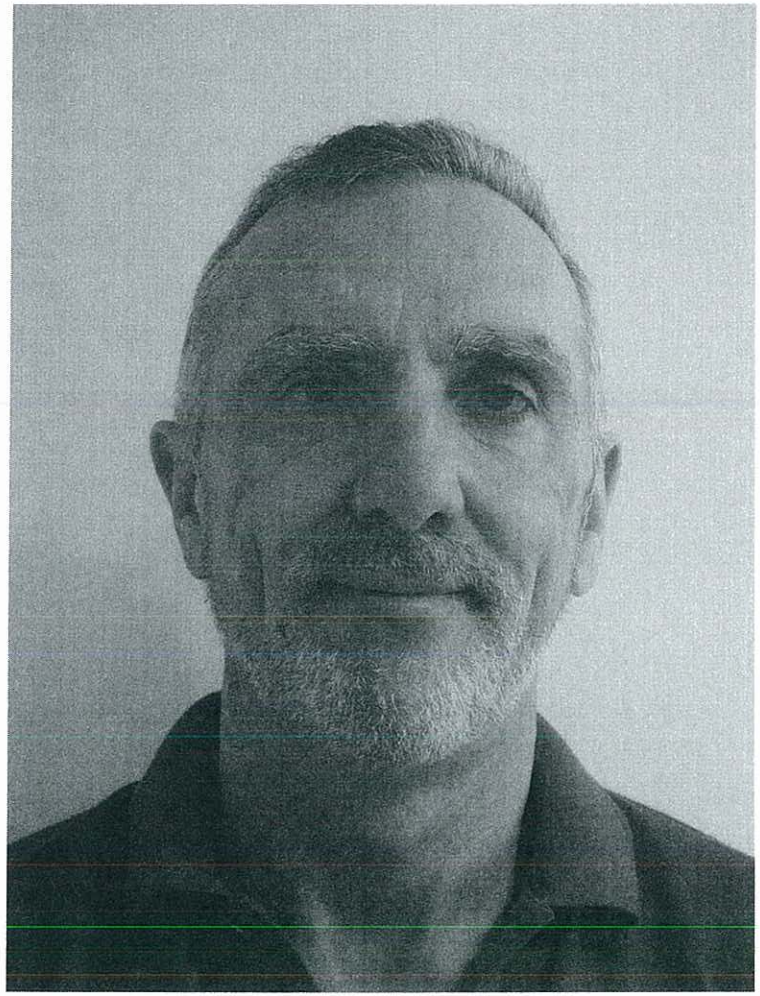

Destroying Māra Forever

Buddhist Ethics Essays in Honor of Damien Keown

Edited by

John Powers and

Charles S. Prebish

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Contents

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You're Only as Good as You Look:

Indian Buddhist Associations of Virtue and Physical Appearance

JOHN POWERS

Ethics, Virtue, Bodies

Academic studies of Buddhist ethics commonly focus on the cognitive aspects of moral behavior. Peter Harvey, for example, highlights the role of intention in Buddhist ethical thought.[1] In his *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*, he states that actions "must be intentional if they are to generate karmic fruits."[2] He separates moral actions from their results: "an action's being good does not consist in its having pleasant karmic results. Rather, it is seen as having pleasant results because it is itself good or wholesome."[3]

In his landmark study, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics*, Damien Keown asserts that Buddhist ethics shares much in common with Aristotle's conception of normative morality.[4] In both systems, there is a fundamental teleological emphasis: Aristotle claims that the aim of ethical practice is "the good" (*eudaimonia*), and in Buddhism, the ultimate goal is nirvāṇa, a state in which rebirth and its attendant sufferings are transcended. Nirvāṇa is the end result of a process of perfecting virtue and advanced meditative states and is conceived as the supreme goal of all religious practice. In both systems the ultimate end is attained through cultivation of virtues.[5]

Keown rejects utilitarian conceptions of Buddhist ethics. According to the doctrine of karma, moral behavior results in positive consequences, such as better rebirth, lives in heaven realms, wealth, health, and so forth, but these are secondary. In Keown's conception, "Nirvana is the good, and rightness is predicated of acts and intentions to the extent to which they participate in nirvanic goodness. The right and the good in Buddhism are inseparably intertwined. If an action does not display nirvanic qualities,

then it cannot be right in terms of Buddhist ethics whatever other characteristics (such as consequences) it might have."[6]

Keown further contends that the relative goodness of actions is related to the cognitive motivations that underlie them. Actions which tend toward nirvanic good are virtuous, while those that are motivated by other concerns are either nonvirtuous or morally neutral. The motivation at the inception of an action is determinative of its status: "An action is right or wrong from the moment of its inception—its nature is fixed by reference to nirvanic values, and it cannot subsequently change its status. . . . In Buddhist ethics it is the motivation which precedes an act that determines its rightness."[7]

Intention is certainly a central concern in Buddhist discussions of ethics, and mental cultivation lies at the heart of the ideal process of moral development, but a focus on the cognitive elements of Buddhist ethics obscures an aspect of Indian Buddhist discussions of the subject that was clearly important to their authors: the intimate and pervasive correlation between virtue and physical beauty. In Indian Buddhism morality is both personal and social; one's ethical decisions are made in a social context and affect others. Moral decisions are also encoded on a person's physical appearance, and the current level of one's development is proclaimed on one's body. In the *Birth Stories* (*Jātaka*), for example, the past lives of the Buddha as a bodhisattva (buddha in training) are recounted, and an important aspect of his performance of extraordinary virtue is its public impact. In a number of stories, physiognomic features are directly correlated with past actions. In most of these tales, he is said to possess an extraordinary physique, one that reflects Indian ideals of human beauty or the author's conceptions of the most perfect form for a particular species when he is born as an animal. His body is generally much larger and stronger than the norm, he possesses skills and abilities that surpass those of all his contemporaries, and others perceive his extraordinary virtue simply by viewing his outward appearance and declare him their natural leader.

In the *Nigrodha-jātaka*, for example, the Bodhisattva is abandoned at birth by his mother and adopted by a woman who had been feigning pregnancy.[8] When he reaches young adulthood, he has a perfect body with golden skin. A king dies without leaving an heir, and the royal chariot is dispatched with an entourage to search for a suitable replacement. When they see the Bodhisattva, they recognize his fitness for the throne solely on the basis of his appearance. The royal priest examines his body and finds that he has markings on his feet which indicate a destiny to rule all of India. There

is no interview, and no attempt is made to ascertain whether or not he possesses sufficient wisdom for the job; nor is his complete lack of experience a factor. His physique proclaims him to be a natural leader, and the search committee responds to this by anointing him their king. In these tales it is assumed that a person's outward appearance is generally a reliable guide to his moral stature.[9]

The Public Nature of Virtue

The *Birth Stories* often recount mighty deeds performed in public that generate admiration and motivate others to emulate the Bodhisattva's example. In Indian Buddhist literature, virtuous deeds are almost never entirely private; even virtuous thoughts draw the attention of others and lead to public displays which testify to the Bodhisattva's greatness and provide examples that inspire audiences. For example, in the *Sivi-jātaka,* the Bodhisattva is king Sivi, an extraordinarily generous ruler who donates vast amounts of wealth to beggars, ascetics, brahmans, and anyone else who asks.[10] He institutionalizes his giving by setting up permanent almonries where the needy can come at any time, but he is dissatisfied because ultimately he gives up only material things, which hold no value for him. One day he reflects on his efforts in giving and a new motivation arises: he hopes to encounter a supplicant who wants part or all of his body. In the *Birth Stories* and in other Indian Buddhist literature, giving away one's body is construed as the ultimate act of generosity, one that can even be contemplated only by the most advanced religious practitioners. As soon as the thought is hatched, the throne of Sakka (Skt.: Śakra), the king of the gods, becomes hot, and he realizes that Sivi has developed the mighty resolution to give away his own flesh. Sakka often plays a central role in these stories: as king of the gods, it is his job to promote virtue throughout the universe and to test those who claim it. In addition, he publicly exalts those who measure up and uses his position to inspire others to up their moral game.[11]

Sakka disguises himself as a blind brahman and travels to Sivi's palace. Sivi offers him the sorts of alms appropriate to brahmans, but the guest indicates that he has no interest in material goods or food; what he really needs is an eye so that he can regain his sight. When he hears this extraordinary request, Sivi is delighted. Without hesitation the king offers not only one eye, but both: he eagerly orders the royal physician to remove them and implant them in the empty sockets of the brahman. The story makes it clear that Sivi endures excruciating agony, but he perseveres in his generosity. His

performance inspires everyone around him, and Sakka ensures that all the gods know of it and that Sivi's generosity is widely proclaimed in the realms under his authority.

At the end of his ordeal Sivi is blind but content. He refers to the common notion that generosity will lead to rebirth in better and more beautiful bodies, increased wealth, and blissful sojourns in heaven, but he dismisses all of these ends as trivial. Sivi gave away parts of his body because he wants to attain the state of buddhahood and benefit all other beings. His generosity is a means toward that end, and he is also aware that the public nature of his performance served to inspire those who viewed it and countless others who heard of his exploits.

Despite his blindness, Sivi never repents his actions, and his continued resolve in the practice of virtue serves to further his moral progress. Due to the extraordinary nature of his gift, he also generates a vast amount of merit (Pāli: *puñña*; Skt.: *puṇya*), which gives him supernatural abilities. Sakka informs him that if he performs an "act of truth" (making a public proclamation of the purity of his intentions in giving away his eyes), they will be magically restored. He follows the god's advice, and immediately two new orbs grow in his empty sockets. And they are even better than the previous ones: they are as powerful as the eyes of the gods and far surpass those of ordinary beings. This miracle is also widely proclaimed and serves to inspire others to improved morality by illustrating the physical benefits that result from virtuous behavior.

Virtue and Somaticity

In Indian Buddhist literature, the somatic consequences of actions are construed as both testimony to one's attainments and powerful tools that are used to promote virtue in the world.[12] The Buddha and his followers are not only individual moral agents who make decisions and reap their consequences; they also play a social role that involves, among other things, inspiring others to emulate their moral examples. Moral behavior in Indian Buddhism is not merely an individual concern; it resonates with the larger society, and the effects of one's actions on others' ethical decisions are part of the karmic system of rewards and punishments.

Keown regards such consequences as health, wealth, better rebirths, and worldly resources as tangential to Buddhist ethics properly understood. This is problematic for at least two reasons: first, much of the behavior that most Buddhists regard as related to ethics is motivated by such concerns,

and second, Indian Buddhist texts posit a close linkage between a person's physical endowments, social status, and wealth and both past and present ethical behavior. The body is particularly important as a marker of morality. In Indian Buddhism, virtue is beautiful, and the most morally advanced beings are also those with the most attractive physiques. In the *Verses of the Elders* (*Theragāthā*), for example, the monk Vimala is said to possess a body "as pure as a dewdrop on a lotus leaf" because of his past virtue.[13] In the *Connected Discourse on Stream Entry*, the Buddha informs Nandaka that a person who has confidence in the Buddha, his teaching (Pāli: *dhamma*; Skt.: *dharma*), and the monastic community will be rewarded with a long lifespan and a body "endowed with beauty."[14] In another discourse in this collection, he assures his followers that if monks put on their robes in the morning, take their bowls and beg for alms, and teach the dharma, laypeople will have confidence in them, and they "will increase in beauty and strength."[15] The physical actions publicly performed by monks include properly arranging their robes, assuring that their clothing is neat and clean, and maintaining dignified comportment. Their physiques proclaim their inner virtue and are inspected by the public. When inner perfection and outer presentation are in conformity, laypeople will spontaneously develop confidence in them, and their own morality will be enhanced.

The Buddha often judges people by their physical appearance, which is correlated with their moral status. In the *Connected Discourses to Monks*, the Buddha sees the venerable Sujāta approaching and remarks to some monks that he is "beautiful to behold in two respects: he is handsome, good-looking, pleasing to behold, and possesses supreme beauty of complexion; he is a person who in this very life has personally realized [the truth] with direct knowledge and who dwells in the unsurpassed goal of the holy life." Sujāta "shines with sublime beauty and possesses a mind that is utterly rectified."[16] The ideal religious adept has both inner and outer beauty, and such a perfect outer form is a reliable indicator of virtue.

Keown dismisses such consequences as merely proximate goals of ethical behavior and as irrelevant to the Buddhist path, but Indian texts commonly present them as central aspects of the salvific activities of the Buddha and his followers. The Pāli Canon contains a number of stories in which skeptical brahmans come to visit the Buddha and listen to a sermon. They are reportedly favorably impressed by his words, but remain unconvinced that he is truly a "great man" (Pāli: *mahāpurisa*; Skt.: *mahāpuruṣa*) who fulfills the prophecies of their scriptures. Such a person possesses transcendent wisdom and has perfected morality. The proof of his attainments is

the fact that he is endowed with the thirty-two physical characteristics of a great man (Pāli: *mahāpurisa-lakkhaṇa*; Skt.: *mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa*), which include: golden skin, flat feet, a wheel pattern on the palms and soles of his feet, webs between his fingers and toes, a curled tuft of hair between his eyebrows (Pāli: *uṇṇā*; Skt.: *ūrṇā*), a fist-sized lump at the top of his cranium (Pāli: *unhīsa*; Skt.: *uṣṇīṣa*), arms that extend to his knees without having to bend over, a sheathed penis, and an enormous tongue. This unusual physiognomy is presented as the epitome of male bodily perfection.

In the *Discourse to Brahmāyu*, a student named Uttara is sent to examine the Buddha to determine whether or not he is a "great man" as his followers claim. When he sees him preaching in Videha, Uttara verifies thirty of the physical characteristics but is unable to ascertain whether or not the Buddha has a sheathed penis and a huge tongue. The quality of his sermon is apparently not sufficient to convince Uttara that he is in fact a buddha; even fools can parrot words of wisdom, but in Indian Buddhist literature, the ultimate proof of wisdom and ethical perfection is found on a person's body.

The Buddha reads Uttara's mind and eliminates his doubts by allowing him to view his sheathed penis and then sticks out his tongue: "Next the Blessed One extruded his tongue, and he repeatedly touched both ear holes and both nostrils, and he covered the whole of his forehead with his tongue." Contemporary readers might view such a display as freakish, but Uttara was highly impressed: "Then the brahman Uttara thought: 'The recluse Gotama [Skt.: Gautama] is endowed with the thirty-two marks of a great man!'" Following the Buddha's performance, Uttara became a disciple and "he followed the Blessed One for seven months like a shadow, never leaving him."[17]

Throughout Indian Buddhist literature, the Buddha's body is presented as the pinnacle of human physical perfection and is a testament to his perfection of wisdom, compassion, and morality. People who see him are overwhelmed by his magnificent physique and gaze at him in wonder. After his conversion Uttara followed the Buddha constantly and minutely inspected every aspect of his physical comportment, which the text associates with his moral perfection. Uttara described the Buddha's movements as deliberate, free from jerkiness or agitation, perfectly controlled, dignified, purposeful, bespeaking perfect mindfulness. Every aspect of his deportment, even the way he ate and relieved himself, proclaimed his exalted inner qualities, and when Uttara recounted his exacting observations to

his teacher, the brahman Brahmāyu, the latter decided to visit the Buddha so that he could personally observe his public displays of the physical dimensions of virtue.

This scenario is repeated several times in the Pāli Canon. The most extended discussion of the Buddha's body endowed with the thirty-two physical characteristics is found in the *Discourse on the Physical Characteristics*, which asserts that he acquired them because of various "mighty deeds, generosity, discipline, abstinence, honoring his parents, ascetics, and brahmans."[18] In these texts, the Buddha's physical endowments are not merely peripheral or unimportant: they are essential components of his persona and play a crucial role in his conversion activities. His audience expects that a buddha will possess the physical characteristics of a great man, and skeptics can be convinced only by a display of all of them. They prove that he is the "ultimate man" (Pāli: *purisottama*; Skt.: *puruṣottama*) and that he has perfected both wisdom and morality. Moreover, he is said to devote considerable time and effort to their cultivation: The *Great Exposition* asserts that they are acquired at the very end of a buddha's training period and that they are essential aspects of fully fledged buddhahood.[19] He devotes most of an entire eon of training to perfecting them because they will be a vital tool in his missionary work as a buddha. They represent the culmination of his countless lifetimes of religious practice. Vasubandhu contends that each of the physical characteristics is produced by cultivating one hundred merits,[20] and Buddhaghosa similarly asserts that each "is born from its corresponding action."[21]

Beauty Conversions

The Buddha's extraordinary physical beauty is a recurrent theme in descriptions of him in Indian Buddhist literature. His perfect body elicits admiration from men and women who view it, and it also plays a key role in his propagation of the dharma. Shortly after his attainment of full awakening, he was walking along a road toward Sarnath, where he would deliver his first sermon, and a naked ascetic saw him from a distance and was struck by the radiance of his body. He approached him and asked: "Your reverence, your faculties are very pure, your complexion is very bright, very clear."[22] His response to the Buddha is depicted as natural and spontaneous, prompted solely by his appearance.

After the completion of the process of awakening, the Buddha fully penetrated the dharma, and this effected a physical transformation. His body

changed, and those who viewed it responded in new ways. Stories of his life prior to the awakening abound with accounts of various beings who saw him and were struck by his sublime beauty, but afterward his physical presence was fully perfected, and it elicited spontaneous conversion experiences in many of those fortunate enough to see him in person.

Shortly after his awakening, he decided to preach his first sermon to five former companions who practiced extreme asceticism in hopes of attaining liberation from cyclic existence. After six years of fruitless effort, he had concluded that their path leads nowhere except starvation and premature death. They separated from him, thinking that he was a weakling addicted to sensual pleasures. When they saw him approaching from a distance after attainment of buddhahood, they initially resolved not to stand and greet him but instead treat him with casual disdain befitting a backsliding "glutton." As he drew nearer, however, they were struck by the change in his physical demeanor.

The *Extensive Sport* describes them as becoming increasingly physically ill at ease; they felt like caged birds, and their bodies rebelled against their resolve to remain sitting because "there is no person anywhere who on seeing the Thus Gone One would not arise from his seat. The closer the Thus Gone One came, the less the five were able to endure his splendor and majesty. They became agitated on their seats and, breaking their agreement, each stood up to honor him."[23] Overwhelmed by his physical presence, they addressed him: "Venerable Gautama, your features are perfectly clear; your complexion is perfectly pure."[24] They were already advanced meditators, and after hearing his sermon all had spiritually transformative experiences. Two became arhats (adepts who have eliminated mental afflictions and are destined for nirvāṇa at the end of their lives), and all were fully established on the Buddhist path. His words were effective, but their initial decision to listen to him was motivated by the effect of his physique.

His attainment of spiritual perfection resulted in a change in appearance. Traditional accounts uniformly credit him with a beautiful body from the time of his birth; prior to his attainment of buddhahood, women became sexually aroused when they saw it, and men admired him. It also bespoke outstanding potential: when he approached a group of ascetics shortly after his decision to leave the householder's life and pursue liberation from cyclic existence, they remarked at his appearance and demeanor and opined that someone so beautiful would probably achieve success in his religious endeavors; but this potential had not yet been actualized.[25] No one responded to him in the way people did after he attained buddhahood, when the mere

sight of his body prompted spontaneous conversion experiences and drew followers to him.

Even a brief adumbration of the dharma coupled with directly viewing the body of an advanced follower of the Buddha can also effect a profound transformation. His two greatest disciples, Sāriputta (Skt.: Śāriputra) and Moggallāna (Skt.: Maudgalyāyana), were converted after Sāriputta encountered a Buddhist monk on the road and was struck by his calm demeanor and physical deportment, which bespoke his inner spiritual attainments. Sāriputta approached the monk and remarked that his countenance was pure and his features beautiful. He asked him who his teacher was and what dharma he followed. Assaji replied that the Buddha was his teacher and then provided Sāriputta with a brief account of the doctrine of dependent arising (Pāli: *paṭicca-samuppāda*; Skt.: *pratītya-samutpāda*), and he experienced a profound awakening. Sāriputta and Moggallāna had previously made a vow that if either found "the deathless," he would pass on his insight to the other, and so Sāriputta sought out his friend, who saw a change in his physical demeanor from a distance and remarked on the purity of his outward faculties and physical demeanor. When Sāriputta recounted what he had heard from the monk, Moggallāna was also converted to Buddhism and became an arhat (Pāli: *arahant*).[26]

Sāriputta and Moggallāna became instant converts as a result of the combination of the physical appearance of a Buddhist monk and the persuasiveness of the Buddha's teachings and remained steadfast followers throughout their lives, but for others the dharma alone was insufficient to sustain their faith. Ultimately the sight of the Buddha's perfect body was a decisive factor that caused some followers to remain committed to their religious practice. The *Apaṇṇaka-jātaka* begins with a story of a group of monks who had converted from another sect after "beholding the Master's countenance, glorious as the full moon, his excellent presence endowed with the major and minor physical characteristics [of a great man] and surrounded by a fathom-wide halo, and upon the sublime glory that marks a buddha." They maintained their commitment only as long as he was physically present, but soon after he left their area they returned to their former faiths. Hearing that they had fallen away from the dharma, he returned, and as soon as they saw him "opening the lotus of his mouth, like a jewel casket, scented with divine scents and filled with various perfumes that are the result of his speaking correctly for eons," they were again converted.[27]

The Buddha's beauty functions as a cure for backsliding in several other *Birth Stories*; for example, the *Saṃvara-jātaka* begins with the case of a

monk who stopped applying himself to his religious practice because he was making little progress, and he decided to renew his enthusiasm by traveling to Jetavana to behold the Buddha's perfect body. This apparently provided the necessary incitement for his return to diligence in training.[28]

The physical presence of the Buddha also affects animals, gods, and demons. In the opening section of the *Cullahaṃsa-jātaka*, his malevolent cousin Devadatta attempts to kill him so that he can become leader of the monastic community. He first rolls an enormous boulder toward the Buddha, but two mountains come together and crush it, and only a small splinter gets through and inflicts a minor wound on his foot, which immediately heals. Devadatta tries to hire assassins, but they become converts, and he realizes "no one who sees the excellent beauty of Gotama's body would dare to approach him [with harmful intent]."

Devadatta's next attempt on the Buddha's life involves sending a maddened elephant because he hopes that a violent beast will not be affected by the Buddha's demeanor and compelling physical qualities. Seeing the onrushing elephant, the Buddha's faithful attendant Ānanda jumps in its path to save him, exclaiming: "He will crush the glorious form of the ascetic Gotama!" At this point we are informed that one result of the Buddha's past cultivation of virtue is a body that is utterly impervious to any physical threat, and so Ānanda's well-intentioned intervention presents a significant danger to his own safety, but the Buddha has nothing to fear. He uses his magical powers to lift Ānanda into the air, thus preventing him from being crushed, and he stands calmly while the violent beast charges toward him. As the elephant draws near, the Buddha speaks calmly to him with a voice like the god Brahmā, but the decisive element is his body: when the elephant perceives the glory of his form, he is instantly pacified. He falls to the Buddha's feet and becomes physically submissive.[29] The author comments that the Master's presence is so overwhelming that had the elephant not been an animal he would have entered the first Buddhist path at that point, but instead he undergoes a profound transformation that will lead to spiritual progress in subsequent lives.

Training for Perfection: Why Practicing Virtue Is Better than Working Out

Among the highlights of the 2008 Olympics held in Beijing were the remarkable performances of Michael Phelps and Usain Bolt, who respectively dominated the swimming and sprint running events. Each competed with

a field of world-class athletes who had the best training facilities, coaching, and support networks, but the two comprehensively bested all rivals in their respective fields. Every athlete in the final heats had trained hard and prepared mentally and physically for the contest, but Phelps and Bolt won over and over, often by significant margins. Anyone watching their performances would have to conclude that they enjoyed physical advantages over their competitors; they also had to train to reach such a high level of performance, but no matter how hard their opponents worked, they could not beat them. Genetic factors that began at birth were ultimately decisive.

A similar notion pervades the stories of the Buddha's past births, in which he is depicted as engaging in extraordinary acts of virtue. These result in pleasant births as a god or in prosperous human families, and even when he is born as an animal because of an anomalous moral transgression,[30] he has a large, beautiful body, which is commonly described as possessing extraordinary strength that inspires others through its physical beauty and bespeaks the inner virtues of the Bodhisattva.

One common feature is golden skin, fur, or feathers; a golden exterior is a pervasive motif in Indian Buddhist literature that indicates moral excellence. I am not aware of any instance in the Pāli *Discourses* or *Birth Stories* in which a character endowed with golden skin is morally flawed or evil. The Buddha, his greatest disciples, and many of his past incarnations are described as having golden exteriors, while evil characters commonly have dark complexions, fur, or feathers.[31]

An example of the close association of a golden exterior with spiritual excellence is a story in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Monastic Discipline* in which Devadatta importunes king Ajātasattu (Skt.: Ajātaśatru), who has recently murdered his father Bimbisāra, to repay him for his help in seizing the throne. Devadatta asks the king to depose the Buddha as head of the monastic order and declare him a buddha. The king is willing to assist Devadatta in his evil schemes, but declares that he is unable to name him a buddha because he lacks golden skin, which is an essential marker of buddhahood. Devadatta is depicted as relentless in his efforts to kill or displace the Buddha, and he responds by hiring a goldsmith to gild him. Unfortunately for the would-be buddha, the process is unsuccessful and only results in excruciating pain. The lesson of the story is that the physical signs of moral perfection cannot be faked: one is either born with them or not, and those who lack them can acquire them only through a long process of moral cultivation and meditative practice.

In most *Birth Stories*, the Bodhisattva is depicted as unusually beautiful and is always physically gifted. He is stronger, faster, and better in athletic competitions than any of his compatriots. He is also wiser and more virtuous, and thus the physical and spiritual are conceptually intertwined. He is powerful and beautiful because of his past and present practice of morality, and his spiritual attainments are proclaimed by his physique. Even when he is less than physically perfect, he still possesses extraordinary bodily endowments.

The culmination of the process of physical perfection depicted in the *Birth Stories* was reached in his final life. Shortly after he emerged from his mother's womb, a brahman came to examine him. He was initially impressed by the infant's radiant golden skin and remarked that he looked like a statue of a perfect male physique made from molten gold. Upon further scrutiny, he confirmed that the Bodhisattva (who was named Siddhārtha Gautama [Pāli: Siddhāttha Gotama]) possessed all of the physical characteristics of a "great man" and described him as "a superlative being without comparison, a precious pearl of the health and goodness of the human world...of all beings this one is perfect, this man is the pinnacle, the ultimate, the hero of creatures.... This is the ultimate, this is the perfect man!"[32]

In stories of his youth and young adulthood, his perfect body is a pervasive element of the narrative of his life. Siddhārtha excelled in martial arts and impressed everyone who saw him with his beauty. He was given a harem of beautiful women, and he is portrayed as a sexual "stallion" who easily satisfied all of them. When he went out into the city, women swooned and indicated their envy of courtesans lucky enough to share his bed.

When the time arrived for him to get married, his father sent out emissaries to locate a suitable wife. The beautiful Yaśodharā emerged as the leading candidate, but her father Daṇḍapāṇi was hesitant to give her to Siddhārtha because of rumors he led a dissolute lifestyle unsuited to the manly martial pursuits valued by *kṣatriyas* (the warrior and ruler class of traditional Indian society). Because Siddhārtha resided in the women's quarters and devoted considerable time and effort to sexual dalliances, Daṇḍapāṇi was concerned that the young prince had missed out on the manly training in sports, martial arts, and other physical activities that characterized the ideal life of a kṣatriya man. "It is the custom of our family to give our daughters in marriage only to men skilled in the worldly arts (*śilpa*), and your son has grown up in luxury in the palace. If he does not excel in the arts, does not know the rules of fencing or archery or boxing or wrestling, how could I give my daughter to him?"[33]

When his father related Daṇḍapāṇi's concerns, Siddhārtha assured him that he outshone all the young men of the kingdom in his proficiency in sports and martial arts and advised him to hold a public contest in which he could demonstrate his prowess. Daṇḍapāṇi agreed to the idea and promised that the winner could have Yaśodharā's hand. The account in the *Extensive Sport* begins with a wrestling contest: first Devadatta paraded around flexing his muscles and proclaiming his strength, but Siddhārtha easily picked him up and lifted him over his head, twirled him around a few times, and then casually tossed him to the ground. Other princes came at him one at a time, but he effortlessly defeated all challengers. Finally he told the other contestants to attack him en masse, but he swept them aside as easily as a strong wind disperses a swarm of mosquitoes.

The final event was an archery contest. In Indian Buddhist literature, archery is presented as the most valued martial art among kṣatriyas. The ability to bludgeon opponents into submission in hand-to-hand combat is recognized as a necessary skill for a warrior, but archery is preferred: it is depicted as an elegant way to defeat enemies that requires strength, skill, a steady hand, and athletic ability. The other contestants shot arrows at targets, and some had outstanding results, but when Siddhārtha entered the arena, he utterly surpassed all of them. He first hefted a huge bow that few others could even lift, let alone draw, but he notched an arrow and pulled the string back with little effort while half-sitting. It pierced the targets of all his opponents in the exact center and then plunged into the earth, following which a spring appeared.

There is no indication that Siddhārtha trained for this event or that he devoted a great deal of time to physical pursuits. Rather, his commanding performance was made possible by past practice of virtue, due to which he was endowed with a body that was naturally stronger, faster, and more athletically gifted than those of his contemporaries. At the conclusion of the contest, the other young men acknowledged him as their superior in martial arts, and Daṇḍapāṇi happily agreed to marry his daughter to Siddhārtha.

The Bodhisattva's extraordinary skill in archery features in several *Birth Stories*. In the *Culladhanuggaha-jātaka*, for example, he is born as a brahman. One day while traveling through a forest with his wife, he encounters a band of fifty thieves. Their leader looks at his physique and immediately recognizes that he is a great warrior, and he orders his men not to attack. Instead, they are told to offer him some of their food, but when they only give him raw flesh, he feels insulted. One of the robbers chafes at the idea of standing down to a single man and challenges his fellows: "Are we mere

women?" They decide to attack the Bodhisattva, but he dispatches forty-nine of them with a single arrow.[34]

In story after story, the Bodhisattva is described as taller, stronger, more athletically gifted, and generally more handsome than his contemporaries. He is also wiser and more virtuous, and the two aspects of his psychophysical persona operate in tandem: his physical endowments are the natural result of his practice of virtue, and others recognize him as outstandingly virtuous because of his external appearance.

Ugly Virtuous People

In Indian Buddhist literature, the most advanced practitioners are commonly described as possessing beautiful bodies that bear testament to their moral cultivation in past lives and their present existence. The Buddha has the most beautiful possible body because he surpasses all others in morality, wisdom, and other good qualities. There are, however, some notable exceptions to this pattern. There are a few individuals who are both moral exemplars and also physically ugly. In the opening section of the *Keḷi-sīla-jātaka*, a group of monks travel to Jetavana to attend a sermon by the elder Lakuṇṭaka, who is renowned as a great preacher who "proclaims the sweet doctrine" and has completely subdued his passions, but he is the shortest of the eighty elders and is compared to a "dwarf kept for amusement."[35]

When the monks arrive, they see a short old man and make fun of him by pulling on his robe, tweaking his nose, and verbally abusing him. When the Buddha later informs them that he is in fact Lakuṇṭaka they are profoundly shocked that a person of such diminutive stature could be an advanced practitioner, and the Buddha agrees that Lakuṇṭaka is an anomaly. He does not rebuke them for their superficial equation of beauty and spiritual excellence; instead he agrees that there is a discrepancy between Lakuṇṭaka's attainments and his outward appearance and appears to condone their rude behavior. He informs his audience that in a past life Lakuṇṭaka was a king who had a pathological dislike of anything old and decrepit, and as a consequence his misdeeds are inscribed on his present form. He beat up old women, ordered old carts to be smashed, and forced old men to roll on the ground in humiliating ways for his amusement. Thus in his present life others (apparently with some justification) make fun of his diminutive stature and frail, bent body. The Buddha does not rebuke the visiting monks for their behavior; instead he explains it and accepts their assumption that it is reasonable to expect that advanced practitioners

should also have beautiful physiques. Those who do not have incurred a natural retribution for past negative actions, and apparently others who judge them by their outward appearance are not to blame.

Lakuṇṭaka also appears in the *Connected Discourses to Monks*, where he is described as "ugly, unsightly, deformed, and despised among the monks," but the Buddha praises him for his great spiritual power. In this instance he advises his followers to look beyond surface appearances and extols Lakuṇṭaka as an outstanding monk. He asserts that "among humans . . . the small person endowed with wisdom is the one who is truly great, not the fool with the well-built body."[36] Nonetheless, most of the Buddha's leading disciples in the Pāli Canon are said to possess resplendent bodies that reflect their inner virtues, and the Buddha's perfect physique is a recurrent motif that attests to his transcendent good qualities.

Virtue and Physical Transformation

The Buddha acquired his perfect body as a result of eons of diligent practice, during which he performed innumerable acts of extraordinary virtue. In most cases, reward for good actions is inscribed on future bodies, but there are also a number of examples of instantaneous physical changes that result from either positive or negative deeds. Immediate retribution is most commonly the result of outrageously evil conduct, such as Devadatta's schemes to kill the Buddha, the ultimate paragon of virtue. His demise is described in the opening section of the *Samudda-vāṇija-jātaka*.[37] After several attempts on the Buddha's life and fomenting a short-lived schism in the monastic order, Devadatta realized that his evil was so monstrous that he might be thrown into hell at any moment. He decided to personally apologize to the Buddha, but before he reached Jetavana his body began to burn. Painful sores erupted on his skin, and he desperately craved water. As soon as he stepped out of his chariot and his feet touched the ground, however, the earth opened and he was swallowed up. As he plunged down to hell, he called out to the Buddha and extolled his auspicious physical characteristics, but this self-serving display was too little and too late to save him.[38]

A man's outward appearance proclaims his inner state of mind. The *Mudulakkhaṇa-jātaka* begins with the story of a monk who sees a beautiful woman on his alms round and develops lust for her.[39] No longer satisfied with celibate monasticism, his physical state degenerates. He had been robust and healthy, but his body loses its vitality, and he lets his hair and nails grow long. His lack of attention to his outward appearance indicates his

moral degeneration. He neglects to wash his robes, and others notice his body odor. When the Buddha confronts him, he admits that his problems are caused by sexual desire. The Buddha responds by telling him a story of a past life in which the backsliding monk was an outstanding ascetic with supernatural powers. He could fly through the air, but one day he happened to catch a glimpse of the body of a beautiful queen whose robe had been blown apart by wind. Despite decades of diligent meditative practice, a single glance provoked thoughts of desire, and he lost his ability to fly. Fortunately, he refused to succumb to lust and retreated to his hut, where he redoubled his efforts to subdue passion. He considered the true nature of the queen's outwardly beautiful body, which contained various disgusting substances like urine, excrement, bile, digestive juices, blood, internal organs, and so forth and realized that beneath its superficial attractiveness, the body is foul and unworthy of interest. As a result, he regained his meditative equipoise and supernatural powers. The Buddha concluded that the queen was the same woman whose body had sparked thoughts of lust in his present life and warned him that she had been the downfall of his religious practice other times in the past.[40]

Sometimes negative conduct results in gender change. The *Commentary on the Doctrinal Verses* contains a story of a young brahman man named Soreyya who was riding in a carriage with some friends and happened to pass a monastic residence. He caught a glimpse of the great arhat Mahākaccāna (Skt.: Mahākatyāyana), who had performed his morning ablutions and was in the process of wrapping his robe around his bare torso. Struck by his beautiful physique and golden skin, Soreyya thought: "I wish that elder would become my wife! Or may the color of my wife's body be like the color of his body!" Soreyya was apparently naturally inclined toward women, and his thought was brief and inadvertent, but because the object of his musing was very pure, he was instantly transformed into a woman as karmic retribution. Shocked at the gender change, she bolted from the carriage so that her friends would not see what had happened. After wandering for awhile, Soreyyā entered the city of Takkasilā, where she met the son of the city's treasurer, and they married. For several years she lived the life of an Indian wife and gave birth to two sons (as a man Soreyya had also fathered two sons). One day she saw one of her former friends and invited him to her house. At first he was unable to recognize his companion and was naturally shocked to see him in female form, and Soreyyā told him her story. The friend advised her to confess her misdeed to Mahākaccāna, and she agreed. The next day she traveled to the elder monk's residence and told him what had transpired. She begged his forgiveness, and as soon as he said "I absolve you," she reverted to male form.[41]

Physical Alterations

The *Birth Stories* have a moralistic tone and are obviously intended to warn the Buddha's followers of the negative consequences of wrongdoing and the beneficial effects of virtue. They emphasize tangible and physical outcomes, such as increased wealth and social status, rebirth in heaven, health and beauty, and so on. Malefactors develop various unpleasant attributes, often in immediate retribution. In the *Cetiya-jātaka*, a king deliberately tells a fairly trivial lie, but then obstinately persists in it even though it is obviously false. At the beginning of the story, he has four divine guardians, but they desert him after he makes his first false statement. When he repeats the lie, his mouth emits a foul smell like rotten eggs, and his body smells like a cesspool. Through previous virtue he had acquired four supernatural powers, but he loses them all. He stubbornly persists in repeating his lie even though everyone present knows it to be false, and with each repetition he sinks deeper into the earth. Finally, due to the combined weight of his wickedness, he is dragged down to hell.[42]

With most beings, however, karma is mixed. Virtuous deeds produce physical effects that testify to the positive aspects of one's character, while physical deformities indicate past misdeeds. One interesting account of mixed karma is found in the *Kiṃchanda-jātaka*, which tells the story of a brahman who vowed to maintain a fast but cheated. He also rendered false judgments in exchange for bribes, but ameliorated his bad conduct by giving a mango to a virtuous woman who properly maintained the fast. As a result he was reborn with a body that was beautiful and healthy for half of each day, but at night it assumed a monstrous shape, and he compulsively tore at his flesh with his fingernails.[43]

Indian Buddhist morality tales generally exhibit little ambiguity: most figures are either straightforwardly good or evil, and the consequences of their actions serve to illustrate the effects of their moral choices. The most impressive physical rewards for virtue generally accrue to those who have positive interactions with advanced beings. In Indian Buddhism there is a hierarchy of spiritual attainment, and gifts given to superior recipients yield better results than those given to lesser ones, including the truly needy. If one gives alms to a beggar, for example, it produces positive results, but if the recipient is a Buddhist monk, the rewards are far greater. Arhats provide

an even better return on one's investment. Solitary realizers (Pāli: *paccekabuddha*; Skt.: *pratyeka-buddha*) rank above them in the merit hierarchy.[44] Bodhisattvas and buddhas are the ultimate repositories of virtue; any positive interaction with them produces the best possible results.

Several stories involving solitary realizers report dramatic and often immediate rewards for those fortunate enough to encounter them and give them alms. In addition, those who make great strides in religious endeavors may see the results in immediate physical transformations. In the *Kumbhakāra-jātaka*, a king gives alms to a solitary realizer and later sees a wilted fallen leaf. He experiences profound realization of impermanence (Pāli: *anicca*; Skt.: *anitya*) and immediately becomes a solitary realizer himself. He informs his advisors of his change in status and that he will no longer be able to rule the kingdom (because the purity and holiness of a solitary realizer are fundamentally antithetical to worldly life), but they do not believe him because he still looks like a king.[45] At that moment he undergoes a profound outer transformation that reflects his changed psychological state. He touches his head and the marks of a householder disappear; they are replaced by those of an ascetic. His royal robes turn into the garments of Buddhist monks, and his hands magically hold a begging bowl and the other requisites of his new life. His hair falls out, and his retainers remark: "Your religious life appears to be very beautiful. Your faculties are very pure, your complexion very clear." He subsequently leaves his kingdom and builds a hermitage in the Himalayas. In this and several similar *Birth Stories*, characters who experience significant advances in their practice undergo a fundamental external change, which inspires others who see them.[46]

Virtue and Gender

In Indian Buddhist literature, there is a pervasive link between gender and morality. A male body is a testament to past practice of virtue, while a female form is retribution for past misdeeds. The *Birth Stories* abound with accounts of female wickedness and warnings regarding the negative effects of their wiles on unwary men. Each story begins with an introductory section that gives a reason why the Buddha taught it; accounts of monks whose religious practice degenerates as a result of women's sexuality outnumber all other reasons for initiating a story. Women are portrayed as congenitally unfaithful, capricious, and sexually promiscuous. In the *Mahānāradakasapa-jātaka*, for example, a beautiful princess named Rujā

(one of the few examples of female virtue in this collection) dispenses copious amounts of alms to mendicants and gives sermons extolling righteousness. Her audience wonders how a woman can be a moral exemplar, and she informs them that seven lifetimes ago she was a man, and together with a friend seduced married women. As a consequence, she was born in the Roruva (Skt.: Raurava) hell. After a period of torment, she incarnated as a castrated goat which was forced to endure heavy labor.

The animal's pathetic condition reflects Indian societal notions: the state of a castrated male is a consequence of extremely negative karma, and such a being ranks at the very lowest level of a given species. In her next life she was a castrated ox, and following that she was born as a hermaphrodite. Hermaphrodites are also despised figures in Indian literature, along with sexual deviants (*paṇḍaka*), a term that is often translated "eunuch" but which includes a range of sexual dysfunctions and perversions.[47]

In successive births Rujā was born as a female forest spirit, still below the level of humans in the rebirth hierarchy. In her present lifetime, as a result of the compensatory practice of virtue since her fall from her previous masculine state, she received a beautiful female human body, and she resolved to devote herself to cultivation of virtue. She informs her audience that she will spend six successive lives as a goddess, and if she maintains her virtuous conduct will then be rewarded with rebirth as a man: "for six more births I will not be released from my female gender." But there is a light at the end of the tunnel: she will eventually return to manhood and will have a glorious body.[48]

Negative female tendencies are innate and result from misdeeds in past lives. Women are portrayed as naturally promiscuous, and the *Birth Stories* abound with accounts of female infidelity. It is the duty of Indian males to safeguard the virtue of women under their control, but this is depicted as a hopeless task. In a number of places the *Birth Stories* declare: "It is impossible to guard women."

In the *Asātamanta- jātaka*, the Bodhisattva is a brahman who is sent to study with a famous teacher. The master cares for his aged mother as a son should, but he has no illusions regarding her moral character. He knows that like all women she is driven by base instincts and lust and decides to demonstrate this to his student as a salutary lesson. He instructs the Bodhisattva to massage her hands and feet and tell her that she is beautiful. She is described as a blind, decrepit hag, but she still seethes with a woman's sexual appetite. She deludes herself that the young brahman desires her and propositions him, but following his teacher's instructions, the Bodhisattva

informs her that he would be punished if they were caught. In response she proposes that he murder her devoted son, who has selflessly cared for her. The narrator comments: "So lustful, so vile, so degraded are women that, giving free rein to lust, an old hag like this actually thirsted for the blood of so dutiful a son . . . women are depravity incarnate!"[49]

Women are likened to a roaring fire that naturally consumes everything it touches. They are at the mercy of their unquenchable desires, and men who succumb to their blandishments suffer as a result. After witnessing this display of female wickedness, the Bodhisattva resolved to have nothing to do with women and became a celibate ascetic, and the author indicates that this is the wisest course of action for men.

Another account of female wickedness is found in the *Bandhanmokkha-jātaka*, in which the Bodhisattva is an upright priest to a king. His employer faces a rebellion on his borders and sets forth with his army to quell it, but he is so devoted to his wife that he sends a messenger every league he travels to check on her well-being (and to ensure that she remains chaste). She seduces every one of them, and then sets her sights on the Bodhisattva and propositions him. He refuses her advances, and in pique she scratches herself and informs her husband that his priest attempted to rape her. The king is at first enraged, but later learns of her prodigious infidelity and decides to have her killed. The Bodhisattva dissuades him by convincing him that it really is not her fault: "The passions of women are insatiable, and she merely acts in accordance with her innate nature."[50]

This is also the counsel of the *Anabhirati-jātaka*, in which the Bodhisattva is a teacher. One of his students discovers that his wife has been unfaithful and decides to have nothing further to do with her. The Bodhisattva informs him: "My son, there is no private property in women; they are common to all." He adds that wise men realize this fact and do not become angry when their wives cheat on them. They cannot help it; he describes them as public resources like highways, rivers, courtyards, hostels, and taverns, which accept all who come to them.[51]

Men who try to perform their social duty of protecting women under their charge face virtually insurmountable odds because women will fornicate with any man if they think they can get away with it. In the *Aṇḍabhūta-jātaka*, a king's priest tries to keep his wife chaste by taking her from her parents at birth and commissioning seven rings of guards to constantly watch her, but still she manages to sneak her lover through them and fornicate with him. The king berates his priest for his foolishness in thinking he could keep her for his own: "You imagined that by taking a girl in the hour of her birth and placing a sevenfold guard around her you could be confident of her [virtue]. You could not be confident of a woman's [virtue] even if you kept her inside you and constantly carried her. No woman is faithful to only one man."[52] The king advises him to fully comprehend the innate wickedness of women. As in the previous account, we are informed that their perfidy is not really their fault: women are congenitally incapable of distinguishing truth and falsehood, and so misconduct seems blameless to them.

The only perspective in these stories is a male one.[53] In this story the woman was married to a much older man as an infant, and her suspicious, controlling husband hired a platoon of guards to watch her constantly. There is no indication that either has any affection for the other, and it seems unsurprising from a contemporary perspective that she might feel trapped and resentful. To the authors of these stories, however, her infidelity is inexcusable, but it is explained sufficiently by reference to the faults of her gender.

In these stories women are depicted as slaves of their bodies. After a discourse on the innate faults of females, the *Sattubhasta-jātaka* states that there are three things with which a woman can never be satisfied: sex, adornment, and child bearing. It recounts the story of a woman who was oversexed and had numerous affairs. She also had intercourse with her husband but thought that his futile attempts to guard her virtue impeded her ability to fornicate with other men, and so she decided to kill him in order to enhance her chances of having more sexual encounters.[54]

In some *Birth Stories*, husbands go to extraordinary lengths to preserve the virtue of their spouses, but their efforts are always thwarted by the guile and treachery that comes naturally to women. The *Samugga-jātaka* describes a male *yakṣa* (Pāli: *yakkha*, a type of demon) who marries a human woman and tries to keep her chaste by forcing her to remain in his belly at all times. He foolishly assumes that she will be unable to find a way to cheat on him, but when his attention is diverted, she manages to sneak a lover inside him and fornicate.[55] There is no condemnation of the yakṣa for imprisoning his unwilling wife, nor is there any sense that her actions might be justified. A hideous demon abducted her and forced her to marry him, and then carried her around inside his monstrous body because he feared that unless she was imprisoned she would cheat on him. But when her perfidy is discovered, the author concludes that the fault lies entirely with her and her behavior is a predictable outcome of female wickedness. There is finally no way for a man to find happiness with a woman, and the author states: "The man who

shuns the path of women lives happily and free from sorrows. He finds true bliss in solitude far away from women and their treachery."[56]

The pervasive misogyny of the *Birth Stories* is out of sync with contemporary attitudes, but it reflects the background in which they were written: they were composed or compiled by monastics and attributed to the Buddha, who founded an order of celibate ascetics whose very survival required convincing men to forswear their natural desires and renounce the life of a householder. The frequent references to backsliding monks indicate that many questioned their decision to join the order, and some renounced their vows and returned to lay life. This dynamic is clearly at play in these stories, many of which are apparently attempts to convince wavering monks that women are innately wicked, that worldly life may seem appealing but is ultimately fraught with frustrations and disappointments, and that true happiness can be found only in a society of male renunciates who pursue the higher goals of advanced meditative states, perfection of morality, and liberation from cyclic existence.

In the *Birth Stories*, men's sins are presented as moral failings of an individual, whereas women's misdeeds are outcomes of their nature and reflect on their entire gender. They serve as object lessons to men that prove women's innate perfidy. This reflects a common notion in Indian Buddhist discussions of gender and morality. According to Buddhaghosa, "The masculine sex is superior, the feminine is inferior. Therefore the latter may be brought about by weak morality." He adds that a man who commits many grave offenses may be changed into a woman in that very life as retribution. Conversely, a woman who performs good deeds may be rewarded by a spontaneous sex change: "Thus [the marks of] both sexes change—[those of males] disappear on account of many offenses, while with many good actions [a female] becomes a male."[57]

Men are naturally more inclined toward religious pursuits, but their resolve is tested by the blandishments of women. In many stories these seductresses appear to be motivated by lust, but in others simply respond to the challenge of tempting reluctant ascetics with their charms. Many travel great distances and endure physical hardships to seduce men who are committed to celibacy and the pursuit of liberation. In traditional India, men were thought to be naturally cool in temperament, while women were thought to be hot.[58] Men are born with an innate propensity toward virtue and religious practice, while women are driven by their desires and fear, and often act completely irrationally.

Despite such negative stereotypes, however, there are numerous examples

of female virtue in Indian Buddhist literature, and the system holds out the possibility of salvation to any being that comprehends the workings of karma and becomes dedicated to religious practice. Women may have congenital impediments, but they can still engage in acts of generosity and cultivate moral sentiments, which will result in better rebirths or even nirvāṇa. The *Verses of the Elder Nuns* (*Therīgāthā*) contains stories of women who joined the Buddhist order and became *arhatīs*, and some of them are portrayed as paragons of virtue. And while men are conceived as enjoying a natural advantage, many male figures in Indian Buddhist literature utterly fail to actualize their potential. Ultimately virtue is universal and nongendered: the good or evil of actions is confirmed by their consequences and whether or not they conform with dharma.

Concluding Remarks

This discussion has mainly focused on associations between virtue and somaticity in the *Birth Stories* and accounts of the Buddha's life in the Pāli *Discourses*. The former were chosen because they present an influential Indian Buddhist vision of the training program of an aspirant to ultimate virtue. The Bodhisattva's career is described, and the stories highlight how he encountered various difficulties and overcame them. He performed mighty deeds that both testified to his moral character and dedication to religious practice and led to better rebirths, enhanced resources, and beautiful bodies. The Pāli Canon describes the Buddha as the "ultimate man," a paragon of moral excellence whose past performance of virtue is proclaimed on his physique. His body is naturally perfect, and he does not need to exercise to maintain fitness. Even after he leaves his palace and becomes a wandering ascetic, he still retains his enormous strength and sublime beauty.

In these texts, it is assumed that bodies are born, not made. In the contemporary West, a very different set of assumptions prevails: people who are out of shape, whose flabby physiques indicate their disinclination to exercise or eat healthy diets, face a general moral condemnation of their choices. Advertisements for fitness centers and weight loss programs commonly appeal to guilt; those who are overweight and out of shape are often subjected to condemnation with strongly moralistic overtones, and people who "let themselves go" are urged to change their habits and make their physiques conform to society's norms.

In the society of the Buddha's time, however, it was assumed that one's physiognomy is largely a matter of birth, and there is little that can be done

to improve it in the short term. Well-favored beings like the Buddha outshine their contemporaries as a result of their past cultivation of virtue, and their outstanding karma produces bodies that are stronger, taller, faster, more coordinated, and better looking than those of others whose past actions were not as positive. Their physical example serves to inspire those who are less favored: a person who is weak, sickly, overweight, or unattractive should conclude that his or her present state is the natural consequence of negative deeds performed in past lives, but one can always change course and practice virtue. The *Birth Stories* and Pāli *Discourses* contain an implicit message that such behavior will be rewarded and that even minor acts of generosity to such worthy recipients as Buddhist monks, arhats, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas will yield vast amounts of merit and provide desirable things in the future.

Such concerns are commonly dismissed by contemporary commentators on Buddhist ethics, but they were clearly important to the authors of the texts examined in this study. They sought to appeal to their audience in a number of ways: accounts of the Bodhisattva's prodigious virtue were inspirational, and his career was presented as a model for emulation. The ultimate goal of nirvāṇa might seem too distant for most people, and so such proximate goals as health, wealth, and beauty are promised for those who practice moral behavior and generosity.

In the Pāli *imaginaire*, the good includes moral behavior, but this is only one facet of virtue. Qualities like generosity, patience, diligence in religious practice, compassion, wisdom, and absence of anger, greed, and delusion are also cultivated by exemplary figures like the Bodhisattva and his elite followers. Their resolve is tested in various ways, and when they overcome obstacles their own progress is furthered. Their virtue also has a public dimension: it inspires others and is an important aspect of the conversion activities of the Buddha and his disciples.

A recurrent theme in discussions of Buddhist ethics is the notion that behavior patterns tend to perpetuate themselves: actions establish tendencies, and if one makes negative choices, these often result in downward karmic trajectories. It is possible, however, to reverse course, and this often begins when one encounters a positive role model (*kalyāṇa-mitra*). Such beings are virtuous and inspire others to emulate their example. But how does one distinguish them from the many false claimants to virtue? One important factor is their outward appearance: true virtue is depicted by a nonfalsifiable set of physical attributes, the most perfect instantiation of which is the Buddha. Outstandingly virtuous beings have a particular type of beauty

that cannot be faked, and those fortunate enough to encounter them and respond to their physical presence are inspired to virtue and themselves become agents of the good.

Notes

1 See, for example, Peter Harvey, "Avoiding Unintended Harm to the Environment and the Buddhist Ethic of Intention," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 14 (2007), www.buddhistethics.org/14/harvey-article.html.

2 Peter Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

3 Ibid., 17–18.

4 Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 193–227.

5 Ibid., 178.

6 Ibid., 177.

7 Ibid., 177–78.

8 V. Fausboll, ed., *The Jātaka together with Its Commentary: Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha* (London: Luzac and Company, 1963), *Jātaka* #12, vol. I, 145–53.

9 The masculine pronoun is used consciously here. As we will see below, the *Birth Stories* closely associate virtue and masculinity and characterize women as congenitally deficient in morality. There are a handful of virtuous women depicted in these stories, but the overall tone is strikingly misogynist.

10 *The Jātaka together with Its Commentary*, *Jātaka* #499, vol. IV, 401–12.

11 Stories of the Bodhisattva's gifts of part or all of his body are the focus of a study by Reiko Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). She discusses the role played by Sakka at length.

12 This emphasis is found throughout the Pāli Canon, as well as scholastic treatises, Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras, as well as didactic stories. Suzanne Mrozik discusses this conceptual linkage in Śāntideva's *Śikṣā-samuccaya* in *Virtuous Bodies: The Physical Dimensions of Morality in Buddhist Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

13 F. L. Woodward, ed., *Paramattha-dīpanī Theragāthā-Aṭṭhakathā: The Commentary of Dhammapālācariya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1952), vol. II, 109.

14 Leon Feer, ed., *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), *Sotāpatti-saṃyutta*, vol. V, 390.

15 Feer, ed., *Saṃyutta-nikāya, Opamma-saṃyutta*, vol. II, 269.

16 Ibid., *Bhikkhu-saṃyutta*, vol. II, 279.

17 Robert Chalmers, ed., *Majjhima-nikāya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), *Brahmāyu-sutta*, "Division on Brahmans" (*Brāhmaṇa-vagga*), vol. II, 136.

18 J. E. Carpenter, ed., *Dīgha-nikāya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), *Lakkhaṇa-sutta*, vol. III, 144–45.

19 The *Mahāvibhāṣā* states: "How long does it take to complete the maturation of the physical characteristics? Answer: It usually takes one hundred great eons (*mahākalpa*), but Śākyamuni Bodhisattva took only ninety-one due to his industrious work" (T 27.890b). This project began only after he had already undergone three countless eons

(*asaṃkhyeya-kalpa*) of training, and his main goal during this phase of his maturation was development of the physical characteristics.

20 Prahlad Pradhan, ed., *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1967), 266.

21 T. W. Rhys Davids, J. E. Carpenter, and W. Stede, eds., *Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī:* (London: Pali Text Society, 1886-1932), vol. II, 448. The *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* (chap. 8, verses 13–17), edited by Eugene Obermiller and Th. Stcherbatsky (Osnabruck: Biblio Verlag, 1970, 35–36), lists the characteristics, and verses 18–30 describe the karmic factors that led to each of them. Peter Harvey provides a useful chart that lists each characteristic and the action(s) that produced it in the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, edited by Damien Keown and Charles Prebish (London: Routledge, 2007), 100–101.

22 Hermann Oldenberg, ed., *Vinaya Piṭakaṃ* (London: Pali Text Society, 1969), vol. IV, 11.

23 P. L. Vaidya, ed., *Lalitavistara* (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1958), 297.

24 Ibid. See also V. Trenckner and Robert Chalmers, eds., *Majjhima-nikāya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1960), vol. I, 247.

25 The *Lalitavistara* (177) recounts that as he approached the hermitage of the famed teacher Ārāḍa Kālama, the old sage exclaimed: "Look at the man who approaches! How beautiful he is!" His disciples replied: "We see him; he is indeed wonderful to behold!"

26 *Vinaya-piṭakaṃ*, vol. I, 39–40. This story is also recounted in E. Senart, ed., *Mahāvastu* (Paris: l'Imprimerie Nationale, 1977), vol. III, 59–60.

27 *The Jātaka together with Its Commentary*, vol. I, *Jātaka* #1, 94–95.

28 Ibid., vol. IV, *Jātaka* #462, 130–31.

29 Ibid., vol. 5, *Jātaka* #533, 333–37.

30 The notion that he occasionally has a moral lapse which results in rebirth as an animal or as an ill-favored human is found in several places in the *Birth Stories*, including the *Satapatta-jātaka*: "Even though bodhisattvas are great men (mahāpurisa), sometimes they take the goods of others and are born as wicked men; this is due to a fault in their horoscope." Ibid., vol. II, *Jātaka* #279, 389.

31 In several *Birth Stories,* crows function as markers of inborn greed and a short-term, myopic focus on their own ends. Their black feathers are cited as indicators of their moral shortcomings. In the *Cakkavāka-jātaka* (ibid., vol. III, *Jātaka* #434, 520–24), the Bodhisattva is born as a golden goose, and when a greedy crow sees his beautiful, plump body, he thinks that his physical excellence must be a result of the food he eats. The Bodhisattva informs him that he is beautiful because he does no harm to living beings and that, no matter what the crow consumes, his deficient morality will ensure that he remains black and thin. In the *Kaṇha-jātaka* (vol. II, *Jātaka* #440, 6–14), however, the Bodhisattva is born as a dark-skinned brahman. He is still beautiful, but his external coloring leads others to question his moral fiber. He states that despite his dark skin he is a true brahman (meaning that he is virtuous and excels in religious pursuits).

32 Dines Anderson and Helmer Smith, eds., *Sutta-nipāta* (London: Pali Text Society, 1990), 131–32.

33 *Lalitavistara*, 100. A similar concern about Siddhārtha's manliness is expressed in the *Mahāvastu,* vol. II, 73.

34 *The Jātaka together with Its Commentary*, vol. III, *Jātaka* #374, 219–24. The main import of the story, however, is not the Bodhisattva's martial prowess, but the perfidy of women, which is a pervasive motif of the *Birth Stories*. He is about to cut off the head of the robber chief, but his wife falls in love with the robber chief and asks that he be spared. She later runs off with him and tries to kill the Bodhisattva. After the faithless wife and thief escape, however, her new lover decides she cannot be trusted, and so he eventually abandons her.

35 Ibid., vol. II, *Jātaka* #202, 142–44.

36 *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, *Bhikkhu-saṃyutta*, vol. II, 280.

37 *The Jātaka together with Its Commentary*, vol. IV, *Jātaka* #466, 158–59.

38 In the *Birth Stories* Devadatta is relentless in his ambitions. He wants to displace the Buddha as leader of the monastic order, and a number of the stories recount events from past lives in which he tried to injure or kill the Bodhisattva. The *Serivāṇija-jātaka* states that his career of animosity began in a past life when he was a tinker who repaired pots. He tried to cheat a woman with a golden pot that had become encrusted with grime by telling her that it was worthless, hoping to trick her into letting him buy it for next to nothing. The Bodhisattva was an honest tinker who told her what it was really worth and offered a fair price. When the dishonest tinker returned to make an offer and found that it had been sold to a rival, he became enraged. Because the Bodhisattva was blameless, and the dishonest tinker's own conduct was motivated by greed and wickedness, his heart became hot, blood gushed from his lips, his heart cracked like dried mud, and he expired on the spot. This set the pattern for his future encounters with the Bodhisattva. Ibid., vol. I, *Jātaka* #3, 110–14.

39 Ibid., vol. I, *Jātaka* #66, 302–3.

40 A similar story is told in the *Kusa-jātaka*: a monk saw a woman, fell in love with her, and lost interest in religion. His nails and hair grew long, he wore soiled robes, grew sallow, and his veins stood out. The text states that when a Buddhist monk falls from the path there are five physical signs: the flowers of faith wither; the robes of righteousness are soiled; their bodies take on an unpleasant appearance; sweat pours off them; and they no longer delight in living at the foot of a tree. Ibid., *Jātaka* #531, 278–312.

41 Soreyya's story is recounted in H. C. Norman, ed., *Dhammapada Commentary* (*Dhammapada-atthakathā*) (London: Pali Text Society, 1970), vol. I.1, 325–32. Following his reversion to male form, Soreyya decided to renounce the world and became a monk under the tutelage of Mahākaccāna and attained arhathood. In the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāsya*, Vasubandhu gives another interesting example of gender change resulting from negative karma; he states that if a monk were to jokingly berate a group of monks with pure conduct by saying, "You are a bunch of women!," he might be changed into a woman. He refers to this as an example of a "weak intention with respect to an excellent field." P. Pradhan, ed., *Abhidharmakośa-bhāsya*, 232–33. He also gives an example of a eunuch who rescues a bull about to be castrated and, as a result, regains his own sexuality.

42 *The Jātaka together with Its Commentary*, vol. III, *Jātaka* #422, 454.

43 Ibid., vol. V, *Jātaka* #511, 1–11.

44 According to Indian Buddhist soteriology, three types of practitioners attain nirvāṇa: arhats, solitary realizers, and buddhas. Arhats can attain nirvāṇa in as little as three human lifetimes from the point of "stream entry," when they become established on the Buddhist path. Solitary realizers take much longer to perfect their training and are ranked above arhats in most sources. Buddhas require a minimum of three countless eons to attain the perfection of their training, and they are the supreme practitioners.

45 Ibid., *Jātaka* #408, 375–83. A similar idea is often stated with regard to arhats: it is possible for a layperson to attain arhathood, but when this occurs he or she must immediately receive monastic ordination or death will result within a day. The purity of arhathood is incompatible with lay life.

46 A similar account of spontaneous physical transformation into a solitary realizer is given in the *Darīmukha-jātaka*, in which a brahman priest sees a withered leaf and becomes a solitary realizer. Ibid., vol. III, *Jātaka* #378, 238–46. He immediately takes on the appearance of a hundred-year-old Buddhist monk of perfect moral rectitude and flies through the air to a cave in the Himalayas. In the *Mahāmora-jātaka* (vol. IV, *Jātaka* #491, 332–42), a hunter snares the Bodhisattva when he is born as a peacock. The hunter is so struck by his virtuous appearance that he decides to release him, and this act changes the hunter into a solitary realizer.

47 These are discussed in my forthcoming book, *A Bull of A Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), chap. 4.

48 *The Jātaka together with Its Commentary*, vol. IV, *Jātaka* #544, 219–55.

49 Ibid., vol. I, *Jātaka* #61, 285–89.

50 Ibid., vol. I, *Jātaka* #120, 437–40.

51 Ibid., vol. II, *Jātaka* #65, 301–2.

52 Ibid., vol. I, *Jātaka* #62, 289–95. A similar account is found in the *Mudu-pāṇi-jātaka*, in which a suspicious husband insists on holding his wife's hand at all times, but she manages to cheat on him (while still holding his hand) after he falls asleep. Vol. II, *Jātaka* #262, 323–27.

53 In the *Birth Stories* women are viewed as property of their husbands and as commodities that are exchanged between men. An example is a story in the *Mahāvāṇija-jātaka* in which some (male) travelers are hungry and thirsty and come upon a wondrous tree that provides them with the things they need and desire: when they cut off one branch, water pours forth, and another yields food. When a third branch is cut, beautiful women issue forth, and the men have sex with them. Ibid., vol. IV, *Jātaka* #493, 350–54.

54 Ibid., vol. III, *Jātaka* #402, 341–51.

55 Ibid., vol. III, *Jātaka* #436, 527–31.

56 Ibid. This story is spoken by the Buddha for the benefit of a monk who has become dissatisfied with the celibate monastic life and is contemplating a return to lay status. It warns him that the purported joys of a householder are ephemeral and ultimately illusory. If he becomes a husband and father, he will be shackled with various cares and troubles, his wife will be naturally inclined to cheat on him, and he will never find peace of mind.

57 Edward Müller, ed., *The Atthasālinī, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (London: Pali Text Society, 1979), 322–23.

58 See Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar, trans., *Vatsyayana Kamasutra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 33.

Mahāyāna Ethics and American Buddhism:

Subtle Solutions or Creative Perversions?

CHARLES S. PREBISH

Introduction

Sandra Bell begins her exciting chapter on "Scandals in Emerging Western Buddhism" in *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* with a reference to a meeting of twenty-two Western dharma teachers with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in the spring of 1993. They gathered to discuss the problems involved in the transmission of the Buddhadharma from East to West and particularly those focusing on the role and ethical responsibilities of spiritual teachers. The results of that important meeting were captured in a stirring video called *In the Spirit of Free Inquiry: The Dalai Lama in Conversation with Western Buddhist Teachers*, produced by Meridian Trust and published by Parallax Press. Clearly, the most significant portions of that video are those that focus on sexual ethics and sexism, with penetrating questions and discussion offered by Tenzin Palmo, Sylvia Wetzel, Martine Batchelor, and other women participants. Bell frames the discussion by declaring early in the chapter:

> In contemporary Britain and North America, Buddhists are most likely to be well-educated, white, middle-class folk of liberal persuasion who display permissive attitudes toward their teachers' eccentric behavior and minor indiscretions. But events have shown that tolerance breaks down when teachers make persistent use of the power they wield over their followers to obtain material goods and sexual favors. I will argue that scandals resulting from this kind of conduct by teachers are most likely to occur in organizations that are in transition between the pure forms of