term that is translated “laziness” (p. 171) should be “idleness”, according to the explanation given.

Two chapters deal with *Theravāda*, rather than specifically Tibetan Buddhism, and some of the Sanskrit and Pali words are misspelled. The book contains a preface, notes, and a good index. The author has also supplied helpful subheadings. The quality of the physical publication is excellent.

Despite a slight lack of scholarly precision and maturity, this is a fine beginning-level book, with sufficient substance and an approach novel enough to interest the sophisticated reader.

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The Summary of the Great Vehicle (by *Bodhisattva Asaṅga*). Tr. John P. Keenan. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1992. pp. 147, n.p.

This volume is one of the first series of translations of the Chinese Buddhist canon in the on-going project established by the late Dr. Yehan Numata, a Japanese industrialist. He devoted himself and his resources to a variety of efforts to support the propagation of Buddhism in the West. The translation of the Buddhist canon, expected to take many decades, will contribute to the increasing depth of knowledge of Buddhism for lay people, as well as scholars.

The present volume (*Taishō* 31. No. 1593) by Asaṅga (ca. 310-390) is a significant addition to the study of Buddhism by making available in English a very important text of the Yogācāra school. This stream of teaching, together with the Mādhyamika teaching of Nāgārjuna, provided the foundation for the philosophical and epistemological development of the Mahāyāna tradition and its practices.

The Mādhyamika teaching works to overcome the human addiction and attachment to words and ideas through logical analysis. It uncovers the self-contradiction in all language, concepts, and assertions which purport to understand reality.

However, the Yogācāra approach investigates the nature and functioning of consciousness which underlies all expressions of teaching. It centers on the mind/consciousness by which we believe that we apprehend reality, and conduces to greater interiority or self-introspection through meditative practice and reflection. This approach enables the practitioner to realize that experience and the apprehended world are "mind only." That is, by analyzing the nature of perception, the author Asaṅga shows how the mind constructs reality and points to what is called the "container consciousness" (*ālayavijñāna*) at the base of all knowing. Through this process, the effects of past karma interact with the active consciousness in a dynamic stream of co-arising that gives rise to the world of our experience. This world, therefore, is the result of fundamental ignorance which causes beings to misunderstand the true nature of reality. As a result, the projections of the consciousness appear as an external world dichotomized as the subject over against the world or object. The effort is to show that all perceptions and ideas are essentially empty, because the perceived objects have no self-existence or essence independent of consciousness.

The text in ten chapters treats the general sphere of perception and ideas in chapters I to III. Chapters IV through IX take up the training and development of the Bodhisattva, leading to the attainment of wisdom. There is a detailed presentation of the six perfections or virtues (*pāramitā*) which culminate in the perfection of wisdom. This wisdom comprises a full understanding of "conscious construction" and

thereby, control over "reality" with the purpose of embracing all beings in compassion.

Chapter X deals with the concept of the Three Bodies of the Buddha, i.e. Dharma, Enjoyment, and Transformation. Each body has its distinctive character and function for understanding Buddhist teaching as a means to enlighten beings. Nevertheless, though the bodies are differentiated, they are not different. While these concepts share in conscious construction, they arise from the pure aspect through a process of conversion within the container consciousness. This conversion and purification within the consciousness becomes the basis for the realization of compassion and wisdom. However, the bodies are not to be taken as objective existences and are themselves empty as constructs.

In their various manifestations all the Buddhas aim to bring the roots of beings to maturity and to bring them from the illusory imagination of subject-object polarity to non-imaginative awareness which is non-dual and empty, i.e. the illusory imagination is seen for what it is. Yet, when the Bodhisattva understands the true nature of things, he is able to work in the world without being attached or defiled. Through understanding the various aspects of the Buddha Bodies, their characteristics, functions and relation to the Dharma Body, the practitioners, by their cultivation of meditation and recollection of the Buddha, aim at the realization of the Dharma Body and never abandon their goal.

The text is interesting for its effort to demonstrate the superiority of the Mahāyāna over the path of the word-hearers or Hīnayāna (lesser vehicle). Consequently, it has a polemical purpose. In addition, despite the abstruse analysis of consciousness and explanation of the training of the Bodhisattva, there is a constant and consistent emphasis on the altruistic aim of the teaching. The process of understanding and practice has the salvation of all beings in view. Asaṅga's contention is that the Mahāyāna teaching is superior to all other teachings in accomplishing this goal. He asserts that the Mahāyāna teaching is the word of the Buddha, because its teaching is more profound and inclusive than the Hīnayāna. Finally, the explication of conscious construction focuses on the process of thinking, thereby, looking inward and stressing experience and practice.

This translation is competent and clear. The introduction, glossary, and bibliography are helpful for those who may engage in deeper study. It is clearly a text designed by its author Asaṅga for study rather than general reading which the title in English may suggest. A careful reading of the text and reflection will permit the reader to catch the major thesis of the work and to appreciate its value as a summary of the Great Vehicle.

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