

# *Mystics Magazine*

*Buddhist Mystical Theology*

Conversations with Charaka and Acvagosha

Compiled by Marilyn Hughes

*The Out-of-Body Travel Foundation!*

[www.outofbodytravel.org](http://www.outofbodytravel.org)



Amitabha Buddha Teaching Disciples



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# *Mystics Magazine*

*Buddhist Mystical Theology*

*Conversations with Charaka and Acvagosa*

*By Marilynn Hughes*

*Mystics Magazine ventures to take on the issues of Mystical Theology in Different Faiths and World Religions in a new and unique way. It is the purpose of each issue of the magazine to embrace the personal dialogue and teachings of a great Master of the Mystical Path within that religion and allow them to speak of their personal experience and conclusions based on their years of inquiry into the supersensual world.*

*We've utilized many texts which involve actual dialogue between the Great Mystics and others wherein they explain important aspects and understanding of the mystical theology (and sometimes moral theology) of their own unique religious path.*

*The Author does not necessarily agree with all views presented, but wishes to present the similarities and differences between some of the Great Mystics the world over. In doing so, we can see better where we agree and where we disagree. We can also pick up points from other paths that may enhance our own.*

*Look upon this journey into Mystics Magazine as an opportunity to discern for yourself as to how these things may be able to help you in your own spiritual journey.*

*This is an opportunity to have a conversation with some of the greatest mystical minds in history. So consider listening in . . .*

# Amitabha:

## A Story of Buddhist Theology

By Paul Carus (1906)

*From Ancient Texts Written by Charaka and  
Acvagoshā*

### THE ORDINATION.

SOON after the time of Açoka, the great Buddhist emperor of the third century before Christ, India became the theater of protracted invasions and wars. Vigorous tribes from the North conquered the region of the upper Pan jab and founded several states, among which the Kingdom of Gandhâra became most powerful. Despoliations, epidemics, and famines visited the valley of the Ganges, but all these tribulations passed over the religious institutions without doing them any harm. Kings lost their crowns and the wealthy their riches, but the monks chanted their hymns in the selfsame way. Thus the storm breaks down mighty trees, but only bends the yielding reed.

By the virtues, especially the equanimity and thoughtfulness, of the Buddhist priests, the conquerors in their turn were spiritually conquered by the conquered, and they embraced the religion of enlightenment. They recognised the four noble truths taught by the Tathâgata: (1) the prevalence of suffering which is always in evidence in this world; (2) the origin of suffering as rising from the desire of

selfishness; (3) the possibility of emancipation from suffering by abandoning all selfish clinging; and (4) the way of salvation from evil by walking in the noble eightfold path of moral conduct, consisting in right comprehension, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right living, right endeavor, right discipline, and the attainment of the right bliss.

When the kingdom of Gandhâra had been firmly established, commerce and trade began to thrive more than ever, while the vihâras, or Buddhist monasteries, continued to be the home of religious exercises, offering an asylum to those who sought retirement from the turmoil of the world for the sake of finding peace of soul.

It was in one of these vihâras in the mountains near Purushaputra, the present Peshawur, that Charaka, a descendant of the Northern invaders, had decided to join the brotherhood. He was as yet little acquainted with the spirit and purpose of the institution; but being very serious and devoutly religious, the youth had decided, for the sake of attaining perfect enlightenment, to give up everything dear to him, his parents, his home, his brilliant prospect of a promising future, and the love that was secretly budding in his heart.

The vihâra which Charaka entered was excavated in the solid rock of an idyllic gorge. A streamlet gurgled by, affording to the hermits abundance of fresh water, and the monks could easily sustain their lives by the gifts of the villagers who lived near by, to which they

added the harvest of fruit and vegetables which grew near their cave dwellings. In the midst of their small cells was a large chaitya, a hall or church, in which they assembled for daily services, for sermons, meditations, and other pious exercises.

The chaitya, like the cells, was hewn out of the living rock; a row of massive columns on either side divided the hall into a central nave and two aisles.

The ornaments that covered the faces of the rocky walls, though the product of home talent, being made by the untrained hands of monk artists, did not lack a certain refinement and loftiness. The pictures exhibited scenes from the life of Buddha, his birth, his deeds, his miracles, illustrations of his parables, his sermons, and his final entry into Nirvâna.

A procession of monks, preceded by a leader who swung a censer, filed in through the large portal of the chaitya. Two by two they moved along the aisles and solemnly circumambulated the dagoba, standing at the end of the nave in the apse of the hall, just in the place where idol worshipers would erect an altar to their gods. It was in imitation of a tumulus destined to receive some relic of the revered teacher, and the genius of the architect had artfully designed the construction of the cave so that the rays of the sun fell upon the dagoba and surrounded its mysterious presence with a halo of light.

The monks intoned a solemn chant, and its long-drawn cadences filled the hall with a spirit of sanctity, impressing the hearers as though Buddha himself had

descended on its notes from his blissful rest in Nirvâna to instruct, to convert, and to gladden his faithful disciples.

The monks chanted a hymn, of which the novice could catch some of the lines as they were sung; and these were the words that rang in his ears:

"In the mountain hall we are taking our seats,  
In solitude calming the mind;  
Still are our souls, and in silence prepared  
By degrees the truth to find."

When they had circumambulated the dagoba, they halted in front of it where the novice now discovered an image of the Buddha in the attitude of teaching, and the monks spoke in chorus:

"I am anxious to lead a life of purity to the end of my earthly career when my life will return to the precious trinity of the Buddha, the Truth and the Brotherhood."

Then the chanting began again:

"Vast as the sea  
Our heart shall be,  
And full of compassion and love.  
Our thoughts shall soar  
Forevermore  
High like the mountain dove.

"We anxiously yearn  
From the Master to learn,

Who found the path of salvation.  
 We follow His lead  
 Who taught us to read  
 The problem of origination."

A venerable old monk who performed the duties of abbot now stepped forth and asked the assembled brethren whether any one had a communication to make that deserved the attention of the assemblage, and after the question had been repeated three times Subhûti, one of the older monks, said:

"There is a young man with us who, having left the world, stayed with me some time for the sake of instruction and discipline. He is here and desires to be admitted to the brotherhood."

The abbot replied: "Let him come forward."

It was Charaka; and when he stepped into the midst of the brethren, the abbot viewed his tall figure with a kindly, searching glance and asked: "What is your name and what your desire?"

Charaka knelt down and said with clasped hands: "My name is Charaka. I entreat the Brotherhood for initiation. May the Brotherhood receive me and raise me up to their height of spiritual perfection. Have compassion on me, reverend sirs, and grant my request."

The abbot then asked the supplicant a series of questions as prescribed in the regulations of the brotherhood: whether he was free from contagious

disease, whether he was a human being, a man, and of age, whether his own master and not a slave nor in the king's service; whether unencumbered with debts and whose disciple he was.

When all the questions had been answered satisfactorily, the abbot submitted the case to the brotherhood, saying: "Reverend sirs, the Brotherhood may hear me. This man Charaka, a disciple of the venerable Subhûti, desires to receive the ordination. He is free from all obstacles to ordination. He has an alms-bowl and a yellow robe, and entreats the Brotherhood for ordination, with the reverent brother Subhûti as his teacher. Let those among the venerable brethren who are in favor of granting the ordination be silent. Let those who are opposed to it step forth and speak."

These words were three times repeated, and as there was no dissenting voice, the abbot declared with solemnity: "The Brotherhood indicates by its silence that it grants to Charaka the ordination, with the reverend brother Subhûti as his teacher."

Having completed the ceremony and having recited the rules of the order including the four great prohibitions, viz., that an ordained monk must abstain from carnal indulgence, from theft of any kind, from killing even the meanest creature, and from boasts of miraculous powers, the abbot requested the novice to pronounce the refuge formula, which Charaka repeated three times in a clear and ringing voice. Then the congregation again



intoned a chant, and, having circumambulated the dagoba, left the assembly hall, marching in solemn procession along the aisles, each brother thereupon betaking himself to his cell.

### THE NOVICE.

CHARAKA the novice lived with his brethren in peace, and his senior, the venerable Subhûti, was proud of his learned disciple, for he was patient, docile, modest, earnest, and intelligent, and proved all these good qualities by an abnormally rapid progress. He learned the Sutras perfectly and soon knew them better than his teacher. He had a sonorous voice, and it was a pleasure to hear him recite the sacred formulas or chant the verses proclaiming the glorious doctrine of the Blessed One. To all appearances the Brotherhood had made a good acquisition; but if the venerable Subhûti could have looked into the heart of Charaka he would have beheld a different state of things, for the soul of the novice was full of impatience, dissatisfaction, and excitement. The life of a monk was so different from what he had expected and his dearest hopes found no fulfilment.

Charaka had learned many beautiful sentiments from the mouth of his teacher; some of them fascinated him by the melodious intonation of their rhythm, some by the philosophical depth of their meaning, some by their truth and lofty morality. How delighted was he with the lines;

"Earnestness leads to the State Immortal  
Thoughtlessness is dreary Yama's portal.

Those who earnest are will never die,  
While the thoughtless in death's clutches lie."

How powerfully was he affected by the following stanza:

"With goodness meet an evil deed,  
With lovingkindness conquer wrath,  
With generosity quench greed,  
And lies, by walking in truth's path."

But sometimes he was startled and had difficulty in understanding the sense. He wanted peace, not tranquilisation; he wanted Nirvâna, its bliss, and its fulness, not extinction. And yet sometimes it seemed as if the absolute obliteration of his activity were expected of him:

"Only if like a broken gong  
Thou utterest no sound:  
Then hast thou reached Nirvana,  
And the end of strife hast found."

Yet Charaka said to himself: "It is only the boisterous noise that must be suppressed, not work; only evil intention, not life itself; the weeds, not the wheat." For it is said:

"What should be done, ye do it,  
Nor let pass by the day:  
With vigor do your duty,  
And do it while you may."

Not life, but error and vice, must be attacked. Not existence is evil, but vanity, anger, and sloth:

"As fields are damaged by a bane,  
 So 'tis conceit destroys the vain.  
 As palaces are burned by fire,  
 The angry perish in their ire.  
 And as strong iron is gnawed by rust,  
 So fools are wrecked through sloth and lust."

What ambition was beaming in the eyes of Charaka! The venerable Subhûti thought, there is but one danger for this noble novice: it is this, that the brethren may discover his brightness and spoil him by flattery. Instead of freeing himself from the fetters of the world, he may be entangled in the meshes of a spiritual vanity, which, being more subtle, is more perilous than the lust of the world and of its possessions. Then he recited to Charaka the lines:

"No path anywhere  
 Leadeth through the air.  
 The multitude delights  
 In sacrificial rites.  
 Throughout the world  
 Ambition is unfurled:  
 But from all vanity  
 Tathagatas are free."

Charaka knew that there were fools among men considered saints, who claimed to walk through the air. He was not credulous, but when told that to attempt the performance of supernatural deeds was vanity, his ambition revolted against the idea of

setting limits to human invention. Man might find paths through the air as well as over water; and he submitted to the sentiment only because he regarded it as a form of discipline by which he would learn to rise higher. So he suppressed his ambition, thinking that if he only abode his time he would find himself richly rewarded by the acquisition of spiritual powers which would be a blessing forever, an imperishable treasure that could not be lost by the accidents of life and would not share the doom of compounds which in due time must be dissolved again. He was yearning for life, not for death, for a fulness of melody and a wealth of harmony, not for' the stillness of the broken gong. He had seen the world and he knew life in all its phases. He disdained loud noise and coarse enjoyments but he had not left his home and wandered into homelessness to find the silence of the tomb. A chill came over him, and he shrank from the ideal of sainthood as though it were the path to mental suicide. "No, no!" he groaned, "I am not made to be a monk. Either I am too sinful for a holy life, or the holiness of the cloister is not the path of salvation."

### **KEVADDHA'S STORY.**

"THERE was a priest in Benares, a man of Brahman caste, learned in all the wisdom of the Vedas, not of the common type of priests but an honest searcher after truth. He longed for peace of heart and was anxious to reach Nirvâna; yet he could not understand how it was possible in the flesh to attain perfect tranquillity, for life is restless and in none of

the four states of aggregation can that calmness be found which is the condition of the blissful state. So, this priest thought to himself: 'Before I can make any progress, I must solve the question, Where do the four states of aggregation: the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, utterly cease?'

"Having prepared his mind, the priest entered into a trance in which the path to the gods became revealed to him, and he drew near to where the four great kings of the gods were. And having drawn near, he addressed the four great kings as follows: 'My friends, where do the four states of aggregation: the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, utterly cease?' When he had thus spoken, the four great kings answered and said: 'We gods, O priest, do not know where the four states of aggregation utterly cease. However, O priest, there are the gods of the higher heavens, who are more glorious and more excellent than we. They would know where the four states of aggregation utterly cease.'

"When the four great kings had thus spoken the priest visited the gods of the higher heavens and approached their ruler, Ishvara. He propounded the same question and received the same answer. Ishvara, the Lord, advised the priest to go to Yâma. 'He is powerful and has charge over the souls of the dead. He is apt to be versed in problems that are profound and recondite and abstruse and occult. Go to Yâma; he may know where the four states of aggregation utterly cease.'

"The priest acted upon Ishvara's advice, and went to Yâma, but the result was the same. Yâma sent the priest to the satisfied gods, whose chief ruler is the Great Satisfied One. 'They are the gods who are pleased with whatever is. They are the gods of serenity and contentment. If there is any one who can answer your question, they will be able to tell you where the four states of aggregation utterly cease.'

"The priest went to the heaven of the satisfied gods, but here too he was disappointed. Their ruler, the Great Satisfied One, said: 'I, O priest, do not know where these four states of aggregation, the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, utterly cease. However, O priest, there are the gods of the retinue of Brahma, who are more glorious and more excellent than I. They would know where these four states of aggregation utterly cease.'

"Then, this same priest entered again upon a state of trance, in which his thoughts found the way to the Brahma world. There the priest drew near to where the gods of the retinue of Brahma were, and having drawn near, he spake to the gods of the retinue of Brahma as follows: 'My friends, where do these four states of aggregation, the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, utterly cease?'

"When he had thus spoken, the gods of the retinue of Brahma answering spake as follows: 'We, O priest, cannot answer your question. However, there is Brahma, the great Brahma, the First Cause of the All, the Supreme Being, the All-Perfection, the All-

Perceiving One, the Controller, the Lord of All, the Creator, the Fashioner, the Chief, the Victor, the Ruler, the All-Father, he who is more glorious, more excellent, than all celestial beings, he will know where the four states of aggregation, the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, do utterly cease.'

"Said the priest: 'But where, my friends, is the great Brahma at the present moment?' And the gods answered: 'We do not know, O priest, where the great Brahma is, or in what direction the great Brahma can be found. But inasmuch, O priest, as he is omnipresent, you will see signs and notice a radiance and the appearance of an effulgence, and then Brahma will appear. This is the previous sign of the appearance of Brahma, that a radiance is noticed, or an effulgence appears.'

"The priest, having invoked Brahma's appearance with due reverence and according to the rules of the Vedas, in a short time Brahma appeared. Then the priest drew near to where Brahma was, and having drawn near, he spake to Brahma as follows: 'My friend, where do the four states of aggregation, the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, utterly cease?'

"When he had thus spoken, the great Brahma opened his mouth and spake as follows: 'I, O priest, am Brahma, the great Brahma, the Supreme Being, the All-Perfection, the All-Perceiving One, the Controller,

the Lord of All, the Creator, the Fashioner, the Chief, the Victor, the Ruler, the All-Father.'

"A second time the priest asked his question, and the great Brahma gave him the same answer, saying: 'I, O priest, am Brahma, the great Brahma, the Supreme Being, the All-Perfection;' and he did not cease until he had enumerated all the titles applied to him.

"Having patiently listened to Brahma, the priest repeated his question a third time, and added: 'I am not asking you, my friend, Are you Brahma, the great Brahma, the Supreme Being, the All-Perfection, the All-Perceiver, the All-Father, and whatever titles and accomplishments you may have in addition; but this, my friend, is what I ask you: 'Where do the four states of aggregation, the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state or air, utterly cease?'

"The great Brahma remained unmoved, and answered a third time, saying: 'I, O priest, am Brahma, the great Brahma, the Supreme Being, the All-Perfection, the All-Perceiver,' enumerating again all the titles applied to him.

"Now the priest rose and said: 'Are you truly a living being, or an automaton, that you can do nothing but repeat a string of words?'

"And now the great Brahma rose from his seat and approached the priest, and leading him aside to a place where he could not be overheard by any of the gods, spake to him as follows: 'The gods of my suite and all the worshipers of the world that honor me



with sacrifice and adoration, believe that Brahma sees all things, knows all things, has penetrated all things; therefore, O priest, I answered you as I did in the presence of the gods. But I will tell you, O priest, in confidence, that I do not know where the four states of aggregation, the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, utterly cease. It was a mistake, O priest, that you left the earth where the Blessed One resides, and came up to heaven in quest of an answer which cannot be given you here. Turn back, O priest, and having drawn near to the Blessed One, the Enlightened Buddha, ask him your question, and as the Blessed One shall explain it to you, so believe.'

"Thereupon the priest, as quickly as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm, disappeared from the Brahma heaven and appeared before the Blessed One; and he greeted the Blessed One and sat down respectfully at one side, and spake to the Blessed One as follows: 'Reverend Sir, where do the four states of aggregation, the solid state, the watery state, the fiery state, and the state of air, utterly cease?'

"When he had thus spoken the Blessed One answered as follows: 'Once upon a time, O priest, some seafaring traders had a land-sighting bird when they sailed out into the sea; and when the ship was in mid-ocean they set free that land-sighting bird. This bird flies in an easterly direction, in a southerly direction, in a westerly direction, and in a northerly direction, and to the intermediate quarters, and if it sees land anywhere it flies thither, but if it does not see land it

returns to the ship. In exactly the same way, O priest, when you had searched as far as the Brahma world and found no answer to your question you returned to the place whence you came. The question, O priest, ought never to have been put thus: Where do these four states of aggregation cease? The question ought to be as follows:

"Oh! Where can water, where can wind,  
Where fire and earth no footing find?  
Where disappear all mine and thine,  
Good, bad, long, short, and coarse and fine,  
And where do name and form both cease  
To find in nothingness release?"

"The answer, however, is this:

"Tis in the realm of radiance bright,  
Invisible, eternal light,  
And infinite, a state of mind,  
There water, earth, and fire, and wind,  
And elements of any kind,  
Will nevermore a footing find;  
There disappear all mine and thine,  
Good, bad, long, short, and coarse, and fine,  
There too will name and form both cease,  
To find in nothingness release."

"Then the priest understood that the world of matter is restless and remains restless, but peace of heart is a condition of mind which must be acquired by self-discipline, by wisdom, by devotion. The gods cannot help; nor even can Brahma himself, the Great Brahma, the Supreme Being, the Lord and Creator. Sacrifice is

useless and prayer and worship are of no avail. But if we desire to attain the highest state of bliss, which is Nirvâna, we must follow the Blessed One, the Teacher of gods and men; and like him we must by our own effort become lamps unto ourselves and resolutely walk upon the noble eightfold path."

### **THE CONFESSION.**

THE young novice spent his days in study and his nights in doubt. He followed with interest the recitations of his instructor on the philosophy of the Enlightened One; he enjoyed the birthstories of Bodhisattva and the parables of the master with their moral applications, but when he retired in the evening or was otherwise left to his own thoughts he began to ponder on the uselessness of the hermit's life and longed to return to the world with its temptations and struggles, its victories and defeats, its pleasures and pains, its hopes and fears. He enjoyed the solitude of the forest, but he began to think that the restlessness of the world could offer him more peace of mind than the inactivity of a monkish life.

When Charaka had familiarised himself with all the Sutras and wise sayings which were known to the brethren of the monastery, the time began to hang heavy on his hands, and he felt that the religious discourses were becoming tedious.

Weeks elapsed, and Charaka despaired of either becoming accustomed to monkish life or of understanding the deeper meaning of their renunciation of the world, and his conscience began

to trouble him; for the more the elder brethren respected him for his knowledge and gentleness, and the more they praised him, the less worthy he deemed himself of their recognition.

The day of confession approached again. He had spent the hours in fasting and self-discipline, but all this availed nothing. He was weary and felt a sadness of heart beyond description.

In the evening all the brethren were gathered together in the chaitya, the large hall where they held their devotional meetings. The aisles lay in mystic darkness, and the pictures on the heavy columns and on the ceiling were half concealed. They appeared and disappeared from time to time in the flicker of the torches that were employed to light the room. The monks sat in silent expectation, their faces showing a quietude and calmness which proved that they were unconcerned about their own fate, ready to live or to die, as their doom might be, only bent on the aim of reaching Nirvâna.

The senior monk arose and addressed the assembly. "Reverend sirs," he said, "let the order hear me. To-day is full moon, and the day of the unburdening of our hearts. If the order is ready, let the order consecrate this day to the recital of the confession. This is our first duty, and so let us listen to the declaration of purity."

The brethren responded, saying: "We are here to listen and will consider the questions punctiliously."

The speaker continued: "Whoever has committed a transgression, let him speak, those who are free from the consciousness of guilt, let them be silent."

At this moment a tall figure rose slowly and hesitatingly from the ground at the further end of the hall. He did not speak but stood there quietly, towering for some time in the dusky recess between two pillars as though he were the apparition of a guilty conscience. The presiding brother at last broke the silence and addressed the brethren, saying: "A monk who has committed a fault, and remembers it, if he endeavors to be pure, should confess his fault. When a fault is confessed it will lie lightly upon him."

Still the shadowy figure stood motionless, which seemed to increase the gloom in the hall.

"One of the brethren has risen, indicating thereby that he desires to speak," continued the abbot. "A monk who does not confess a fault after the question has been put three times is guilty of an intentional lie, and the Blessed One teaches that an intentional lie cuts a man off from sanctification."

The gloomy figure now lifted his head and with suppressed emotion began to speak. "Venerable father," he said, "and ye, reverend sirs, may I speak out and unburden my heart?" The voice was that of the novice, and a slight commotion passed through the assemblage. Having been encouraged to speak freely and without reserve, Charaka began: "Venerable father, and ye, reverend sirs: I feel guilty of having infringed on one of the great prohibitions. I

am as a palm tree, the top of which has been destroyed. I am broken in spirit and full of contrition. I am anxious to be a disciple of the Shakya-Muni, but I am not worthy to be a monk, I never have been and I never shall be." Here his voice faltered, and he sobbed like a child.

The brethren were horror-stricken; they thought at once that the youth was contaminated by some secret crime; he was too young to be free from passion, too beautiful to be beyond temptation, too quick-witted not to be ambitious. True, they loved him, but they felt now that their affection for him was a danger, and there was no one in the assembly who did not feel the youth's self-accusation as partly directed against himself. But the abbot overcame the sentiment that arose so quickly, and encouraged the penitent brother to make a full confession. "Do not despair," he said, "thou art young; it is natural that thy heart should still cherish dreams of love, and that alluring reminiscences should still haunt thy mind."

"I entered the brotherhood with false hopes and wrong aspirations," replied the novice. "I am longing for wisdom and supernatural powers; I am ambitious to do and to dare, and I hoped to acquire a deeper knowledge through self-discipline and holiness. I am free from any actual transgression, but my holiness is mockery; my piety is not genuine; I am a hypocrite and I find that I am belying you, venerable father, and all the monks of this venerable community. But it grieveth me most that I am false to myself; I am not worthy to wear the yellow robe."

"Thou art not expected to be perfect," replied the abbot, "thou art walking on the path, and hast not as yet reached the goal. Thy fault is impatience with thyself and not hypocrisy."

"Do not palliate my fault, venerable father," said Charaka. "There is something wrong in my heart and in my mind. If I am not a hypocrite, then I am a heretic; and a heretic walks on the wrong road in the wrong direction, and can never reach the goal. Do not extenuate, do not qualify and mitigate my faults, for I feel their grievousness and am anxious to be led out of the darkness into the light. I long for life and the unfoldment of life. I want to comprehend the deepest truths; I want to know and to taste the highest bliss; I want to accomplish the greatest deeds."

"Then thou art worldly; thou longest for power, for fame, for honor, for pleasures," suggested the abbot inquiringly; "thou art not yet free from the illusion of selfhood. It is not the truth, then, that thou wantest, but thyself, to be an owner of the truth; it is self-enhancement, not service; vanity, not helpfulness."

"That may be, reverend father," replied the novice; "thy wisdom shall judge me; though I do not feel myself burdened by selfishness. No, I do not love myself. I would gladly sacrifice myself for any noble cause, for truth, for justice, for procuring bliss for others. Nor do I crave for worldly pleasures, but I do not feel any need of shirking them. Pleasures like pains are the stuff that life is made of, and I do not hate life. I enjoy the unfoldment of life with all its

aspirations, not for my sake, but for life's sake. I do not love myself, I love God. That is my fault, and that is the root from which grow all my errors, heresies, hypocrisies, and the false position in which I now am."

The good abbot did not know what to say. He looked at the poor novice and pitied him for his pangs of conscience. Every one present felt that the man suffered, that there was something wrong with him; but no one could exactly say what it was. His ambition was not sinful but noble. And that he loved God was certainly not a crime. At last the abbot addressed Subhûti, Charaka's senior and teacher, and asked him: "Have you, reverend brother, noticed in this novice's behavior or views anything strange or exceptional?"

Subhûti replied that he had not.

The abbot continued to inquire about Charaka's previous religious relations and the significance of his love of God.

"I do not know, reverend sir," was the elder monk's answer. "He is not a Brahman, but a descendant of a noble family of the northern conquerors that came to India and founded the kingdom of Gandhâra. Yet he knows Brahman writings and is familiar with the philosophy of the Yavanas of the distant West. I discoursed with him and understand that by God he means all that is right and good and true in the world and without whom there can be no enlightenment . . ."



Having thus discussed the case of the novice Charaka, the abbot addressed himself to the Brotherhood, asking the reverend sirs what they would deem right in the present case. Was the brother at all guilty of the fault of which he accused himself and if so what should he do to restore his good standing and set himself aright in the Brotherhood?

Then Subhûti arose and said: "Charaka is a man of deep comprehension and of an earnest temper. The difficulty which he encounters is not for us to judge him or to advise him about. But there is a philosopher living in the kingdom of Magadha, by the name of Açvaghosha. If there is any one in the world that can set an erring brother right, it is Acvagosha whose wisdom is so great that since Buddha entered Nirvana there has been no man on earth who might have surpassed him either in knowledge or judgment." So Subhûti proposed to write a letter of introduction to Açvaghosha commending the brother Charaka to his care and suggesting to him to dispel his doubts and to establish him again firmly in the faith in which the truth shines forth more brilliantly than in any other religion.

The abbot agreed with Subhûti and the general opinion among the brethren was in favor of sending Charaka to the kingdom of Magadha to the philosopher Açvaghosha to have his doubts dispelled and his heart established again in the faith of Buddha, the Blessed One, the teacher of truth.

Before they could carry out their plan the session was interrupted by a messenger from the royal court of Gandhâra, who inquired for a novice by the name of Charaka,—a man well versed in medicine and other learned arts. A dreadful epidemic had spread in the country, and the old king had died while two of his sons were afflicted with the disease and now lay at the point of death. The oldest son and heir to the throne was in the field defending his country against the Parthians, and some mountaineers of the East, nominally subject to the kingdom of Magadha but practically independent had utilised the opportunity afforded by these circumstances to descend into the fertile valleys of Gandhâra and to pillage the country.

The regard in which Charaka had been held in the Brotherhood during his novitiate had not suffered through his confession and was even heightened. It had been known in the cloister that the young novice was of a noble family, but he had made nothing of it and so the intimate connection with the royal family of the country created an uncommon sensation among his venerable brethren. Now, a special awe attached to his person since it was known that the young king knew of Charaka, and needing his wisdom, sent a special messenger to call him back to the capital.

In spite of the interruption the ceremony of confession was continued and closed in the traditional way; all the questions regarding transgressions that might have been committed were asked and in some cases sins were punctiliously

reported by those who felt a need of unburdening their conscience. Penances were imposed which were willingly and submissively assumed. When everything had been attended to, the abbot turned again to Charaka saying, "If you had concealed your secret longings, you would have been guilty of hypocrisy, but now since you have openly laid bare the state of your mind, there is no longer any falsehood in you. Therefore I find no fault with your conduct; should you find that you cannot remain a monk, you must know that there is no law that obliges you to remain in the Brotherhood against your will."

The abbot then granted Charaka permission to obey the King's call, saying, "You are free to leave the order in peace and goodwill, but I enjoin you to make a vow that you will not leave your doubts unsettled, but that as soon as you have attended to the pressing duties which will engage your attention at the capital you will make a pilgrimage to the philosopher Aṣvaghosha, who lives in the kingdom of Magadha. He will be a better adviser than I, and he shall decide whether or not you are fit to be a monk of our Lord the Buddha."

### **AṢVAGHOSHA.**

BUDDHA'S birthday was celebrated with greater rejoicing than usual in the year following king Kanishka's invasion, which took place in the fifth century after the Nirvâna. The formidable invaders had become friends and the people were joyful that the war clouds had dispersed so rapidly.

Kanishka was in good spirits. He was elated by his success, but it had not made him overbearing, and he was affable to all who approached him. In a short time he had become the most powerful monarch of India, his sway extending far beyond the boundaries of his own kingdom. His generals had been victorious over the Parthians in the far west, and his alliance with the king of Magadha made him practically ruler over the valley of the Ganges. But more effective than his strategy and the might of his armies was the kindness which he showed to his vanquished enemies. Princes of smaller dominions willingly acknowledged his superiority and submitted to him their difficulties because they cherished an unreserved confidence in his fairness and love of justice. Thus was laid the foundation of a great empire upon whose civilisation the religion of the Enlightened One exercised a decided influence. Peace was established, commerce and trade flourished, and Greek sculptors flocked to Gandhâra, transplanting the art of their home to the soil of India.

It was the beginning of India's golden age which lasted as long as the Dharma, the doctrine of the Tathâgata, was kept pure and undefiled. A holy enthusiasm seized the hearts of the people and there were many who felt an anxiety to spread the blessings of religion over the whole world. Missionaries went out who reached Thibet and China and even far-off Japan where they sowed the seeds of truth and spread the blessings of lovingkindness and charity.

Kanishka and the king of Magadha enjoyed each other's company. The two allied monarchs started on a peaceful pilgrimage to the various sacred spots of the country. They visited Lumbinî, the birthplace of the Bodhisattva. Thence passing over the site of Kapilavastu, the residence of Shuddhodana, Buddha's father in the flesh and the haunt of Prince Siddhârtha in his youth, they went to the Bodhi tree at Buddhagaya and returned to the capital Benares, to celebrate the birth festival of the Buddha in the Deer Park, on the very spot where the revered Teacher had set the wheel of truth in motion to roll onward for the best of mankind,—the wheel of truth which no god, no demon, nor any other power, be it human, divine or infernal, should ever be able to turn back.

A procession went out to the holy place and circumambulated the stupa, erected on the sacred spot in commemoration of the memorable event, and the two monarchs, who had but a short time before met as foes on the battlefield, walked together like brothers, preceded by white-robed virgins bearing flowers, and followed by priests chanting gâthâs of the blessings of the good law and swinging censers. No display of arms was made but multitudes of peaceful citizens hailed the two rulers and blessed the magnanimity of the hero of Gandhâra.

When the procession halted, Kanishka and his brother king stood in front of a statue of the Buddha and watched the process of depositing flowers. "Who is the beautiful maiden that is leading the flower carriers?" asked Kanishka of the king of Magadha in a

whisper; and the latter replied: "It is Bhadrac̣rî, my only daughter."

Kanishka followed with his eye the graceful movements of the princess and breathed a prayer: "Adoration to the Buddha!" he said to himself in the silent recesses of his heart. "The Buddha has guided my steps and induced me to make peace before the demons of war could do more mischief. I now vow to myself that if the princess will accept me I shall lead her as queen to my capital and she shall be the mother of the kings of Gandhâra to come. May the Tathâgata's blessing be on us and my people!"

At the stupa of the first sermon of the Buddha, peace was definitely concluded. The king of Magadha delivered to his powerful ally the sacred bowl, a treasure which, though small in size, was esteemed worth more than half the kingdom of Magadha; and Açvaghosha, the old philosopher, was bidden to appear at court and be ready to accompany the ruler of Gandhâra to his home in the northwest of India.

Açvaghosha arrived at the Deer Park in a royal carriage drawn by white horses, and there he was presented to King Kanishka. He bowed reverently and said: "Praised be the Lord Buddha for his blessed teachings! Gladness fills my heart when I think how your majesty treats your vanquished foe. The victorious enemy has become a friend and brother, making an end of all hostility forever."

"Good, my friend," replied Kanishka; "if there is any merit in my action I owe thanks for my karma to the

Tathâgata. He is my teacher and I bless the happy day on which I became his disciple. My knowledge, however, is imperfect and even my learned friend Charaka is full of doubts on subjects of grave importance. Therefore I invite you to accompany me to Gandhâra, where my people and myself are sorely in need of your wisdom and experience."

"Your invitation is flattering," said the philosopher, "and it is tendered in kindly words; but I pray you, noble sir, leave me at home. I am an aged man and could scarcely stand the exertion of the journey. But I know a worthy scholar, Jñanayaça, who is well versed in the doctrine of our Lord and much younger than I. He may go in my place; and should I grow stronger I shall be glad to visit you in Gandhâra."

"Charaka!" said the king, "have a room fitted up for Açvaghosha in our residence at Benares, and so long as we remain here he shall pass the time in our company. Let him be present at our meals, and when we rest in the evening from the labors of the day let us listen to the words of the philosopher who is regarded as the best interpreter of the significance of Buddha's teachings."

### **THE PARABLE OF THE ELEPHANT.**

AÇVAGHOSHA saw that every eye was intent upon him, and so he told the story of the white Elephant. He said:

"There was a noble and mighty elephant, an elephant white in color, with a strong trunk and long tusks,

trained by a good master, and willing and serviceable in all the work that elephants are put to. And this noble and mighty elephant being led by his guide, the good master who had trained him, came to the land of the blind. And it was noised about in the land of the blind that the noble and mighty elephant, the king of all beasts, the wisest of all animals, the strongest and yet the meekest and kindest of creatures, had made his appearance in their country. So the wise men and teachers of the blind came to the place where the elephant was and every one began to investigate his shape and figure and form. And when the elephant was gone they met and discussed the problem of the noble and mighty beast, and there were some who said he was like a great thick snake; others said he was like a snake of medium size. The former had felt the trunk, the latter the tail. Further there were some who claimed that his figure was like that of a high column, others declared he was large and bulky like a big barrel, still others maintained he was smooth and hard but tapering. Some of the blind had taken hold of one of the legs, others had reached the main body, and still others had touched the tusks. Every one proposed his view and they disputed and controverted, and wrangled, and litigated, and bickered, and quarreled, and called each other names, and each one imprecated all the others, and each one denounced all the others, and they abused and scolded, and they anathematised and excommunicated, and finally every one of them swore that every one else was a liar and was cursed on account of his heresies. These blind men, every one of them honest in his contentions, being sure of



having the truth and relying upon his own experience, formed schools and sects and factions and behaved in exactly the same way as you see the priests of the different creeds behave. But the master of the noble, mighty elephant knows them all, he knows that every one of them has a parcel of the truth, that every one is right in his way, but wrong in taking his parcel to be the whole truth.

"Not one of these sectarians observed the fact that the elephant was perfectly white and a marvel to see, for all of them were purblind. Yet I would not say that they were either dishonest or hypocrites. They had investigated the truth to the best of their ability.

"The master of the elephant is the Tathâgata, the Enlightened One, the Buddha. He has brought the white elephant representing the truth, the noble and mighty elephant, symbolising strength and wisdom and devotion, into the land of the blind, and he who listens to the Tathâgata will understand all the schools, and all the sects and all the factions that are in possession of parcels of the truth. His doctrine is all-comprehensive, and he who takes refuge in Him will cease to bicker, and to contend, and to quarrel."

\* \* \*

When Açvaghosha had finished the parable of the noble and mighty elephant, the two kings returned from the summer palace carrying with them in a solemn procession the slain tiger, and close behind on a white charger decked with garlands and gay ribbons, rode the hero of the day, one of the generals

from the South, whose dart had struck the tiger with fatal precision and death-dealing power.

"Behold the hero of the day!" said Charaka. "And had the conspiracy not miscarried the same man might now be an assassin and a miscreant."

"There is a lesson in it!" replied Aṣvaghosha, "existence is not desirable for its own sake. That which gives worth to life is the purpose to which it is devoted.

"Our aim is not to live, but whether we die or live, to avoid wrong doing and to let right and justice and lovingkindness prevail. Says the Tathâgata:

"Commit no wrong, but good deeds do,  
And let thy heart be pure.  
All Buddhas teach this doctrine true  
Which will for aye endure."

# *Mystics Magazine*

*Buddhist Mystical Theology*

Conversations with Charaka and Acvagosha

Compiled by Marilyn Hughes

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