

Zeitschrift:	Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie
Herausgeber:	Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft
Band:	49 (1995)
Heft:	2
Artikel:	The Buddha and the Jainas reconsidered
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DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147184

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THE BUDDHA AND THE JAINAS RECONSIDERED*

Johannes Bronkhorst, Lausanne

The early Buddhist Sūtras repeatedly refer to the Jainas. This has been known for more than a century. Hermann JACOBI (1895: Introduction), in particular, has shown that the position attributed to the Niganṭhas in the Pāli canon agree with those found in the earliest texts of the Jainas. The Buddha and his followers are on various occasions depicted as being in discussion with followers of Niganṭha Nātaputta, in whom we recognise the last Tīrthamkara Mahāvīra. Mahāvīra himself never figures in these encounters. The event of his death, on the other hand, is used as an excuse to put some order in the Buddhist doctrine in the Saṅgīti Sūtra. If the Buddhist tradition is to be believed, the Buddha himself, before his enlightenment, did the ascetic practices which we can identify as typical for early Jainism; he abandoned them when he came to the conclusion that they did not lead him to the desired goal. A number of verses that are part of the Pāli Buddhist canon show that the interaction between Buddhists and Jainas was frequent and, it would seem, intimate.¹

These more or less frequent and intimate contacts between the early Buddhists and the early Jainas left their traces on the Buddhist doctrine as recorded in the ancient Sūtras. This, at least, is what one is tempted to conclude. For these ancient texts ascribe statements to the Buddha which directly contradict other statements of his. Moreover, some of these contradicted statements agree with positions which we know were held by the early Jainas.

Before we turn to any concrete instances of contradictory passages in the Buddhist canon that are sometimes against, and sometimes rather in favour of Jaina positions, it is important to observe that the same ambiguous position can be found with regard to other religious movements of that time. The main difference is, of course, that, whereas in the case of Jainism we have independent evidence allowing us to confirm and identify the beliefs

* I thank D. Seyfort RUEGG for some valuable observations.

1 GOMBRICH, 1995: 1078 f.

and practices concerned, the other religious movements criticised – be it implicitly – in the Buddhist canon are frequently only known to us through their depictions in the Buddhist texts.

Let me now give three examples of such religious practices that are criticised at one place, and accepted at another place of the Buddhist texts:² The *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, in its various recensions, records a discussion of the Buddha with someone called Putkasa (in Sanskrit) or Pukkusa (in Pāli). The Buddha here boasts that once, in a violent thunderstorm when lightning killed two farmers and four oxen nearby him, he did not notice it. Abilities of this kind were claimed by certain non-Buddhists, according to the testimony of the Buddhist texts. Another Buddhist *Sūtra* (the *Indriyabhāvanā Sutta* of the Pāli canon and its parallel in Chinese translation), however, ridicules such ‘cultivation of the senses’ which leads to their non-functioning; the Buddha is here reported to say that if this is cultivation of the senses, the blind and deaf would be cultivators of the senses.

A second example is the following:³ The *Vitakkasanthāna Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* and its parallels in Chinese translation *recommend* the practising monk to ‘restrain his thought with his mind, to coerce and torment it’. Exactly the same words are used elsewhere in the Pāli canon (in the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, *Bodhirājakumāra Sutta* and *Saṅgārava Sutta*) in order to describe the *futile* attempts of the Buddha before his enlightenment to reach liberation after the manner of the Jainas. It is tempting to conclude that these Jaina practices had come to be accepted by at least some Buddhists. This second example concerns a detail of certain Jaina practices, it would seem. I do not, however, know of passages in the Jaina canon which prescribe this detail.

Our third example is clearer in this respect. It concerns practices which certain Buddhist texts explicitly ascribe to Jainas and criticise, and which are confirmed by the Jaina canon. In spite of this, they are a number of times attributed to the Buddha himself.⁴ A *Sūtra* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* (the *Cūlādukkhakkhandha Sutta*) and its parallels in Chinese translation

2 Cp. BRONKHORST, 1993: x.

3 Cp. BRONKHORST, 1993: xii.

4 Cp. BRONKHORST, 1993: x f.

describe and criticise the Jainas as practising ‘annihilation of former actions by asceticism’ and ‘non-performing of new actions’. This can be accepted as an accurate description of the practices of the Jainas. But several other Sūtras of the Buddhist canon put almost the same words in the mouth of the Buddha, who here approves of these practices. It is, once again, tempting to conclude from this contradiction that non-Buddhist practices – this time it clearly concerns Jaina practices – had come to be accepted by at least some Buddhists, and ascribed to the Buddha himself.

So far I have presented some conclusions from my book *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India*. My friend Professor Richard GOMBRICH does not agree with all the conclusions of this book, and has taken the trouble of writing a reply, called “The Buddha and the Jains,” which has been published in the *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques*.⁵ What I welcome in particular in his reply, is that, unlike some other scholars, he does not try to deny the significance of the contradictions which formed the basis of my arguments. Quite on the contrary, Professor GOMBRICH accepts that these contradictions constitute a problem, which require an explanation. He accepts my explanation of outside influence on early Buddhism for some cases; for others, particularly those that concern the Jainas, he offers a different explanation.

GOMBRICH comments in this reply on the three examples which we have just considered. With regard to the first of these, he does not exclude the possibility that indeed the Buddha’s boast not to have noticed a violent thunderstorm “is merely the invention of a stupid hagiographer”, as he puts it. An alternative explanation which he presents, is that the incident is historical, and was occasioned by the circumstance that the Buddha was not, at that moment, on his best form. In fact, the episode occurs just after the Buddha has eaten his last recorded meal, a dish of pork which has given him the dysentery which kills him; as a result he is exhausted and dehydrated.⁶

5 GOMBRICH, 1995. In this paper only those of GOMBRICH’s observations that concern the topic at hand can be considered. For a discussion of some further points, I refer to my contribution to the forthcoming volumes on Buddhism in the series *Die Religionen der Menschheit*.

6 GOMBRICH, 1995: 1077.

With regard to the second example, the recommended practice to 'restrain his thought with his mind, to coerce and torment it', GOMBRICH comments: "I do not find it at all strange that a technique which, used by itself and taken to excess, turned out not to lead to Enlightenment, could be recommended by the Buddha as one of a range of methods for overcoming a particular difficulty". In his well-known humoristic style, GOMBRICH explains this observation with the following example: "Analogies from physical health are easy to think of: purgatives as a sole means of producing health are likely to do more harm than good, but there is nevertheless a sound case for using a purgative at a specific juncture."⁷

These two cases illustrate GOMBRICH's fundamental approach to the texts. Where possible, he takes them seriously, i.e., literally. I strongly support this approach. Texts which present themselves as historical accounts have to be taken as such until and unless there are overriding reasons to doubt their veracity. The difficulty, however, lies in the details, in the application of this principle to specific cases. Restraining one's thought with one's mind, coercing and tormenting it, presents a contrast with many other forms of Buddhist meditation, which are, unlike this practice, gentle. It is, moreover, explicitly rejected in some passages, and apparently ascribed to certain non-Buddhists, probably Jainas. Are we really obliged to believe that this practice was recommended by the Buddha himself? In cases like this the principle of taking the texts seriously does not really help us, or not enough. One is obliged to ask whether in this case the reasons which plead against taking the text literally are not strong enough to desist from taking the text at its face value. There is obviously no hundred percent foolproof method to decide either way. Whatever position one takes, the opposite possibility is never fully excluded. This does not, however, mean that there are no rational ways to make a choice. We will come back to the question below.

Most of GOMBRICH's article deals with the third example given above. It would perhaps be more correct to speak of examples – in the plural – rather than of example in the singular, for a few Sūtras ascribe to the Buddha, or to one of his pupils, statements to the extent that one should annihilate former actions and not perform new actions. GOMBRICH does not

7 GOMBRICH, 1995: 1080.

deny that such statements are typical of Jainism, and not of Buddhism. Yet he believes that the Buddha actually uttered them. He presents as reason for this peculiar behaviour of the Buddha the latter's frequent habit not to contradict the points of view of his opponents, but rather to reinterpret them in a Buddhist way.⁸

In spite of an interesting analysis of a number of passages, GOMBRICH does not, even in his own opinion, arrive at a fully satisfactory explanation of the central problematic statement. The following citations from his article show this:⁹

Finally, why the strange passage ... in which it is claimed that a *Buddhist* 'does no new karma, and touch by touch puts an end to the old karma – expunging in this very life'?¹⁰ ... the idea that one can put an end to one's karma contradicts many other texts. ... Unfortunately I have no complete explanation. It is evident that the texts are corrupt: even the sentence quoted has no syntax, for from 'expunging' on we have a string of hanging nominatives.

I also cite a part of GOMBRICH conclusion at the end of his article:¹¹

Let me sum up. I think that our wider knowledge of the Buddha's context and mode of preaching allows us to see that when talking to people who already adhered to a doctrine he tried to lead them into his way of thinking by first stressing the similarities between them and then subtly infusing new meaning into words and phrases. The texts preserve an imperfect record of this process, in general because they naturally preserve the gist of the Buddha's message rather than his precise words, and in particular because detailed knowledge of the doctrinal views of the Buddha's opponents was for the most part lost. In these *suttas*, two of which have preserved an important sentence about wearing out old karma, we have fragmentary reflections of a larger and originally more coherent account of how the Buddha converted (or tried to convert) Jains by twisting their own terms against them. ... we can conclude on the one hand that we have some clouded reflections of the Buddha's preaching style, and on the other that the texts as they stand are of later origin.

8 In this respect GOMBRICH follows RUEGG, who states with regard to this position when attributed to the Buddha (1989: 143): "The connexion of such a teaching with the Buddha himself seems nevertheless to be rare. When it does occur, it is evidently to be explained by the fact that his auditor was a Nirgrantha and that the teaching was thus intended as an introductory salvific device ..."

9 GOMBRICH, 1995: 1094.

10 The Pāli reads: *so navañ ca kammañ na karoti purāñ ca kammañ phussa phussa vyantikaroti sanditthikā nijarā ...*

11 GOMBRICH, 1995: 1096.

GOMBRICH's careful formulation shows that his explanation of the contradictions in the texts he deals with is confronted with difficulties, which he ascribes to the fact that the texts are corrupt and of later origin. Instead of holding these difficulties against him, I will rather assume, for argument's sake, that GOMBRICH's explanation accounts as well for the contradictions concerned as does mine. In other words, we assume that there are two altogether different explanations which account equally well for some of the puzzling contradictions that occur in the early Buddhist texts. Is there a way to make a rational choice between them?

I think there is, and I will presently indicate how, in my opinion, a way out of this dilemma may be found. Before doing so, however, it is important to emphasize that the present discussion should not be an occasion for excessive polarisation of points of view. Historical reality is as a rule complex. We cannot discard the possibility that the contradictions under consideration owe their origin *both* to the teaching methods of the Buddha *and* to the vulnerability of later Buddhists to outside influence. If, therefore, the following lines present an argument in favour of the latter alternative, this is not automatically an argument against the former one.

The essential strength of the theory of outside influence is that it explains far more than the theory that bases itself on the teaching method of the Buddha. Above I mentioned three examples, all of which could be explained with the help of the same assumption: the assumption that Buddhism, early in its history, underwent the influence of other religious currents. We have seen that GOMBRICH, in order to explain these three examples, had to take recourse to three different stratagems. In the case of the first example, where the Buddha boasts about his abilities not to see and hear, GOMBRICH ascribed this to the poor physical state of the Buddha at that moment. Alternatively, he explained it as "merely the invention of a stupid hagiographer". The second example concerned "restraining one's thought with one's mind, coercing and tormenting it". Here GOMBRICH had to think of another kind of explanation: the practice is useful, if one does not carry it to extremes. The third example, finally, was explained with the help of the presumed teaching method of the Buddha. There are numerous other examples of contradictions which can be explained as resulting from outside

influence, which have been dealt with in my book.¹² GOMBRICH does not discuss these other cases, so I cannot say how he would explain them. It seems however likely that, as in the case of the three examples just discussed, he would come up with various different explanations. Given that one single explanation can account for all these cases, such alternative explanations create the impression of being invented *ad hoc*.

In the remainder of this article I will show that the theory which explains these contradictions as due to outside influence is far more homogeneous than it may look at first sight. I will argue that Buddhism, from a very early date onward, has been particularly vulnerable to one specific kind of influence. Most, if not all, of the cases of outside influence which we can, as it seems to me, discover in the ancient texts, are of this particular kind.

12 One of the conclusions arrived at, was that the four meditational states known by the Sanskrit names of *ākāśānāntyāyatana*, *vijñānānāntyāyatana*, *ākiñcanyāyatana*, and *naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana*, some (or all) of which appear to have been final stages of meditational exercises, are not authentically Buddhist. In this connection it is interesting to cite a passage from the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, in the French translation of LOUIS DE LA VALLÉE POUSSIN (1937: 161-162):

“En outre, l’expression ‘une vérité’, veut dire: ‘un *nirodhasatya*’, car le Bouddha veut condamner les autres [théories de la] délivrance (*vimukti*). En effet les hétérodoxes enseignent quatre délivrances: 1. La délivrance incorporelle qui est l’*ākāśānāntyāyatana*; 2. la délivrance de l’esprit infini (*anantamanovimukti*) qui est le *vijñānānāntyāyatana*; 3. la délivrance de ‘l’accumulation du pur’ qui est l’*ākiñcanyāyatana*; 4. la délivrance du ‘Stūpa du monde’ qui est le *naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana*. Le Bouddha dit que cela n’est pas la vraie délivrance (*vimukti*), la vraie sortie (*nihsarana*), mais l’existence dans la sphère immatérielle (*ārūpyabhava*). La vraie délivrance est seulement l’unique *nirodhasatya*, l’absolu Nirvāṇa.

En outre, l’expression: ‘une vérité’, veut dire: ‘un *mārgasatya*’, car Bhagavat désire condamner les autres *mārgasatyas*. Les hétérodoxes enseignent en effet beaucoup de *mārgasatyas*. Ils pensent que le chemin est: 1. s’affamer; 2. coucher dans la cendre; 3. suivre le soleil (*sūryānuvartana*); 4. boire le vent, boire l’eau, manger des fruits, manger des légumes; 5. nudité; 6. coucher sur des épines; 7. ne pas se coucher; 8. se vêtir de haillons; 9. prendre des drogues et ne pas manger. Le Bouddha dit que cela n’est pas le vrai chemin; ce sont de mauvais chemins, des chemins contrefaits, des chemins décevants. Les saints ne les pratiquent pas; ce sont les mauvais qui y errent. Le vrai pur chemin est l’unique *mārgasatya*, le saint chemin à huit membres, vue correcte, etc.”

Can one conclude from this passage that these meditational states were still known as being practised by non-Buddhists in the time of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*?

In order to specify the kind of influences to which Buddhism has been particularly vulnerable, it is important to recall that Buddhism presented a way to put an end to the cycle of rebirths determined by one's acts. We can speak in this connection of the doctrine of karma. Buddhism was not the only religious current of its time that offered a solution to the problem posed by the doctrine of karma. It did, however, offer a solution which differed in various ways from the solutions offered by others. In the case of the other currents of the time known to us, the link between the problem and its solution was obvious. In the case of Buddhism, on the other hand, this link was not so clear, or perhaps not clear at all. As a result at least some members of the early Buddhist community tended to borrow such elements from other religious currents, which would help re-establish the link between the solution and the problem it was meant to solve.

Which were the methods taught outside the Buddhist community? Two of them are known to us. The one is, in the early period, primarily linked to the Jainas, the other is, for that same period, best known from certain Upaniṣadic passages. Both are frequent in the more recent brahmanical literature. These two methods have one thing in common, the conviction namely that one can only escape the results of one's actions by somehow putting an end to all activity. The early Jainas, and many other Indian ascetics with them, applied this principle literally, and suppressed all bodily and mental activity.¹³ They would stand motionless for long periods of time, not reacting to any outside disturbances. The Jaina texts tell with pride how their spiritual heroes would not even react when tortured in various ways by curious onlookers, or by insects and other horrible creatures. The pains and suffering which these kinds of practices provoke were looked upon as signs that old karma was being destroyed. Once all the old karma destroyed, no new karma being added, it was sufficient for the ascetic to fast to death, motionlessly of course, and no new births would await him.

The other method shares the same essential concern. One can only be freed from the result of actions by not committing them. According to this second method, one has to discover that one is not identical with the active parts of the personality. All that is required is that one realise this important

13 BRUHN (1993: 14) rightly points out that the discussion of this characteristic of Jainism has only started.

insight. Once one stops identifying with the body and the mind, i.e. with all those aspects of the person that are active, one is no longer bound by the actions that have been committed by those parts.¹⁴ Usually this insight consists in the discovery of one's real self, one's soul, which is completely inactive by nature. Knowledge of the self has remained an essential, often the sole, ingredient of most doctrines of liberation that have been current in India. Virtually without exception, the self that has thus to be known is described as inactive. Sometimes it is stated to be identical with Brahman which, in its turn, is a non-agent; sometimes, such as in the classical Sāṅkhya philosophy and elsewhere, no such identity with Brahman is postulated, and it is rather the individual self, the *puruṣa*, which is said to be without activity.

These two methods of liberation are organically related to the doctrine of karma. They constitute, in a way, natural answers to the problem posed by this doctrine: Rebirth being occasioned by one's actions, only inaction can stop it. In spite of this, the early Buddhist texts contain clear evidence that both these methods were rejected at one point, most probably by the historical Buddha himself. The early Buddhist texts, to be sure, know the two methods just discussed, but they squarely reject them. On a number of occasions the Buddha is depicted as debating with Jainas, and as rejecting their practices. The Jainas are here described as "standing erect, refusing to sit down" and as experiencing "painful, sharp, severe sensations due to [self-inflicted] torture".¹⁵ In order to characterise the reaction of the Buddha to these practices, it is sufficient to cite the words that are put in his mouth after a discussion with some Jainas:¹⁶ "If, monks, the pleasure and pain which creatures undergo are due to what was previously done, certainly, monks, the Jainas were formerly doers of deeds that were badly done in that they now experience such painful, severe, sharp feelings." The method of bodily inaction evidently evoked a reaction of irony in the Buddha. But nor was he in favour of the method consisting in knowledge of the true nature of the self. We will consider some textual passages below. Let me first remind

14 This can imply the idea of liberation while still alive, which makes a hesitant appearance in the *Upaniṣads*; see FORT, 1994.

15 BRONKHORST, 1993: 26.

16 MN II.222, *Devadahasutta*; tr. HORNER, 1959: 10.

you that – quite independently of the question whether the Buddha did or did not deny the existence of a self – no one has yet claimed, on the basis of the early Buddhist texts, that *knowledge* of the true nature of the self was the method preached by him.

Buddhism, then, accepted the doctrine of karma. Moreover, like the other religious currents that accepted this doctrine, and which constituted together what might be called the śramaṇa movement, Buddhism looked upon the ongoing cycle of rebirths as thoroughly unsatisfactory, and accepted escape from this cycle as the highest religious aim. But the Buddha did not accept either of the two methods which most naturally fitted the problem connected with this doctrine. Buddhism preached an own method, different from those two. For my present purposes it is not essential that we know exactly what the Buddha's message consisted in.¹⁷ The Buddhist texts present, in fact, various methods, which are sometimes in contradiction with each other. The confused appearance of the early Buddhist texts is most easily explained by the circumstance that, from an early date, the Buddhists themselves were embarrassed by the fact that the solution presented by their tradition did not, or not clearly, fit the problem. This circumstance, in its turn, made Buddhism particularly vulnerable to the influence of the other methods, which fitted the problem admirably.

The three examples given at the beginning of this article illustrate this. They all concern the restriction of the mind, of the sense organs, or quite simply of all bodily and mental activities. The other examples which can be found in my book *The Two Traditions of Meditation in Ancient India* concern this same theme, and illustrate the attraction which this particular theme exerted on the early Buddhists. However, there is another theme which should be expected to have left its traces in the ancient Buddhist texts. This is the theme of the inactive self, knowledge of which will liberate one from the cycle of rebirths.

Let me here, in order to avoid misunderstandings, point out that the Buddhist texts contain no indication whatsoever suggesting that the Buddha or his early followers looked upon knowledge of the true nature of the self as a method to obtain freedom from rebirth. It is even open to doubt whether

17 This question will be addressed in my contribution to the first volume on Buddhism in *Die Religionen der Menschheit*, now under preparation.

the very existence of the or a self was accepted by them.¹⁸ Many passages rather emphasize the non-self: the constituent parts of the personality are not the self.

Let us now consider the first sermon which the Buddha, according to the tradition preserved in the Vinaya, is supposed to have preached after his enlightenment. His audience is constituted by the group of five monks, his first disciples. I will quote some passages from the Pāli version belonging to the Theravādins; very similar passages occur in the Vinayas of the Mahīśāsakas and Dharmaguptakas.¹⁹ We read here:²⁰

Then the Lord addressed the group of five monks, saying: "Matter (*rūpa*), monks, is not self. Now were this matter self, monks, this matter would not tend to sickness, and one might get the chance of saying in regard to matter, 'Let matter become thus for me, let matter not become thus for me'. But inasmuch, monks, as matter is not self, therefore matter tends to sickness, and one does not get the chance of saying in regard to matter, 'Let matter become thus for me, let matter not become thus for me'."

The same words are then repeated with regard to the remaining four constituents of the person (*skandha*), viz. feeling (*vedanā*), ideation (*saṃjñā*), the habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*), consciousness (*vijñāna*). The Buddha then continues:

"What do you think about this, monks? Is matter permanent or impermanent?"

"Impermanent, Lord."

"But is that which is impermanent suffering or bliss?"

"Painful, Lord."

"But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, painful, of a nature to change, as 'This is mine, this am I, this is my self'?"

"It is not, Lord."

The same words are then repeated, this time in connection with the remaining four constituents of the person.

18 Claus OETKE's analyses in his book '*Ich' und das Ich*' have definitely shown, as it seems to me, that the early texts do not contain sufficient evidence to state that the Buddha did not accept the existence of the self, but nor can one say with certainty that he did.

19 Translated into French by BAREAU (1963: 191 f.)

20 Vin I.13 f.; tr. HORNER, 1951: 20 f., modified.

This passage neither proves nor disproves that the Buddha accepted the existence of the self. It is not the *existence* of the self, however, that is of particular interest here, but the *conception* of the self that manifests itself in these lines. These lines are about a self that is permanent, unchangeable and bliss. Such a conception of the self is well known from other, non-Buddhist sources. Indeed, the conception of a permanent, unchangeable self underlies the religious movements which I have just referred to, and which believe that insight into the true nature of the self is the necessary, or even sufficient, condition for the attainment of liberation from the cycle of rebirths. Their self has to be permanent and unchangeable, precisely because it does not participate in any actions. Some texts add that the self is bliss (*ānanda*) which corresponds to the *sukha* mentioned in our Vinaya passage.

I think it is justified to conclude, not just that the author of this passage knew the conception of a self that is permanent, unchangeable and bliss; but also, that he was acquainted with the method of liberation through insight into the true nature of the self. The present passage shows acquaintance with that method, and rejects it. It rejects the belief that it suffices to know the true inactive nature of the self in order to be liberated from the effects of one's actions.

The continuation of this same sermon has more surprises in store. Here the Buddha draws some conclusions from his earlier observations:

Wherefore, monks, whatever is matter, past, future, present, or internal or external, or gross or subtle, or low or excellent, whether it is far or near – all matter should, by means of right wisdom, be seen, as it really is, thus: This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self.

The same is repeated with reference to the four remaining skandhas. The Buddha then continues:

Seeing in this way, monks, the instructed disciple of the ariyans turns away from matter and he turns away from feeling and he turns away from ideation and he turns away from the habitual tendencies and he turns away from consciousness; turning away he is dispassionate; through dispassion he is freed; in the freed one the knowledge comes to be: 'I am freed', and he knows: Birth has been destroyed, the pure life has been lived, what was to be done has been done, so that there is no more return here.

Interestingly, this continuation of the sermon, having just rejected one liberating insight, introduces another one. For here the knowledge of not-

self is presented as a liberating insight. The concluding remarks of this passage of the Vinaya show this beyond any possible doubt:

Thus spoke the Lord; delighted, the group of five monks rejoiced in what the Lord had said. Moreover while this discourse was being uttered (*imasmiñ ca pana veyyākaraṇasmīm bhaññamāne*), the minds of the group of five monks were freed from the intoxicants without grasping. At that time there were six perfected ones (*arhat*) in the world.

In other words, the mere fact of hearing this wisdom proclaimed was enough for the five monks to reach Arhat-ship right there and then. No question of retiring into loneliness, of reaching subsequently the Four Dhyānas, etc., which are elsewhere in the Buddhist texts presented as essential prerequisites for attaining to this exalted state. And the liberating knowledge presented here is quite different from the one usually formulated in connection with the Four Dhyānas. Moreover, the very possibility of sudden enlightenment is denied in a passage that occurs several times in the early texts, and which reads:²¹ “Just as the great ocean dips gradually, ebbs gradually, slopes gradually and not suddenly like a precipice, so in my doctrine and my discipline, the access to perfect knowledge is achieved by gradual practice, a gradual action, a gradual way and not directly.”

All this looks mysterious at first sight, but is really relatively easy to explain. For the knowledge of the not-self is, in its essence, hardly different from the knowledge of the self of the non-Buddhists. Why did knowledge of the self signify, for so many Indians, liberation from the effects of one's actions? Precisely because it implied that one is not identical with the active parts of one's personality, i.e., the body and the mind. Well, this is exactly what the knowledge of the not-self does for the Buddhists. It teaches that none of the constituents of the personality are the self. If we understand this to mean that one should not identify with these constituents, we come to the same kind of insight as that of the self for the non-Buddhists. A major difference is, of course, that an empty spot seems to remain there where the non-Buddhists believed to find a soul, but the effect of non-identification with one's actions is exactly the same.

I believe that this passage illustrates how a doctrine that was explicitly rejected, found its way into the Buddhist texts through a back-door. We

21 Vin II.238; AN IV.200-201; Ud 54; tr. HARRIS, 1991: 75. See further DURT, 1994: 826.m

have already spoken about the reason why such a doctrine was apparently welcomed back by at least some Buddhists: because in the case of such an insight it was clear why it could constitute a solution to the problem posed by the doctrine of karma. The effects of action can only be avoided through non-action. Knowing that one's active parts are not really one's self, implies not being affected by the results of those actions.

The thesis which this last case, as well as the ones considered earlier, illustrates, is that Buddhism was vulnerable to clear and direct answers to the problem of karma. To conclude, I will give two examples from later Buddhism, which are meant to show that, many centuries after its earliest period, Buddhism remained vulnerable to such answers. The first example is about the notion of an inactive self, the second one concerns physical and mental inactivity.

The idea of an inactive self continued to exert an attraction on the Buddhists. It finds expression in the so-called *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The similarity between the *tathāgatagarbha* of certain Buddhists and the self of certain non-Buddhists was so striking that one Buddhist text comments upon it. The following passage occurs in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. The Bodhisattva Mahāmati addresses the following question to the Buddha:²²

You describe the *tathāgatagarbha* as brilliant by nature and pure by its purity etc., possessing the thirty-two signs [of excellence], and present in the bodies of all beings; it is enveloped in a garment of *skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas*, like a gem of great value which is enveloped in a dirty garment; it is soiled with passion, hatred, confusion and false imagination, and described by the venerable one as eternal, stable, auspicious and without change. Why is this doctrine of the *tathāgatagarbha* not identical with the doctrine of the *ātman* of the non-Buddhists? Also the non-Buddhists preach a doctrine of the *ātman* which is eternal, non-active, without attributes, omnipresent and imperishable.

The Buddha's answer does not interest us at present. An attempt is made to show that there is, after all, a difference between the *tathāgatagarbha* of the Buddhists and the *ātman* of the non-Buddhists. The main point is that the two were so close that even Buddhists started wondering what the diffe-

22 *Laṅkāv(V) 2.137*, p. 33 l. 10 ff. The word *kartā* at the end of Mahāmati's question has been corrected into *akartā* 'non-active'; only this reading makes sense; it is moreover confirmed by the Tibetan translation (Taipei edition vol. 10, folio 86a), as I have been informed by T. TILLEMANS.

rence was. Clearly, the idea of an inactive self had maintained its attraction for the Buddhists of this later period.

For the second example we have to leave India, and consider a controversy which took place within the Buddhist community of Tibet, in the 8th century of the Common Era. This controversy has recently been discussed by David Seyfort RUEGG in his book *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism in a Comparative Perspective*. It seems likely that the position criticised in the third Bhāvanākrama of Kamalaśīla is the teaching which he ascribed to the Chinese master Mahāyāna and his numerous Tibetan followers. It runs as follows:²³

A certain [teacher] has the following opinion: “It is because of the force of good and bad deeds (*śubhāśubhakarman*), produced through mental construction (*cittavikalpa*), that sentient beings (*sattva*) revolve in the round of existences (*samsāra*), experiencing the fruits of deeds (*karmaphala*) such as heaven (*svargādi*). Those who on the contrary neither think on anything (*na kiṃcic cintayanti*) nor perform any deed whatever are completely freed (*parimuc-*) from the round of existences. Therefore nothing is to be thought on (*na kiṃcic cintayitavyam*), nor is salutary conduct (*kuśalacaryā*) consisting in generosity and the like (*dānādi*) to be practised. It is only in respect to foolish people (*mūrkhajana*) that salutary conduct consisting in generosity and the like has been indicated (*nirdistā*).”

And again:²⁴ “No deed whatever, salutary or otherwise, is to be performed” (*na kiṃcit kuśalādikarma kartavyam*). We find here ideas which in early Buddhism we could attribute to the influence of Jainism and related currents, but this time in a country, Tibet, where there were no Jainas.

It is beyond the scope of this study to address the question whether perhaps the Tibetan controversy was, in the end, due to the influence of Chinese, such as Taoist, ideas, which might have been introduced into Tibet by the teacher Mahāyāna, who was, after all, a Chinese himself. Nor can we deal with the question whether the conception of the *tathāgatagarbha* which we find in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* has undergone the influence of Brahmanical thinkers; RUEGG (1989: 19f.) thinks it hasn’t, but his arguments may not be altogether compelling. The answers to these two questions are not essential in the present context. The questions themselves suffice to draw

23 Tucci, 1971: 13-14; tr. RUEGG, 1989: 93.

24 Tucci, 1971: 20; tr. RUEGG, 1989: 94. See further RUEGG, 1989: 141 f.

attention, once again, to the most important conclusion which our reflections lead to: Buddhism did not borrow just anything that it happened to come into contact with. Quite on the contrary, Buddhism was susceptible to certain kinds of ideas. Buddhism was, one might say, structurally in need of a satisfactory answer to the doctrine of karma. When such solutions were present in neighbouring religious currents, some Buddhists at least were likely to borrow these solutions, or rather adjusted versions of these solutions, and absorb them into Buddhist doctrine. The possibility cannot however be entirely ruled out that in certain circumstances ideas of this kind – i.e. ideas concerning the non-active nature of the self, or concerning the need to practice mental and physical inaction – arose within Buddhism itself, without outside influence.

In conclusion we may return once more to the questions from which we started: What was the exact relationship between early Buddhism and early Jainism with regard to the central problem of karma and rebirth? And how do we explain the passages in the early Buddhist texts which proclaim practices similar to those attributed to the Jainas? I have argued that Jainism offered a very straightforward, and therefore satisfactory, answer to the problem of karma. Buddhism did not. The effects are visible throughout the history of Buddhism. It was and remained susceptible to certain kinds of non-authentic ideas and practices. Jaina-like practices, in particular, already exerted a great attraction upon the early Buddhist community. This in itself explains that such practices are occasionally recommended in the early Buddhist texts. No further explanation is necessary, as I have tried to show with the help of a number of examples. It is yet not impossible that the special teaching method of the Buddha made it even easier for such endorsements to find their way into the texts. Personally I see no need for this latter assumption, but nor do I see the need to deny its possibility.

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Abbreviations:

AN *Ānguttara-Nikāya*, ed. R. MORRIS, E. HARDY, 5 vols., London 1885-1900 (PTS); vol. 6 (Indexes, by M. HUNT and C.A.F. RHYS DAVIDS), London 1910 (PTS)

BST *Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, Darbhanga*

Laṅkāv(V) *(Saddharma)laṅkāvatārasūtra*, ed. P.L. VAIDYA, Darbhanga 1963 (BST 3)

MN *Majjhima-Nikāya*, ed. V. TRENCKNER, R. CHALMERS, 3 vols., London 1888-1899 (PTS)

PTS *Pali Text Society, London*

Ud *Udāna*, ed. P. STEINTHAL, London 1885 (PTS)

Vin *Vinayapiṭaka*, ed. H. OLDENBERG, 5 vols., London 1879-1883 (PTS)