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# A Road to Nowhere:
# The Significance of the Pilgrimage in Buddhist Literature

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**Abstract**

This paper is an exploration of the theme of pilgrimage in the following three works: *Gaṇḍavyūha, Journey to the West* and *The Life of Marpa the Translator.*

Through an examination of the narrative structure of the texts, I derive a pattern which is consistent throughout these three Mahāyāna works. This pattern is then compared to the Mahāyāna doctrine of Two Truths, which is shown to be expressed by the literary pilgrimage. Finally, by exploring the ways in which these texts 'work' on the reader -- both by seeing the protagonist go through the stages of Buddhist practice and through the reader's interaction with the text -- I show how reading these stories can act as a transformative Buddhist practice.

**Acknowledgments**

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I also want to thank Lama Ole Nydahl for never being separate from me.

And finally, I dedicate this work to the memory of my mother, Dianne, who would have loved to be here to see this.

**Résumé**

Le texte qui suit est un exploration du thème du pélèrinage de trois textes: *Gaṇḍavyūha, Journey to the West* et *The Life of Marpa the Translator.*

En examinant la structure narrative de ces textes, j'ai trouvé un motif persistant qui parcourt ces travaux Mahāyāna. Ce motif, je le compare à la doctrine Mahāyāna des Deux Verités, en montrant comment cette doctrine est exprimée par le pélèrinage littéraire. En conclusion, j'explore les façons dont ces textes peuvent fonctionner pour la lectrice comme exercice Bouddhiste transformateur: d'une part en suivant le progrès du pélèrin pendant qu'il passe par les étapes du pélèrinage; et d'autre part en interaction avec le texte.

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## Introduction

It is the case that Buddhist Literature has gone largely unstudied. Individual works have been analysed, but the field of examining the use of *story* as a form of Buddhist practice has not been established or even satisfactorily explored.[1] Francisca Cho Bantly's work *Embracing Illusion* constitutes the first attempt to formally analyse the relationship of Buddhism to fiction and will be reviewed later in this introduction.

While it would be asking too much of a Master's thesis to include in its scope the whole gamut of what could be considered Buddhist Literature, I will contribute to this fledgling field of study by attempting to grasp a single common *theme* -- pilgrimage -- as it appears in three texts from three distinct Mahāyāna Buddhist cultures: *Gaṇḍavyūha* (the final book of the *Avataṁsaka Sūtra*) from India, *The Life of Marpa the Translator (sgra-bsgyur mar-pa lo-tsa'i rnamthar mthong-ba don-yod)* from Tibet, and *Journey to the West (Xiyou Ji)* from China. I will show how the pilgrimage and the environment which evolves with it can be read as devices which express Two Truths, as well as exploring how reading these texts can function as Buddhist practice. In short, I will introduce the use of fiction as a legitimate tool for teaching and learning Mahāyāna Buddhism and show how skilfully three particular texts do just that.

This introductory chapter will introduce the reader to the role of language in Buddhism, present a justification of my serious consideration of the *story* as a

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[1] The ways the individual works I am analysing have been interpreted will be reviewed later in this paper. It should also be mentioned that there are some people working hard to understand stories -- specifically biographies -- "not as historical records but as religious texts" (Granoff 8). Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara have been particularly prolific in this area. However, my project is to understand how these pilgrim stories function as practice, and not to observe how they evolved or how they can be read as purely inspirational religious texts. Therefore, while their work is of interest to me, it is not directly relevant to my research.

medium for the communication of Buddhist philosophy through a review of Bantly's work, and address the question of what Buddhist literature actually is.

## Buddhism and Language

In Mahāyāna Sūtras like the *Laṅkāvatāra* and the *Tathāgataguhya* -- indeed often in Mahāyāna philosophy in general -- we encounter the insistence that the highest truth, the ultimate nature of reality, is inexpressible. Perhaps the most famous expression of the role of language in teachings on the nature of Buddhist reality is the Buddha's pronounced silence when he refused to answer fourteen questions.[2] There is another typical use of silence in Buddhism and D. T. Suzuki cites a useful illustration from the *Prajñāpāramita-sūtra*:

> When Subhuti was sitting quietly in a cave, the gods praised him by showering celestial flowers. Said Subhuti: "Who are you that shower flowers from the sky?"
>
> "We are the gods whose chief is Śakradevendra."
>
> "What are you praising?"
>
> "We praise your discourse on Prajñāpāramitā [perfection of wisdom]"
>
> "I have never uttered a word in the discourse of Prajñāpāramitā, and there is nothing for you to praise."

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[2] According to the texts, Buddha said "I have not determined whether (1) The world is eternal, (2) the world is non-eternal, (3) the world has boundaries, (4) the world is unbounded, (5) life is the physical body, (6) life is one thing and the physical body is another, (7) one who knows the truth exists after death, (8) one who knows the truth does not exist after death, (9) one who knows the truth both exists and does not exist after death, (10) one who knows the truth neither exists nor does not exist after death, (11) discontent is caused by oneself, (12) discontent is caused by another, (13) discontent is caused by both oneself and another, (14) discontent, being caused neither by oneself nor by another, arises spontaneously" (from the *Potthapadasutta* of the *Dighanikaya*, quoted in Hayes 357). Actually, according to Hayes' reading of the texts, the Buddha makes it clear that the reason he does not want to answer these questions is because they are completely irrelevant to the issue of suffering ("discontent") and its alleviation. However, many other scholars -- Kalupahana and Murti in particular -- subscribe to a more interpretive view, taking this refusal to answer as an indication of the non-discursive nature of wisdom in Buddhism.

> But the gods asserted, "You have not discoursed on anything and we have not listened to anything; nothing discoursed, nothing heard indeed, and this is true Prajñāpāramitā." So saying they shook the earth again and showered more flowers. (110)

Like a black hole which is only made visible by the events taking place around it, the wisdom and realisation seemingly only attainable and expressed through silence are made visible by the effect it has on the world around it -- like the recognition laid upon Subhuti by the gods, or that other artifact which we use to mark the proximity of this realisation: language.[3]

The language, texts, teachings -- all these are, to borrow a famous metaphor from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra,* seen as only a finger pointing to the moon, but not as the moon itself. The highest level to be reached by the meditator is described as *sarvaprapañcopaśama* (appeasing all discursive thinking) and *sarvavādacaryoccheda* (cutting out all doctrines and practices). Despite this, language remains. Luis Gomez writes:

> Still, all traditions, including the Mahāyāna, develop a language of the sacred . . . for it is necessary to explain holy silence in order to lead living beings to it. Thus, the culmination of this sort of speculation comes with the recognition that language, with all its limitations, is an important vehicle for salvation: language is *upāya.* (534)

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[3] There is an interesting parallel in Buddhist art to the role of silence: the aniconic icon. In early Buddhist art (everything up until the first centuries of the common era) one finds a distinct absence of representations of the Buddha in Buddhist art. He will be implied by a dharma wheel, a foot-print, a stupa or empty space. It is commonly held by modern scholars that this was done in order to express Buddha's true nature -- "the state of being 'just so'" (Snellgrove 23) -- a state characterised by emptiness and no-self. For an argument against the prevalent theory of the aniconic icon, see Susan Huntington's "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism."

Language's status as *upāya* connotes a sense that the enlightenment sought in Buddhism is not itself a discursive one; that it is silent and a truth which stands apart from the conventional hustle and bustle of the world. Gomez writes:

> The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*'s statement on the silence of the Buddha is extended to mean that all words of the Buddha have only a provisional value. They are pronounced only in response to the needs of living beings who cannot penetrate directly into the mystery of the Tathāgata's silence. (532)

Having said all this, it is important to point out that this approach to language creates a new duality, one that distinguishes between language and enlightenment, means and end, finger and moon. In Chapter 7 of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, a goddess has the following exchange with Śāriputra:

> Śāriputra kept silent and did not reply. The goddess then asked: "Why is the wise elder silent on this point?" Śāriputra replied: "He who wins liberation does not express it in words; hence I do not know what to say." The goddess said: "Spoken and written words reveal liberation. Why? For liberation is neither within nor without nor in between, and words also are neither inside nor outside not in between. Therefore, Śāriputra, liberation cannot be preached without using words. Why? Because all things point to liberation." (Luk 75)[4]

Śāriputra is attached to his idea of what liberation consists of and how it is expressed. His approach to language as something which is somehow contradictory

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[4] Robert Thurman's translation basically agrees with Luk's -- I will cite the final speech by the goddess to allow some measure of comparison: "All the syllables pronounced by the elder have the nature of liberation. Why? Liberation is neither internal nor external, nor can it be apprehended apart from them. Likewise, syllables are neither internal nor external, nor can they be apprehended anywhere else. Therefore, reverend Sariputra, do not point to liberation by abandoning speech! Why? The holy liberation is the equality of all things!" (Thurman 59)

to liberation illustrates that. What the goddess is teaching him is that language is as much an expression of enlightenment as it is a pointer to it; that to differentiate between liberation and that which leads to it is not a useful distinction. To do so articulates a duality that is particularly insidious because at first glance it seems to make so much sense and so quickly begins to feel like it must be *true*. As will be explained in my discussion of the Two Truths doctrine in Chapter 2, the duality of conventional means and ultimate goal is not as obvious as it first appears to be.

## Giving Form to Airy Nothing: Buddhism Meets Story

Francisca Cho Bantly explores the idea of how fiction can not only express but *enact* the message of Buddhism[5] in great detail in *Embracing Illusion,* a work which explores the validity of reading fiction as a philosophical discourse in the study of Buddhism. She explains that fiction "can affirm the functional value of purely created and illusory words without allowing its own discourse to give rise to self-subverting ontological impressions" (171). In other words, fiction, which by its very nature is ontologically 'untrue' prevents its readers from trying to attach any hard and fast truth-claims to its words. These words, while they have no responsibility to represent 'reality' as such, can be and *are* nonetheless functional, effective and even *make sense*. As the first work of its kind, her theoretical defence is quite valuable to the framework of my thesis.

Bantly is concerned with redeeming the role of the imagination in the Western academic community. She explains how members of this particular community may be characterised as subscribing to either univocal or equivocal

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[5] An interesting aside: Victor Mair proposes that the development of fiction in China attained fruition only after the influx of Indian Buddhist literary themes and Indian Buddhist ontology (ie: world is illusion).

analysis of cultures. 'Univocal analysis' works on the assumption that one may uncritically affirm the similarities between cultures, and results in a 'New-Agey' white-washing of their uniqueness and particularities. 'Equivocal analysis,' on the other hand, affirms just the opposite view; that the differences between cultures are unbridgeable, separating them to such a degree that no comparison is possible. She places herself between these two extremes, and cites the imagination, the scholar's mind,[6] as a valid locus of cultural comparison. Functioning as an arena where different texts, cultures, languages and ideas can meet, the imagination facilitates this dialogue in a uniquely agile and creative manner. *How* this occurs is something I will explore in Chapter 3. Her affirmation of the imagination is relevant to my work as it amounts to the means by which I may justify this research. After all, how else could a caucasian Canadian compare Buddhist texts from China, Tibet and India? What Bantly offers is a means by which the scholar's mind may provide the necessary locus of comparison, as well as an arena in which the stories "can talk back to our present time and space" (2).

Bantly then goes on to introduce her project as: "the attempt to discover different ways in which cultures constitute philosophical discourse" (5). As, by her own definition, philosophy "refers not only to a view of reality...but a system of articulation with internal criteria of satisfaction" (6), a work of fiction can fulfil the qualifications of being a philosophical text in the context of Buddhist thought because of the Buddhist view of language and ultimate reality. She writes:

> If fictional truth releases itself from the need of reality verification, then its very mode or process of making truth claims coincides perfectly

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[6] I believe that Bantly emphasises the *scholar's* mind because she is a scholar writing for an academic audience. I am in the same position but wish to clarify that I am not in any way trying to instantiate a hierarchy, for the scholar's imagination is no more refined than anyone else's. For our purposes here, however, we can limit this discussion to the mind of the scholar.

> with the Buddhist truth claim that there are no metaphysical realities that correspond to conceptual and philosophical terms. (152)

In other words, by its very nature fiction doesn't have to be *true* to anything but its own internal criteria.

Buddhism's ontology of illusion also makes it uniquely amenable to this kind of discourse. Victor Mair goes so far as to say that the Buddhist philosophy of illusion provides an ontological justification of fiction, that, in fact, fiction is "a localized intensification" of Buddhist reality (Bantly 198). Further, Bantly argues that stories are ideal vehicles for communicating philosophy, or teachings which point to ultimate reality, because "our ability to be engaged by the novel is a direct reflection of the fact that narratives correspond most closely to the way we construct the meaning of our own lives" (7). In other words, the rich, compelling details of a story can reach us more intimately than formal discourse (6).

If the purpose of philosophy is to change its readers in any way, the ability to do this -- to reach its readers intimately -- is crucial. Bantly quotes Martha Nussbaum's evaluation of this issue. According to Nussbaum, philosophy should, ideally, create a link between historical particularity and our common universal humanity. This link occurs, she argues, in novels:

> By enlisting the reader as a concerned participant in the adventure of the characters, novels take our common humanity for their theme, implying that what is at issue is not merely some idiosyncratic event that actually happened, but a possibility or possibilities for human life. (76)

Or, to put it another way, we as readers get sucked in to the adventures of the characters in a story by starting to identify with them. The issues in the story

become personal and begin to involve us and matter to us to such an extent that they pervade our lives long after we put the book down. The personal dramas of the characters engage our emotions and we begin to reflect upon the larger issues implied. Before we know it, our intellect has been drafted and we have been introduced to one philosophical idea or another. Bantly cites Anthony Yu's views on the subject: Yu evaluates dreams as things which are capable of teaching their lessons without forcing the dreamer to personally undergo the experiences. Yu's argument continues: "This observation can be extended to the nature of fiction itself, which parallels the function of a dream in its potential to constitute a vicarious experience" (97-8). My analysis of the nature of the reader's experience goes beyond Yu's vision of the vicarious -- however, this and the use of identification in reading a Buddhist text as practice will be explored in detail in Chapter 3.

Bantly's book is centred on an analysis of *The Dream of the Nine Clouds* (*Kuunmong* or KUM), a novel by the 17th century Korean writer Kim Manjung. KUM, in fact, is a story which involves a dream. The protagonist, Xingzhen, dreams an entire lifetime in which he is a man named Shaoyou who has a career, two wives, six concubines, a multitude of children, and in the end wakes up out of this dream realising at once that the dream was unreal. Xingzhen attributes the dream to the wisdom of his Master and proceeds to thank him, "however, the Master bedevils his disciple's sense of reality by questioning which of his identities is real -- Shaoyou or Xingzhen" (74).[7] How is he to know if what he has awakened to is 'really real' or 'just' another dream? And, finally, does it make a difference? Let us examine how Bantly ties this in with Buddhist philosophy:

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[7] Another famous example from the 4th Century BCE: "Once Chuang Chu dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn't know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou" (Chuang 45).

> [In Buddhist thought] the world is created and illusory in the same way that fiction is. KUM seems to articulate this understanding of the world through the receding frame motif, which questions the possibility of a final awakening that distinguishes between illusion and ultimate reality. If we persist in applying this [Buddhist] ontology to the theory of fiction, the only course seems to be to affirm fiction as a direct embodiment of the world rather than a mimetic or symbolic representation of it. (116)

What Bantly refers to as "the receding frame motif" is the placing of a story within a story, each of which appears to be 'real' when one is involved in it, but which becomes unreal when one shifts stories, or frame of reference. In the context of KUM, it is what we see at work when the main character lives a lifetime that is as real as any story could be, and then awakes to find it's all been a dream. What he wakes to then takes on the appearance of 'reality', but the dreamer is left with the question: "is *this* the real thing?" and the reader at some point must realise the constructed nature of each of those realities (being, as they are, all part of a 'fiction'). Practitioners of Buddhism are often forced to examine the illusory nature of everything from the desk in front of them to what they identify as their 'self'. As the fact remains -- once one has thoroughly convinced oneself of the unreality of these things -- that there is still a desk in front of one and one still feels somehow 'existent', the question arises as to whether ultimate reality is anything other than this. If this ontology is then applied equally to fiction, the most logical and fascinating conclusion one must come to is that fiction is no more or less real than anything else we encounter -- it does not symbolise reality or simply make a show of imitating it, it embodies it, it *is* it.

One of the most difficult notions to grasp then, is that of enlightenment -- realising *nirvāṇa* in this world of illusion. As we shall soon see, the Buddhist

pilgrim must undertake his journey in search of enlightenment in order to find out that enlightenment is as illusory as everything else he tried to leave behind. One must abandon one's familiar frames of reference and explore all the kinds of realities out there before one returns to what one started with and sees it as it is:

> Our dilemma is that the equivalence of all frames of reality, and, similarly, the immanence of spiritual perfection within oneself, by no means dispenses with the need to set off on the religious journey. The trajectory of this journey, however, is not linear but rather traces a full circle in which one ends where one began. (139)

## Buddhist Literature

Now I must turn my attention to less lofty subjects for a moment and explore the question of what constitutes Buddhist literature.

Initially, one may be inclined to define it by the presence or absence of Buddhist features: references to Sūtras, the Buddha, or perhaps a protagonist who practices Buddhism. This seems to work well enough until one then tries to pin down what a legitimate Buddhist feature is -- for that requires one to define Buddhism in concrete terms. If any old text with a reference to Buddha counts as Buddhist literature, we are forced to consider the possibility of including Kerouac and Hesse as authors of Buddhist literature. If, then, one wants to lay down rules about what really counts as Buddhism and what does not in order to keep some kind of 'quality control', one must then establish what forms of Buddhism are acceptable, which Sūtras are to be accepted, and who counts as an authority on Buddhism (a Buddhist monk in Dharamsala? a lay practitioner in the United States? a full professor of Buddhist Studies at an expensive university?)[8] What

[8] See *Curators of the Buddha* (ed. Donald Lopez) for a more provocative formulation of this question.

are we to make of Yukio Mishima's *The Golden Pavilion*, for instance? It could be read as a Buddhist novel, a novel about Buddhism, or a story about a troubled young man set against the backdrop of Buddhism. The questions we would be forced to ask ourselves would never end.

I believe that the site which determines whether or not a text is Buddhist lies in one of the most neglected features of literature: the reader. What this actually translates into is an assertion that there is no way to definitively establish what makes a Buddhist text, but one can say that there is such a thing as a Buddhist reading. A Buddhist reading, loosely defined, describes the way a Buddhist practitioner approaches a text; reading a text with Buddhist assumptions in mind and expecting the text to illustrate Buddhist teachings. In this fashion, reading a text becomes part of a practitioner's practice, like meditation, prostrations, chanting, etc. In that sense, we may say that in a Buddhist reading, one reads the text not to understand the text but to understand oneself.[9] As an academic, then, insofar as one has the freedom to study Buddhism, one has the freedom to attempt a Buddhist reading of a text.

That being said, it is obvious but nonetheless necessary to state that some kinds of texts are better suited to a Buddhist reading than others. A text constructed with some intention on the part of the author to be meaningfully legible by a Buddhist is the ideal.

## Apologia

There are obvious problems with this project: there is no way for me to determine who the ideal audience of these texts was intended to be; I cannot

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[9] Hori, Victor. Email to the author. 14 February 1998.

determine who originally read these texts and how they understood them; and I cannot establish beyond the shadow of a doubt that my reading is anything but a coincidence of scholarship, experience and wishful thinking. Only further scholarship on the subject and the willingness of my readers to 'play along' can neutralise these criticisms.

# Chapter 1

## The Texts: Gaṇḍavyūha

The *Gaṇḍavyūha* is the only so-called 'canonical' work that I am studying. Apparently written in the second century CE, it is one of two books of the *Avataṁsaka Sūtra* which can be traced back to India through its Sanskrit original (the other is the *Daśabhūmika*). According to Francis Cook, the *Avataṁsaka* as a whole was probably compiled (and in some part composed) somewhere in Central Asia, inspired by the *Gaṇḍavyūha* and the *Daśabhūmika* (Cook 22). By Thomas Cleary's reckoning, it issued "from different hands in the Indian cultural sphere during the first and second centuries A.D" (Cleary *The Flower* vol. 1: 1). Traditionally, "it is believed to have been delivered by the Buddha while he was in deep meditation after the Enlightenment" (Suzuki 147 footnote 1). Destined to become one of the most widely used Sūtras in Chinese Buddhism -- and eventually the central text of what would come to be known as Hua-yen Buddhism ('Hua-yen' is the Chinese translation of 'Avataṁsaka') -- it was translated into Chinese in bits and pieces starting in the second century CE and continuing for nearly a thousand years (Cleary, vol. 1: 2). Over thirty different translations of various books of the Sūtra were made, but there are only two comprehensive renditions. The first was completed by the Indian monk Buddhabhadra in 420 CE, and the second by the Khotanese monk Śikṣānanda (652-710 CE) in the late seventh century. The version of the *Gaṇḍavyūha* I am working with is Cleary's translation of Śikṣānanda's seventh century translation.

The *Gaṇḍavyūha* appears to have originally been an independent work. This is evidenced both by its sheer size and its capacity to stand apart from the rest of the Sūtra and appear complete (Suzuki 147; Cook 22). Commentarial literature on

this work does exist -- although for the most part is extant only in Chinese -- including Cheng-kuan's[1] *Hua-yen ching ju fa-chieh p'in shih pa wenta* ("Eighteen Questions and Answers on the 'Entry into the Realm of Reality' Book of the Hua-yen Scripture") and Tsung-mi's[2] commentary on Cheng-kuan's commentary (Cleary *Entry* 11-15).

It is, essentially, the story of a young Buddhist who sets off on a quest to perfect his practice as a Bodhisattva. Sudhana, "an outstanding boy," (*The Flower* 3: 49) sets out to receive teachings from Mañjuśri, who has temporarily entered the human realm. Sudhana asks of him the following:

> Noble One, please give me a full explanation of how an enlightening being is to study the practice of enlightening beings, how an enlightening being is to accomplish it. How is an enlightening being to initiate the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to carry out the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to fulfil the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to purify the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to comprehend the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to effect the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to follow the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to keep the practice of enlightening beings? How is an enlightening being to expand the practice of enlightening beings? How can an enlightening being fulfil the sphere of the universally good practice? (3: 54)

Mañjuśri is thrilled that Sudhana wants not only enlightenment, but to become a bodhisattva. He gives Sudhana the following advice:

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[1] Cheng-kuan (738-839 or 760-820) is the fourth patriarch of Hua-yen Buddhism.
[2] Tsung-mi (780-841) is the fifth patriarch of Hua-yen.

> An enlightening being is to attain certainty through true spiritual friends, spiritual benefactors, for the realization of omniscience. One should indefatigably seek spiritual benefactors and be tireless in seeing spiritual benefactors. One should respectfully follow the appropriate instructions of spiritual benefactors and should carry out the techniques skillfully devised by spiritual benefactors, without interruption. (3: 55)

He then tells Sudhana to head south, to Rāmavarānta, to a mountain there called Sugriva where he will find a monk named Meghaśri. Here begins Sudhana's pilgrimage.

Over the course of much time -- it is unspecified -- Sudhana visits a total of fifty-three teachers, each of whom passes on his/her highest practice and wisdom to the boy but who is unable to answer the pivotal question. Each visit to a teacher results in the naming of the next teacher Sudhana should visit, until he is finally sent back to Mañjuśri and attains the insight he was seeking.

## The Life of Marpa the Translator

The *Life of Marpa the Translator (sgra-bsgyur mar-pa lo-tsa'i rnamthar mthong-ba don-yod)* belongs to a genre of Tibetan religious writing called *namtar (rnam-thar* : 'complete liberation'). A *namtar* is a work which "serves as a supreme example for sincere beings" (Heruka xxii). The title of the biography in Tibetan, part of which translates to "Seeing Accomplishes All" (*mthong-ba don-yod*) refers to the process which the reader is to undergo in reading or hearing the story: it is meant to bring about enlightenment. In general, *namtar* are exciting, engaging stories about the lives of Tibet's most revered yogis. Marpa's story is both popular and typical of the genre. It is at once a story of very human struggles, challenges,

mistakes and hardships on the road to spiritual enlightenment, and a deeply religious and devotional text paying homage to one of Tibet's greatest Buddhist heroes. The genre of *namtar* will be explored more fully at a later point in this paper. For the moment I will limit myself to introducing the text and something of its history.

Relatively little work has been done on Tibetan spiritual biographies -- Janis Willis' *Enlightened Beings* and introductions to English translations (like Chögyam Trungpa's introduction to the translation I am using) constitute much of the available literature. If one uses a wider lens and includes Indian Buddhist biographies as well, one is still confined to information provided by the odd paper[3] and scholarly introductions (Herbert Günther's introduction to *The Life and Teachings of Nāropa*, for instance[4] ).

Marpa, as I have implied above, is a historical figure from the early history of Buddhism in Tibet. He was born in 1012 in southern Tibet, near the current border with Bhutan. At that time, Tibet was in a period of 'Dharma revival' -- Buddhism having been suppressed quite effectively for the previous 100 years. By the time Marpa was born, Buddhism's second coming had begun, and his parents sent him to a monastery at the age of 12 because he was a really aggressive boy. He quickly learned how to read and write, and some years later he went to study with the translator Drogmi, from whom he learned Sanskrit and number of colloquial Indian languages. He eventually grew dissatisfied with the limited teachings available to him in Tibet, so he sold off his possessions for gold and set off on what would be the first of three trips to India. The texts and teachings he brought back with him from these three journeys vastly expanded Buddhism in Tibet and

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[3] see James Burnell Robinson's "The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints: Biography, Hagiography and Myth."

[4] *The Life and Teachings of Nāropa* is a translation from a Tibetan text and the actual teachings of Nāropa are employed in Tibetan Buddhism. However, as Nāropa was an Indian siddha and the story originated in India I decided to identify it with Indian sacred biography instead of Tibetan.

Marpa's role is viewed as key in the expansion of the Dharma that would result in an almost entirely Buddhist country. The record of his pilgrimages and his life in Tibet between and after his travels is what is recorded in the biography. Marpa died at the age of 88.[5]

The author of this text is Tsang Nyön Heruka (the madman of Tsang). Born in 1452 in western Tibet (Tsang), he was ordained as a novice monk at the age of 7. By the time he was in his 20s he had started doing meditation retreats away from the monastery, and eventually spent most of his time in retreat at the holy places of western Tibet. He did a lot of writing, completing the biography and *dohas* of Milarepa by the time he was 37, and, among other works, the biography of Marpa in 1505. This last work was actually dictated by him to one of his students and he died two years later. The edition I am working with is a translation of Heruka's work prepared by 'the Nālandā translation committee' under the supervision of Chögyam Trungpa.

The *Life of Marpa* records Marpa's life and journeys, emphasising the relationship between him and his teachers -- most notably Nāropa -- and charts his ever-deepening spiritual realization. It also gives life to the hardships he was forced to endure on his trips to and from India as well as those imposed upon him by Nāropa and his other gurus. Marpa's journey is only completed once he returns to Tibet for the third and last time, where he realises that he and his teachers are inseparable at the ultimate level and have been all along.

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[5] Actually, there is some uncertainty about the precise dates of Marpa's birth and journeys, but scholars do more or less agree on these dates. (Heruka footnote 199-200)

## Journey to the West

Like *Life of Marpa, Journey to the West (Xiyou Ji )* is a book based on the pilgrimage of a historical character. Another similarity between the two is the nature of the accomplishment of the historical protagonist; like Marpa, Xuanzang's contribution to the development of Buddhism in his native country is vast -- he travelled from China to India and brought reams of Mahāyāna scriptures back with him. Living in Tang dynasty China, Xuanzang (c. 602-664 CE) sought scriptures in India which, up until that time, had not found their way to China. His pilgrimage, begun in 629, lasted a total of 16 years. Xuanzang faced innumerable hardships, including tipping over and losing his entire water supply while crossing a desert, forcing him to go four nights and five days without water (Waley 18), and encountering armed bandits and evil spirits. Once he had made it back to China, he dedicated most of the rest of his life to translating the texts he had gathered from Sanskrit to Chinese.

*Journey to the West* is a much-embellished rendition of Xuanzang's pilgrimage that evolved over the course of nine centuries. It was most probably formally composed by Wu Cheng'en (c. 1500-1582 CE), but that is open to some debate. No one is positive. What is generally assumed by most scholars of Chinese literature is that it evolved slowly, episodes gradually being added on as the centuries passed. A thirteenth century predecessor to *Journey* exists, known as *The Tale of How Sanzang the of the Great Tang Fetched the Scriptures.*[6] There also exists a fourteenth century musical play called *The Drama of the Journey to the West* (Jenner, vol. 3: 632) and a fifteenth century work called *The Story of the*

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[6] According to Jenner, this version is the first in which Monkey appears (3: 632). A translation of this text by Arthur Waley exists in his *Ballads and Stories from Tunhuang.*

*Journey to the West* (3: 633).[7] The version that we read today was first published in 1592. *Journey to the West* has remained an incredibly popular story; its plot and characters have pervaded popular culture in Japan and China for centuries, taking shape in everything from Noh dramas to the popular cartoon *Dragon Ball.*[8]

While there is a fair amount of debate surrounding *Journey's* status as a Buddhist story, it is not my intention to take part in that particular battle. My project is to submit the texts I am working with to a Buddhist reading and not to definitively prove them to be Buddhist texts.[9]

The version of *Journey* which I am using is the 1990 edition of W. J. F. Jenner's translation of Wu Cheng'en's masterpiece. It is a three-volume tale whose principal characters deserve some description. Xuanzang, otherwise known as Tripitaka, is portrayed as a frightened and weepy (although very virtuous) monk who is rigidly attached to his precepts. His chief disciple is Sun Wukong, "Awakened to Emptiness," an immortal monkey with incredible magical powers. He is most often simply referred to as Monkey. The role of second disciple belongs to Zhu Wuneng, or 'Pig' -- a porcine monster who is also endowed with many magical powers. After him come Sha Wujing, or 'Sandy' -- a quiet but earnest monster disciple -- and a magical horse who used to be a dragon. Together they

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[7] For a comprehensive study of the evolution of *Journey*, I refer readers to Glen Dudbridge's *The Hsi-yu chi: A Study of Antecedents to the Sixteenth-Century Chinese Novel.*

[8] Those interested in following this up must note that the connection to *Journey* is evident only in the original series *Dragon Ball – Dragon Ball Z*, a series produced later, is sadly deficient in its allusions to the great Ming novel. For those readers who have access to the internet, check <http://wuken.tierranet.com/story-of-dragonball.html>

[9] For anyone interested in this particular debate I recommend Francisca Bantly's "Buddhist Allegory in Journey to the West" and Tu Wei Ming's "Hsi-Yu Chi as an Allegorical Pilgrimage" for evidence of *Journey's* status as a Buddhist text. For some variety of opinion I recommend Liu I-Ming's "The Original Intent of the Hsi-yu Chi," Andrew Plaks *Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel*, and Tu's review of 'the Hu Shih view' -- an approach to the work which interprets it as pure fantasy and satire.

For more scholarly work on *Journey* I also recommend C.T. Hsia's *The Classic Chinese Novel: A Critical Introduction* and Anthony Yu's introduction in volume 1 of his translation of the work.

survive eighty-one trials, finally obtaining the scriptures on Vulture Peak and successfully bringing them back to China.

## Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage[10] is a practice that has long been a part of Buddhism.[11] The first historical records date from King Aśoka's Rock Edict 8 (3rd century CE), in which he states that "while previously he used to go out on *vihārayātras* ('excursions for enjoyment'), ten years after his coronation he undertook a *dharmayātra* ('journey for truth')" (Keyes 348) to Bodh Gaya. It is certain that the *dharmayātra* was not an innovation of Aśoka's. Indeed, the *Mahaparinibbanasutta* provides a scriptural basis for setting out on pilgrimage:

> 'Ananda, there are four places the sight of which should arouse a sense of urgency in the faithful. Which are they? "Here the Tathagata was born" is the first. "Here the Tathagata attained supreme enlightenment" is the second. "Here the Tathagata set in motion the Wheel of the *Dharma*" is the third. "Here the Tathagata attained Nirvana without remainder" is the fourth. And, Ananda, the faithful monks and nuns, male and female lay-followers will visit those places. And any who die while making the pilgrimage to these shrines with a

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10 Pilgrimage is not an easy topic to research. Victor Turner is often cited as one of the patriarchs of the anthropological study of pilgrimage. According to an article by Alan Morinis, "the only significant theory of pilgrimage that has been put forward to date is that of Victor Turner" (Morinis 8) -- which theory has failed to withstand the test of being applied in the field by anthropologists. Despite this weakness, Turner does provide some helpful tools for beginning to interpret pilgrimage by giving us language with which to describe it. He views pilgrimage as a liminal state in which "pilgrim[s] cease to be members of a perduring *system* of social relations . . . and become members of transient *class*" (122).

Turner's domination of this more or less impoverished field of study is further confirmed by the fact that the *Encyclopedia of Religion*'s entry for 'pilgrimage' was written by Edith Turner -- Victor's wife -- who refers exclusively to her husband's work and to the then upcoming volume edited by Alan Morinis (quoted above).

11 Pilgrimage has long been a part of most world religions. See *Pilgrimage* by Simon Coleman and John Elsner for a good introduction to its role in Hinduism, Islam, Christianity etc.

> devout heart will, at the breaking up of the body after death, be reborn in a heavenly world.' (Coleman 170)

The paradigm of setting out on the Buddhist path is the act of "going forth" – an emulation of Śākyamuni's original departure from his home in search of a permanent solution to the problems of old age, sickness and death. Keyes writes:

> Most (pilgrims) . . . see pilgrimage as a means for orienting themselves toward the Buddha as a preliminary step along the path to enlightenment. The pilgrimage that begins by turning toward the Buddha in this world finds its culmination in an inner pilgrimage that leads to a true understanding of the Dharma. (349)

This idea is also expressed in more universal terms by Victor Turner when he writes: "We might speak of ritual liminality as an exteriorised mystical way, and the mystic's path as interiorised ritual liminality" (125). While arguably too simplistic a model to describe the physical pilgrimage, it is still a helpful first step towards understanding the pilgrimage in literature.

Having already taken the time to review the general outline of the three texts I am focussing on, it is time for me to extract what I take to be the pattern of the literary Mahāyāna Buddhist pilgrimage. The literary pilgrim is a character who has set off on a quest in search of teachings or texts which are unavailable to him. The purpose of undertaking this journey is to access the deepest teaching of Buddhism, which is invariably thought to be found someplace *other* than home. The pilgrim undergoes trials and hardships along the way, only to discover that the greatest obstacle to attaining his goal has been himself all along (his karma which must be purified, his ego which must be annihilated).

The goal is never attained in the form in which it was originally sought (ie: as the place, teacher, teaching, text) and the end of the journey always points back to the process -- the mind/outlook cultivated on the journey is what is attained, not a cure-all Truth. Part of that process is coming to understand the emptiness of all things -- including emptiness itself. This experience occurs in opposition to what the pilgrim believes he already understands about the nature of reality. As he sets out on his journey he thinks he knows what reality is, that he has already seen through the illusions of the sensory world. However, he must come to see that what he took be reality -- emptiness or enlightenment -- is also an illusion.

Let us examine these ideas in the context of the stories themselves. Each of the pilgrims I am studying -- Sudhana, Marpa and Xuanzang -- is already a devout Buddhist when he sets out on his journey, a departure invariably inspired by noble intentions. In each case they are already considered exceptional. Sudhana is immediately perceived by Mañjuśri to be a vessel worthy of the teachings. Sudhana's state is described:

> Sudhana...having served past buddhas and planted roots of goodness, imbued with great zeal and devotion, intent on following spiritual benefactors, impeccable in word, thought, and deed, engaged in clarification of the path of enlightening beings, heading for omniscience, having become a vessel of the Buddha teachings, his course of mind purified, had achieved an unhindered, unattached determination for enlightenment. (3: 50)

This outstanding boy is then sent out on his pilgrimage by Mañjuśri, and is led to believe that the teacher he is sent to -- and each of the subsequent fifty-two -- will be able to answer the question concerning the practice of a bodhisattva that propels him along. Marpa, after leaving Tibet for the first time, is seen in his homeland as a difficult and temperamental character. The reader, however, is given a different

view, being told how incredibly quickly Marpa learned the Dharma and Indian languages as a child. His guru to be, Nāropa, also immediately sees the greatness in him. Laying eyes on him for the first time he says: "My son, the worthy vessel Marpa Lodrö, / From the northern Land of Snow, / Is welcome to the regency" (12). Because he is dissatisfied with the small number of teachings available to him there, Marpa initially leaves Tibet and sets out to further his education and advance his practice.

Xuanzang, too, is portrayed as being exceptionally virtuous:

> He had been a monk from infancy, and ever since birth he had eaten vegetarian food and observed the prohibitions. . . .Xuanzang . . . had no interest in honour and glory, and his only joy was to cultivate Nirvana. . . .[O]f the thousand sutras and ten thousand holy books there was not a single one that he did not know. (1: 223)

Xuanzang volunteers to set out when he learns that Guan Yin needs someone willing to make the journey to India to get the Mahāyāna teachings to bring to China -- at that time a country, like Tibet, with quite limited teachings available.

In all three cases, that which is most crucial to the success of the pilgrimage turns out to be internal; and that which most hinders the pilgrim's progress is also internal. Sudhana is sent from teacher to teacher, because each spiritual friend he meets claims to be unable to answer his question. The hardships of his journey are not described -- Sudhana seems to quite cheerfully walk from one end of India to the other with his desire to understand the bodhisattva's practice overriding all other concerns. What he fails to see is that the solution to his own question is to be found in his own activity; that the endless years of journeying from one teacher to another are only necessary because of his own inability to perceive the *nearness* and *immediacy* of enlightenment, of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas: "For one

whose mind is...purified, the buddhas are not hard to find" (3: 348). This lesson is manifested best by an incident which occurs when Sudhana meet Mañjuśri for the second time, as the last teacher at the end of his pilgrimage. At this point, Sudhana's wisdom, compassion and motivation are so developed, that the sheer power of his wishes to see and meet Mañjuśri are enough to effect the meeting. Sudhana does not realise at this stage is that his *bodhicitta* is becoming so developed that:

> [B]y the power of effectuation of resolute vows, deriving from intense faith, Sudhana projected himself continuously into the presence of all buddhas, and likewise into the presence of all enlightening beings, to the abodes of a spiritual benefactors, to all monuments of buddhas, to all statues of buddhas, to the abodes of all enlightening beings and buddhas, to the locations of all treasures of true teaching, to the presence of all monuments to saints and individual illuminates, to the vicinities of all groups of sages, worthies, and parents: he continuously projected himself into the presence of all beings, by entering into the totality of the body of knowledge, extending everywhere, by focusing attention through knowledge of control of formation of mental images. (3: 329)

What this passage expresses is the total breakdown of what one would normally consider to be the boundaries imposed by location. This breakdown becomes even more apparent when:

> Manjushri extended his hand over a hundred and ten leagues and laid it on the head of Sudhana, who was standing in the city of Sumanamukha, and said, "Good, good! Those without the faculty of faith, those who are weary or sluggish in mind, those who have not accumulated efforts, those whose vigor recedes, those who are satisfied with meager virtues, those imbued with only one root of goodness, those unskilled in carrying out practical vows, those who are not in the

> care of spiritual benefactors, those who are not minded by the buddhas, cannot know this true nature, this principle, this sphere, this abode -- they are unable to know, to fathom, to penetrate, to believe, to conceive, to know exactly, or to attain. (3: 378)

What is it, exactly, that Sudhana has attained? At least one aspect of Sudhana's realisation is his understanding of the interpenetratedness -- in terms of space and time -- of all things. His wishes reach Mañjuśri one hundred and ten leagues away, and he has the power to see that Mañjuśri, unlimited by space and time, is with him once those wishes are made:

> Having caused Sudhana to see by means of his spiritual talk, having directed him, inspired him, gladdened him, imbued him with countless facets of truth, illumined him with the great light of infinite knowledge, led him into the endless mental command, presence of mind, concentration, and superknowledge of enlightening beings, plunged him into the sphere of universally good practice, and established him in his own place, Manjushri left the presence of Sudhana. (3: 378)

Sudhana is gradually becoming one with the practice and vows of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and this is the point at which he enters into the energy-field of Samantabhadra (the Universally Good). Mañjuśri then establishes Sudhana "in his own place" -- in other words, Sudhana and Mañjuśri become one and the same at the ultimate level[12] -- and Mañjuśri then leaves Sudhana's presence. This passage

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12 Keiji Nishitani writes of this process in *Religion and Nothingness*: "The 'mind' of the Tathagata or 'Buddha-mind' -- *projects* itself (in the double sense of a reflection and a transference) into the essence of human existence, into the 'mind' of man, bringing about its conversion; at the same time, the essence *projects* that reality back into itself. As the well-known Buddhist simile goes, it is like two mirrors reflecting off one another without any intervening image. The mind of the Tathagata and the mind of man reflect each other in such a way that the very same light . . . transfers from one mind onto the other, and vice versa" (178).

simultaneously affirms multiplicity (Mañjuśri leaves Sudhana) and unity (they become the same). Sudhana's insight puts him in the presence of all beings, and this also points to the likelihood that all the bodhisattvas and Buddhas who Sudhana has been visiting have been in his presence the whole time. The pilgrimage has served not to allow him to be in physical proximity to all kinds of wonderful teachers, but to remove the ignorance that prevented him from seeing that they have been together all this time. The excruciating duration of his journey and his being shunted from teacher to teacher was the necessary means by which his ignorance was eroded.

In Marpa's case, that what he was searching for was something he had inside himself is shown in a number of ways, most notably in the essence of the teachings he acquires and is able to pass on. We encounter spontaneous poems like:

> In general, all dharmas are mind.
> The guru arises from one's mind.
> There is nothing other than mind.
> Everything that appears is the nature of mind,
> Which is primordially nonexistent.
> The natural state, unborn and innate,
> Cannot be abandoned by the effort of thought.
> So rest at ease, naturally, without restriction. (129)

Here it is necessary to make an excursion into the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism which Marpa's lineage evolved into: the Kagyu (*bKa' brgyud*) lineage. The Kagyu school subscribes to a number of concepts like the buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) -- the idea that all beings have the Buddha-nature within them already; that the process of attaining enlightenment is therefore not learning anything new, only learning to perceive one's nature correctly. Closely related to this is a concept of reality which entails an underlying belief that *all* things have the same

enlightened nature / mind – referred to at times as *dharmatā* – and which, while uncompounded, is still inseparable from its qualities such as wisdom (*buddhajñāna*).[13] Through confidence in the guru, the disciple is open to being shown the undifferentiated nature of reality:

> Buddhajñāna and its Inseparable Qualities are the Nature of Mind. Once disciples have faith that this is the case, they can have confidence that the 'Mind' which their Guru introduces them to in a very direct way through oral instruction is not only their own mind, but also the Guru's Mind inseparable from the Buddha's Mind. (Hookham 59)

In the context of Marpa's development, we see that what is slowly evolving is, in fact, his view of reality. Best expressed by the stages of an eight-month long search for Nāropa on his third trip to India, Marpa, like Sudhana, slowly comes to the realization that he and his goal have been inseparable the whole time. The eight months of the quest chart Marpa's internal development as much as they do his pilgrimage. Each month Marpa receives a message or hears a voice telling him what is standing between him and the ability to see his teacher:

> The first month, Marpa saw Lord Nāropa in a dream, riding on a lion flanked by two consorts. . . .They all were singing and dancing on the sun and moon. Marpa supplicated and the two yoginis said:
>
> Nāropa is nondual unity.
> Flanked by two consorts,
> He rides a lion
> And sings and dances on the sun and moon.
> Are you not deceived by the confusion of dream? (82)

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[13] "[T]rue uncompoundedness is beyond the conceptual duality of compoundedness and uncompoundedness" (44) writes Hookham, explaining the apparent logical inconsistency of something being both uncompounded and having qualities. I will explore this idea further in my discussion of the non-duality of duality and non-duality in Chapter 2.

> The third month, Marpa . . . searched alone. He questioned a man who looked like a herdsman and who said that he had seen Nāropa. Marpa rewarded him and searched on. He saw Nāropa's footprint and touched some dust from it to his head. As he searched farther, a voice said:
>
> The footprint is like the imprint of a bird in the sky.
> If you do not recognize this free from reference point,
> Like a dog chasing the shadow of a flying bird
> Won't you stray into the abyss of futility? (83)

In short, it is Marpa's own attachment, doubts and confusion that prevent his contact -- or his awareness of the already existent contact -- between himself and Nāropa. He thinks that he is being led on a wild search for his guru, but is simply unable to see that they are separated because of his own preconceived ideas of what it means to be with and learn from the teacher:

> The seventh month, Marpa searched and had a vision of Nāropa in an earthen cave. Nāropa disembowelled the body of a human corpse and opened the skull. He was taking out brains, intestines, ribs, and the rest, and eating them. Marpa supplicated him and requested oral instructions. Nāropa gave him a handful of ribs. Marpa felt nauseated and could not eat them. Nāropa said:
>
> 'In the great vessel of great bliss,
> Great bliss and enjoyment are pure in equal taste.
> If you do not enjoy this as great bliss,
> The enjoyment of great bliss will not arise.'
>
> Then Nāropa disappeared.
> Marpa looked around, but the corpse was no longer there except for a bit that was smeared on the side of the wall. Marpa licked this; the taste was wonderful and good samadhi arose in him. (84)

Thus we see an example of the fact that Marpa is not being taught about anything that actually lies outside of him -- it is all a process of breaking down the stiff patterns of conceptual, dualistic thinking within him and uncovering the bliss of the true nature of his mind.

Another example of Marpa's path of purification is the fact that Nāropa sends him crisscrossing through India to find various teachers who will give him an assortment of initiations and practices. While it is clear that Nāropa would have been perfectly capable of giving these teachings himself, Marpa must struggle to find these teachers, learn to live with hardship and develop devotion for gurus other than Nāropa. First he is sent to find Kukkurīpā (who is later referred to as Śāntibhadra), who "has a body covered with hair. His face is like a monkey's. His color is unpleasant..." (17). He also happens to live on a mountain island surrounded by a boiling, poison lake. Marpa's journey is terrifying:

> When Marpa arrived at the mountain island in the poison lake, the local spirits magically filled the sky with thick clouds. Lightning flashed, thunder resounded fiercely, and many thunderbolts struck the ground. There was a great tempest with rain and snow. Though it was the middle of the day, it became pitch black. Marpa experienced such anguish that he wondered whether he was dead or alive. (18)

Marpa's experience with Śāntibhadra as a teacher is extraordinary. He gains a deep understanding of a particular Tantra (the *Mahāmāya*) and leaves the mountain island greatly enlarged. "In order to receive the blessings of the lineage," explains Nāropa later, "you were delayed and made to undergo hardships" (91). The hardships, in other words, are part of the path.

Turning now to Xuanzang, we see the same phenomenon. The poor, weeping monk spends years on the road undergoing all manner of trials and

surviving all kinds of disasters, monsters and temptations. What he is obtusely unable to recognize is the fact that both hardships and goal are contained within him. A conversation between Xuanzang, the two younger disciples and Monkey regarding the length of their journey reveals this:

> 'How far are we from Thunder Monastery, elder brother?' asked Friar Sand.
>
> 'Thirty-six thousand miles,' Monkey replied, 'and we haven't covered a tenth of it'
>
> 'How many years will it take us to get there?' Pig asked.
>
> 'You two younger brothers of mine could manage it in ten days or so, and I could go there fifty times over in a single day and still be back before sunset. But for our master it doesn't bear thinking about.'
>
> 'Tell me, Monkey, how long will it take?' asked [Xuanzang].
>
> 'If you went from childhood to old age,' said Monkey, 'and from old age back to childhood again, and you did it a thousand times over, you'd still find it hard to get there. But if you see your true nature, are determined to be sincere, and always remember to turn your head back to enlightenment, then you will have reached Vulture Peak'. (1: 442)

Here, Monkey basically spells out the nature of the pilgrimage to Xuanzang but the monk does not quite grasp it. The hindrances do not inhere in the way, but rather in the pilgrims themselves. Xuanzang's fear, ignorance and one past bad deed are what determine the nature of their journey.[14]

Indeed, one of the regular patterns in the adventures in *Journey* is Xuanzang's stubborn refusal to listen to Monkey's advice. As Monkey has all kinds of magical powers, he is able to perceive evil auras and recognize demons and spirits when they are disguising themselves. Despite seemingly endless instances of Monkey's correct perception, Xuanzang always trusts his own, blunt instincts.

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[14] The readers are informed relatively early in the story of some of the ill deeds wrought by Xuanzang's earlier incarnation as Golden Cicada, Buddha's second disciple. (1: 222) Apparently he once slighted the Dharma, and "dropped off to sleep instead of listening to the Buddha teaching the Dharma, and as he drowsed he trod on a grain of rice with his left foot" (3: 267).

At another point in the story, Monkey says to the ever inconsolable Xuanzang, "...if you're as scared, frightened and disturbed as this the Great Way is distant, and Thunder Peak is far, far away" (3: 341). In yet another moment of wisdom, Monkey says to him:

> Do not go far to seek the Buddha on Vulture Peak;
> Vulture Peak is in your heart.
> Everybody has a Vulture Peak stupa
> Under which to cultivate conduct. (3: 340)

## Shapes of the Journey

In the case of each of the pilgrims whose stories I am analyzing there is a direct link between their internal development and the geography through which they move. As Sudhana progresses he finds himself equally present in all places and all times, unhindered by conventional notions of space and time; as Marpa seeks deeper and deeper practices from his guru he must face his own rigid dualistic ideas in the form of his agonizing inability to find his teacher -- although it is apparent that Nāropa is somehow with him the whole time; and finally, Xuanzang's torturously long journey is one that could have been completed "fifty times over in a single day" (1: 442), and the demons he continuously met could have been avoided had he only deeper insight into the actual nature of reality.[15]

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[15] There are precedents for studying the ways in which landscape reflects the internal condition of the protagonist; most notably in studies of medieval literature. In his work *Visionary Landscape*, Paul Piehler touches on the investment of landscape with meaning: "In ancient literature, the primary danger to the consciousness inherent in the wilderness is manifested and symbolized in its animal inhabitants. . . .At the frontiers of the unknown, the sleep of reason engenders monsters, apotropaic sentinels warning man away from the psychic disintegration threatened where urban rationality will no longer find its necessary phenomenal correlatives. . . .[T]he monster embodies the terror engendered by the hostility of

Let us now turn our attention to the shape of the path taken by the pilgrims. In each case, the pilgrim sets out with an idea of what his goal is and expects to reach it in whatever place he has set off to in order to accomplish it. In fact, the Mahāyāna Buddhist pilgrimage turns out to have a circular shape -- after all each of them accomplishes, the ultimate destination turns out to be the point from which they originally set out.

In the case of Sudhana, the end of his pilgrimage is back in the presence of Mañjuśri, who sent Sudhana off on his journey to begin with.[16] By the time he finds his way back to Mañjuśri he has already begun to project himself into the presence of all Buddhas, bodhisattvas and other beings simply by the power of his devotion and motivation. He does not actually need to find Mañjuśri in the end, only wish strongly enough to see him that he can perceive the great bodhisattva's hand and voice even from one-hundred and ten leagues away. It is due to a combination of an experience in Vairocana's tower and his subsequent encounter with Mañjuśri that the reader (and the pilgrim) realises that Sudhana's pilgrimage itself, the outlook he developed on the road, *is* the practice of an enlightening being; that the answer he sought was in the very seeking.

Sudhana's penultimate teacher is Maitreya, who offers to show him the tower of Vairocana. Sudhana is intrigued and asks, "Please open the door of the tower, and I will enter" (3: 365). Maitreya goes to the door and snaps his fingers; the door opens and Sudhana enters. The door shuts behind him. Sudhana finds himself in an incredibly vast and interpenetrated space -- everywhere he looks he

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featureless terrain to the rational process" (73). While he is discussing images from Western literature which do not necessarily apply to my study of Buddhist literature, the very idea of interpreting the landscape's symbolic meaning within a text will be most relevant to any further study of Mahayana Buddhist literature.

16 While it is the case that the very last portion of the *Gandavyuha* sees Sudhana visiting Samantabhadra, it is my opinion that the pilgrimage as the *deluded* pilgrim's journey is, by that point, finished. By the time that episode arrives, Sudhana has already understood why he undertook the journey and how it answered his question; by that point he sees his travels as his practice.

sees infinite towers in all directions, incredible arrays of jewels and is flooded with joy. His mind is cleared of all conceptions and obstructions and he becomes -- through the power of identification with Maitreya's mind -- clairvoyant. He bows "in all directions with his whole body" (3: 366) and sees this action taking place in each of those infinite towers. He then sees Maitreya in each of his rebirths, from his first aspiration to enlightenment onwards, and always with Sudhana at his feet. He sees infinite Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, infinite webs of jewels and mirrors.

This continues until Maitreya enters the tower and relaxes his magical force. He snaps his fingers and says to Sudhana: "Arise. This is the nature of things; characterised by nonfixity, all things are stabilised by the knowledge of enlightening beings, thus they are inherently unreal, and like illusions, dreams, reflections" (3: 374).

What follows is probably the most famous passage from the *Gaṇḍavyūha*:

> Then, at a finger snap, Sudhana emerged from that trance and Maitreya said to him, 'Did you see the miraculous display of the magical power of enlightening beings?'
>
> . . . .Sudhana said, 'Where has that magnificent display gone?'
>
> Maitreya said, 'Where it came from.'
>
> Sudhana said, 'Where did it come from?'
>
> Maitreya said, 'It came from the effectuation of the magical power of knowledge of enlightening beings, and it resides in that very magical power'. (3: 374-5)

The extraordinary interpenetratedness of Hua-yen reality makes it absolutely clear that there is no 'really real' here or there -- all things are everywhere at all times. It is a matter of the ability of sentient beings to perceive enlightening beings that makes the difference. This is illustrated beautifully by Maitreya when he explains

to Sudhana in a rather long passage how Bodhisattvas can at once have no abode and at the same time appear to be born at a certain place and time. Actually, it is in answer to the rather odd question, "What are the native lands of enlightening beings?" (3: 375). To this query, Maitreya answers:

> There are ten native lands of enlightening beings. What are they? The arousal of the aspiration for enlightenment is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the family of enlightening beings. Strong will is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the family of spiritual friends. The stages are a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the family of the transcendent ways. Carrying out vows is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the family of sublime acts. Universal compassion is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the house of means of salvation. Profound contemplation is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the house of transcendent wisdom. The Great Vehicle is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the house of skill in means. Educating sentient beings is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the house of buddhas. Knowledge and means is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the house of tolerance of things as unoriginated. Practicing and realizing all truths is a native land of enlightening beings, causing one to be born in the house of all buddhas past, future and present. (3: 375-6)

This is a poetic -- although somewhat cryptic, I will grant you -- method of expressing how the practice of enlightening beings is the birth of enlightening beings. Fundamentally this paragraph describes ten ways in which *bodhicitta* is both the desire for awakening and the awakening itself. Anonymous enlightening beings -- Śākyamuni, Mañjuśri or Amitabha, for example -- appear in the conventional realm taking shape as someone's aspiration for enlightenment,

strong will, carrying out of vows, universal compassion, etc.. All these practices -- which look like practices *for* awakening -- are also practices *of* awakening (of enlightening beings appearing through individual practitioners). This helps to explain the interpenetratedness; how it is, for example, that Sudhana and Mañjuśri are able to become one.[17]

Marpa's journey is also circular in a number of ways. Despite the fact that with each successive trip to India he grows more and more attached to his beloved teacher Nāropa, and that he personally would be happiest remaining in his guru's company, in order to complete his pilgrimage, Marpa must return home to Tibet. There is a moving passage which takes place while Marpa is journeying home for the third and final time. He has stopped in Nepal where he has decided to spend the winter. Surrounded by eager students, Marpa is constantly busy teaching. At one point he is giving a teaching in a charnel ground, and his listeners get more and more scared of the ever-intensifying howls of jackals. They ask if he could possibly finish his teaching before darkness falls, as they are too terrified to stay in the charnel ground at night. Later that evening, Marpa sinks into a depression thinking about the lack of courage of these people:

> Lord Marpa thought, 'If it were my gurus Nāropa and Maitrīpa, they would prefer to actually sit on a corpse and acquire human flesh in the charnel ground. If they could not acquire these, they would visualize them through samadhi, and so enjoy them. Even when rows of *kṣetrapāla ḍākinīs*[18] lined up in person to receive *torma,* [19] they would not be afraid. But tonight these people are afraid of the howls of the jackals in this empty valley and the natural sounds of the elements'. (122)

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[17] Nishitani writes, "[T]he mind of the Tathagata is *projected* into the mind of man, and vice versa" (Nishitani 181).

[18] Ksetrapala dakinis: female deities of very wrathful appearance.

[19] Torma: shrine/feast offering.

Marpa is so overwhelmed by emotion while thinking about this that "He regretted that he had come back from India and decided he would go back again. Then he sat down and cried and cried" (122). That night, a ḍākinī comes to him in his dreams and tells him that he will be of much more benefit to all beings if he goes back to Tibet to teach. He awakens happy, certain that she had been sent through the kindness of his Lamas. He decides to return home to teach and never again regrets this decision.

It is interesting to note that while Marpa's original goal of seeking texts was fulfilled -- even from his first trip to India -- the texts became of secondary importance to the *transmission* and oral teachings he got from his teachers. That the teachings he got from personal contact were more important is illustrated by the incident when, returning from India after his first trip, his evil travelling companion, Nyö, throws his hard-won texts into the river. While Marpa's first impulse is to hurl himself into the river after his texts and die, he soon realises that he has also accumulated a vast store of oral teachings that cannot be damaged, so he carries on. He realises, after a moment, that the most valuable teachings he has gained reside in his awakening mind.

Xuanzang's pilgrimage also brings him back to the point where he began: Chang'an in China. Despite the search for Vulture Peak being the focus of his years-long journey, it is not until he is home in China that Xuanzang's pilgrimage is completed:

> The holy monk long strove to fetch the scriptures;
> For fourteen years across the West he strayed.
> He journeyed hard and met with much disaster;
> By mountains and rivers long delayed.
> Completing eight times nine and one nine more,

His deeds filled worlds in numbers beyond measure.
He went back to his country taking sutras
That people in the East will always treasure. (3: 621)

Interestingly enough, once Xuanzang's pilgrimage is completed the reader is treated to the rounding out of a larger pilgrimage which encompasses the entire *Journey*: that of Golden Cicada, Xuanzang's earlier incarnation. Centuries earlier, Golden Cicada had shown a distinct lack of reverence for Buddha during one of his teachings, and as a result of the bad karma he accumulated from that deed he was sent into a rebirth as the human Xuanzang. He burned off all his bad karma by completing his designated task as Xuanzang, and after the scriptures are deposited in Chang'an, the monk is brought back to Vulture Peak where he is reinstalled in his original position as a disciple of the Buddha. Thus two pilgrimages are completed in *Journey* -- Xuanzang's and Golden Cicada's.

It is also the case, as with Marpa, that Xuanzang both attains his original goal and achieves something much more valuable, which he had no idea he had ever set out to do. In Xuanzang's case, we have a very similar incident with texts, when he is given blank pages by Ānanda and Kaśyapa. After meeting the Buddha with much joy, they are sent with the two above-mentioned disciples to receive Scriptures to bring back to China. Before they hand over the texts, Ānanda and Kaśyapa ask Xuanzang for gifts in return. Xuanzang has nothing to offer and Monkey threatens to tell Buddha what they've done. Buddha's two disciples back down and hand over the goods, and Xuanzang and his disciples bid *adieu* to Buddha and climb down the mountain. After some time, they discover that the scrolls they were given are totally blank. They return to the Thunder Monastery, where Buddha tells them: "The blank texts are true, wordless scriptures, and they really are good. But as you living beings in the East are so deluded and have not

enlightenment we'll have to give you these ones instead" (3: 587). Xuanzang is given 'real' sutras this time -- among them the *Avataṁsaka Sūtra* -- and, accompanied by Buddha's eight Vajrapanis, is promised an eight-day flight home after his fourteen year pilgrimage. In this way, Xuanzang gets what he originally set out for, but finally realises that the true goal of Buddhism is not to be found in texts. This same pattern is repeated in the fact that he had to travel for over ten years to reach a goal that was ultimately internal -- the fruition of enough karmic purification to allow him to perceive Vulture Peak.

In all three cases, the original goal is not the most important part of what is achieved by the pilgrims. There is no single point at which the quest is over; each pilgrim's most important attainment is the refinement of his process towards enlightenment and bodhisattvahood. It is the view which is cultivated in the process of the journey which is most crucial; the end of the journey points back to the process. This raises an interesting point about the relationship of 'practice' to 'bodhicitta.' First of all, the term 'practice' is ambiguous. There is the sense of practice which is practicing *for* something -- say, practicing piano for a recital. This is practicing as a means to achieving an end. The second sense of practice is that of putting something into practice; the sense in which a doctor practices medicine or a lawyer law. These two senses of the word align nicely with the two senses of bodhicitta being explored above: bodhicitta is both the desire for awakening (the road there, the practice of Buddhism); and at the same time is awakening itself (the practice of a Bodhisattva). In other words, before awakening, pilgrimage is a practice *for* awakening. After awakening, pilgrimage is the practice *of* awakening. As will hopefully become more clear in the chapter which follows this one, the next step is understanding that 'before awakening' and 'after awakening' are not two different things. Practicing to achieve awakening is itself an expression of awakening.

## Chapter 2

In the previous chapter I showed that the pilgrims in these three texts follow a very basic, common pattern. First of all, the pilgrimage itself is circular rather than linear; a shape which points to the goal of Mahāyāna Buddhists to become bodhisattvas -- returning to samsara in order to save sentient beings. The most valuable goal which they attain is not what they originally set out to accomplish, and the most important part of the journey is inevitably the process of the journey itself. The pilgrims must all learn that both goal and obstacles are not external to them, but are direct results of their true nature (in the case of the former) and of their karma (in the case of the latter).

I will now turn towards one of the most salient philosophical/religious foundations of these stories, the complexity of which it is necessary to understand in order to properly understand the texts themselves: the Two Truths doctrine. After discussing the Two Truths, I will demonstrate how this doctrine is woven into the pattern and story of the Buddhist pilgrimage.

### Two Truths

> *The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma*
> *Is based on two truths:*
> *A truth of worldly convention*
> *And an ultimate truth.*
> *Without a foundation in the conventional truth,*
> *The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.*
> *Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,*
> *Liberation is not achieved.*
>
> (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV v. 8/10)[1]

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[1] trans. Jay Garfield

Fundamental to any understanding of Mahāyāna Buddhism is the Two Truths doctrine. In brief, the Two Truths doctrine holds that everything can be viewed from either the perspective of conventional (*saṁvṛtti*) or ultimate (*paramārtha*) truth. It would seem that the conventional view is easy to grasp -- its main defining feature, in fact, is its graspability: I see something and then I name that thing, think about it, or describe it. The coffee cup in front of me is clearly a coffee cup. This affirms both its 'thing-ness' and my own subjecthood, for to translate any 'thing' into words, thoughts, etc. requires both that which is 'out there' and a perceiving, thinking subject. Garfield translates *saṁvṛtti-satya* as 'truth of worldly convention' and explains it thus:

> 'Truth of worldly convention' denotes a truth dependent upon tacit agreement on everyday truth, a truth about things as they appear to accurate ordinary investigation, as judged by appropriate human standards. (297)

While Garfield does not go to any great lengths to explain exactly what he means by "accurate ordinary investigation" and "appropriate human standards," I take this to mean perception of the everyday world by so-called 'normal' people whose sense organs are all in good working order.[2] This agrees with the conditions set for 'correct' conventional knowledge by such notables as Candrakīrti and Tsongkhapa (Williams 71).[3] I am in accord with this definition, but feel that it can be clarified,

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[2] As opposed to, to draw on a standard Indian example, a man who has an illness of the eyes that results in him perceiving two moons.

[3] Nagao's understanding of correct conventional perception includes the provision that it is something only bodhisattvas have -- subsequently attained, as it were, or "reengaged" (Nagao 27). Further, some Buddhists, like Atisa, also distinguish between correct and incorrect conventional truths by means of the extent to which something is efficient in accomplishing its conventional purpose:

> A *dharma* which has the ability to bring about its goal (ie: has efficiency), which arises and ceases and satisfies so long as it is not critically examined -- this is maintained to be the correct conventional. ( Williams 71)

At this point it is important to at least mention some other uses of the term. In the earliest Theravada tradition, the two truths described two kinds of *Sutta* -- "those 'whose meaning is literal' and those whose

simplified and rendered more intuitively Buddhist if one stays on the 'graspability' track with its sister concepts of the presupposition of permanent entities (*svabhāva*) and the self (*ātman*). 'Reality tacitly agreed upon and informed by the notions of *ātman* and *svabhāva*' is what I mean when I use the term conventional reality.[4]

Let us then turn our attention to clarifying what I mean when I refer to *ultimate* reality. The ultimate can be loosely referred to as emptiness (*sūnyatā*), no-self (*anātman*) or the non-dual. In the dedicatory verses to Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, we find the following description of the ultimate nature of things:

> Unceasing, unborn,
> Unannihilated, not permanent,
> Not coming, not going,
> Without distinction, without identity,
> And free from conceptual construction. (Garfield 2)

As may be apparent to the reader, all of these terms are negations. One finds that this is the dominant trend when anyone is referring to emptiness, or *sūnyatā*. There are a few reasons for this. First of all, there is the obvious problem of trying to describe something with no form, colour, taste, smell, etc. Imagine trying to describe space and you will begin to sympathise with all the negations. Secondly, as

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'meaning is to be interpreted'" (Collins, 154). A *Sutta*'s meaning was considered literal if it spoke of impermanence, suffering and no-self. It required interpretation if it referred to 'persons' (*puggala*) because at the absolute level, 'persons' don't exist. Collins also writes: "[I]n the later two truths, conventional truth is that which speaks of selves, persons, spirits, gods and so on; ultimate truth is that which speaks in terms of the analytical categories of Buddhist doctrine, the 'categories', 'sense-bases' (ayatana), 'elements' (dhatu) and so on" (154).

[4] There are two variant spellings of this term in Sanskrit -- with one or two 't's. The meaning changes depending o n which one is chosen. *Samvrti* more or less means occluded, or obscured, while *samvritti* means manifest. For that reason, there is quite a lot of debate in the history of discussions of the Two Truths as to which of these is meant by the term 'conventional reality.'

Buddhists are traditionally very talented at showing just how what we conceive of as 'things' in the world around us -- indeed, the very world around us -- do not exist as such and are in that sense negated, there is always the danger of reifying emptiness and then discovering that it, too, must be negated by the same process through which the rest of 'reality' was negated. In other words, describing it can create a *svabhāva* and thereby make it a part of conventional reality. Nagao writes:

> Whenever one posits something called 'ultimate meaning' in contrast to worldly convention, ultimate meaning tumbles from its throne, self-destructs, and becomes worldly and conventional. The very positing of an ultimate meaning is an attempt philosophically to validate its self-essence. (27)

In this sense, emptiness would appear to be undescribable.

We must backtrack for a moment in order to see how this is not exactly the case. Amongst the attributes of ultimate reality which I listed was the term 'non-dual.' Non-duality is a complicated concept. To appeal to a common-sense notion of non-duality, it may be useful to think -- for a moment -- of non-duality as the 'great oneness' which includes everything, where there is no 'this' and 'that,' 'here' and 'there.' If this great, undifferentiated Oneness includes everything, it must also exclude nothing. This is because if something is to be truly non-dual, positing something *outside* of that non-duality serves only to create a new duality. This leads the attempt to define non-duality to a question: if non-duality by its nature can exclude nothing, what happens to the conventional world of duality when the ultimate nature of things as non-dual is invoked? Here we find ourselves embroiled in the delightful *non-duality* of *duality* and *non-duality*. In other words, if the nature of the universe we live in is actually non-dual, then even what we perceive as duality must be a part of that non-duality. In still other

words, the concepts of duality and non-duality cannot exclude each other's existence if there is such a thing as non-duality. Applying this to the language of conventional and ultimate truths, we have the non-duality of the conventional and the ultimate; of emptiness and form. While it does not make it any easier to describe emptiness itself, it opens the door to allowing emptiness to be expressed by its better half: conventional reality. This brings us to perhaps the most crucial point about Two Truths which needs to be highlighted: their interdependence. Paul Williams paraphrases Nāgārjuna's particularly useful explanation of Two Truths: "when the everyday conventional world is thus seen correctly it is apparent that emptiness (the ultimate truth) and the world are not opposed to each other but rather mutually imply each other" (70). In discussing his translation of Nāgārjuna's verses on Two Truths from the MMK, Garfield writes: "It is important to note that they are introduced as two *truths*. . . .For it is tempting, since one of the truths is characterized as an ultimate truth, to think of the conventional as 'less true'" (296-7).

On the contrary, it can be said that the conventional is as indispensable to penetrating the ultimate as the ultimate is to penetrating the conventional. Garfield writes:

> It is important to see here that Nāgārjuna is not disparaging the conventional by contrast to the ultimate, but is arguing that understanding the ultimate nature of things is completely dependent upon understanding conventional truth. (298-9)

He then goes on to make two points regarding *how* that dependence is expressed: first, by the fact that in standard Mahāyāna Madhyamaka philosophy, the ultimate nature of things is equated with the understanding of their conventional nature as

conventional;[5] and second, "in order to explain emptiness . . . one must use words and concepts" (299) -- which are, of course, conventional phenomena themselves.

In my opinion, these two points do not accurately express the relationship between the two levels of truth. The first fails to convey the potential and richness of emptiness seen in the shapes and colours of conventional reality, its identity with the ultimate. In the case of the second point, the impression is given that conventional reality is mere *upāya* which points to ultimate reality. If one is to fully accept non-duality, conventional reality's place in the scheme of things may be as a tool -- *is* as a tool -- but is also much more. It expresses a thing's true nature as much as it points to it. Nishitani writes of what he refers to as 'the being of a thing one with emptiness':

> It is not . . . an illusory appearance in the sense that dogmatism uses the word to denote what is not objectively real. . . .A thing is truly an illusory appearance at the precise point that it is truly a thing in itself. As the saying goes, 'A bird flies and it is like a bird. A fish swims and it looks like a fish.' The selfness of the flying bird in flight consists of its being *like* a bird; the selfness of the fish as it swims consists of looking *like* a fish. Or put the other way around, the 'likeness' of the flying bird and the swimming fish is nothing other than their true 'suchness'. (139)

Nagao also has some useful points about the interdependence of conventional and ultimate reality. With uncharacteristic simplicity he writes:

> Worldly convention and ultimate meaning each encompass the entire world. This implies that the world is not double layered, as if it were composed of one worldly conventional layer and another ultimately

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[5] This understanding of emptiness is seen as incomplete by some schools of Vajrayana Buddhism, most notable for our purposes the Karma Kagyu school which Marpa fathered, which holds that emptiness -- while not a thing -- still has qualities.

> meaningful layer. Once one has attained awakening, the whole of the world affirmed as conventional is identified with the world of ultimate meaning. (33)

In other words, *saṁvṛtti* and *paramārtha* truths are identical -- but it is only perceptible after leaving enlightenment. From the point of view of the hopelessly conventional -- worldlings trapped in "a one-dimensional, dependently co-arising cycle of birth and death where all avenues are closed off" (25) -- "the relationship between ultimate meaning and worldly convention must be one of complete otherness and discontinuity" (72). If I can be forgiven for cutting and pasting Nagao, what is being implied here is that the identity of conventional reality with ultimate reality is evident only in the context of no-self and an absence of permanent essences. "Only within a dependent co-arising that is identical with emptiness can ultimate meaning be enunciated" (73). In other words, only the re-engaged being aware of her dependently co-arisen 'self' is able to understand just how it is that the conventional is *true*. Not seen from that point of view, the two truths are distinct. This discontinuity is also necessary, however, *and true* -- as it is crucial to the setting out on the path.

## Two Truths and the Buddhist Pilgrim: Sudhana

The description of the pilgrimage itself embodies the Two Truths in that the character of the pilgrim first undertakes the pilgrimage with the goal of enlightenment in mind, and at the end of the journey understands the pilgrimage to have been enlightenment all along. This directly parallels the ideas discussed in the above description of Two Truths -- conventional and ultimate realities are at first totally distinct, giving beings a goal. Once the goal is attained, the ultimate

achieved, it is apparent that the conventional and ultimate are and always have been as inseparable as they are separable. The interdependence of the Two Truths is demonstrated by the fact that one cannot see the pilgrimage as an expression of enlightenment without having undertaken it as a means.

This may be further compared to the uniquely ironic Buddhist path of practice where the practitioner finally realises that her own nature has been fundamentally enlightened all along and that, while the effort was necessary, she never needed to *seek* enlightenment, only uncover or recognise it. This irony is further compounded in the realisation that 'seeking' anything is an egotistical act of self, as is the attainment of a 'thing' called enlightenment. The realisation of no-self therefore also entails a realisation that one's own nature has been fundamentally *unenlightened* all along. This final irony is one well expressed in the three pilgrim stories.

Sudhana's story fits neatly into the pattern described above. As a human boy "with the quest for supreme perfect enlightenment uppermost in his mind," (3: 50) Sudhana approaches Mañjuśri in the forest where he is teaching. With single-pointed determination, he pleads for teachings:

> Turning away from the paths of woe, purifying the paths of bliss,
> Transcender of all worldly states, lead me to the door of liberation. (3: 51)

With the goal of liberation -- synonymous, for him, with the perfected practice of bodhisattvas -- in mind, Sudhana is sent from one teacher to another with his seemingly unanswerable question. Only once he comes full circle, comprehending at last the interpenetrated nature of reality and the fact that he has been in the presence of his teachers, perfecting the bodhisattva's practice the whole time, does it become apparent that the idea of the goal was what gave him the impetus to

carry out the pilgrimage -- and was nothing more than that. It served almost as a distraction that allowed him to keep his 'egotistical' desire to have his question answered out of the way of the 'real' process which was going on. That 'real' process was one of the disintegration of his notions of self, goal and action. By the end of his pilgrimage, Sudhana is everyone in all places doing all things -- simultaneously.

Like the idea of an ultimate truth to be pursued, Sudhana's goal was unattainable for as long as it was a concept. Serving both as the driving motivator for the journey and the obstacle to achieving liberation, Sudhana's goal basically vanishes at the end of his pilgrimage once he attains immeasurable insight into the nature of things. Once that insight is attained, his journey from teacher to teacher is recognisable as both the hopelessly conventional act of self of the boy Sudhana, and as an expression of the activity of all bodhisattvas.

In the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, there is a fascinating distinction drawn between *śravakas* and *bodhisattvas*. *Śravakas* are practitioners in the 'vehicle of the listeners' -- those who seek enlightenment for themselves. Buddha's top disciples belong to this category and are limited by it. While Buddha is busy manifesting a limitless pavilion of jewels his students are aware only of the single body of their teacher before them -- and that only if they are not absorbed in the deep bliss of their meditation:

> Because they were emancipated by the vehicle of the hearers . . . they rested on the knowledge of the light of truth, they were fixed at the limit of reality, they had gone to the state of eternal peace, they had no thought of great compassion and had no pity for the beings of the world; they had accomplished what they had to do for themselves. (3: 23)

Blocked by their satisfaction with quiescence and their lack of compassion, these disciples are inhibited entirely from recognising the meaningfulness of engagement -- or reengagement -- with the world. Their belief in the ultimacy of their inferior goal is a severe hindrance; their eyes are veiled by ignorance (3: 24) and they have ceased to progress on the path towards enlightenment because they believe themselves to be there already. They are contrasted to the bodhisattvas, who:

> . . . had attained the knowledge that all realms of beings are like illusions; they had realized that all buddhas are like reflections; they knew that all existence, states of beings, and births are like dreams; they had pure knowledge that all developments of actions are like images in a mirror; they were intensely aware that all becoming is like a mirage; they perceived that all worlds are like emanations. (3: 21)

Having achieved insight into emptiness, the bodhisattvas are fully capable of seeing the pure nature of the manifested world.

Motivated by the carrot of ultimate meaning they pursue a path of practice which eventually leads back to the conventional realm. All this while the *śravakas* relax into the perceived taste of the carrot. This directly expresses the process by which one comes to understand the Two Truths: first, trapped in *saṁvṛti* reality one has the idea that there is a goal 'out there' to be attained. Setting out to attain *paramārtha-satya*, one eventually comes to discover that the only way to express or share an understanding of the ultimate is through conventional means. "Ultimate meaning," writes Nagao, "is meditated by conventional truth" (32).

Thus we can see that the *Gaṇḍavyūha* expresses the doctrine of Two Truths in a couple of different ways. Each way emphasises the importance of the reengagement, the activity of the bodhisattva, as the perfect medium of expressing

this understanding. This also introduces Nagao's idea of 'other power,' as the bodhisattvas who reenter the realm of birth and death serve to instil a desire for enlightenment in the hearts of sentient beings. Taken by the idea of this goal, they embark on their path, and the cycle repeats endlessly.

## Marpa

In *The Life of Marpa the Translator* we also find this pattern. Leaving Tibet of his own accord in search of advanced teachings, Marpa's initial setting out eventually led him to travel to India a total of three times. If we start with a broad look at the work as a whole, Marpa's life clearly outlines the path of coming to understand the Two Truths. Within that broad perspective also come a number of incidents which illustrate the same thing. The first of these incidents takes place during his first return trip from India, when his jealous companion Nyö dumps the fruit of twelve years of Marpa's labour into the Ganges during a ferry crossing. After a brief contemplation of suicide, Marpa understands what he has gained at an ultimate level -- oral transmissions and teachings, understanding and experience that are unshakable and do not rely on texts. This actually introduces something of a twist to the pattern, for in this case, Marpa is only made aware of the ultimate meaning when the concrete, conventional traces of that meaning -- the texts -- are destroyed. Arguably, he only comes to understand the ultimate meaning of the texts once they vanish and take nothing irreplaceable with them.

Marpa first left with the goal of accessing deep teachings in mind. What he encountered there was a teacher who captivated him at such a profound level that once he returned home, his main drive was to accumulate enough gold to be able to return. With his goal shifted from teaching to teacher, he undertook his journeys without complaint:

> The gurus Nāropa and Maitrīpa live in India.
> Śrī Śāntibhadra lives in India,
> And the shrine of Mahābodhi is in India.
> Whatever the consequences may be, I am going to India.
> Even at the cost of my life, I am going to India. (77)

Once there, Marpa was sent by Nāropa from teacher to teacher across one treacherous landscape after another -- most memorably the boiling poisonous lake on whose island Śāntibhadra lives. Despite the fact that Nāropa is capable of teaching him everything he learned from the other gurus he was sent to, Marpa pursues the ends set before him by his teacher with unflagging devotion (although sometimes through many tears). While carrying out all that is asked of him Marpa is unaware of the fact that what feels like a linear journey or progression is simply an erosion of the inner obstacles to his own enlightened nature -- something which Nāropa cannot reveal to him until this is accomplished. One of the biggest obstacles to Marpa's development turns out to be the great love he has for his teacher as a person. To a less dramatic degree, his being sent out to various teachers in India is one of Nāropa's means of making Marpa's love for him less personal: being forced to cultivate devotion for others did help him understand that the realisation he sought did not inhere in his main teacher. At a much more dramatic level, Nāropa rocked Marpa's understanding of their relationship over the course of the eight-month search episode, during which Marpa is unable to find his teacher because of his own deeply rooted ignorance. Each month brings another vision or teaching from the simultaneously absent and present Nāropa who is trying to snap Marpa out of his habitual thought patterns. Stubbornly clinging to his desire to see the man Nāropa as a man, Marpa is held at a distance:

> The fifth month, Marpa searched, saw a glimpse of Nāropa's face, and attachment arose in him. Nāropa said:
>
> Like a rainbow, the body is free from attachment.
> If you do not recognize this free from reference point,
> Like a blind man sightseeing
> How can you understand the truth?
>
> Then Nāropa disappeared. (83)[6]

Marpa is finally able to recognize an elaborate form of energy and light (the maṇḍala of Hevajra) as Nāropa and through the power of his supplications convinces his teacher to manifest in his familiar and much-loved form. Still attached to the forms of the world around him, Marpa is shocked at Nāropa's treatment of his offering of gold -- not understanding that it was the effort of gathering it and not its material value that the teacher sought. Nāropa rejects Marpa's offering repeatedly, and repeatedly Marpa insists he take it. Finally, Nāropa accepts the gold and then flings it into the woods. Marpa feels pangs of regret because of all the effort he put into gather the wealth, and Nāropa:

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[6] This pattern of a disciple seeking his teacher, but being unable to find him because of his own ignorance is quite common. Naropa himself, when searching for his teacher Tilopa, encounters eleven manifestations of his guru and is unable to recognize him. For instance: "Naropa came upon a man who had impaled his father on a stake, put his mother in a dungeon and was about to kill them. They cried loudly: 'Oh son, do not be so cruel.' Although Naropa revolted at the sight he asked the man whether he had seen Tilopa, and was answered: 'Help me kill the parents who have brought me misfortune and I will then show you Tilopa.' But since Naropa felt compassion for the man's parents he did not make friends with this murderer. Then with the words: 'You will find it hard to find the Guru / If you kill not the three poisons that derive / From your parents, the dichotomy of this and that. / Tomorrow I will go and beg.' the man disappeared" (Guenther 34).

Another instance of this pattern is found in the story of Asanga's search for Maitreya (Tibetan: byams pa). After twelve years of retreat in a cave, waiting for Maitreya to appear to him, Asanga is finally convinced that he will never meet the Buddha. Exiting the cave and on his way back to town, he comes upon a dog who is writhing in pain from a maggot infested wound on its side. Overcome with compassion he decides to clean the wound, but realises that the maggots would starve. He decides to place them on his own flesh so that they will survive and leans over to pick them off, but realises that he may crush them with his fingers. He leans over to lick the maggots from the wound, and as his tongue touches the dog the dog disappears in cloud of light and Maitreya appears. Asanga is overwhelmed with emotion and says: "Why now -- now that my thirst is gone, do you appear before me?" Maitreya answers: "It is only now, through your great act of compassion, that your mind is pure and therefore able to see me. In truth I have been here all the time" (Hyde-Chambers 25).

> . . . beckoned with his hands, joined his palms, and then opened them and returned the gold . . . saying, "If you feel a loss, here it is again. I don't need gold. If I needed it, all this land is gold." He struck his foot on the earth and the ground turned to gold. (87)

Finally, after this episode, Marpa's mind opens to the nature of emptiness.

Once this has happened, the two of them settle down to sleep next to each other, and in the morning Marpa is greeted by the dazzling sight of the Hevajra maṇḍala:

> . . . at dawn Mahāpaṇḍita Nāropa manifested the maṇḍala of Hevajra with the nine deities, bright and vivid in the sky. He said "Son, teacher Marpa Chökyi Lodrö, don't sleep, get up! Your personal yidam Hevajra with the nine emanation devis has arrived in the sky before you. (92)

Nāropa is also present in his habitual form and asks Marpa, "Will you prostrate to me or to the yidam?" (92) Marpa prostrates to the yidam, and Nāropa says:

> 'Before any guru existed
> Even the name of Buddha was not heard.
> All the buddhas of a thousand kalpas
> Only come about because of the guru.
> This maṇḍala is my emanation.' Then the yidam dissolved into the guru's heart center. (92)

After all his instruction on *not* fixating on the outer form of the guru; after his psychologically trying lessons on perceiving the emptiness behind the form, Marpa is now urged to reenter the conventional world of forms and appearances -- to see

the form behind the emptiness. It appears that the most important teaching one receives after penetrating ultimate reality, is penetrating conventional reality.

If we return now to a more panoramic view of Marpa's story, we see how the pattern of misrecognition of the path and goal are instantiated. After receiving what he understands to be the highest teachings of Nāropa, Marpa is seized by the idea that past twenty years of his life would have been made much easier if Nāropa had started with this:

> 'Knowing this one thing liberates all. Therefore, since this king of teachings alone is enough, it would have been sufficient to give me this in the beginning.'
> . . . Nāropa said, 'When you visited on the two previous occasions, it was not yet the appropriate time to give this teaching to you. . . .Undergoing great difficulties in collecting gold and paying no attention to dangers on the journey, you endured hardships for the sake of dharma. . . .Out of my irresistible love for you, I thought that I must give you this teaching. . . .In order to receive the blessings of the lineage, you were delayed and made to undergo hardships'. (91-2)

Marpa had not yet grasped the fact that the obstacles he had encountered and hardships he had endured were as meaningful and pure as the joy of seeing his teacher. Unable to comprehend the nature of his path, it is pointed out to him by Nāropa. As far as his goal is concerned, Marpa really only begins to understand what he has achieved while on his journey home; visited by ḍākinīs and his gurus in his dreams, he starts to really understand that he and his teachers are not separate; that returning to Tibet to share what he has learned completes the journey:

> Now depart to U in Tibet.
> In the northern Land of Snow,

A place abundant with a variety of fragrant trees,
Son, go there and perform benefit for others.
You will certainly accomplish this benefit. (100-101)[7]

We can see from the above observations that Marpa's story enacts the pattern of coming to understand the doctrine of Two Truths at a number of levels: conventional, emotional attachment to texts is replaced by true understanding of their meaning and a subsequently better ability to transmit that meaning; deeply conventional love for his teacher is blasted out of the water by a direct intuition of emptiness, which is almost immediately replaced by a renewed devotion to the teacher; and finally, the over-arching pattern of his journey which is one of taking two decades to grasp what he had, unbeknownst to himself, set out for in the first place and once he recognises and attains his goal he must turn around and reenter his life in Tibet -- wife, children, disciples and all. To put it another way, before he had achieved it, there was such a thing as goal. After he had achieved it, the goal itself ceased to exist.

## Xuanzang

The story of Xuanzang in *Journey to the West* also explores the theme of the Two Truths in some detail. Xuanzang's pilgrimage as a whole is more or less a record of his inability to shed his own ignorant views which keep him locked in conventional reality. From the point of view of the emperor and his disciples in

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[7] It is interesting to see how this parallels Naropa's development. Having achieved insight into emptiness, he originally vanished into the wilderness to enjoy his insight. Tracked down by two would-be disciples (who would eventually become Marpa's Nepalese teachers) and his guru Tilopa, Naropa is told the following: "Listen to this order, great pandit Naropa: / With rain from the cloud of the Noble Doctrine / In the sky of self-awareness, radiant in itself / And not to be born as some content of mind, / Ripen the crop of those who should be taught" (Guenther 97).

China he is the most pious and wise man around. However, he is thoroughly entangled in rigid ideas about conduct and morality, the nature of enlightenment, and the path there. He is attached to outer forms and is completely without experiential insight into emptiness. This is explained over the course of eighty-one episodes which make up his pilgrimage. He is also completely unable to understand the nature of his path or the true nature of his goal until such time as the path is completed and the goal attained.

One of the first clear indications the reader gets that Xuanzang's attachment to conduct is an obstacle he must overcome is in the first episode he has with Monkey at his side. Set upon by six bandits, Xuanzang is terrified, certain that death awaits him. Monkey, ever able to understand what's going on around him sees the bandits for what they are: the six senses. He slaughters them without a second thought, correctly perceiving them to be the obstacles that they are, which need to be removed at all costs. Xuanzang is horrified by his disciple's behaviour. Believing Monkey has acted violently with no good reason he berates the poor creature:

> Why did you have to kill them all? Even taking a man's life by accident is enough to stop someone from becoming a monk. . . .What business did you have to slaughter the lot of them . . . ? You haven't a shred of compassion or goodness in you. . . .You're too evil, too evil. (1: 272-3)

One need only the barest understanding of the Buddhist precepts to see that it is quite clear that killing is wrong. However, Xuanzang's blind devotion to those rules is a gross attachment that hinders his ability to break his reliance on his conventionally attuned senses. Had Monkey not killed the bandits/senses, they would have killed Xuanzang, but that makes no difference to the monk. By his reckoning, a rule is a rule.

This attachment makes him a difficult man to protect; his disciples, especially Monkey, are constantly saving him from situations that would be easily averted if he would learn to trust their insight. It also makes him a difficult travelling companion, as it seems that Monkey could make it to Vulture Peak and back before breakfast and it takes Xuanzang more than a decade to cover the same distance. This puts Xuanzang in a situation similar to that of Sudhana; the physical distance is a completely illusory obstacle that can be overcome by spiritual development. Just as Sudhana gradually overcame the barriers of space as he progressed on his path, so we are told that Xuanzang could do the same:

> Do not go far to seek the Buddha on Vulture Peak;
> Vulture Peak is in your heart.
> Everybody has a Vulture Peak stupa
> Under which to cultivate conduct. (3: 340)

It is his unswerving reliance on the appearances of things that continually cause Xuanzang so much grief. Similarly, Marpa's months-long quest for Nāropa falls into this category, as well. He is shown his teacher again and again but is unable to perceive him because of his own mental obstacles. Xuanzang's goal, one senses, is actually at his fingertips, but it is understood that his past accretions of bad karma demand a certain amount of purification and his mind isn't sharp enough to penetrate that fact and take the obstacles as expressions of his impending enlightenment. "As long as your will is sincere," says Monkey to his master, "Thunder Peak is before your eyes" (3: 340).

One of the most crucial obstacles is the river which must be crossed in order to become a Buddha; the river which Xuanzang and his disciples must cross in a bottomless boat. Much to the monk's horror, a corpse floats by them in the water. Soon they recognise it to be Xuanzang's body, and Monkey says, "Don't be

frightened, Master . . . that's you" (3: 577). It is then understood that a radical transformation has taken place. Leaving his conventional body behind, the body in which the negative karma and stiff tendencies and habits inhered is abandoned. From that moment forward, Xuanzang's body is light -- able to be flown by means of magical *siddhis* -- like the bodies of his disciples.

Like Marpa suffering necessary hardships for the sake of the dharma, Xuanzang does not comprehend until the end of his journey just what his journey was. It seems, in fact, as though even at the end of his journey he does not comprehend the fact that he has 'crossed to the other side' and then reengaged himself with the world by collecting the scriptures and making the return journey. This is demonstrated by the episode with the blank scrolls. This episode also serves to illustrate the inadequacy of ultimate truth on its own to do anything but satisfy the already enlightened. With blank scrolls, Xuanzang could not reach or teach anybody. With blank scrolls, the desire for the goal and subsequent setting out on the path would not be instilled in the people of China. What is needed are words, physical traces of awakening, to convince beings in the conventional realm to move towards the goal:

> All kinds of matter are really without matter;
> No emptiness is truly empty.
> Stillness and clamour, speech and silence, all are the same. (3: 533)

In wrapping up this section, I want to make it clear that I do not intend to give the impression that the reengaged being is anything but ordinary -- Sudhana sees through his delusory notion of seeking and then keeps seeking; Marpa cuts through the hindrances of attachment to the world of form and then returns, bad temper and all, to his wife and children in Tibet; and Xuanzang even sees the

corpse of his conventional, grasping 'self' float by and remains partial to anxiety attacks. The important point here is recognising that emptiness, non-duality itself, is not separate from form, and that form -- conventional reality -- is not separate from emptiness.

## Path and Goal: Emptiness Manifest

Having examined how the doctrine of Two Truths is expressed in the three pilgrimage stories, it is now worthwhile to turn back to Nagao for some support. The model of the pilgrimage as it mirrors Two Truths, in my discussion, has involved the initial setting out of the pilgrim, entrenched in conventional reality, who derives strength and motivation from his mistaken belief in the nature of both path and goal. Achievement of the goal is completed at the expense of all preconceived ideas about the journey and goal and the end result is reimmersion in conventional reality. Nagao agrees with this model of the Two Truths and, in fact, makes a similar parallel to the Buddhist path:

> The path is a process, a journey whose vicissitudes become clear only when one has arrived and looks back. . . .If the attainment of ultimate meaning were preestablished from the start, before the journey had begun, it would have to be understood as a foregone conclusion by virtue of its inner teleology. A journey, however, is a process of whose final destination one is not initially aware. If both the starting point and the destination were preestablished, identifiable realities and if the journey consisted only in traversing the interval, the path could be undertaken in an altogether worldly and conventional manner, and thus would itself be clouded and occluded. Since the journey would belong entirely to worldly convention, it could not involve a leap from worldly convention to ultimate meaning. (78)

What he is basically saying here is that the deluded point of departure and goal are necessary components of any 'real' journey. If the journey is one from the conventional to the ultimate it could not be any other way. This is because the ultimate point of view is totally inaccessible from the *saṁvṛti* point of view; anything grasped by a grasping mind will necessarily be as much a product of that mind as of anything else: "The truth of worldly convention remains yoked to and derived from one-dimensional, primal ignorance. It is because of primal ignorance that it is the truth of worldly convention" (Nagao 57). It will be conceptual, constructed, a conventional aggregate that suits the neuroses and tendencies of the conventional mind. In other words, anything conceived of by the conventional mind will itself be conventional, as the ultimate is beyond concepts: ". . . ultimate meaning is emptiness itself. Emptiness is ineffable and inconceivable; it is silence" (30). For this reason, the pilgrim's ignorance of his own actual path and goal are indispensable ingredients of his success.

Nagao continues:

> The true path is the path that is originally not a path. . . .The destiny of one following the path consists in knocking repeatedly at a door that remains eternally unopened, in waiting expectantly, even in despair, for that unopened door, in the pilgrimage of knocking again and again. . . . Whatever is shown cannot be the true path; the true path cannot be described or appreciated as a path at all. (78-9)

Again, this refers us to the fact that one cannot grasp the nature of one's journey until the journey is completed. Without understanding what is going on or where anything is leading, the pilgrim perfects the *process* of his searching as he approaches its *point*. It is the belief that he is on a path headed towards a goal that

facilitates the actual development towards the ultimate. His ignorance of the process which is actually taking place and belief in the illusory path give the pilgrim the endurance, one may even say provides the distraction, necessary to bring him to the penultimate realisation that what he took to be the path was nothing but the product of a conventional mind:

> Only a path that is dark and empty in both its beginning and its end, in its starting point and in its destination, only a path that bespeaks a journeying, can fulfill the requirements of a process that casts a bridge from initial conventional awareness to ultimate meaning. (78)

What makes the path of the pilgrim such an ideal vehicle for the apprehension of this is the delusion that he is *on* the path to enlightenment while in fact he has no grasp of the other process he is undergoing. "In the passage from worldly convention to ultimate meaning," Nagao writes, "it is only after one has reached ultimate meaning that one becomes aware, in retrospect, that it was after all a single path" (78).

## Chapter 3

Having explored the features of the literary Buddhist pilgrimage and its philosophical basis, it is now time to examine the *literature* aspect of this research. What follows is a review of the Tibetan literary genre *namtar*, a discussion of Wolfgang Iser's approach to reading, and finally a study of how reading a pilgrimage story can function as a form of Buddhist practice.

### Namtar

Of all the literary genres I examined in my research for this paper,[1] the only one which comes close to satisfactorily addressing the issues pertinent to a

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1 While not, in the end, entirely relevant to my paper, some of my findings are worth reviewing: Pilgrimage literature is interesting because it eliminates the complex variable of the subjective experience of the 'real' pilgrim and at the same time introduces the issues of being authored and having an audience. In his essay about pilgrim narratives of Jerusalem, Glenn Bowman makes the following observation:

> The texts purport to describe a distant terrain while, in fact, using that terrain only as a pretext for presenting images of the holy places already deeply inscribed in the popular imagination. (Bowman 152)

In other words, reading pilgrimage narratives affirms a reader's already existent idea of what a pilgrimage and pilgrimage sites should be like. This affirmation also helps secure the reader's feeling of embarking on a vicarious pilgrimage. Bowman later writes: "[Texts] reorganize the past or the distant to accord with the structure of what is present. In pilgrim narratives they form a cultural geography that presents as real domains that have their primary existence in ideology" (154).

Bowman also writes that the pilgrim narratives "provided those persons who lacked either the wealth or the patronage to make the journey themselves with vicarious experience of the holy places" (160). This invocation of the vicarious pilgrimage adds a significant level to what is generally accepted to be the *allegory* of the pilgrimage: there is, first of all, an allegory being drawn between the characters in the story and a soul's journey towards God; and secondly, the reader is asked to extend that allegory to include her own life, to step back and see her own life as a journey towards the ultimate. Indeed, pilgrim literature can be said to be about the life of the reader. It functions, for the spiritually inclined, as a guide to interpreting one's own life as a pilgrimage towards the divine. In the introduction to Clasby's translation of Deguileville's *Le Pelerinage de la Vie Humaine (The Pilgrimage of Human Life,* 14th century) it is written:

> Above all, the *Pelerinage* presents a story, a narrative of choices and consequences, adventures and outcomes, in which people from a wide variety of situations might find a mirror of their own concerns and experiences. (xvi)

For those interested in pursuing this subject further, Esther Harding has written an interesting study of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (17th century) as an embodiment of the the Jungian universal myth of the hero's quest. Drawing on Western sources dating as far back as the *Pelerinage*, Harding pieces together an analysis of the pilgrimage as a universal allegory for humanity's inner journey towards a final solution to the troubles of life.

Buddhist reading is *namtar*. 'Namtar' (*rnam-thar*), short for *nampar tarpa* (*rnam-par thar-pa*), literally means 'complete liberation.' It includes within its scope "written accounts of the lives of accomplished practitioners" (Willis 3) and is a distinct genre of Tibetan literature. The 'liberation' of 'complete liberation' is two-fold, referring both to the liberation of the practitioner whose life is being recounted and that of the reader. Appealing to a reader's 'common sense', considering how the liberation of the practitioner would be expressed in literature seems quite simple. As with hagiography,[2] one's first assumption would be that it entails a description of the practitioner's progress and as good a description as possible of the actual state he/she reaches. In terms of how the name of the genre refers to the liberation of the reader, there is also an immediate, intuitive answer -- namtar provide a good example. Chögyam Trungpa writes in his introduction to the *Life of Marpa*:

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2 Of the three texts I am studying, two of them recount the life stories of historical Buddhist heroes. Both men could easily find themselves referred to as 'saints' by one using the dominant religious vocabulary of the West. As the narrative pattern of Sudhana's story neatly aligns the *Gandavyuha* with its more historically based counterparts, I do not hesitate to situate it in the category of spiritual biography as well -- the history of Christian hagiography, rife as it is with apocryphal tales, gives me the confidence to make this move with a clear academic conscience. Indeed, hagiography would appear to set the obvious precedent for this kind of study. For that reason it is important for me to make an excursion into this field in order to demonstrate why it is not entirely compatible with the study of Buddhist 'saints.'

According to the renowned Bollandist, Hippolyte Delehaye (1859-1941), "in order to be strictly hagiographic, the document should be of a religious character and should aim at edification" (2). Further, the writing "must be inspired by devotion to the saints and intended to promote it" (2). While, as a Bollandist, he was certainly motivated by his own project to historically authenticate the saints' lives he studied, Delehaye's definition of hagiography is sound and unbiased. His statement of its purpose is corroborated by Donald Attwater:

> These 'legendary Lives' became a recognizable literary form (*genre*), designed to honour the saints, to exalt their virtues and actions, and to kindle a more living spirit among lethargic or discouraged Christians. (Attwater 13)

So, we may then ask ourselves, are the texts I am studying hagiographic documents? Are they designed to honour the 'saints'? I would agree with that. Do they kindle a more living spirit among lethargic Buddhists? This may also be true, but I contend that the Buddhist biographies do much more than that. I believe that hagiography is not an adequate tool with which to approach Buddhist literature, because it fails to take into account the crucial factor of *actual transformation* of the reader; the possibility that reading such a story can constitute a transformative experience. This transformation is the most important function of this kind of literature, and any interpretive approach that fails to account for it falls short of adequacy. Edification and education are useful and necessary, but are at the same time desperately conventional.

> Seeing the example of how Marpa or Milarepa overcame their own personal obstacles can inspire later spiritual practitioners in their own efforts to attain complete liberation. (xxii)

Indeed, this is the most conventional interpretation of the function of namtar. In her description of the genre, Willis adds a layer to the literary cake:

> . . . a namtar, by presenting the significant experiences of a tantric adept in his or her quest for enlightenment, is first and foremost a piece of tantric literature. . . .One of their main functions is thus the imparting of esoteric and exoteric practice descriptions and instructions. Viewed in this way, namtar are indeed vehicles for providing inspirational models; but they are, in addition, vehicles for providing detailed instructions to persons seeking to put the teachings of a particular siddha into practice. (5)

In other words, the *siddha* biographies serve as instructional models for aspiring Tantric Buddhists; it is possible, if one can decipher the sometimes veiled language of namtar, to actually learn the *siddha*'s practices from reading his or her story.[3]

Willis explains three distinct levels of interpretation that are traditionally applied to the reading of namtar, and accompanying those levels she adds a threefold structure of her own: 1) *chi namtar (phyi'i rnam thar)* -- this is what is translated as the 'outer biography.' The outer biography presents "details about birth, schooling, specific teachers, texts consulted, etc." (5). Willis further identifies this in her own structure of namtar as being at the 'historical' level, which, as she describes it, "introduces us in a direct way to the lived world of . . . practitioners" (6). This lived world includes details about "their childhoods and education. . . .in

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[3] For example, in "The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints: Biography, Hagiography and Myth," James Burnell Robinson cites Govinda's interpretation of the siddha Virupa's famous act of halting the sun while he imbibed an enormous amount of liquor. Govinda's suggestion is that this is actually a description of an inner yogic process and is not meant to be taken literally.

addition to . . . the world, with all its historical and political vicissitudes, in which they moved" (6). 2) *nanggi namtar (naṅgi rnam thar)* – this is the inner biography; that which "chronicles specific meditation cycles, initiations, etc." (5). This is what Willis refers to as being at the 'inspirational' level. By 'inspirational' she is referring "to the data within these stories that serve to inspire Buddhist practitioners themselves" (6). The texts serve, at this level, to "uplift, encourage, inspire, and empower those seeking to practice" (6). 3) The last of these is the *sargwai namtar (gsaṅ ba'i rnam thar)* or 'secret biography,' and it "describes the meditative accomplishments, mystic visions, and other spiritual realizations and experiences of the accomplished one" (5). In Willis' own schematic this is referred to as 'instructional,' meaning "those elements in the stories that serve advanced practitioners seeking to learn more about how and when to put into practice the diverse skillful methods of the Vajrayāna" (6).

Her main focus is on the second of these three levels, the inspirational inner-biography of the great siddhas. In the course of her research, putting queries to an assortment of Gelugpa teachers regarding the benefits people reap reading namtar and the function of the genre in the context of Buddhist practice, Willis has all three of these levels confirmed, but does home in on inspiration:

> Namtar provide examples of human beings not very different from ourselves, who, owing to the guidance of a kind teacher and through their own efforts in practice, were able to transform themselves for the better. . . .In truth, only those examples that are capable of being replicated are also capable of inspiring. (16)

So, to make a somewhat simplistic interpretation of this, the stories can inspire practitioners insofar as the readers can see themselves in the protagonist's role; the namtar help the reader 'storify' her own life and infuse it with meaning and

direction in that way. These biographies serve as "the supreme example for sincere beings," (Heruka 204) helping practitioners believe that it *is* possible to attain liberation.

Now the question must be asked: is it really that simple? Is it really just a matter of learning to believe in one's own potential liberation by studying the example of those who have come before us? It is my contention that the two-fold liberation implied in the genre title 'namtar' is not as decidedly conventional as all this. I believe that part of the function of namtar is to actually transform the reader, to make possible the intuition of some of the realisation of the subject of the biography by the sincere reader. Beyond the level of 'storification,' edification and inspiration, lies this idea of something more direct. Trungpa and Willis both touch on it -- Trungpa more so than Willis -- but neither of them goes into any great detail. The reason for this is undoubtedly manifold, but most likely includes the problems of trying to describe something that takes place at a non-discursive level and the general lack of a vocabulary to discuss how the reader interacts with her text. Willis writes that in namtar, "ordinary language is called upon to function in an extraordinary way to suggest the richness, the taste, of a reality that is ultimately ineffable" (20). This describes well part of the problem. She cites the comments of one Geshe she interviewed named Jampel Tardö, who said: "[F]or understanding in detail the qualities of each lama in the lineage -- in order to obtain that lama's *power* -- one reads the namtar of that lama" (16). It is precisely the transfer and acquisition of that power that fascinates me about this literature. Trungpa writes:

> In this way, Marpa's or Mila's life story becomes a teaching to be studied and contemplated, since it can spark one's own realisation. This liberating quality that comes from reading these biographies is stated in the title of Marpa's biography, *Seeing Accomplishes All (T: Mthong-ba*

> *don-yod).* The meaning of this pithy title is that merely seeing or reading this biography can accomplish one's purpose, which is to awaken enlightenment. This is the intent with which Tibetan authors write these biographies, or namthars. (Heruka xxii)

It is at this direct level of *seeing* that I believe an understanding of teachings like the doctrine of Two Truths is engendered in the reader. The direct contact between the reader's mind and the ineffable power of the *siddha* constitutes a fourth level of namtar interpretation -- one which paves the way for taking a very different look at the rest of Buddhist literature.

This process is both facilitated and complicated by the readers' initial identification with elements of the story. The complications are something I will explore towards the end of this chapter. The facilitation I will deal with immediately, beginning with explaining *how* this process of identification takes place. It is at this point that we find ourselves facing the world of Reader-Response criticism, and the work of (one) Wolfgang Iser.

## The Phenomenology of Reading

### i - The Literary Work

In his essay "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," Wolfgang Iser presents a basic overview of his approach to literature. It consists, most generally, in the view that a literary work, its meaning and very existence, exists at the point where the reader and text converge. He writes:

> The phenomenological theory of art lays full stress on the idea that, in considering a literary work, one must take into account not only the actual text but also, and in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text. (50)

That response is something he refers as 'realisation'[4] -- and it must be pointed out that this is used in the sense of 'making something real' and not merely in the "a-ha!" sense of meaning grasped.[5] While he more or less locates this realisation, as I mentioned above, he at the same time refrains from pin-pointing it. Claiming that it cannot be identified with either "the reality of the text" or "with the individual disposition of the reader," (50) Iser's claim is that the literary work, its realisation, is virtual and as such is dynamic in nature. By virtual he does not mean unreal, but rather implies that this creative interaction of text and reader occurs at a site which is present when reader's mind and text meet and is not otherwise present. In other words, reading is a creative act.

Iser explains a number of different processes which the reader undergoes in her progression towards realisation. To begin with, she starts putting component parts of the story together in her mind as she progresses through it, gradually integrating the text into her memories and establishing patterns that result in feelings -- like anticipation -- which differ for each reader. He writes:

> The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written. The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the

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[4] *Konkretisation* in the original German.

[5] This is also a distinction made by Keiji Nishitani in *Religion and Nothingness*, where he makes use of *realization*'s "twofold meaning of 'actualize' and 'understand'" (5). He uses this twofold term throughout the work, often using it to help describe enlightenment: "It is the full *realization* (actualization-*sive*-appropriation) of the reality of the self and all things" (22).

> text, which endows it with its reality. The virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination. (54)

Iser is establishing a middle ground between the two traditional poles of text and reader. His respect for and very reasonable approach to the use of imagination as a legitimate, critically accessible *locus* of meaning and creativity allows his work to dovetail nicely with that of Francisca Cho Bantly, whose reclamation of the reader's imagination in the arena of academia informed my introduction. His emphasis on how different readers are differently affected also provides the opportunity for me to reintroduce the factor of the Buddhist reader, or a Buddhist reading. A Buddhist practitioner, or a reader who reads with the goals and tenets of Buddhism in mind, will be bringing a focussed desire for awakening to that text which will, at first, appear to be affirmed while reading a pilgrimage story. What happens to that desire will be dealt with in the next section of this chapter. For now, I will keep the focus on Iser, who further develops his idea, claiming that while the reader's expectations and images will be in a continuous process of change and expansion, "the reader will still strive, even if unconsciously, to fit everything together in a consistent pattern" (58). This is how Iser believes we begin to establish meaning in a text. He quotes Gombrich:

> In the reading of images, as in the hearing of speech, it is always hard to distinguish what is given to us from what we supplement in the process of projection which is triggered off by recognition . . . it is the guess of the beholder that tests the medley of forms and colours for coherent meaning, crystallizing it into shape when a consistent interpretation has been found. (58)

In other words, it is not the case that in any work one approaches, there is one form, one idea, one interpretation to be grasped. The form, the idea, the interpretation are as much the contribution of the reader as the text. We search for consistent patterns in everything we encounter from infancy onwards and build our relationship to the world based on the conclusions we draw from those patterns. This does not change when what we encounter is a text. The reader informed by Buddhism will be, consciously or subconsciously, seeking 'Buddhist' patterns in the text, reading Buddhist ideas, experiencing a Buddhist message. The organic whole created from this potentially infinite range of choices Iser calls *Gestalt*. He writes of the *Gestalt:*

> ...it is not given by the text itself; it arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook. (59)

Iser believes that the comprehension of a text is an individual, configurative act which is tied inextricably together with the reader's expectations, "and where we have expectations," he writes, "there too we have one of the most potent weapons in the writer's armory - illusion" (59). Illusion plays a major role in Iser's scheme, for illusion is the reader's constructed realm of the familiar; that realm of consistency which she has engendered which allows her to comprehend the *experience* of the text. This is easily paralleled to the place of *paramārtha-satya* in the conventional Buddhist path; struggling with notions of *anātman* and *śūnyatā*, the Buddhist requires the potential of an ultimate reality in order to read/make sense of the world around her. "For," Iser writes, "it is only the illusion, on its different levels of consistency, that makes the experience 'readable'" (59). While the construction of that illusion is necessary to the cognitive sense of *realisation*, it

remains at odds with the text itself, its undifferentiated multiple layers of meaning. The tension between these two poles, each of which fails to wield full power over the experience, gives the reading itself a dynamic quality. The weaknesses or holes in the illusion are what allow it to grow, what allow the reader to experience and learn, while the illusion itself provides the basis for that experience:

> The polysemantic nature of the text and the illusion-making of the reader are opposed factors. If the illusion were complete, the polysemantic nature would vanish; if the polysemantic nature were all-powerful, the illusion would be totally destroyed. Both extremes are conceivable, but in the individual literary text we always find some form of balance between the two conflicting tendencies. The formation of illusions, therefore, can never be total, but it is this very incompleteness that in fact gives it its productive value. (59-60)

The inability of the reader to fabricate an unbreachable illusion allows the text to introduce novelty in those gaps. It also serves another function; that of making the impermanent and constructed nature of the illusion evident to its holder. The reader is in two possible states while she is reading: either safely engrossed in the construction and maintenance of the illusion, which lends familiarity to what is being read; or being forced to actually observe the illusion when something alien to it penetrates it. For instance, a Buddhist reading *Journey to the West* will at first take Xuanzang to be the ideal Buddhist:

> He had been a monk from infancy, and ever since birth he had eaten vegetarian food and observed the prohibitions. . . .Investigation revealed that his origins were good and his virtue great; of the thousand sutras and ten thousand holy books there was not a single one that he did not know. (1: 223)

Although the reader has already been told that he was born into the realm of human suffering because of past misdeeds, his incorruptible virtue and vast learning immediately lend themselves to the belief that he is within inches of enlightenment. This constitutes the construction of a familiar illusion, putting the reader at ease in the context of an otherwise quite fantastic story and making her at home with the righteous protagonist. What the reader is confronted with, however, is the 'reality' of Xuanzang's character and problems: he is easily scared, easily angered by his disciples and is overly attached to the outer appearance of virtuousness, a trait which comes at the expense of the ability to act skilfully and the development of wisdom. Xuanzang's profound ignorance keeps him on the road for twelve long years. Seeing these flaws in Xuanzang, understanding that he does not embody perfect skill and wisdom, constitutes the text's assault on that illusion, the damaging of which results in the reader's experience of seeing her own illusion for what it is and starting to grasp the unformulated part of the text.

According to Iser, it is the combination of text, reader and the infinite illusions, expectations, imaginings and projections that their commingling produces that together constitute a literary work. With that, it is now possible to move on to the key term in my discussion of Buddhist reader-response.

## ii - Identification

'Identification' is a complicated term. Iser's definition is common sense and appeals to the implied meaning attributed it by the other authors I have been discussing in this chapter: "the establishment of affinities between oneself and someone outside oneself - a familiar ground on which we are able to experience the unfamiliar" (65). By Iser's reckoning, identification is not an end but rather a means, a tool which may be used by the author in order to "convey the experience

and, above all, an attitude toward that experience" (65). I agree with his evaluation. Through the process of identifying with a character, the reader can be stimulated into adopting a particular attitude. Thus the process of identification can be seen to parallel the function of setting out on the Buddhist path -- identifying with the illusion of a self to be awakened, the aspirant begins to cultivate *bodhicitta*.

As far as understanding the process of transformation which transcends this identification goes, Iser explores how in the course of reading, the distinctions between subject (reader) and object (text) are effaced. Iser turns to the work of Georges Poulet, another important voice in the world of Reader-Response criticism, to begin his exploration of this area. Discussing Poulet's ideas, he writes:

> He says that books only take on their full existence in the reader. It is true that they consist of ideas thought out by someone else, but in reading the reader becomes the subject that does the thinking. Thus there disappears the subject-object division that otherwise is a prerequisite for all knowledge and all observation, and the removal of this division puts reading in an apparently unique position as regards the possible absorption of new experiences. (66)

Citing Poulet's own work, it becomes much clearer exactly how the reader becomes the thinking subject of another's ideas:

> Whatever I think is a part of *my* mental world. And yet here I am thinking a thought which manifestly belongs to another mental world, which is being thought in me just as though I did not exist. Already the notion is inconceivable and seems even more so if I reflect that, since every thought must have a subject to think it, this *thought* which is alien to me and yet in me, must also have in me a *subject* which is alien to me. . . .Whenever I read, I mentally pronounce an *I*, and yet the *I* which I pronounce is not myself. (66)

This temporary erasure of the subject/object distinction allows the reader temporary relief from her habitual thought processes and personal boundaries. Recognising this, one can potentially glimpse one's idea of 'self' as just another illusion, constructed as one part of the endless process of searching for patterns of consistency in an unforgivingly polysemous reality. If a text has been written with the intention of either constructing or undermining the goal of Buddhism, and is being submitted to a Buddhist reading, the effects can be dramatic. Iser writes:

> In the act of reading, having to think something that we have not yet experienced does not mean only being in a position to conceive or even understand it; it also means that such acts of conception are possible and successful to the degree that they lead to something being formulated in us. (67)

Iser himself touches on the profound implications of this theory of reading/textual production when he writes:

> The production of the meaning of literary texts does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness. (68)

Iser's theory demonstrates how texts transform readers at a level beyond that of identification or information -- he points to the often disregarded fact that the process of reading entails more than reader and text; it engages both in an activity unique to the moment of reading which can effect change on the way the

reader conceives her very identity. It is precisely this possibility which I propose Buddhist pilgrimage literature partakes in when it transforms the reader.

The unformulated part of a text is not a feature of the text alone; it is something which *occurs* at the point where reader and text converge. That *something* is transient and points to a process and an experience rather than a graspable 'it.' It occurs at the moments of conflict and transition between expectations and disappointment, and is a catalyst of change within the reader. By providing the reader with the very arena for this process, literature makes itself an ideal tool for human development. Through our expectations, our illusions, what Iser refers to as our entanglement:

> . . . the reader is bound to open himself up to the workings of the text and so leave behind his own preconceptions. . . .Reading reflects the structure of experience to the extent that we must suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the literary text. (65)

And it is during this process, according to Iser, that "something happens to us" (65).

## Pilgrimage and Quest

Approaching a text as a form of Buddhist practice entails, as I have already mentioned, a collection of ideas about the way things are and the way they ought to be. The conviction that there is an ultimate, non-discursive goal out there to be attained is one of those things. *Reading* the text as a form of Buddhist practice entails a deep level of engagement with the text, identification which facilitates participation in illusory thoughts, feelings, assumptions and expectations. In

short, the text has something which the reader expects to gain through identification.

Superficially, the pilgrim's story promises insight into the pilgrim's realisation as if it were a thing to be seen or gained. This kind of inspiration keeps the reader reading and parallels the first stage of the Buddhist pilgrimage, where the pilgrim embarks on his journey in order to *seek* enlightenment. How this inspiration occurs has been explained by the above excursions into namtar and Iser's phenomenological approach to reading. Through her interaction with the text, through her approach to its 'unformulated' parts, through her struggle with illusion and its dissolution, the reader embarks on a pilgrimage of her own.

It is my contention that, unlike the situation in the average quest story,[6] the Buddhist reader identifies with the *goal* of the pilgrim rather than the pilgrim himself. While most novels which entail a quest involve a hero whose skills, bravery, progress and setbacks the 'normal' reader can identify with, the Buddhist pilgrim figure is one characterised by his failures, his ignorance, his obstinacy and his foolishness. While the reader will almost certainly develop something of a condescending affection for the pilgrim, she will be primarily focussed on his goal. Seeing his faults -- actually laughing at Xuanzang as he gives up all hope yet again and bursts into tears; grasping as obvious the obstacles which obstruct the pilgrim's progress -- wincing as Marpa gets upset about Nāropa throwing away his offering of gold; the reader's cultivation of anticipation and expectation will manifest as enthusiasm for the pilgrim's achievement of awakening. She can laugh at him and even encourage him, seeing all the while the delusions which limit his progress and that which lies beyond them: his goal. While the reader can identify with the struggle for awakening, the pilgrim's flaws appear to be so obvious that to the

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[6] Northrop Frye describes the quest as "a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climacteric adventure, usually announced from the beginning, the completion of which rounds off the story" (Frye 187).

reader, achieving the goal seems a simple process. The reader sees Nāropa in the corpse; the reader stands on Vulture Peak while Xuanzang struggles towards her, hindered by his narrow-mindedness; the reader *knows* that the answer to Sudhana's question lies in the cultivation of his mind and not in the words of the teachers he visits.

To put a spin on Heruka's assertion that spiritual biographies function as a "supreme example," (204) my argument is that the pilgrims in fact provide an example of weakness and ignorance rather than accomplishment. So while it is true that the "sincere reader" identifies with elements of the text, she relates to the pilgrim's destination instead of his journey.

All this is in great part due to the unavoidable conviction of the Buddhist reader that there is such a thing as Buddhism and the Buddhist goal of awakening. From departure to destination the reader's convictions are affirmed. However, when the pilgrim turns back from his destination unfulfilled something happens to the reader, and it is this that makes that experience distinctly Buddhist.

## The Emptiness of Emptiness

When the pilgrim heads for home in order to complete his pilgrimage, the reader is forced to confront the emptiness of emptiness. For the Buddhist reader, this takes shape in the recognition that the initial assumption that realisation is some 'thing' is what prevents her from understanding that emptiness is no-thing-ness. To read a text believing that there is something to be gained from it is to be deceived by a false idea of what constitutes realisation. While this does not necessarily agree with Trungpa, Willis or Iser -- it definitely takes the process a step further -- Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy requires this next stage. Reading a text

with a goal in mind is actually creating an object of attachment which, while perhaps necessary at the outset, can only hinder growth past a certain point. It places being/form/conventionality on one side and nothingness/the ultimate on the other. A reader who has been engaged in a Buddhist reading, identifying herself with awakening, will begin to recognise this and be forced to understand that to make a goal of emptiness is to misunderstand it. Nāgārjuna writes:

> By a misperception of emptiness
> a person of little intelligence is destroyed.
> Like a snake incorrectly seized
> Or a spell incorrectly cast. (XXIV/11: Garfield 68)

Becoming attached to an inaccurate understanding of emptiness constitutes a grave peril for a Buddhist.[7] It is not a peril which is made any easier to deal with by the fact that what a misperception of emptiness exactly is, is itself not intuitive. One's initial inclination is to assert its non-discursive nature, to privilege the 'ultimate' over the conventional. The failure here, however, is the inability to grasp the identical *truth* of the two truths; the misperception of the conventional as illusion. Nishitani writes:

> When we say 'being-*sive*-nothingness,' or 'form is emptiness; emptiness is form,' we do not mean that what are initially conceived of as *being* on one side and *nothingness* on the other have later been joined together. In the context of Mahayana thought, the primary principle of which is to transcend all duality emerging from logical analysis, the phrase 'being-*sive*-nothingness' requires that one take up the stance of the

[7] There is a marvellous passage in *Journey* where this weakness which is so much a part of Buddhism is exploited by a demon. The old demon king creates a false Vulture Peak with a false Thunder Monastery (the monastery where Xuanzang is supposed to meet the Buddha), the evil of which place Monkey can perceive immediately. "But if it looks like the Thunder Monastery this must surely be the Vulture Peak" (2: 598) says the ignorant monk, who goes rushing forward, kowtowing, and is promptly seized by the monster who plans to steam and eat him.

> *'sive'* and from there view being as being and nothingness as nothingness. (97)

What this translates into for the Buddhist reader is a kind of second awakening -- one which shakes the Buddhist from her idea that there is a goal to be reached and leads the reader back to the pilgrim. The activity of reading a Buddhist text as a means to awakening is eventually replaced by the reading of a Buddhist text as a simple act of awakening in itself. Expecting to find enlightenment around every corner, the reader is eventually forced to confront the fact that Xuanzang goes back to Chang'an, Marpa to Tibet and Sudhana to Mañjuśri -- each with his habits and questions intact. Understanding the meaning of this is difficult but key to understanding the Buddhist literary pilgrimage and the doctrine of Two Truths. This moment of turning back, for the pilgrim, marks the reader's transition from expectations to disappointment. It is that crucial catalyst of change I referred to in my discussion of Iser which makes this literature transformative.

The second stage of a Buddhist reading is like the second stage of the pilgrimage, where the pilgrim realises that the goal has been his greatest obstacle all along -- that to aspire to a goal as a Buddhist is to attribute a thing-ness to emptiness. As far as the Buddhist reading is concerned, this means that at the end of it all, the Buddhist reader is left with what she came to the text with -- if not less. The *something* that 'occurs' is in fact a no-thing. What the reader expected would be a process of acquisition is, in the end, a loss, and what she loses is awakening.

The reader's process of identification leads her from certainty and expectation to a kind of blind fumbling; she learns to identify with the pilgrim's ignorance instead of his goal. She must come to face the fact that while the whole time she placed herself above the pilgrim, cheering him along a path that seemed

so obvious to her, she herself was the foolish pilgrim all along. At this stage, the Buddhist reader must cleanse herself of the notion of enlightenment; emptiness must return to form.

## Conclusion

I began this study with a brief review of the role of language in Buddhism. Drawing on canonical sources I illustrated two seemingly opposed views -- one of which prioritises silence (as an expression of the 'ultimate') over language (which cannot transcend the 'conventional') and sees language as mere *upāya*; the other of which understands language to be simultaneously a tool to achieve awakening and an expression of it. This conflict introduced an ambiguity which, combined with the Buddhist ontology of illusion, provides the perfect opportunity to *take fiction seriously.*

The texts I opted to study were chosen for the challenges their differences and similarities provided: they all share the theme of pilgrimage; they all emerged from a Mahāyāna Buddhist context; they come from three different countries; and they vary in their level of 'authority' as religious texts. My goal was to show the underlying philosophical 'lesson' by analysing the remarkably consistent pattern of the literary pilgrimage in these three texts and then to examine how reading them could function as a transformative practice.

The pilgrimage pattern was relatively easy to extract. The pilgrim leaves home with a specific goal in mind, arrives at what should have been his destination and more or less accomplishes what he set out to do. He then discovers that an entirely different and unexpected process has taken place and that he must complete his journey by returning home to ordinariness. This parallels the process of understanding Two Truths, where one begins with the idea that one is currently embroiled in the suffering of conventional reality and that there is a goal of enlightenment to attain. After embarking on the path towards that goal one realises that the goal was the illusion all along. This pattern is iterated yet again in the actual reading of the pilgrimage, during which process the reader first identifies

with the pilgrim's goal of awakening and then finds herself trapped in the egotistical pride born of that identification. The pride is crushed with the realisation that it is the ignorance of the pilgrim and not his enlightenment that she identifies with.

What follows is a chart which provides a useful visual aid to the structural parallels between the journey of the literary pilgrim, the Buddhist path expressed by the Two Truths doctrine and the journey of the Buddhist reader:

| Pilgrimage | Two Truths/Buddhist Practice | Act of Reading |
|---|---|---|
| Pilgrim sets out on journey | Form to emptiness, desire for awakening | I read the book |
| Passage into unknown lands, overcoming trials | Entering the path | Growing identification with the destination -- awakening |
| Acquisition of self-understanding | Insight | Self-understanding through identification |
| Deepening faith | Development of meditational powers | Total engagement with the text |
| Arrival | Attainment: "A-ha!" | Insight: "That's me!" |
| Reaching the goal is half-way there... | Emptiness to form | The book reads me |
| Recognising the futility of the accomplishment | Recognising the objectification of and attachment to awakening/the ultimate | Recognising the self-centred egotism called awakening |
| Return home | Return to the ordinary: extraordinary ordinariness | Return to the ordinary: extraordinary ordinariness |

As is illustrated by the above chart, if one reads down each column separately one sees the path of each of the three strands I discuss. If one examines the

horizontal rows, it is apparent that the individual elements of the vertically represented paths align beautifully with one another.

By teasing out the complexities of all the relationships involved -- text and Buddhism, reader and text, protagonist and goal, conventional and ultimate truths -- a wealth of sophisticated philosophical ideas and religious implications have made themselves available for analysis. However, I must grant that allowing myself the luxury of condensing a thesis from the infinitely polysemous potential of three exciting texts may open the door to accusations of arbitrariness. In answer to that thought and for my closing words I offer a line from the most playful of the three texts I studied, *Journey to the West*:

> All kinds of matter are really without matter;
> No emptiness is truly empty.
> Stillness and clamour, speech and silence, all are the same. (3: 533)

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