

*This is a survey of the religion of Buddhism as it developed in India millennia ago, before its success elsewhere in Asia. At important junctures, the author pauses to reflect from a Jungian perspective, to find meaning for us today.*

**The Self and the Lotus:  
A Jungian View of Indian Buddhism, Volume I**  
By George R. Elder

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GEORGE R. ELDER



THE  
SELF  
AND THE  
LOTUS

A JUNGIAN VIEW OF INDIAN BUDDHISM

VOLUME I

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# CONTENTS

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| FIGURES AND CREDITS..... | vii |
| PRONUNCIATION GUIDE..... | xi  |

## PART 1: BASICS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....             | 3  |
| The Title .....                           | 4  |
| The Snake and the Rope.....               | 8  |
| Some Buddhist Terms .....                 | 11 |
| About this Book .....                     | 13 |
| A Technical Note .....                    | 21 |
| Acknowledgments.....                      | 22 |
| CHAPTER 2. PSYCHOLOGY OF C. G. JUNG ..... | 24 |
| A Model of the Mind.....                  | 24 |
| Ego Consciousness.....                    | 28 |
| The Unconscious.....                      | 29 |
| Personal unconscious (“shadow”).....      | 30 |
| Collective unconscious.....               | 31 |
| Jung’s View of Buddhism .....             | 36 |
| Jung’s Essays on Buddhism .....           | 39 |

## PART 2: CONTEXT

|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER 3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT.....   | 49 |
| Indus Valley Culture.....            | 49 |
| Indo-Aryans.....                     | 50 |
| Conflict of Cultural Opposites ..... | 51 |
| Orthodox Protest .....               | 56 |
| Upaniṣads.....                       | 57 |
| Unorthodox Protest .....             | 60 |
| Ājīvakas .....                       | 60 |
| Jains .....                          | 62 |
| Cārvākas .....                       | 64 |
| Buddhists .....                      | 67 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| CHAPTER 4. COSMOLOGICAL CONTEXT .....        | 71  |
| Structure of the Cosmos .....                | 74  |
| Realm of Desire .....                        | 76  |
| Realm of Form and Realm of the Formless..... | 80  |
| Inhabitants of the Cosmos .....              | 82  |
| The Six Destinies.....                       | 82  |
| Dynamics of the Cosmos.....                  | 97  |
| Karma and Transmigration .....               | 97  |
| Cosmic Cycles .....                          | 103 |

### **PART 3: THE LIFE**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| CHAPTER 5. THE LIFE OF GAUTAMA BUDDHA .....            | 111 |
| The Historical Biography of Siddhārtha Gautama.....    | 112 |
| The Mythological “Life” of Buddha .....                | 114 |
| The Story of Sumedha .....                             | 116 |
| “Jātaka” Tales .....                                   | 119 |
| The Twelve Acts of a Buddha .....                      | 125 |
| Act 1) Descent from Tuṣita .....                       | 125 |
| Act 2) Entrance into the Womb.....                     | 129 |
| Māyā’s Dream.....                                      | 130 |
| Act 3) Rebirth.....                                    | 136 |
| The Thirty-two Marks .....                             | 140 |
| CHAPTER 6. THE LIFE OF GAUTAMA BUDDHA (CONTINUED)..... | 147 |
| Act 4) Skill in Worldly Arts .....                     | 147 |
| Act 5) Enjoyment of the Harem Women.....               | 148 |
| Act 6) Departure from Home .....                       | 151 |
| The Four Sights .....                                  | 151 |
| Kisā Gautamī .....                                     | 154 |
| Māra.....  | 157 |
| Act 7) Arduous Discipline.....                         | 159 |
| Extreme States of Trance .....                         | 161 |
| Extreme Acts of Mortification.....                     | 162 |
| Act 8) Passage to the Terrace of Enlightenment .....   | 164 |
| Enlightenment Food .....                               | 165 |
| Premonitory Dreams.....                                | 166 |
| The Tree of Enlightenment.....                         | 169 |
| Act 9) Defeat of the Māra-host .....                   | 172 |
| “Earth” Witness .....                                  | 175 |
| Act 10) Complete Enlightenment.....                    | 179 |

|                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| Act 11) The Wheel of the Law .....  | 182 |
| Act 12) Departure into Nirvāṇa..... | 183 |

## PART 4: EARLY BUDDHISM

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| CHAPTER 7. EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHING ..... | 187 |
| The Teaching Crisis.....                 | 188 |
| The First Sermon.....                    | 193 |
| The Middle Way .....                     | 193 |
| The Four Noble Truths .....              | 196 |
| The Second Sermon .....                  | 205 |
| Nonself.....                             | 206 |
| “Two Truths” .....                       | 210 |
| Skillful Means.....                      | 212 |
| Three Characteristics .....              | 214 |
| CHAPTER 8. TEACHING (CONTINUED).....     | 220 |
| The Third Sermon .....                   | 220 |
| Nirvāṇa .....                            | 223 |
| Dependent Origination .....              | 230 |
| Abhidharma.....                          | 236 |
| Dharmas.....                             | 237 |
| Momentariness.....                       | 239 |
| Continuity .....                         | 239 |
| CHAPTER 9. PATH .....                    | 246 |
| Noble Eightfold Path.....                | 247 |
| Faith.....                               | 250 |
| Training in Morality .....               | 253 |
| Five Precepts.....                       | 253 |
| The Monastic Code.....                   | 254 |
| The Four Defeats .....                   | 256 |
| The Nuns Order .....                     | 257 |
| Training in Meditation .....             | 259 |
| Training in Wisdom.....                  | 267 |
| The “Mindfulness” Movement .....         | 268 |
| CHAPTER 10. THE CULT AND ITS ART .....   | 277 |
| Departure into Nirvāṇa.....              | 277 |
| Regular Assemblies .....                 | 278 |
| Rains Retreats and Monasticism.....      | 278 |
| Councils.....                            | 281 |

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| The Last Days.....            | 282 |
| Stricter Rules .....          | 283 |
| The Last Meal.....            | 285 |
| Death of the Buddha.....      | 287 |
| The Funeral .....             | 292 |
| Historical Developments ..... | 295 |
| The Stūpa.....                | 299 |
| The “Buddha” Image.....       | 307 |
| Consecration of Images .....  | 318 |



## FIGURES AND CREDITS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure 1.1. Lotus (American water lily) .....   | 6   |
| Photograph by author.   |     |
| Figure 1.2 Buddha Seated on a Double Lotus .....  | 7   |
| “Burma-Seated Buddha-2011.149-Cleveland Museum of Art (cropped).” Creative Commons, CC0 1.0 Universal, Public Domain Dedication. Wikimedia Commons.   |     |
| Figure 2.1 Mind as a Mountain.....  | 26  |
| Drawing by Emily Kenyon.  |     |
| Figure 3.1 Map of Ancient Indian States .....   | 53  |
| “Mahājanapadas (c. 500 BCE).” Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.   |     |
| Figure 4.1 Diagram of the Buddhist “World” .....  | 75  |
| Drawing by Emily Kenyon.  |     |
| Figure 4.2 Buddhist View of the “Earth” .....   | 76  |
| “Cosmological Mandala with Mount Meru.” Metropolitan Museum of Art. In the Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons.  |     |
| Figure 4.3 Wheel of Life.....   | 83  |
| Painting by Andy Weber in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Courtesy of Andy Weber Studios, <a href="https://andywebertudios.com/product/wheel-of-life/">https://andywebertudios.com/product/wheel-of-life/</a>   |     |
| Figure 4.4 Buddha Protected by a Nāga .....   | 87  |
| “Buddha paré protégé par le nāga,” 12 <sup>th</sup> century, Angkor Wat style. Musée Guimet, Paris. Photograph by author.   |     |
| Figure 5.1 Cakravartin with his “Wheel” .....   | 126 |
| “Le Souverain universel (cakravartin),” 1 <sup>st</sup> century BCE to 1 <sup>st</sup> century CE, from the region of Amarāvātī. Musée Guimet, Paris. Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons. |     |



|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Figure 5.2 Dream of Queen Māyā .....  | 132 |
| “Dream of Maya. Bharhut, c. 100 BC. Indian Museum, Calcutta ei05-21.” Photograph by G41m8. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.                                 |     |
| Figure 5.3 Birth of Siddhārtha Gautama.....   | 137 |
| “La reine Māyā Devī donnant naissance au prince Siddhārtha, le future <i>buddha</i> Śākyamuni,” Nepal, gilded brass and copper, inlaid. Musée Guimet, Paris. Photograph by author.  |     |
| Figure 5.4 Yakṣiṇī .....  | 138 |
| “Elephants and Yaksini.” Photograph by Anandajoti. Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.   |     |
| Figure 5.5 Footprints of the Buddha .....   | 142 |
| “Footprints of the Buddha (2 <sup>nd</sup> century, Yale University Art Gallery).” Photograph by Smuconlaw. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.                     |     |
| Figure 5.6 Golden Buddha.....   | 144 |
| “The Golden Buddha at Wat Traimit.” Photograph by Kushal Das. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.   |     |
| Figure 6.1 The Great Departure .....  | 157 |
| “Le Grand Départ, Andhra Pradesh, region d’Amarāvati,” 2 <sup>nd</sup> century CE. Musée Guimet, Paris. Photograph by author.   |     |
| Figure 6.2. The Great Fast .....  | 163 |
| “Lahore Museum smn121 5.” Photograph by Syed Muhammad Naqvi. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.  |     |
| Figure 6.3 The Bodhi Tree .....   | 170 |
| “Bodhi Tree Maha Bodhi Temple Bodh Gaya India—panoramio.” Photograph by Hiroki Ogawa. Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.   |     |
| Figure 6.4 Attack of Māra.....  | 178 |
| “Mara’s Attack, Gandhara, 3 <sup>rd</sup> century AD, schist-Ethnological Museum, Berlin-DSC011622.” Photograph by Daderot. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en</a> ). Wikimedia Commons. |     |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Figure 10.1 Caves at Ajañtā.....   | 279 |
| “Ajanta (63).” Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.   |     |
| Figure 10.2 Sanctuary at Ajañtā, Cave 26.....  | 280 |
| “Cave 26, Ajanta.” Photograph by Dey.sandip. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.   |     |
| Figure 10.3 Death of the Buddha.....   | 288 |
| “The Death of the Buddha (Parinirvana),” ca. 3 <sup>rd</sup> century. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. In the Public Domain.  |     |
| Figure 10.4 Pillar of Aśoka .....  | 297 |
| “Ashokan Pillar and Buddhist Stupa at Vaishali, Bihar (350840154).” Photograph by Chandan Singh. Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikipedia Commons.              |     |
| Figure 10.5 Stūpa at Sañcī .....   | 300 |
| “Great stupa of Sanchi.” Photograph by Nagarjun. Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.  |     |
| Figure 10.6 East Gateway at Sañcī Stūpa .....  | 302 |
| “Ornamental Pillar Leading to Sanchi Dome.” Photograph by Amigo&oscar. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.                     |     |
| Figure 10.7 Interior Staircase at Sañcī Stūpa.....   | 304 |
| “Interiors of Stupa 1.” Photograph by Vivek Shrivastava. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons.                                   |     |
| Figure 10.8 Buddhist Worship .....   | 308 |
| “Pipal tree temple of Bodh Gaya depicted in Sanchi Stupa 1 Eastern Gateway.” Photograph by Biswarup Ganguly. Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported ( <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en">https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en</a> ) license. Wikimedia Commons. |     |
| Figure 10.9 Standing Buddha from Gandhāra .....  | 311 |
| “Gandhara Buddha,” Tokyo National Museum. Photograph by World Imaging. In the Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons.  |     |

Figure 10.10 Seated Buddha from Mathurā.....313  
 “Amohaasi Bodhisattva, Mathura.” Photograph by Biswarup Ganguly and Gary Todd. Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en>) license. Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 10.11 Seated Buddha from Sārnāth .....316  
 “Buddha in Sarnath Museum.” Photograph by Tevaprapas Makklay. Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>) license. Wikimedia Commons.

## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The following list of terms is an informal guide to pronouncing Sanskrit. They have been selected to demonstrate the use of diacritical marks when transliterating into English.

*ātman* (OUGHT-muhn) self

*āsrava* (AAH-sruh-vuh) inflow, outflow

*bhikṣu/nī* (BICK-shoo/NEE) monk/nun

*buddha* (rhymes with COULD-uh) awake

*cakra* (CHUCK-ruh) wheel, tantric circle

*citta* (CHIT-uh) thought

*deva* (DAY-vuh) deity, god

*devī* (day-VEE) goddess

*dhyāna* (dih-YAWN-uh) trance

*duḥkha* (rhymes with hookah) suffering

*jñāna* (gin-YAWN-uh) knowledge

*kāya* (KYE-yuh) body

*kleśa* (CLAY-shuh) defilement

*manas* (muh-nuhs) mind

*pāramitā* (par-um-ee-TAAH) perfection

*prajñā* (pruh-gin-YAAH) wisdom

*prapañca* (pruh-PUNCH-uh) proliferation

*rddhi* (RID-ee) supernatural power

*saṃgha* (SUNG-uh) congregation

*sukha* (rhymes with hookah) happiness, bliss

*śūnya/tā* (SHOON-yuh/TAAH) empty/emptiness

*tathāgata* (tuh-TAAH-guh-tuh) thus come, thus gone

*ṛṣṇā* (trish-NAAH) craving

*upāya* (oo-PIE-uh) means, strategy

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

This book is a companion to my earlier work, *The Snake and the Rope: A Jungian View of Hinduism*.<sup>1</sup> Like its predecessor, it surveys a great religious tradition of ancient India while interpreting that long history from a modern psychological point of view. In the earlier subtitle, however, I did not need to specify “India” as the book’s limit. Hinduism, for all its complexity, has stayed largely within the confines of South Asia—even as it influenced Southeast Asia and Indonesia. That is not true for Buddhism which was the world’s first missionary religion. Originating in India in the sixth century BCE, Buddhism spread by the third century into the island kingdom of Sri Lanka, and from there eventually into mainland Southeast Asia where today it remains the dominant religion. And while China can no longer be said to be Buddhist, it was predominantly so by the sixth century CE—a spiritual victory for a foreign religion in a culture already committed to Taoism and Confucianism. China’s strong influence on Korea and Japan would take Buddhism to those countries. Tibet began to be Buddhist by the eighth century. Much more recently, Asians emigrated into Europe and the United States, bringing with them different forms of traditional Buddhism. They are now joined by what we will call “Modern Buddhism,” popular new versions of old ways.

It is fortunate for the religion of Buddhism that its many missions succeeded, because it died out in its homeland by 1200 CE. We will discuss why, but certainly one reason was the destruction of the grand monastic universities of Nālandā and Vikramaśīla by Muslim Turks who invaded India primarily to conquer and only secondarily to convert. Another reason for Buddhism’s demise was its assimilation by Hinduism, its older and better rooted sister religion.

Before any of that happened, however, the religion flourished for its first five hundred years in a phase we will call “Early Buddhism.” This was a conservative style of the religion that is predominant today (although not in its original form) in Sri Lanka and in the nations of Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia. Then, from the early centuries CE, there arose a second, more liberal phase calling itself “Mahāyāna.” The name means, Great Vehicle, to distinguish itself from Early Buddhism that the Mahāyānists pejoratively labeled the “Hīnayāna” (Little or Inferior Vehicle). Historically, however, the so-called Great Vehicle may not have been very popular in India—although it was this expansive and more flexible style of the religion that was more successful on the mission fields of East Asia.

Whatever the relative size of their constituencies, Early Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism would coexist within India for many centuries and lend to the religion there a richness, even a bewildering complexity, that is one of the great stories in the history of religion. It is a story that makes it possible to say—accurately—that Buddhism is both a conservative and liberal religion, that it was founded by a human being who is yet worshipped as a Savior, that this founder who

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<sup>1</sup> George R. Elder, *The Snake and the Rope: A Jungian View of Hinduism* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2012).

called himself Buddha taught in some sense a doctrine of “no soul” although late scriptures say there lies hidden within everyone a sacred “Embryo” of the Buddha. Indian Buddhism helped people conquer suffering by showing them a way to escape this world and also by showing them the value of staying in the world out of compassion. And since all these different positions unfolded within the confines of the subcontinent of India, I must limit this study to a “Jungian View of *Indian Buddhism*.”

## The Title

### *Self*

The first term in this book’s title is “Self.” It calls attention to the fact that the Sanskrit term *ātman* is very important in Indian religious thought. It can mean merely “body” or the body’s “breath;” and it can also be used as a reflexive pronoun, as in “myself, oneself.” But *ātman* came to mean by around 700 BCE the divine “Self”—leading modern writers in the West, somewhat misleadingly, to call it “soul.” In *The Snake and the Rope*, we witnessed a remarkable evolution of religious wisdom beginning around 1,000 BCE. Early Vedic religion had been worshipping a pantheon of “Thirty-three” gods, but they were demoted or relativized in favor of something called Puruṣa or “Person” lying behind these many gods as their origin. This Person, then, gave way over time—linguistically, at least—to a more impersonal sacred power called Brahman, rooted in Sanskrit *brh*, meaning, “to grow great or strong.”<sup>2</sup> A. L. Basham describes it as “a mysterious magical force of the type widely known to modern anthropologists by the Polynesian word *mana*.”<sup>3</sup>

Yet in a subsequent set of scriptures called the Upaniṣads, the divine Person that is Brahman was proclaimed to be really Ātman—as if to say that the divine power behind everything in the universe has something to do with “myself.” The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* states more precisely that the sacred lies *within* myself:

The Self-existent One pierced the apertures outward,  
therefore, one looks out, and not into oneself [*ātman*].  
A certain wise man in search of immortality,  
turned his sight inward and saw the self [*ātman*] within.<sup>4</sup>

Although there is no upper and lower case distinction in Sanskrit, this last line’s use of the term *ātman* should appear in English as “Self” with an initial capital since it is—like Puruṣa and Brahman—a God-term. It is, of course, an English convention to capitalize such terms. But translators often find it difficult to acknowledge the Upaniṣads’ discovery of a “God within” and so retain the lower case. The Indian scholar S. N. Dasgupta, however, does not hesitate to call this shift of the sacred from the

<sup>2</sup> Dictionary references for Sanskrit will be to Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1899; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970). Dictionary references for Pāli will be to T. W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *The Pali Text Society’s Pali-English Dictionary* (1921-1925; repr. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That was India* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 391.

outer world to the inner world a “Copernican revolution” in religious focus and “probably the most remarkable event in the history of philosophic thought.”<sup>5</sup> The reader will discover in subsequent chapters that I will be noting other “Copernican” moments since they help us appreciate what is important—or what a particular writer personally considers important—in a plethora of data.

C. G. Jung read the Upaniṣads and was similarly impressed. Although not a Hindu, he chose the term “Self” to refer to a sacred core of the human psyche. Jung writes:

I have chosen the term “self” . . . in accordance with Eastern philosophy, which for centuries has occupied itself with the problems that arise when even the gods cease to incarnate. The philosophy of the Upanishads corresponds to a psychology that long ago recognized the relativity of the gods.<sup>6</sup>

As we can see from this quotation, Jung’s translators also have had difficulty accepting the psychological immanence of divinity. When Jung wrote letters in English, however, he used our convention for God-terms by capitalizing his term “Self.” And I will do so throughout this book if not forced to do otherwise when quoting. The reader will need to be alert to this issue and make the proper adjustment as required. I personally judge a writer’s grasp of Jung’s thought by whether or not that person capitalizes “Self” when appropriate.

With this much religious history in the background, it must have been shocking for pious Indians of the sixth century BCE to hear the Buddhists proclaim that in some real sense there is “no self.” Indeed, it shocks many persons today who know something of South Asia. We read: “The Buddhist tradition often seems to play the role of the knotty exception in comparative studies of religion. . . . They are not out to uncover a secure and stable reality behind the changeable world of appearances; they want to demonstrate that there is no stable, ultimate reality.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, we are being told that there are no “God-terms” in Buddhism. If this is true, Hinduism and Buddhism are deeply incompatible even as they somehow inspired the same civilization. If it is true, Buddhism is also incompatible with other world religions and, significantly, with Jungian “Self” psychology. But I believe I can show that the conventional view of the matter is inaccurate and will demonstrate it from the scriptures and doctrines of Buddhism itself.

<sup>5</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (1922; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 31-33.

<sup>6</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion*, vol. 11 of the *Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953-1979), par. 140. Hereafter, the *Collected Works* will be designated as *CW* without publication data.

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm David Eckel with John J. Thatamanil, “Cooking the Last Fruit of Nihilism: Buddhist Approaches to Ultimate Reality,” in *Ultimate Realities*, ed. Robert Cummings Neville (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 125.





Figure 1.1. Lotus (American water lily)

### *Lotus*

The second term of our title is not in the least contentious. (See Figure 1.1.) The “Lotus” is a beautiful flower and a symbol beloved by all religious traditions of India, by its artists and poets. We saw it in the Hinduism book in a relief sculpture as a plant growing from the navel of the great god Viṣṇu—with the demiurge “Creator” god Brahmā (not to be confused with the impersonal Brahman) sitting upon its large open blossom. We saw Viṣṇu’s beautiful wife Lakṣmī—who is also called Padmā or “Lotus”—caressing her Lord’s foot as he sleeps for an “aeon” (*kalpa*). She sometimes appears in paintings standing on a pink lotus that floats on the waters of Creation.<sup>8</sup> Buddhism would not be outdone in the use of this floral symbolism. We learn from the *Buddhacarita* (2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE) that the Buddha’s mother was as beautiful as the Hindu goddess Padmā.<sup>9</sup> We learn from the *Lalitavistara* (4<sup>th</sup> c. CE) that when her son—who would become the Buddha—was born “a great lotus arose from the depth of the earth to receive him.” As the divine Child took his first steps, “beneath him lotuses sprang up wherever he set foot.”<sup>10</sup>

Thirty-five years after this extraordinary birth, Siddhārtha Gautama became “Awake” (*buddha*) and had to decide if it was worth his while to try to teach a sleepy world. He pondered in the *Majjhima Nikāya*:

Just as in a pond of blue or red or white lotuses, some lotuses that are born and grow in the water thrive immersed in the water without rising out of it, and some

<sup>8</sup> See Elder, *Snake and the Rope*, 203-208.

<sup>9</sup> Aśvaghōṣa, *Buddhacarita: Acts of the Buddha*, trans. E. H. Johnston (1936; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972), 1.2.

<sup>10</sup> Gwendolyn Bays, trans., *The Voice of the Buddha: The Beauty of Compassion*, 2 vols., from a French draft (1884) of the *Lalitavistara* by Edouard Foucaux (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1983), 1:45.

other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rest on the water’s surface, and some other lotuses that are born and grow in the water rise out of the water and stand clear, unwetted by it; so, too, surveying the world with the eye of a Buddha, I saw beings with little dust in their eyes and with much dust in their eyes, with keen faculties and with dull faculties with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach. . . .<sup>11</sup>

And so—with the knowledge of real human difference, prompted by thoughts of the lotus—the Lord taught his first sermon. Needless to say, Gautama Buddha was himself a “Lotus among men.” The *Āṅguttara Nikāya* expresses that in verse: “As a lovely white lotus / is not soiled by the water, / I am not soiled by the world” (2.39).<sup>12</sup> So pervasive is this symbolism that Buddhism is often identified with the symbol of the Lotus; and it often appears in the titles of books about this religion—as it does in mine.



Figure 1.2 Buddha Seated on a Double Lotus

<sup>11</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, rev. trans. of Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 26.21 (pp. 261-262). I will use the abbreviation *MN* to refer to this Pāli scripture and this translation. Page numbers allow easy reference.

<sup>12</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Āṅguttara Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 4.36 (p. 426). I will use the abbreviation *AN* to refer to this Pāli scripture and this translation.

We could learn much of this simply by visiting a museum with a collection of Asian art. For there we would see a sculpture like the one in Figure 1.2. It is a beautifully carved wooden Buddha from twelfth-century Burma—with gilded black lacquer that rarely survives the centuries. The Lord is seated with crossed legs in what is called the “lotus posture” (*padmāsana*) upon a tiny round cushion ringed with stylized lotus petals, the entire form supported by a pedestal in the shape of a double-lotus. Were this Buddha, in our imagination, to emerge from his meditation, perhaps he would preach his long and lovely sermon, the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka*, the “Lotus of the True Dharma,” the most popular scripture in China. Perhaps he would say nothing and “preach” instead the Japanese Zen “Flower Sermon”—holding up before us the stem of a lotus blossom. And we would smile, like the Indian disciple Mahākāśyapa is said to have smiled, in recognition of what it means.

Jung says it means there is something “beautiful” and “alive” within the “watery” depths of the unconscious psyche. He calls it the “Self” and says it wishes to “grow,” as is its nature, into the “light” of consciousness. Jung explains in his last essay, finished weeks before his death:

The discovery that the unconscious is no mere depository of the past, but is also full of germs of future psychic situations and ideas, led me to my own new approach to psychology. A great deal of controversial discussion has arisen around this point. But it is a fact that, in addition to memories from a long-distant conscious past, completely new thoughts and creative ideas can also present themselves from the unconscious—thoughts and ideas that have never been conscious before. They grow up from the dark depths of the mind like a lotus and form a most important part of the subliminal psyche.<sup>13</sup>

When this “creative” unconscious images itself in a dream or a fantasy—in a poem, an art work, or a religious story—it often does so as a beautiful flower rooted in the soil yet blossoming in the sunlight. Its blossoming can be understood as a life well-lived, according to its own true nature.

Moreover, this is how we are to appreciate floral symbolism elsewhere in the history of religion. Jung writes that the lotus “corresponds to the ‘Golden Flower’ of Chinese meditative alchemy, the rose of the Rosicrucians, and the mystic rose in Dante’s *Paradiso*.”<sup>14</sup> The Christian Litany of Loreto, Italy, likens the Mother of God to a beautiful Rose (instead of a Lotus) and her divine child a lightsome Rose-child (akin to the shining Lotus-like Buddha). It follows that, in regard to “flowers,” Buddhism is no “knotty exception in comparative studies of religion” but, instead, belongs to a universal pattern of symbolism. While Indian Buddhism says that in some sense there is “no self,” it never says there is “no lotus.”

## The Snake and the Rope

I considered entitling this work, *The Snake and the Rope: Volume Two*, because the problem of accurate perception—that informed our first volume’s understanding of Hinduism—is essential for

<sup>13</sup> C. G. Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” in *Man and his Symbols* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, CW 9.i, par. 652.

understanding Buddhism. Although there are different versions of Gautama Buddha's first sermon, one anthology includes the following story:

He who has awakened is freed from fear; he has become Buddha; he knows the vanity of all his cares, his ambitions, and also of his pains. It easily happens that a man, when taking a bath, steps upon a wet rope and imagines that it is a snake. Horror will overcome him, and he will shake from fear, anticipating in his mind all the agonies caused by the serpent's venomous bite. What a relief does this man experience when he sees that the rope is no snake. The cause of his fright lies in his error, his ignorance, his illusion. If the true nature of the rope is recognized, his tranquility of mind will come back to him; he will feel relieved; he will be joyful and happy.<sup>15</sup>

The man in question is probably a wealthy city-dweller. The bath or pool would be his own—located in the garden attached to his beautiful home, if not in the suburbs where he likely owns an entire park. He uses this artificial body of water not for purposes of cleansing but to cool off from the heat, for relaxation, and for “sporting”—as the Sanskrit likes to say—with his wives and concubines.

The ancient listener knows all this but is confronted by the scene of a privileged man suddenly like anyone else, terrified of an early painful death from a snake in the bath. Thus—as Buddhist doctrine puts it, “all is impermanent”—including one's anticipation of pleasure, one's very own life. On the other hand, the danger is an “illusion” (*māyā*). The snake is merely the product of the man's “imagination” (*parikalpa*, an important term in Buddhism) since the rope feels just like a snake under his foot. His mind has added to a physical sensation an interpretation (what we can call an apperception) that is wrong because the hero of our story is for the moment “ignorant” (*a-vidyā*, “without knowledge”) of what is actually in the water (what Buddhism often calls *tathatā*, “thusness,” “suchness,” or “reality as it is”). Specifically, this man who is caught in an illusion lacks the knowledge of a misplaced piece of rope. But just as suddenly—for reasons we are not told—correct knowledge dawns. Awareness clears up the misperception; and the “snake” disappears while only the rope remains. The Buddhist goals of “freedom from fear,” “joy,” and “happiness” arise—along with memories of better days in the bath. At best, the urbane man's new-found “tranquility of mind” should prompt him to pause and reflect: on how the mind operates, on how convincing its subjective interpretations of the facts can be even when wrong, and how an increase in awareness or consciousness is the cure for all manner of mental distress.

As we learned in our first volume, the philosopher Śāṅkara (9<sup>th</sup> century CE) reflected on the disturbing fact that illusions created by the mind can even kill: “for we observe that death sometimes takes place from imaginary venom.”<sup>16</sup> As he discusses the classic case of the “snake and the rope,” however, it is obvious that this Hindu is borrowing Buddhist terminology. In fact, he was

<sup>15</sup> Lucien Stryk, ed., *World of the Buddha* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1969), 52. Stryk does not give a source for this story nor have I been able to find it. The image, however, is used often by Buddhist writers. See Deisetz Taitaro Suzuki, *Studies in the Lankavatara Sutra* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1930), 158-159.

<sup>16</sup> Elder, *Snake and the Rope*, 1.



called a “crypto-Buddhist” by his detractors despite being judged by his admirers to be the most important interpreter of the pre-Buddhist Upaniṣads. Who was right? Did the critics think Śāṅkara’s interpretation was a kind of misperception (“snake”) of what those early scriptures actually say (“rope”)? Or were they misinterpreting his interpretation? Can anyone ever really say what someone else means? What scriptures mean? In other words, do we ever know for certain that there is even a rope in a bath—or are we always caught inside the limitations of our perceptions and subjective apperceptions? I have posed all these questions since Hindus and Buddhists have been asking them and arguing their answers for millennia. In doing so, they reveal to us that all Indian religions, despite their differences, consider certain issues to have the highest value for the sake of our salvation.

Those issues concern the mental life that we usually associate with psychology. They involve epistemology—the study of “how we know”—that we usually associate with philosophy. In both cases, right answers are said to bring release from suffering, a goal that we usually associate with religion. These categories are not separate in pre-modern India and may point the way to our discovery that they need not be so separate in our own culture. In fact, this could be a re-discovery. Plato’s famous “Allegory of the Cave” sits, after all, at the foundation of Western philosophy. But it is at the same time a psychological analysis of how we are imprisoned by misinterpreting facts: in this case, taking shadows on a cave wall as if they were real objects, instead of projections of objects created by a fire behind them. Furthermore, the goal of this allegory is to free us from the shackles of ignorance so that we can see reality as it is—not only the ordinary objects used to make the shadows but also their Source, the Forms or Ideas of the Good, the Beautiful, and the True. Plato called these ultimate objects Archetypes (*archai*) and experienced them as divine. It follows that we have the potential to be less compartmentalized and more culturally whole.

### *Projection*

The Buddhist story of the “snake in the bath” demonstrates how close modern psychology and Buddhism can be. Both are concerned with what Freud called the “reality principle,” a proper assessment of which allows one to adapt effectively. Jung agreed. Moreover, both modern psychologists analyzed the problem of projection: namely, when a high degree of distortion—and not just the usual level of subjectivity—gets in the way. In his lectures at the Tavistock Clinic in London in 1935, Jung explained:

The mechanism of projection, whereby subjective contents are carried over into the object and appear as if belonging to it, is never a voluntary act . . . . In projection the apparent fact you are confronted with in the object is in reality an illusion; but you assume what you observe in the object not to be subjective, but objectively existing. Therefore, a projection is abolished when you find out that the apparently objective facts are really subjective contents. Then these contents become associated with your own psychology. . . . Projection is always an *unconscious* [Jung’s italics] mechanism, therefore consciousness or conscious realization, destroys it.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Jung, “The Tavistock Lectures,” in *The Symbolic Life*, CW 18, pars. 314-315.

In other words, the Indian man in our story did not know consciously that there was a rope in his pool. But it served as a “hook” for projection—as Jung puts it elsewhere—because its shape is similar to that of a snake.<sup>18</sup> For reasons unknown, the bather’s unconscious was stirred or “activated” to imagine something terrible (not something delightful like a heavy necklace dropped by one of his wives). This negative content colored his tactile sensation of the rope, transforming it into a “snake”—a deceptive mixture of objective external reality and subjective internal reality. Consciousness saved the day. And, by definition, the unconscious projection dissolved.

Indian religions know much of this psychological “mechanism.” Hinduism even knows of positive projection in a standard example of getting excited at finding silver on the beach—when it is just mother-of-pearl shining in a shell. The Buddha referred to the “nonsense” of falling in love with “a girl you have never known or seen” based upon the hook of what one has heard (*Majjhima Nikāya*, 79.10)—an experience that many of us, unfortunately, can recall.<sup>19</sup> Impressed by this psychological precocity, Karen Armstrong has written: “Long before Freud and Jung developed modern psychoanalysis, the yogins of India had discovered the unconscious mind and had, to a degree, learned to master it.”<sup>20</sup> Even if we grant some degree of discovering the unconscious, it is doubtful that Freud or Jung would agree that anyone can “master” it. Freud, after all, was not optimistic about our ability to turn unconscious Id into conscious ego, while Jung thought that understanding the unconscious merely freed us from its domination—not its ineluctable, dangerous yet often creative, influence. And while we, too, are impressed by Indian religions, we must not “fall in love” with them too soon, not before getting to know them first.

It is then that we may be able to answer critical questions: To what extent does Indian Buddhism actually acknowledge a depth dimension to the psyche or is it primarily concerned with conscious experience? Does the religion know that projections are involuntary? And when consciousness dissolves these distortions, do Buddhists integrate that content, i.e., are they willing to admit that the “venom” of an imagined snake actually belongs to one’s own psychology? Put positively, do they know that the “unknown beautiful girl” is not only a misplaced fantasy but also a clue to what lies within one’s own unconscious from which “she” sprang—and that there is an opportunity to get to know “her” better as an image of one’s own Soul? However we answer, it will not detract from the extraordinary fact that “Buddhism is the most psychologically interested of the great world religions,” as one scholar notes.<sup>21</sup> Another says simply, “Buddhism is all about the mind.”<sup>22</sup>

## Some Buddhist Terms

When Gautama Buddha approached the Five Ascetics (who had earlier abandoned him) to deliver his first sermon, they deigned to call him “Friend.” And Gautama responded somewhat

<sup>18</sup> See Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, *CW* 7, par. 152, for a discussion of a “suitable hook” for a projection.

<sup>19</sup> Bodhi, *MN*, p. 656.

<sup>20</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Buddha* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 49.

<sup>21</sup> John Hick, in the Foreword to Padmasiri de Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), ix.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Williams, with Anthony Tribe and Alexander Wynne, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 50.

testily: “Bhikṣus, do not address the Tathāgata by name and as ‘friend.’ The Tathāgata is an Accomplished One, a Fully Enlightened One.”<sup>23</sup> Let us examine the technical terms here. *Bhikṣu* in Sanskrit means “beggar”—more nicely put, a “mendicant”—and refers to the fact that ordained Buddhists are traditionally expected to beg for their food from the lay community either on their own or in groups. The term is often translated as “monk.” But that refers specifically to a *bhikṣu* who lives in a monastery near a town or village where he walks with other monks in single file—his eyes downcast, with head shaved and wearing robes—carrying a begging bowl to gather food for the one meal of the day. An ordained Buddhist woman is a *bhikṣuṇī*, the feminine form of the same word, usually translated “nun.”

*Tathāgata* is usually left untranslated since it is more technical. But it was the title that the Buddha used most often when referring to himself. The Sanskrit compound can be broken down into two opposing meanings: *tathā-gata* or *tathā-āgata* which mean respectively, “thus gone” and “thus come.” Some traditions prefer one solution over the other, but it was probably intended by Gautama Buddha to express his self-perception that he belonged to a long line of other Buddhas—variously listed in scripture as six (of which Gautama is the seventh) or twenty-four (of which he is the twenty-fifth), etc.—who had “come” into our world and taught as he was doing, but who had also “gone” into Complete Nirvāṇa as he himself would. In this title, we begin to see that the founder of Buddhism is an historical figure and yet belongs to a trans-historical paradigm. This is not unlike the fact that, in Christianity, Jesus is both an historical human being and paradigmatically divine.

In psychological terms, Jung would say that the historical Gautama and Jesus were, indeed, human beings—but had projected onto them the transpersonal archetype of the “Self.” It appears they even accepted this projection as part of their self-understanding. The “Greater Personality” is another name for the Self archetype that lies deep within each of us and “comes” and “goes” within our individual lives but also within entire civilizations. It manifests most completely in the “greater personalities” of a particular era, can disappear during times of cultural transition, then reappear when the time is right. I think Jung would add that Gautama Buddha sensed he was personally rooted in this archetypal dynamic and that he was expressing it in his own life as fully as it had ever been lived within the history of India. That would explain why Gautama spoke with authority and was not unduly self-effacing.

The “Enlightened One” in our passage is a standard translation of *buddha* that we already know means the “Awakened One.” The Sanskrit verbal root is *budh* which literally means “to awake” and, by extension, “to know.” The root has branched into several important Buddhist terms. The noun *bodhi* means “Enlightenment” or the “Awakening” itself. The title *bodhi-sattva* means literally, “Enlightenment-being,” and signifies someone who is not yet a Buddha but will surely become one. In Early Buddhism, Gautama is a Bodhisattva before he becomes a Buddha while his disciples who become Enlightened are merely called Arhat (“worthy one”). By contrast, any disciple in later Mahāyāna Buddhism who vows to become Enlightened is considered a Bodhisattva, and assured of eventual—albeit usually very distant—Buddhahood. Both early and late movements, however, accepted the power of the *bodhi-citta* vow. Literally, this term means “Enlightenment thought” and

<sup>23</sup> Bodhi, *MN* 26.27, p. 264. Pāli regularized to Sanskrit.



signifies the mental resolve to become Awake. This means that the man Siddhārtha Gautama in an earlier lifetime aeons ago made his “Bodhicitta” resolve, thereby becoming a “Bodhisattva” who in his last lifetime achieved “Bodhi” and became a “Buddha.” These are the most frequent terms in Buddhism.

It may be worth noting that some scholars today are avoiding the translation of “Enlightenment” in rendering forms rooted in *budh* and choosing, instead, only “Awakening” words. It is true that the Sanskrit does not contain a reference to “light,” although there is much “light” imagery in Buddhism—as in all religions when “seeing more clearly” or being more conscious is symbolized. We all have experiences of “seeing the light” about some difficult issue. And our dreams use images of light, sometimes the celestial lights, to symbolize an increase in awareness. Sometimes, as well, this “light” refers to an ultimate sacred “Light” by which we all “see.” Nevertheless, the translation of *bodhi* as “Enlightenment” has a questionable history. Robert Gimello explains:

the most common English rendering of *bodhi* (or [Chinese] *wu* or [Japanese] *satori*) is “enlightenment.” There are grounds for such a translation. Some of the earliest usages of the word *enlightenment* show it to have meant something like spiritual illumination, and spiritual illumination is not so far from “awakening.” However, the term *enlightenment* is also commonly employed in the West to designate an age in European intellectual and cultural history, roughly the eighteenth century, the dominant voices of which were those of philosophers like Voltaire, Condorcet, and Diderot, who all declared the supremacy of reason over faith, and the triumph of science and rational ethics over religion. Such thinkers were harshly dismissive of the kinds of piety, faith, asceticism, and mystical insight that we saw above to be among the components or factors of *bodhi*. . . . Better then to use the more literal rendering of “awakening” . . . .<sup>24</sup>

I agree that it is better to do it that way since “being awake” is symbolically richer than “being enlightened,” even without the freight of eighteenth-century European thought. But I will use both translations in this book since they are inextricably woven into scholarly and popular writing about Buddhism—and hope that the reader does not associate too closely Gautama’s ancient Indian “Enlightenment” with our own more recent Age of Reason.

## About this Book

### *Purpose*

This book is intended for a reader who wishes to acquire a basic knowledge of the Buddhist religion at its historical origins. I imagine this person already knows from experience that the study of any religion is “good for the soul,” that it not only educates but puts one in touch with one’s own

<sup>24</sup> Robert M. Gimello, “Bodhi (Awakening),” in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr., 2 vols. (New York: Thomson-Gale, 2004), 1:53. Hereafter, this work will be cited as *EB* without bibliographical data.

deepest reaches and encourages a certain seriousness about life. If it is true that civilization begins at Sumer, as is often said, it is also true that “the gods” inspired the Sumerians’ invention of writing, their composition of a great mythology, the building of ziggurat architecture, their beautiful art. Without that pantheon, they would not have known how to organize government, nor could they have trusted their network of irrigation canals without the annual Sacred Marriage (*hieros gamos*) between a priest-king and priest-queen. Similarly, without the religion of the Indus Valley, just a bit later than Sumer, India would not have produced a great civilization. Buddhism would not have played its part. It follows that one is not truly educated unless one has understood the religious traditions of the world. Yet as the scholar of religions Kees Bolle has remarked: “The trouble about religion is that everyone has an opinion on it. Moreover, almost everyone presents his or her opinion without knowledge, without reflection, without inhibition.”<sup>25</sup> That needs to stop.

To gain a knowledge of ancient Indian Buddhism, however, can be very difficult. It is rooted in a non-Western culture with a world view carrying non-Western assumptions, expressed in languages that are foreign to us and whose meanings are often misleading. For example, “insight” (Sanskrit, *vipaśyanā*, from *paś*, “to see”) means something specific in Early Buddhism: namely, training oneself to see that ordinary life is marked by “suffering, impermanence, and non-self”—a most unattractive evaluation. By contrast, the word “insight” in English tends to carry a positive nuance, suddenly seeing good and helpful things about life’s meaning, not its meaninglessness. Jung would add that these “insights” arrive, almost unbidden, from the creative unconscious.

Furthermore, my imagined reader has found it burdensome to plow through dense scholarly materials that merely describe Buddhism. They may feel as Jung did: “I must confess that I myself could find access to religion only through the psychological understanding of inner experiences, whereas traditional religious interpretations left me high and dry.”<sup>26</sup> So I have written a book that explains Buddhism by way of psychology—in order to explain the religion at all. Still, as Jung noted, psychology comes up against the same problem Bolle noticed about religion: “It is a remarkable fact, which we come across again and again, that absolutely everybody, even the most unqualified layman, thinks he knows all about psychology.”<sup>27</sup> Perhaps, someday, that will stop.

Every author must contend with the possibility that there will be few sympathetic readers. And the question arises: Is there a larger purpose for writing a book on the psychology of ancient Buddhism? The Jungian analyst, Edward Edinger, has articulated a twofold reason for doing so: “demonstration” and “assimilation.” Referring to Jung’s “new world view” at the beginning of his own study of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Edinger writes:

According to this view, all that man has ever done or thought is pertinent to psychology. Religion, mythology, history, philosophy, art, literature, and political affairs—all being manifestations of the psyche—are included in psychology. . . . One of the best ways to promote an understanding of the new psychological view is to compare its discoveries with the intuitions of the wise men and poets

<sup>25</sup> Kees W. Bolle, *Religion Among People: Essays on Religions and Politics* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), 31.

<sup>26</sup> Jung, *CW* 18, par. 1643.

<sup>27</sup> Jung, *CW* 12, par. 2.

of the past and thus to throw light on old and familiar material. Such a procedure serves two purposes. It holds up to general view the new *Weltanschauung* by demonstrating its application to a particular subject matter, and at the same time it contributes to the long-range process of assimilating the old culture to the new orientation.<sup>28</sup>

“Assimilating” the best is what the Christian philosopher Justin did for emergent Christianity in the second century CE as he addressed the Roman Emperor. It was what Augustine achieved in the fifth century with regard to Plato’s works, and what Thomas Aquinas achieved in the thirteenth with regard to the philosophy of Aristotle. They were the brightest lights in a grand process that included innumerable, unknown lesser lights who somehow understood that civilization cannot grow into the future if it is not rooted in its past.

This insight is actually compatible with Indian civilization that features Floral and Vegetation symbolism, giving that culture an “organic” quality that tends to assimilate new ideas and discoveries rather than deny or contend with them. Although the Buddha criticized much of the Hinduism that he knew, he was eventually named an *avatāra* of Lord Viṣṇu—just another branch on the competing religion’s holy Tree. Similarly, Buddhists claimed that they converted Lord Śiva to their own form of Tantra. In the same spirit, modern India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru—famously rejecting all religion for its “blind belief”—said of the Buddha: “The nation and race which can produce such a magnificent type must have deep reserves of wisdom and inner strength.”<sup>29</sup> It follows that this book is my effort to preserve “deep reserves of wisdom.”

### *Modern Buddhism*

Many Buddhists today would say they began a process of “assimilation” more than a century ago, bringing traditional Buddhism into the modern age. I have in mind the changes that emerged in the nineteenth century in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and somewhat differently in Japan.<sup>30</sup> Partly due to the need for internal reforms (too much rote learning, too much monastic property and political intrigue), Buddhists were mainly responding to centuries of too much external Western influence. Let us note that Western traders had been in contact with the East since Greco-Roman times (actually, since the third millennium BCE before contact with the Indus Valley Culture was interrupted). And they brought with them, not surprisingly, attitudes of cultural superiority. The Christian missionaries that followed upon Vasco da Gama’s discovery in 1498 of a sea route to India insisted that the “idolatrous heathens” in that region convert to their superior religion. When the Dutch, the English, and the French colonialists subsequently subdued Asian populations, they were sometimes more tolerant—under the influence of Enlightenment rationality and then the Romantic fascination with exotic languages and places.

<sup>28</sup> Edward F. Edinger, “Ralph Waldo Emerson: Naturalist of the Soul,” in *An American Jungian: In Honor of Edward F. Edinger*, eds. George R. Elder and Dianne D. Cordic (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2009), 136-137.

<sup>29</sup> John Clifford Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008), 21-22.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of this history, see Richard Robinson, Willard L. Johnson, and Thanissaro Bhikkhu, *Buddhist Religions: A Historical Introduction*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont: Thomson-Wadsworth, 2005), chapter 12.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, Buddhists had had enough of being the “white man’s burden” and began to resist effectively. Nevertheless, they often did so in the very terms they were opposing, thereby shifting (or distorting) their religion in a direction more acceptable to their Western critics. Further, it is this “reformed” Buddhism that sent its representatives to the first World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. They were well received and, more importantly, defined how Buddhism would be understood—and even practiced—by Europeans and Americans henceforth. This Western “understanding” would even influence Asians educated in the West who became convinced that Buddhism had always been this way (and not just for the last century or so). With confidence, the well-known scholar Huston Smith described “original Buddhism” as “without authority, without ritual, without theology, without tradition, without grace, and without the supernatural”—none of which can be demonstrated to be true.<sup>31</sup> Yet many Asians agreed, succumbing voluntarily to a different kind of “colonialism.”

The anthropologist, Gananath Obeyesekere, calls this phenomenon as it appeared in Sri Lanka, “Protestant Buddhism.”<sup>32</sup> He means that Buddhist monks in his nation protested against the Protestant Christian missionaries’ disparagement by proclaiming they were not “superstitious” but rational: but this meant they had to deny their traditional mythology and downplay stories of the Buddha’s miracles. The educated Buddhist laity protested that their religion was not “monkish”: but this meant they had to deny the traditional sharp distinction between monks and laypersons, even forming lay meditation groups intent on achieving Nirvāṇa in this lifetime—something unimaginable for over two millennia. In an odd twist, the Theosophist Henry Olcott arrived from the United States in 1880, publicly converted to Buddhism, then crafted a “Buddhist Catechism” to help his fellow religious combat the Christian one. In short order, there would appear Buddhist Sunday Schools, an Abstinence Union, and even a YMBA (Young Men’s Buddhist Association). Parallel reforms appeared in Myanmar and Thailand but mostly with regard to meditation practices that were simplified, opened to the laity, “modernized”—yet claiming to be from the “heart” of ancient Buddhism.

Japanese Zen Buddhism arrived at a similar end but in protest against their own government’s persecution. The Meiji Empire that came to power in 1868 was afraid of falling even farther behind the likes of Commodore Perry who had recently “opened” Japan to international trade with his steam-driven war ships. To solidify Japanese national pride—and to prepare for their own policy of militant colonialism—Meiji officials attacked Buddhism as a foreign religion, rife with parasitic monks whom they required to marry (thus, today, most Buddhist monks in Japan are married). Echoing Voltaire’s anti-Christian “*Écrasez l’infâme*,” they shouted, “Exterminate Buddhism and destroy Śākayamuni!” Wounded, the Buddhists answered with something entirely new. Robert Sharf explains:

Japanese intellectuals, seeking to bring their nation into the “modern world,” were naturally drawn to the European critique of institutional religion—the legacy

<sup>31</sup> Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Mentor Books, 1958), 105. This description reappears unchanged in the revised edition, *The World’s Religions* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991), 97.

<sup>32</sup> See Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Awakened Ones* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 29, 351-361.

of the anti-clericalism and antiritualism of the Reformation, the rationalism and empiricism of the Enlightenment, the romanticism of figures such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey, and the existentialism of Nietzsche. Some Japanese Buddhist leaders went so far as to argue that the official suppression of Buddhism was in fact a purifying force that would purge Buddhism of its degenerate accretions and effect a return to the original essence of the Buddha's teachings. The result came to be known in Japan as the New Buddhism (*shin bukkō*) which was "modern," "cosmopolitan," "humanistic," and "socially responsible." This reconstructed Buddhism, under the guise of "true" or "pure" Buddhism, was conceived of as a "world religion" ready to take its rightful place alongside other universal creeds.<sup>33</sup>

It was this "New Buddhism" that Abbot Shaku Sōen introduced so successfully to the World's Parliament of Religions at the end of the nineteenth century.

The translator of the abbot's address into English was D. T. Suzuki. Although a layman (or because he was a layman), Suzuki would soon be charged with the missionary task of spreading this reconstructed form of Buddhism throughout Europe and America. His efforts would prove to be very influential. In large part, that is because Suzuki studied the writings of Western writers on religion like William James and Rudolf Otto—even C. G. Jung—and integrated their insights and language into his own presentation of Buddhism. That presentation was so different from the religion itself that some have called it, "Suzuki-ism."<sup>34</sup>

### *Modern American Buddhism*

In the 1970's in the United States—with much Zen in the air if not on the ground, and with some Tibetan Buddhists arriving to escape the brutality of the Communist Chinese—a "reform of the reform" of Buddhism began to take shape. Young Americans, seeking their religious bearings, had just spent years learning how to meditate in Zen monasteries in Korea and Japan, or at the feet of Tibetan meditation masters in India at their refugee site of Dharamsala, or had spent thousands of hours refining the new "Mindfulness" techniques being taught by Burmese and Thai Buddhist monks.

When they returned home, however, not all were happy with the results. Jack Kornfield's experience is a good example. He writes in, *The Wise Heart: A Guide to the Universal Teachings of Buddhist Psychology*:

My interest in Western psychology began after I returned from Asia and encountered problems that had not come up in the monastery. I had difficulties with my girlfriend, with my family, with money and livelihood, with making my way as a young man in the world. I discovered that I could not use silent

<sup>33</sup> Robert H. Sharf, "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism," in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 109-110.

<sup>34</sup> See Bernard Faure, *Chan Insight and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), chapter 2.



meditation alone to transform my problems. . . . To complement my Buddhist practice, I entered graduate school in psychology and sought out practice and training in a variety of therapeutic approaches: Reichian, analytic, Gestalt, psychodrama, Jungian. I became part of a growing dialogue between Eastern and Western psychology as I worked with innovative colleagues in the early years of Naropa Buddhist University and Esalen Institute and at meditation centers and professional conferences around the world.<sup>35</sup>

Ritually disrobing and becoming a Buddhist layman (not unusual in the Thai form of Buddhism in which he was ordained), Kornfield became a founding member of two highly successful lay “Vipassana” meditation centers in the United States. Recall that meditation centers open to the laity were already part of the nineteenth century reform of Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

“Vipassana” is the Anglicized form of Pāli *vipassanā* (derived from the related Sanskrit word that we have already seen means “insight”). Since “insight” is the eventual goal of a meditative procedure called “mindfulness” (Pāli, *sati*; Sanskrit, *smṛti*, literally, “recollection”), these two terms often overlap in what is actually a new form of Buddhism. Kornfield says his work brings together “the core teachings, the essence of Buddhist wisdom that spans all traditions.”<sup>36</sup> We hear in this statement Modern Buddhism’s claim to have recovered a “purer” form of the religion closer to the original. But the “Mindfulness” movement in America often includes a kind of psychotherapy in short interviews during retreats; and there are “Insight” psychologists who incorporate Buddhist meditation exercises into their therapy practice. That is what is truly new here, a development without precedent in Asian Buddhist cultures where the need to bring together Buddhism and modern Western psychotherapy is not apparent.

Kornfield’s honesty about his personal problems upon returning to the United States suggests something quite striking. One often reads that Buddhism is a “psychological” religion—because it analyzes states of mind and requires contemplation—but this assessment is not entirely accurate. For psychology in Buddhism appears not to mean what we mean by psychology—or Kornfield would not have had to complement his Buddhist experience with psychology. But, then, how could this young man have gotten psychological help concerning his girlfriend, family, money, and making his way in the world from a Thai meditation master in the “Forest” tradition who had never had a wife and family and no need to work? On the other hand—and coming from the opposite direction—there are many psychologists today who add Buddhist “Mindfulness” to their therapy practice, acknowledging thereby that a religious dimension is necessary for the healing of issues that go beyond sex and money. Oddly, this sense that something “holy” is required has not led them to Jungian psychology that already includes a religious dimension.

Actually, modern American Buddhism downplays its Asian religious roots. Followers of “Vipassana” are fond of the distinction, “Buddhism is not a religion, it is a way of life”—even though, as this book will easily show, Buddhism is a religion (and every religion is a way of life). Associations with modern science are also common. They include experiments to determine if

<sup>35</sup> Jack Kornfield, *The Wise Heart* (New York: Random House Publishing, 2008), 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> Kornfield, *Wise Heart*, 4

meditators can lower their blood pressure at will. Kornfield misquotes the Dalai Lama as saying, “Buddhist teachings are not a religion, they are a science of mind.” What the Tibetan spiritual leader actually said is more modest: “Some modern scholars describe Buddhism not as a religion but as a science of mind, and there seem to be some grounds for this claim.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, there is an accommodation even here with modern secular values.

It is a short step to the strange notion of “secular” Buddhism as advocated by Stephen Batchelor in his popular book, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. Having been ordained as a young man in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, then training in Korean Sōn (Jap., Zen), but moving on to the Theravāda “Mindfulness” movement, he found all this traditional Buddhism unsatisfying. He now attempts to release that religion from its mythology, its miracle stories, even its “beliefs” in *karma* and transmigration that are assumed by all of the sermons preached by Gautama Buddha.<sup>38</sup> Batchelor acknowledges that his project is akin to Rudolf Bultmann’s effort to “demythologize” Christianity in the twentieth-century—a failed attempt to revitalize Christianity by appealing to the modern West’s inability to appreciate mythology. By contrast, here is Jung on myth:

The religious myth is one of man’s greatest and most significant achievements, giving him the security and inner strength not to be crushed by the monstrosity of the universe. Considered from the standpoint of realism, the symbol is not of course an external truth, but it is psychologically true, for it was and is the bridge to all that is best in humanity.<sup>39</sup>

Jon Kabat-Zinn learned meditation techniques from prominent Buddhists and, subsequently, developed a program of “Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction” (MBSR) at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. This is a program that has been found useful not only in hospitals, but also in schools, prisons, even the military to reduce stress and to help manage pain.<sup>40</sup> But when one consults the web site concerning this program, Buddhism is not mentioned.

I have described this nineteenth and twentieth century revision of Buddhism at some length, because it is what many of my readers will have already heard about “Buddhism”—but without knowing that quite a bit of it is new and not part of the religion’s long tradition. This book, on the other hand, is concerned with that long pre-modern history. I also have a personal interest in these more recent events since Jack Kornfield and I were in the United States Peace Corps at the same time in northeast Thailand. He stayed on to train as a Theravāda Buddhist monk, while I returned

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<sup>37</sup> Kornfield gives no source for this quotation that opens his book. It is probably a paraphrase of what I have quoted the Dalai Lama to have said at a symposium held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1991. See the Dalai Lama, “The Buddhist Concept of Mind,” in Daniel Goleman and Robert A. F. Thurman, eds., *Mind Science: An East-West Dialogue* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991), 18.

<sup>38</sup> See Stephen Batchelor, *Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening* (New York: Penguin Group, Riverhead Books, 1997).

<sup>39</sup> Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, CW 5, par. 343.

<sup>40</sup> See Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999).



to the States to begin a Jungian analysis. It strikes me that our different paths—each of which was genuine—represent two different answers to the crisis in modern religious life.

Let me state some of my positions at the outset:

1. The “assimilation” project of my book is not an accommodation with modern Western values derived from our 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment. Instead, it is a Jungian critique of them while trying to understand their place in our cultural unfolding.
2. I believe Buddhism has always functioned as a religion with a sacred core—not a secular core—and that is why it “worked” for millennia in very different cultures before the modern era. Understanding this, however, requires more than a Sunday School definition of “religion.”
3. Buddhism’s traditional mythology and miracle stories should not be dismissed as superstition but are rich with symbolic wisdom—if understood psychologically at some depth.
4. Finally, it will not do to trade the dying religious traditions of the West for troubled religious traditions of the East, even if they reduce stress. A living religion always does much more than that.

All of this should become clear in subsequent chapters.

With regard to that last point, Buddhism did not survive in India because it could not. While it did so elsewhere in Asia, those missionary arrangements have been failing in recent centuries—the main reason why modern Buddhists have opened themselves to the pretense of being merely pragmatic or humanistic. Cambodia’s “killing fields” are a horrifying symptom of conservative Theravāda’s inability to hold its people to a saving vision. To the surprise of almost everyone, Sri Lankan Buddhists have recently subdued the Tamil Hindus in their midst with great violence. Myanmar is no bastion of compassionate Buddhism, and Thailand’s troubles are often in the news. The more liberal Mahāyāna form of Buddhism was no protection against anti-religious secular Communism in China, North Korea, or Tibet. And the Japanese today talk of “funeral Buddhism,” since the temple priests are usually called only when someone dies. That is not to deny that Japanese corporate heads encourage Buddhist meditation for their employees to produce an alert and efficient workforce—for an entirely secular, materialistic purpose.

We need a new vision. And I believe Jungian psychology, when properly understood, provides that—or will help to provide it, in the long run. But what about my fellow Jungian analysts who have become Buddhists and recommend Zen or Mindfulness meditation to their clients? As I stated in *The Snake and the Rope*, it is not really possible to be a “Hindu Jungian,” a “Buddhist Jungian” or a “Christian Jungian,” etc.—since these professed combinations are a contradiction not only in terms but in commitment. Thus, I am not surprised that Buddhist Jungians include chapters in their books that are highly critical of Jung, as if they are trying to rid themselves of the tension he creates. In fact, in talking with them, one discovers they are just Buddhists. Nevertheless, these analysts remain “Jungian” to the extent that they are acknowledging with their “Buddhist” practice the need for a religious dimension in psychotherapy. Still, as Jung put it bluntly in a letter shortly before his death: “These Eastern methods don’t enrich consciousness and they don’t increase our real knowledge and

our self-criticism.”<sup>41</sup> One can disagree, of course, but then one’s standards may not be very high nor one’s experience of the archetypal psyche very deep.

## A Technical Note

Sanskrit is the classical language of ancient India, and many early Buddhist texts and virtually all later Mahāyāna texts were orally composed or written in that language. Many texts have survived in a related vernacular, such as Pāli (with its slightly different spellings) and in what is called Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (with its peculiar grammar). The alphabet and script of all these languages, however, are unlike that of English. This means that certain English letters require a standard mark (a dot, a line, etc.) to signify which “s” (there are three such sounds) or which “d” (there are two), etc. is being transliterated from the Indic alphabet. For the sake of accuracy, these diacritical marks appear throughout this book. Also, at the front of the book, there is an informal “Pronunciation Guide.” It contains a list of terms to demonstrate how Sanskrit sounds for those who wish to hear what persons familiar with Indic languages hear as they read. This “Guide” demonstrates at the same time the use of diacritical marks.

Should these technical features seem a chore, let us keep in mind that Sanskrit is an early highly inflected form of the Indo-European family of languages—and English is a late form of that same family. In this sense, ancient Sanskrit is our *mātr* (MAAH-trih), “mother,” tongue. Let me also note that encountering foreign terms and struggling with them can be psychologically beneficial. Edinger writes:

The reason Jung puts so many Latin and Greek quotations into his works is because for many modern individuals the ancient languages constellate the archetypes. They have a mysterious quality not of the everyday. For that reason granting them some attention amounts to pouring attention into the unconscious.<sup>42</sup>

Pouring this attention, I suggest, has the same benefit as “pouring libations” to the gods in the ancient world.

In addition, I have chosen not to complicate matters with regard to Pāli and Sanskrit and will use only Sanskrit for technical terms. Historically, Pāli is the dialect preferred by the early Theravāda sect of India—and eventually by this sect’s adherents in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia—as the sacred language for their canon of scripture. We know there were other early Indian canons of other sects in other dialects, but it is only this Theravāda collection of scriptures (the *Dīgha Nikāya*, *Majjhima Nikāya*, etc.) that has been fully preserved into modern times. Thus, I will need to use this collection to discuss Early Buddhism. But Peter Gregory cautions:

<sup>41</sup> C. G. Jung, *Letters*, ed. Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffe, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 2:613.

<sup>42</sup> Edward F. Edinger, *The Sacred Psyche: A Psychological Approach to the Psalms*, ed. Joan Dexter Blackmer (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2004), 17.

Although the Pali Canon may, as a whole, be closer to the Buddha’s “words” than any other extant textual corpus, it is still mediated by the collective memory of the community that compiled, codified, redacted, and transmitted it orally for hundreds of years before ever committing it to writing, and, even when finally put into writing, it did not remain static but continued to be modified by the tradition over the ensuing centuries. As we have it today it is thus far removed from the Buddha, and we have no way of gauging how close, or how distant any given statement is to the words of the Buddha.<sup>43</sup>

Still, we are fortunate that these scriptures are now so readily available in English. For the sake of continuity, nevertheless, the reader will find only *nirvāṇa* (Sanskrit) and not *nibbāna* (Pāli) even if I am quoting a text with Pāli terminology. My footnotes will document any liberties I take in this regard.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to thank all the scholars of Buddhism, both past and present, who have made my work possible. My ample citation of them in what follows should indicate the degree of my gratitude. Three reference works in particular will appear often in my notes, and the reader will benefit from consulting them. They are: 1) *The Encyclopedia of Religion* for its essays on all the world’s religions (edited by Mircea Eliade, 1987, and abbreviated in this book as *ER*); 2) the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* with its focus on our topic (edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr., 2004, abbreviated as *EB*); and 3) *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* that is more technical but very useful (edited by Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., 2014, abbreviated as *PDB*).

It may be, however, that all we are ever doing in a project such as this is what the Mahāyāna Buddhist Śāntideva claimed at the opening of his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*: “I have composed this with no thought of any other purpose than to clarify my own mind.”<sup>44</sup> Since that is such a difficult task, we need help from all quarters. But I have been especially fortunate to have had the help of Alex Wayman in the field of Buddhist Studies and the help of Edward Edinger in Jungian psychology. One day, Dr. Wayman said to me when I had criticized the obscurity of one of his translations, “But Buddhism is obscure.” This was a lesson from a scholars’ scholar. When I questioned a contradiction in what Dr. Edinger said, he replied, “But, George, we don’t know what we are talking about.” Another lesson from a master, but this time I would have to grow into the epistemological point he was making.

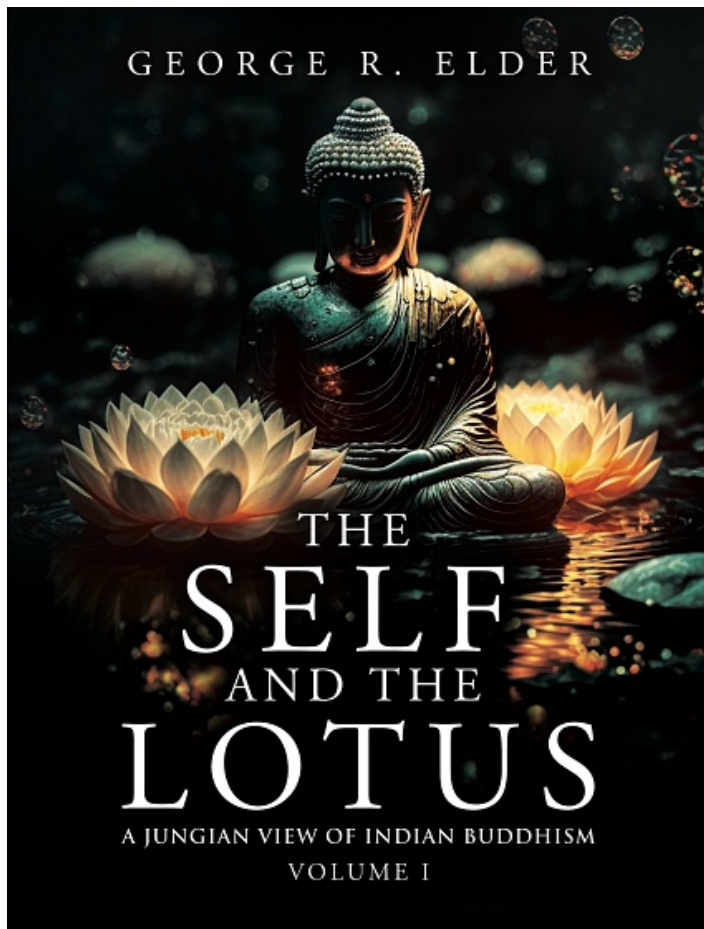
I thank my fellow villagers in Ban Thon, near Sawang Daen Din in Northeast Thailand, for teaching me a most important lesson. I was a young Peace Corps Volunteer in 1967 and sipping coffee on my back porch at daybreak, watching with no particular attention—I had seen it many times—a line of saffron-robed monks on their alms round walking across the field. I had no special interest in their religion since I planned on returning to the United States to study art history. But

<sup>43</sup> Peter N. Gregory, “Is Critical Buddhism Really Critical?” in Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The Storm Over Critical Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 294-295.

<sup>44</sup> Śāntideva, *Entering the Path of Enlightenment*, trans. Marion L. Matics (London: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 143.

suddenly, quietly, it occurred to me: “They are Buddhists.” Of course, I knew that already. Yet on this morning, it dawned on me that the people with whom I was now living were in a different subjective “world” from my own, that their world worked perfectly well for them even though it often frustrated my public health project. It also dawned on me that their world was thoroughly religious, that it would have not held together or have made any sense to them without being “Buddhist.” And with that realization, I stepped back a bit into my own subjective world while observing more objectively a different one. I conclude that it was from that day that I became temperamentally a scholar of comparative religion. Because that is what I actually studied upon returning home. And I am grateful to the Buddhists of Thailand for helping to put me on that very satisfying course.

I wish to thank, also, my three daughters—Phoebe, Isobel, and Chloe—for their computer help. I am grateful to Emily Kenyon for the accurate line drawings. Kyle Williams kindly helped to prepare the Index. And without the assistance of Angela Hoy of BookLocker this book would not have been published. Finally, as in my previous work on Indian religion, I am grateful to my wife, Jo Ann Engelhardt, who agreed to be my first reader and editor. Her intellectual, emotional, and financial support has made it possible for these volumes to appear. Indeed, all my readers should be grateful to her.



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