

Is There Room for "Grace" in Buddhism?

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To this question there are many today who without further reflection would give a negative reply; it is a commonplace of neo-Buddhist apologetics with an eye on the fashionable "humanism" of the Western world to stress both the exclusively self-directed achievement of the Buddha as "discoverer" of the way to Enlightenment and also, on the strength of the Buddha's example, the empirical character of the opportunity open to those who would follow *in* his footsteps: within its proper traditional context the first of these two statements is valid, whereas the second one rests on more doubtful grounds and certainly needs qualifying in several important respects. However, it can be admitted that a perspective which does not include the idea of a personal God may seem, at first sight, to leave little room for the idea of grace either: how could a merciful action from above, definable in terms of unsolicited gift offered to men independently of their own effort, be reconciled, so some will argue, with the inflexible determinism ascribed to the manifested Universe itself, as expressed in the doctrine of concordant action and reaction, *karma* and its fruits? Yet this idea of "grace," which translates a divine function, is by no means unintelligible in the light of traditional Buddhist teachings, being in fact implicit in every known form of spirituality, the Buddhist form included. The question, however, is how to situate the said idea in a manner that implies no contradiction, since it must freely be admitted that the Buddhist wisdom has not given to the idea of grace the same form as it has received in the personalist and theistic doctrines of Semitic provenance; nor is such a thing to be expected, inasmuch as the "economy" of the respective traditions rests on very different premises, thus affecting both the doctrines and the manner of their application in practice. Each kind of wisdom determines the nature of its corresponding method: Buddhism has always made of this a governing principle of spiritual life at any degree or level.

Evidently the nature of the Christic revelation was such as to require a strong affirmation of the element of grace from the very outset, which was not the case with Buddhism. Such differences in the line of approach to the saving Truth are in the nature of things and should cause no surprise given the diversifying of mankind in the course of its karmic development. The important thing, to recognise in this case is the fact that the word "grace" corresponds to a whole dimension of spiritual experience; it is unthinkable that this should be absent from one of the great religions of the world. In fact, anyone who has lived in a traditionally Buddhist country knows that this dimension finds its expression there too, vehicled by the appropriate forms. For us it is of interest to observe these forms and clarify for ourselves the teaching they carry explicitly or else latently; the present essay should be regarded as contributing to this clarification.

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The pursuit of Enlightenment, which is the purpose for which Buddhism exists, is paradoxical by its own showing inasmuch as this aim appears to require an encompassing of the

greater by the less, of the imperishable by the ephemeral, of absolute knowledge by a relative ignorance; it seems to make of Man the subject and of Enlightenment the object of the quest. Moreover, a similar paradox applies in the theistic forms of religion; people speak of seeking God and of contemplating His perfections even while knowing that, in terms of human measurement and however far along the road a man may have proceeded, God lies further still and that no unilaterally directed human perception or effort is adequate to the Divine Truth even across one of its aspects, to say nothing of its Essence. In Buddhist terms, no human powers however stretched can possibly match up to the Suchness of Enlightenment. Yet Buddhahood, to which we are invited by the teaching and tradition of the Buddha and still more by his example, is just this; nothing less is offered to us, since it is axiomatic to the Buddhist revelation as such that to reach this transcendent goal does, in principle, lie within the scope of every human being in virtue of that being's place on the axis of Buddhahood—for this is what to be human really means—and also, more indirectly, within the scope of every being whatsoever "down to the last blade of grass" as the saying goes, via the prior attainment of a human birth in this world or, if another world be in question, a birth of corresponding centrality.

For a start, it is worth pointing out that if, from the "non-personalist" standpoint of Buddhism, the supreme goal is presented as "a state" (hence the use of a word like "enlightenment"), from the standpoint of the Semitic religions that goal is most commonly clothed in the attributes of personality. Nevertheless, in the latter religions the word "God" will always comprise, be it more or less unconsciously, the idea of the unqualifiable *Godhead* and this is true even when the word is being quite loosely used. Despite the anti-metaphysical bias of much Western theological thinking it would be a mistake to conclude that the qualifying of God as "Person" constitutes a limit in principle. In Islam this particular danger of confusion is in practice far less than in Christianity. Outside the Semitic world, Hinduism reconciles the two points of view, personal and impersonal, with perfect ease.

Where Buddhism is concerned, despite its preference for impersonal expressions, one could yet ask oneself "Who's is the state of Enlightenment?", since the word itself, as used, does not altogether keep clear of anthropomorphic overtones, neither does one speak of a Buddha, once enlightened, as "It": all of which goes to prove that in this sphere, as in others, it is not the words used but the manner of using them in a given context which counts; both modes of expression, the personal as well as the impersonal, are possible and therefore legitimate since each may serve as an *upâya* or "provisional means" to evoke, rather than to define, a reality that is inexpressible in terms of our earthly experience. Provided it has this effect on those for whom it is intended, the means in question becomes acceptable. Given our common human condition as thinking and talking animals, there is no reason to fight shy of a more or less anthropomorphic terminology when discussing even the most sublime of subjects provided one does not forget the truth that, if speech is good, speech nevertheless arises from the rupture of a silence which is better still. "The Buddha's silence" regarding the nature of the Ultimate is, among his many and various *upâyas*, the most enlightening of all. When the Buddha spoke no word but merely held up a flower *Zen* took birth; there is a profound lesson in this story.

Fortified by this precaution, it is now possible to approach our chosen theme by quoting a famous passage from the Pâli Canon wherein lies concealed a key to the understanding of what "grace" means in a Buddhist setting; here is the passage in question: "There is, oh monks, an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded; if, oh monks, there were not here this unborn, unbecome, unmade, uncompounded, there would not here be an escape from the born,

the become, the made, the compounded. But because there is an unborn, an unbecome, an unmade, an uncompounded, therefore there is an escape from the born, the become, the made, the compounded." (*Udâna* VII 1-3).

The above quotation is plainly couched in the language of transcendence; any Christian or Muslim could have used these same words when referring to God and the world. This transcendence is propounded by the *sûtra* as providing real grounds for human hope. What it does not do, however, is to define the link between the two terms under comparison; we still need to be shown the bridge over which changefulness must pass to reach the eternal. This link or bridge in fact corresponds to that very function of divine Grace which is the object of our present investigation.

The key to the problem lies in a property of transcendence itself: given the incommensurable gap apparently fixed between Enlightenment and the seeker after enlightenment—ignorant by definition—it is self-evident to anyone who thinks at all, and still more so to anyone possessed of a metaphysical flair, that such a seeking on the part of a human being with his necessarily imperfect vision and limited powers does not really make sense when taken at its face value alone; Enlightenment (or God for that matter) cannot possibly be situated at the passive pole in relation to Man's endeavour, it cannot *per se* become object to Man as subject; if our human language sometimes makes things seem so, it is high time we became aware of its inadequacy. Buddhism for its part will add that here is patent evidence of the illusory character of the human claim to selfhood, to which all our conceptual aberrations are severally and collectively imputable.

To put the above argument somewhat differently: Man cannot possibly be the active agent in an operation wherein Enlightenment plays the passive part; whatever may or may not be suggested by appearances the truth has to be read the other way round since Enlightenment, awareness of the Divine Reality, belongs outside all becoming by definition, it is wholly "in act"; so that wherever one discerns contingency or potentiality, as in the case of our human seeking, this of necessity pertains to *samsâra*, to the changing, the impermanent, the compounded. It is this very character of potentiality, experientable positively as arising and negatively as subsiding, which makes *samsâra*, the Round of Existence, to be such as it is.

The consequences of the above observation are momentous: for if there is to be a wooing of Enlightenment by Man, it is nevertheless the former which, in principle and fact, must remain the real subject of the quest as well as its ostensible object. It has often been said that in Enlightenment the subject-object distinction is cancelled out—a truth to bear in mind even if, in our present state, this remains more of a puzzling thought than a verified reality. Metaphysical intuition, however, already allows one to know—or shall we say, to sense—that intrinsically Enlightenment is the active factor in our situation and that it is Man who, for all his apparent initiative and effort, represents the passive term of the supreme adequation. Meister Eckhart puts this whole question into proper perspective when he says that "in the course of nature it is really the higher which is ever more ready to pour out its power into the lower than the lower is ready to receive it."... for, as he goes on to say, "there is no dearth of God with us; what dearth there is wholly ours who make not ready to receive his grace." Where he said "God" you have but to say "Enlightenment" and the result will be a Buddhist statement in form as well as content.

The great paradox, for us, is that we still cannot help viewing this situation in reverse, a misplaced ego-centricity makes us do so; we all have to suffer the congenital illusion of

existence in which every creature as yet undelivered shares in greater or lesser degree. Buddhism invites us to get this thing straight in the first place, prior to showing us that the two viewpoints on Reality, the relative and absolute, *samsâra* and *nirvâna*, essentially coincide, as the Heart Sûtra explicitly teaches.

In China the Taoists have always spoken of the "Activity of Heaven"; for us to speak of the "Activity of Enlightenment" is in no wise far-fetched. This is in fact the function of grace, namely to condition men's home-coming to the Centre from start to finish. It is the very attraction of the Centre itself, revealed to us by various means, which provides the incentive to start on the Way and the energy to face and overcome its many and various obstacles. Likewise grace is the welcoming hand into the Centre when Man finds himself standing at long last on the brink of the great divide where all familiar human landmarks have disappeared: only he who came down from Heaven can ascend to Heaven, as the Gospel says, but about this mystery it is useless for ignorance to speculate, let alone speak. Till the great leap in the dark is taken, faith in the Buddha's Enlightenment must be our lamp, since all that stems from Light is light and even our darkness, did we but know it, is none other than the dazzlement inflicted by a radiance too intense for *samsâric* eyes to bear.

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The attractive influence of Enlightenment, experienced as providential and merciful emanation from the luminous Centre strikes on human consciousness in three ways that might be described respectively as:

- (i) Invitation into Enlightenment
- (ii) Companionship of Enlightenment
- (iii) Reminders of Enlightenment

The first-named corresponds to "conversion," the gift of faith. The second corresponds to man's being "in a state of grace," in virtue of which his apparent weakness is enabled to envisage tasks and surmount obstacles far beyond ordinary human strength. The third way coincides with the supplying of various "means of grace," that is to say *upâyas* consecrated by tradition—scriptural teachings, methods of meditation, initiatic rites and the like; moreover the whole inspiration of an art properly describable as "sacred" issues from this source. In short, whatever serves as a reminder of Enlightenment or helps to keep attention in that line of vision is a "means of grace" in the sense here intended. It is worth dwelling on the above three factors of attraction in somewhat greater detail.

Invitation into Enlightenment: This phrase has been coined by way of describing a man's first clear experiencing of an over-riding call to turn his religious life into a reality. Antecedent circumstances, such as a person's background formation or the degree of his or her intellectual maturity, need not be taken into account in the present instance, all one is concerned with being the nature of the event itself. Till "the thought of Enlightenment" has gained a place in one's consciousness, one can hardly claim to be "travelling" in a Buddhist sense. The awakening of faith remains a great mystery; its negative concomitant will always be a certain turning away from the world and it is only later (save by rare exception) that any question of integrating the world positively, in the sense of the essential identity of *samsâra* and *nirvâna* as expressed in the Heart Sûtra (this was mentioned before), can play an effective part in one's preoccupations. "Non-duality" is not for the beginner; presented as an abstract theory this idea can even be harmful for a mind insufficiently prepared because leading only too easily to pretensions of an

ego-inflating kind, hence the danger of much that passes for *Zen* or *Vedânta* today. The reticence of some religious exoterisms on the subject, which it is the fashion to blame, is by no means unjustified in the light of the results.

An important thing to notice here is that the sense of spiritual urgency, whether coming to a person suddenly or else by hardly perceptible steps, is experienced as a call to activity whereof the person himself is in the first place the passive recipient, having done nothing particular to bring it about; this is typical and normal and admirably fits in with the description of a grace as being "free gift." All at once a peremptory urge takes root in that man's soul telling him that Enlightenment is the only thing of worth in its own right and that all other things, be they great or small, can only be properly valued in proportion as they contribute to that end or else impede its attainment. Once this has happened the essentials of spiritual life are there, namely discernment between the Real and the Illusory and the will to concentrate upon the Real: this latter definition comes from Frithjof Schuon. However elementary may be one's present awareness of this twofold call, whereof Wisdom and Method are the respective expressions, it can be said with certainty that a foretaste of Enlightenment has been received; it is as if a ray spontaneously emitted from the Centre has come to effect a first incision in the shell of human ignorance because the Buddha-nature in a man wishes to be delivered. More than this cannot be said about something that baffles all the calculations of the ordinary mind.

Companionship of Enlightenment: If invitation into the Way is something of a unique event in a human life, the graces to be experienced in the course of following that way are multiple in the sense that they repeat that first call at various stages of spiritual development in the form of an urge to proceed further, to deepen this experience or that, to eliminate such and such causes of distraction or to concentrate on this or that aspect of awareness. This process can be illustrated by comparing it to the climbing of some mountain ridge leading to a summit. At the start of the ascent the thought of the summit alone possesses one's mind, but when once one is actually on the ridge each successive pinnacle or gash needing to be circumvented will engage all one's attention to the point of temporarily eclipsing remembrance of the summit itself. The nearer obstacles do in fact continue to reveal the existence of the summit by implication, but also in a sense they veil it: in other words, each obstacle in turn serves to *symbolise* the summit and thus becomes a factor of awareness in a relative sense; thus do the things encountered in samsâric existence prove the latent presence of Enlightenment even while appearing to hide it. A "symbol" is a key to knowledge; an "idol" is a symbol taken for a reality in its own right: this is a fundamental distinction to bear in mind because symbolism, properly understood and applied, is the very stuff of the spiritual alchemy whereby the samsâric lead may be transmitted into the Buddhic gold it is in principle. In all this process, be the Way long or short, the companionship of Enlightenment is operating like a ferment, an ever-present grace filling the gap, as it were, between our human incapacity and the apparently super-human task to which we are committed thanks to a human birth.

Seeing that the Way with its stages has just been mentioned in correlation with the effusion of grace, this will provide an opportunity to discuss one question that has often been a cause of confusion, namely how we are to situate our own present life in the general scheme of transmigration as set forth by Buddhism; for this purpose a brief digression will not come amiss.

The question might be put this way: when considering the path to Enlightenment are we to take into account, as some might ask, the extended possibilities implied in successive births (sometimes reckoned by the million) or should we confine our attention to present existence

while ignoring the rest except in the sense of a more or less schematic representation of *samsâra*, the world's flow, as conditioned by the continual interplay of action and reaction, *karma* and its fruits? This is indeed a pertinent question to put, since it touches something quite fundamental in Buddhism, namely the truth that to know *samsâra's* true nature is to know *nirvâna*, nothing less. The converse also holds good: for if one may be allowed to paraphrase a sentence of St. Thomas Aquinas, "a false opinion concerning the world will fatally engender a false opinion concerning Enlightenment (St. Thomas says 'concerning God')"; the two awarenesses hang together, Reality being one.

Coming as a fresh and unfamiliar idea, transmigration often makes a strong appeal to a Western mind just because it seems to provide for "a second chance," that is to say for the possibility of taking the way to Enlightenment by easy stages instead of having to stake one's all on a single throw, as the Semitic eschatologies would appear to suggest. For one who takes this complacent view of his human opportunities, it is only too easy to read into the doctrine of samsâric rebirth something closely akin to the current belief in a one-directional "progress"; whether this belief be clothed in the more scientific-sounding phraseology of "evolution" on Teilhardian lines or otherwise makes no matter.

Now such a view does not square with Buddhism inasmuch as it misses the chief point about transmigration, namely its essential *indefinitude*—*this* can never be said too often—as also, incidentally, the high degree of improbability attaching to any kind of human rebirth when weighed up in terms of karmic consequence. It is not very logical (to say the least of it) to spend most of one's earthly life in the pursuit, not of Enlightenment, but of all that is unnecessary and trivial and then to expect this life to repeat itself in human form; yet this is precisely the case of a majority of people and not less true of those whom the world regards as highly civilised and admires for their manipulative dexterity or their insatiable erudition: what right have these people to expect privileged treatment when the time comes for them to be weighed on the karmic scales? Have they ever given a thought to that saying about "human birth hard to obtain" which runs through Buddhism like a refrain? If one wishes to be honest with oneself one has to admit that in most cases rebirth as a worm would be a merciful requital; certainly one is being less than prudent if one assumes that the hells of Buddhism are only there to accommodate murderers and gangsters: how many of us would ever have the nerve to commit murder? To what kind of rebirth, then, is it likely that a frittered consciousness will lead, or a persistent lukewarmness in respect of truth?

The Semitic eschatologies, which offer man the single alternative "salvation or perdition," can at least claim an empirical realism for this narrowing of choice on the grounds that such an attitude makes for a sense of urgency in life and is therefore, spiritually speaking, an *upâya* adjusted to its purpose. For the Buddhist, what in fact replaces the Christian's fear of God's wrath is the fear of interminable wandering through *samsâra*, now up now down, but never free from suffering: any attempt to read into the samsâric process an idea of something like a uniform cosmic movement endowed with an optimistic trend is as un-Buddhist as it is improbable in itself.

In point of fact whenever Enlightenment is attained this is always from the vantage-point of a particular human life, or an equivalent state if another world-system be in question; the individual called Prince Siddhartha who became Sakya Muni Buddha perfectly illustrates the above statement. One must not slip into thinking of Enlightenment as if it were the last and sweetest of a long drawn out harvest of samsâric fruits. Good *karma*, any life well spent,

contributes to one's enlightenment, firstly because virtue is dispositive to knowledge while vice does the reverse, and secondly because within the scale of samsâric possibilities good *karma* promotes the emergence of fresh creations¹ in relatively favourable surroundings as, for instance, in countries where Enlightenment is not forgotten, which is no small advantage in this world. To this extent a life well and intelligently spent is not irrelevant to one's attainment of the goal even if one stops short somewhere on the path. To admit this is, however, very different from turning this possibility of good *karma* into an excuse for postponing one's best efforts till a future life assumed to be better than the present one. This very attitude almost makes it certain that it will be worse. In any case, so long as one remains a samsâric being any kind of relapse is possible; it is salutary to bear this in mind while putting all one's effort into immediate opportunities consonantly with present grace. Above all it should be remembered that Enlightenment, if and when it comes, spells a reversal of all samsâric values or, in a still deeper sense, their integration. If it be currently said of a Buddha that "he knows all his anterior births" this is because he is identified with the heart of causality, the mysterious hub of the wheel of becoming where no motion ever was or could be. Beings still in *samsâra* do not enjoy this possibility, so that it would seem in every way more practical for them to make the best of a human opportunity while they *have* it, instead of banking on a future that could be anything from a paradise of *devas* to an infernal sojourn amid fire or ice.

A most important thing to remember in all this is that the attainer of Enlightenment is not "this man so-and-so" but rather that it is by the ending of the dream of one's own "so-and-soness" that Enlightenment arises. As far as knowledge of *samsâra* is concerned, what is needed is for each thing to be put in its own place, neither plus nor minus, including one's own person. When all things have become transparent to the point of allowing the Uncreated Light to shine right through them there is nothing further to become. Becoming is the continual process of resolving internal contradictions, fruits of the dualistic tree, by means of partial compensations leading to fresh contradictions and so on indefinitely. To understand this process with full clarity is to escape its domination. The Buddha has shown the way.

With this question behind us, let us take up the last of our three headings, *Reminders of Enlightenment*, but this need not long detain us; it is enough to have listed a certain number of type examples of "means of grace" as supplied by the tradition under various forms and in view of various uses. All traditional civilizations abound in such reminders; once one is aware that such exist it is easy to observe the workings of grace through the medium of these forms. Nevertheless, there remains one example that deserves quite special attention as a supreme reminder and means of grace: this is the sacramental image of the Blessed One found in every corner of the Buddhist world. We will take up this subject in due course.

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The next channelling of grace to be offered to the reader's attention is one that takes us into a spiritual dimension close to the heart of things: this is the function of *guru* or Spiritual Master, of him who initiates a man into the path that leads, via the higher states of consciousness, to the threshold of Enlightenment itself—so near and yet so far, since the final passage remains pure mystery whereof grace only holds the key. In a very special sense the Spiritual Master is the representative of "the spirit that bloweth where it listeth"; his qualification for such an office devolves on him outside any determinable test if he be not yet discovered, his very seeking confers light; when found, his favour may yet be granted or withheld without any reasons given; his displeasure is the bitterest medicine for any man to swallow. In his Master's presence the

disciple is expected to behave as if the Buddha himself stood before him; in the Christian initiation centred on the "Jesus Prayer" the same advice is given, with substitution of the person of Christ.

In relation to the *Sangha* the *guru* stands for its essence; this is true even if the Master be not himself a *bhikku*, though obviously he often is that too. The famous *guru* of Mila Repa, Marpa, was a consecrated layman with a family, than whom no greater Master has existed anywhere; just as, in the matter of discipleship Mila Repa is unsurpassed, to say the least of it. His own poems, the most beautiful in the Tibetan language, ring of the *guru's* grace at every turn, even though as far as personal effort is concerned Mila Repa's persistence in the face of Marpa's calculated (but ever so compassionate) snubbing is something so unheard of as to make one think that a man must be born a Tibetan to stay such a course.

However, the human *guru is* not the whole story; there is another *guru* to be considered, interior this time and whose visible counter-part the outward *guru is*. "Intellect" is his name, Plato's *daemon*, though later usage has debased a word which by rights should be confined to the intuitive intelligence in-dwelling at the heart of every being and especially of man, the immanent grace about which Christ said "the Kingdom of Heaven is within you." When the outer *guru* has done his work, he hands over to the inner *guru* leaving him to do the rest.

Intellect can save us because it is that, in us, which needs no saving seeing that Enlightenment is in its very substance. Stemming from light, itself is light, leading back to light, The great puzzle is our egotism, our false sense of selfhood and consequent reluctance to let go what never makes us really happy. Our recurring dissatisfactions are also *guru*, all we have to do is to trace these dissatisfactions to their primary cause. This is the positive message of suffering, a message that also harbours a hope, one that surely cannot for ever remain unheeded. The Buddha's "First Truth" really teaches nothing different.

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Let us now take a brief flight out of this suffering world in order to visit the homeland of grace and the source of its bountiful stream. Mahâyâna Buddhism speaks of three *kayas* or bodies of Buddhahood or, if one so prefers, three mansions of Enlightenment considered respectively as Essence or Suchness, Fruition or Bliss and lastly as Avatâric Projection into the world; the corresponding Sanskrit names are *Dharma-kaya*, *Sambhoga-kaya* and *Nirmâna-kaya* and it is especially of this third body that something must now be said, as relating directly to the question of grace and its manifestation among beings.

A quotation from a short but highly concentrated Tibetan *sûtra* composed in verse, *The Good Wish of great Power*, will provide us with the essential data, here is the passage: "Uninterruptedly my *Avatâras* (Incarnations) will appear in inconceivable millions and will show forth various means for the conversion of every kind of being. Through the prayer of my compassion may all sentient beings of the three spheres be delivered from the six samsâric abodes."

Traditionally, the "revealer" of this *sûtra is* given as the Buddha *Samanta Bhadra*, the "All Good"; significantly his name is preceded by the prefix *Adi—or* primordial, thus stressing the principal nature of the attribution. Concerning the primordial Reality whereof this Buddha is spokesman it is also said that neither the name of *nirvâna* nor of *samsâra* applies to it, for it is pure "non-duality" (*advaita*) beyond all possible distinction or expression. To realize this truth

fully is to be Buddha, awake; not to realize it is to wander in samsâric existence: the *sûtra* says this expressly. The Vedântine *Selfhood* is but another way of conveying this truth.

In their ceaseless warfare waged against men's proneness to super-impose their own concepts on the Divinity as such, the Buddhist *sûtras* have introduced the word "Void" to suggest the total absence of positive or negative definability; hence also the Buddha's title of *Shunya-murti*, "Form of the Void"—a contradiction in terms which again serves to underline a truth that eludes all attempts at positive enunciation.

As soon as one passes over to attribution, by saying of Divinity that "it is" or "is not" this or that or else by giving names such as "all good" etc. one is perforce in the realm of Being; the merciful epithet mentioned above is, among names, one of the first to impose itself. The visible sign of this merciful presence is to be seen in the stream of avatâric revelation (hence the use of the word "millions" in the *sûtra*), the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who appear in the various world-systems and, through their own Enlightenment, show the way of deliverance to creatures. Our *sutra* concludes with the following words: "May beings of the three spheres one and all by the prayer of my contemplation... finally attain Buddhahood." This grants the very Charter of Grace and of its operation in the world, it hardly calls for further comment.

All that can usefully be added is perhaps to point out that if, in Christianity for example, the aspect of "Divine Personality" may sometimes seem to have obscured the Suchness of the Godhead Itself, in the case of Buddhism, though this danger has been sedulously avoided, a certain personal expression of the Divine is nevertheless to be found there in "distributive" form, namely as the heavenly *Sangha* of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, with the former standing for its static and the latter for its dynamic aspect, as mercy when projected into *samsâra* itself. In the final section of this essay, when the Pure Land doctrine is discussed, this question will be taken up again.

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After this excursion to the heights we must come down to earth again and examine one concrete means of grace, mentioned before, which perhaps more than all others has helped to keep remembrance of Enlightenment alive among men: this is the image of the Buddha making the "earth-touching" (*bhumi-sparsha*) gesture. No corner of the Buddhist world but knows and loves this image; both Theravada and Mahâyana have produced marvellous examples of it. If there be a symbolical representation to which the word "miraculous" properly applies, this surely is the one.

The story of how a Buddha-image came to exist at all is instructive, since Buddhism at the beginning did not incline to anthropomorphic imagery, preferring more elementary symbols. It is said that several abortive attempts were made to put the Buddha's likeness on record from motives of a personal kind such as the wish to remember a loved and revered figure and so on; a certain confusing of appearance and reality is always involved in such cases, hence the prohibition of the "graven image" by Judaism and Islam, for instance. However, in this case the compassion of the Victorious One intervened; he was prepared to allow an image of himself provided this was a true symbol and not a mere reproduction of surfaces—this distinction is very important. Yielding to his devotees' prayers the Buddha projected his own form miraculously and it was this projection which provided the model for a true ikon, fit to serve a purpose other than that of personal adulation such as a sacred theme by definition precludes.

I should like to quote here from a book recently published in England in which a whole chapter is devoted to the traditional *Buddha-rupa*; its commentary on the subject is uncommonly illuminating. This book is published by *Perennial Books*, London, under the title of *Sacred Art in East and West*, the author being Titus Burckhardt; here is the quotation, which has been somewhat shortened. After mentioning the above story about the frustration of the artists and the miraculous projection the author continues:

"... the sacred ikon is a manifestation of the grace of the Buddha, it emanates from his supra-human power... If one considers the matter fully one can see that the two aspects of Buddhism, the doctrine of *karma* and its quality of grace, are inseparable, for to demonstrate the real nature of the world is to transcend it; it is to manifest the changeless states—here the reader may recall the Pâli quotation in the early part of this essay—and it is a breach made in the closed system of becoming. This breach is the Buddha himself; thence-forth all that comes from him carries the influx of *Bodhi*." The enlightening function of the sacred image could not have been better put.

Before going into the various details of the image itself it were well to refresh our memory about the episode in the Buddha's life which this particular posture is meant to perpetuate. Everyone will remember that shortly before his Enlightenment the Buddha-to-be proceeded into the great primeval forest near the place in Bihar now called Bodh-gaya and there found a spreading *Pipal* tree (*ficus religiosa*) at the foot of which a seat stood ready prepared for one destined to become the Light of the World; the tree itself obviously stands for the World's axis, the Tree of Life as Genesis calls it. Just as he was about to take his seat there Mâra the tempter appeared before him, challenging his right to the adamant throne: "I am prince of this world" Mâra said "so the throne belongs to me." Then the Bodhisattva stretched forth his right hand and touched the Earth, mother of all creatures, calling on her to witness that the throne was his by right and Earth testified that this was so.

In the classical form of this image the Buddha is always shown sitting upon a lotus: choice of this water-plant is in itself significant inasmuch as in the traditional lore "the waters" always symbolise existence with its teeming possibilities, that *samsâra* which the Buddha was to show the way to overcoming, not by mere denial but by showing forth its true nature. As for the figure itself, its right hand points downward to touch the earth as in the story while its left hand is turned upward to support the begging-bowl, sign of a *bhikku's* estate. Just as the *bhikku* in his bowl catches whatever the passer-by may choose to cast into it be it much or little, not asking for more but letting it serve his own sustenance for the day, so also man has to accept the heavenly grace as the free gift it is. In the two gestures displayed by the Buddha-image the whole programme of man's spiritual exigencies is summed up.

Towards the earth, that is to say towards the world to which he belongs by his existence, man's gesture is *active*; *such* an active attitude is always needed where the world and its manifold temptations and distractions are concerned. Towards Heaven and its gifts, on the other hand, the spiritual man is *passive*; he is content to receive the dew of grace as and when it falls and to refresh his more or less flagging powers with its aid. As for the ignorant man, he does just the reverse, showing himself soft and accommodating towards the world while making all kinds of conditions of his own choosing where the things of Heaven are concerned, if indeed he deigns to give them any thought at all. For the truly mindful man, even his own *karma* can be both grace and *guru*, not merely in the sense of reward or sanction imposed by a cosmic law, but because *karma* is a potent and inescapable reminder of Enlightenment as the crying need of man and as the only unequivocally reasonable object of his desires. Accepted in this sense *karma*, be it good

or evil, can be welcomed as Sâvitri once welcomed Death when he came to claim her husband and by her resignation overcame him. Contemplated rightly, the Buddha's sacramental image tells us all these things: for us, it is the means of grace *par excellence*.

* * *

Sufficient has by now been said (or so one hopes) by way of answering our original question as to whether Buddhism leaves any room for grace. One last illustration, however, will serve to clinch the argument by showing that the idea of grace can play a predominant part in a doctrine that nonetheless remains Buddhist in both form and flavour: this is the Pure Land doctrine (*Jôdô* in Japanese) centred round the vow of the Buddha *Amitâbha* and using, for its single operative means, the invocation of his name. The name itself means "Infinite Light" and the Buddha thus denoted is the one who presides over the Western quarter where his own "Buddha-land" is symbolically situated. It must be mentioned, in passing, that Europeans who feel drawn to Buddhism have hitherto been inclined to avoid the Pure Land form of it just because of its insistence on grace, described there as *tariki* (=other power), which reminded them too much of the Christianity they believed themselves to have left behind: Western seekers have on the whole felt more drawn to *jiriki* (=own power) methods, those where personal initiative and heroic effort are greatly stressed—hence their preference for Zen (or what they take for such) or else Theravada interpreted in an ultra-puritanical, not to say humanistic sense; not for anything would these people be mistaken for miserable, God-dependent Christians! I hope, however to show that the two lines of approach, *jiriki* and *tariki*, are by no means as incompatible as some affect to believe and that, despite contrasts of emphasis, the two belong together and are in fact indispensable to one another.

Taking Zen first, one thing that many of its foreign admirers are apt to lose sight of is the fact that, in its own country, those who feel called into that way will already, since childhood, have been moulded by the strict discipline of Japanese tradition in which respect for authority, an elaborate civility and the acceptance of many formal restraints all play their allotted part and where all the basic assumptions of Buddhism can also be taken for granted; nor must one forget the Shintô element in the tradition, with its cult of Nature on the one hand and its inculcation of the chivalrous virtues on the other: the Japanese soul would not be what it is without both these influences to fashion it. Thus prepared, a man can face both the severity of a Zen training and also that element of the outrageous in Zen which so fascinates minds anxious to react against the conventional values of their own previous background, with its ready-made morality and its conceptual triteness. All these things have to be seen in proportion if they are to be rightly understood.

For those who think that Zen is pure "self-power" without any "other-power" admixture it is well to point out that at least one of the manifestations of grace listed in this essay plays a most important part there: this is the *guru* or *roshi* who, since he is not the disciple, must needs represent "other power" in relation to the latter, say what one will. That Zen, despite its constant exhortation to personal effort, does not exclude the *tariki* element was proved to me (if it needed proof) by a Japanese Zen lecturer who came to England some years ago. At the end of his talk I went up to the platform and asked him "Is it correct to say that, as between "own power" and "other power," each always will imply the other? If one is affirmed can one then assume the other as latent, and vice versa?" "But of course," the speaker answered, "they are two sides of the same coin, this is self-evident; and moreover is not Zen a non-dualistic doctrine?"

A story that has provided many Japanese painters with a subject will further serve to illustrate this same point. This is the story of Zen's redoubtable Patriarch, Bodhidharma, and of his crossing the ocean borne on a reed or sprig of bamboo: for "ocean," *samsâra* is to be understood, this being the traditional symbolism of the waters all the world over.

It is said that on one occasion Bodhidharma came to the sea-shore wishing to cross to the other side; finding no boat he suddenly espied a piece of reed and promptly seized and launched it on the water; then stepping boldly on its fragile stalk he let himself be carried to the farther shore. Now Bodhidharma was a Sage; he knew that "own power" and "other power," dedicated freewill and grace, are in essence the same and his own use of the reed for a vehicle rests on that very awareness. For us onlookers, however, the point to note is that Bodhidharma *found* that reed on the sea-shore, he neither created it nor brought it with him. Who was it, then, that placed that reed there ready to be discovered? The "Other Power," it could be no other. The reed came to the Zen Patriarch as a grace, to which in the first place he could but be passive; then having received it, he responded actively by an appropriate initiative and crossed the waters of *samsâra* to the other shore. Hereby the moral of the Buddha-image is pointed once again, if in different form.

By contrast with Zen, the Pure Land doctrine offers itself as a typical way of grace; hence the suggestion put forward by some that *Jôdô*, in its early Chinese days, was influenced by Christian teachings brought to China by members of the Nestorian sect from Syria—a gratuitous hypothesis if ever there was one, since *Jôdô* in all essentials remains a typically Buddhist form of wisdom. The following brief outline of the Pure Land teaching will make its theoretical position sufficiently clear for present purposes.

A certain Bodhisattva of the name of *Dharmakâra* was about to enter the state of Enlightenment when, moved by compassion, he said to himself: "How can I bear to enter *nirvâna* when all the multitude of beings have to stay behind, a prey to indefinite transmigration and suffering? Rather than leave them in that state I vow that if I am not able to deliver them down to the last blade of grass, then let me never reach Enlightenment!" But in fact (so the argument runs) he did reach Enlightenment and now reigns, as the Buddha Amitâbha, over the Western quarter; therefore his vow cannot have failed in its object; suffering beings can and must be delivered, if only they will have faith in Amitâbha's vow and call upon his Name. This they do through the *Nembutsu*, the formula "Hail to Amitâbha Buddha" (in Japanese *Namu Amida Butsu*). Invocation of this formula in selfless reliance on the vow is, for the Pure Land devotee, his constant means of grace, the sign of his unconditional surrender to the "other power." To think of effort or merit or knowledge as "one's own" inevitably implies clinging to a fancied selfhood, disguise this as one will; it violates the first and last condition of deliverance. Who can speak of self-power when he lacks the first idea of what self means?

From here, the Pure Land dialectic goes on to say that in the early days of Buddhism men doubtless were stronger, more self-reliant, they could take severe disciplines and follow ways of meditation of the *jiriki* type. But now thanks to our bad *karma* we are living in the latter days, dark and sin-ridden, when men have grown weak, confused and above all, hopelessly passive. Well then, says the Pure Land teacher, let this very weakness of theirs be turned to good account; let it offer itself humbly to Amitâbha's grace, yielding before the power of his vow. If by the force of his vow the righteous can be delivered, how much more will this be true of sinners whose need is so much greater! Compare with this the words of Christ "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"; in their implications the two statements are not all that different.

It is of interest to note that in Tibet a method of invocation exists that is in many ways reminiscent of the *Nembutsu*; it uses a six-syllable formula of which the mystical associations are too complex to be discussed in a few words; it is enough to know that it is called the *Mani mantra* and that its revealer is the Bodhisattva *Avalokitêsvara* (*Chenrezig* in Tibet) who in the heavenly *Sangho* personifies Compassion. For present purposes the significant point to notice is that *Chenrezig* himself is an emanation of the Western Buddha *Amitâbha*, having taken birth from his head, a mythological feature showing the evident kinship of *Mani* and *Nembutsu*. A difference worth noting, moreover, is that whereas *Amitâbha's* mercy, being that of a Buddha, has a "static" quality, the Compassion of *Chenrezig* is "dynamic" as befits a Bodhisattva who, by definition, operates *in the world* as helper of suffering creatures. Every Bodhisattva as such is in fact a living embodiment of the function of grace.

Before concluding this essay I cannot forebear from pointing out a case of what may be called "spiritual coincidence," as between two widely separated traditions, the Buddhist and the Islamic; this coincidence is attributable neither to borrowing nor to any cause of a haphazard kind, but stems from the very nature of things.

In the Koran its opening line is *Bismi 'Lâhi'r-Rahmâni'r-Rahîm* which has usually been translated as "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful": in Arabic a common root renders the connection between these two names still closer. Now some well-instructed Muslim friends have explained to me that the difference between the above names consists herein, namely that *Ar-Rahmân* refers to God's mercy as an intrinsic quality of the Divine Being whereas *Ar-Rahîm* refers to that quality as projected into the Creation—it expresses the dynamic aspect of mercy, mercy poured forth and reaching creatures in the form of grace; from which it would appear that a more apt translation would have been "In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate," since compassion always has a dynamic quality—it must find an object for its exercise. It is easy to see that these two names respectively correspond, in all essentials, to *Amitâbha* and *Chenrezig*: a shining confirmation from an unexpected quarter!

But let not this surprise us unduly; for in the Pure Land of Enlightenment is it not true to say that all ways will most certainly meet?

¹ The words *karma* and creation come, by the way, from a common root.