



LAMA ANAGARIKA GOVINDA, LI GOTAMI and TURTLE the cat

The following essay on the Siddhas was written by Lama Anagarika Govinda. This essay is a small piece of the work of Lama Govinda and of his artist wife and companion Li Gotami Govinda over the years of their life study and practice of Buddhism. The illustrations are brush drawings by Lama Govinda after ancient Tibetan stone-engravings, as photographed by Li Gotami. This issue of the *Wind Bell* marks Lama's eighty-sixth birthday. We want to express our gratitude to Lama and Li for their great life work which has assisted so many of us along the Buddha's way. Lama and Li have been living here in the Bay Area for some years, giving lectures and providing access to their life experience as teachers and students through sharing their lives with us. We at Zen Center are most fortunate to have them near by.

Happy Birthday to you both. Best wishes for your anniversary. And continued good health and serenity in the days and years to come!

—THE EDITORS

## MASTERS OF THE MYSTIC PATH

A thousand years after the Buddha's *Parinirvana* when the religion had become old and had lost its spontaneity — being frozen in monastic rules and regulations which divided monks from laymen (in other words the clergy from the world at large or the scholar from the common man) — there arose a protest from those who had been disinherited from the original message of the Buddha, who had never become monks, never shaved their heads, and who represented the age-old tradition of the *Sramanas*, the peripatetic religious teachers and practitioners who roamed over the Indian subcontinent, following no fixed rules but their own convictions based on inner experience, and representing the highest ideals of spiritual

and physical freedom against a background of organized society and institutionalized religion. They stood outside the pale of caste and creed, opposed the religion of the Vedas, gave birth to a secret doctrine, a revolutionary movement, namely that of the Upanishads. Why were the Śramanas, as their name said, *secret*? Because they taught, in contrast to the Vedas, that man was not dependent on the gods but created his own destiny in the form of *karma*.

But how did this teaching, which with one blow abolished the superiority of the gods and therefore the original power and monopoly of the Brahmins and ultimately the whole caste system, how could it arise? It arose as the culmination of an underground movement which was always present in India from time immemorial, but which was suppressed by the conquering Aryans who had invaded India from the North, and who had invented the caste system in order to protect themselves from being amalgamated and finally annihilated by the teeming masses of the Indian subcontinent. It is only now that we realize that there was a highly sophisticated culture in India before the advent of the Aryan invaders, and therefore before the creation of the Vedic culture. The proof came to light only recently in the excavations of the Indus culture, and particularly in the discovery of Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The great scholars of the last century like Deussen, Oldenberg, Jacobi, Sylvain Lévi, Max Muller, Grünwedel and many others who were convinced that the Vedic culture was the beginning of Indian thought and religion, took it for granted that everything originated with the Vedas and that therefore Buddhism was merely a reform movement of Brahminism or of the Vedic religion, just as Protestantism was derived from Catholicism and as Christianity was a reform movement of Judaism.

All this was very plausible because Buddhism did not abolish all of the Vedic gods, like Indra, Brahma, Sakka, etc.; but the early investigators failed to observe that the Vedic gods remained merely as decorative elements, being deprived of their power over human destinies, just as the ancient local deities of Tibet were incorporated into the Buddha's system as protectors and upholders of the dharma, or as servants of the Buddha and his representatives; or just as early Christianity replaced the local pagan gods by the saints and converted ancient sanctuaries into places of Christian worship. This was a clever and psychologically wise move. The intolerance of later Christians who tried to destroy the traces of other cultures and religions, — and thereby dug their own grave as we see in the present religious revolution — will either destroy or transform all dogmatic forms of Christianity.

The Buddha himself made it be known that the teaching which he propagated was not his own invention but a doctrine proclaimed by previous Buddhas of times long past. Scholars apparently did not take this claim seriously or thought he was referring to the *Rishis* of the Vedas. But a close examination of the Vedas and Brahmanas reveals not the slightest trace of what the Buddha taught. On the contrary, these scriptures are based on the very principles which the Buddha refuted, namely, the institutions of caste and of animal sacrifices which form the main pillars of the Brahmanical system. The very ideas which we regard as typically Indian, such as *karma*, rebirth, *ahimsa*, *nirvana*, *samsara*, *karuna* (compassion),



NĀGĀRJUNA

(Figure 1)

tib.: hPHAGS-PA KLU-SGRUB

the sanctity of sentient life in whatever form we may find it, the free access to scriptures and sanctuaries, the dignity and self-responsibility of Man (according to his deeds): all these were absent in the Vedas. The sacrifices were meant to bribe the gods and to ensure worldly prosperity (like cattle and possessions) and, finally, the dissolution of the individual into cosmic elements. Therefore Yajñavalkya, who had declared that the eyes go into the sun, the hair into vegetation, the bones into rocks, and the blood and semen into the water, the breath into the air, the ears into space, was asked by Arthabhaga: "But where remains Man?" Yajñavalkya took him out of the assembly and told him what was then regarded as a great secret, the doctrine of *karma*.

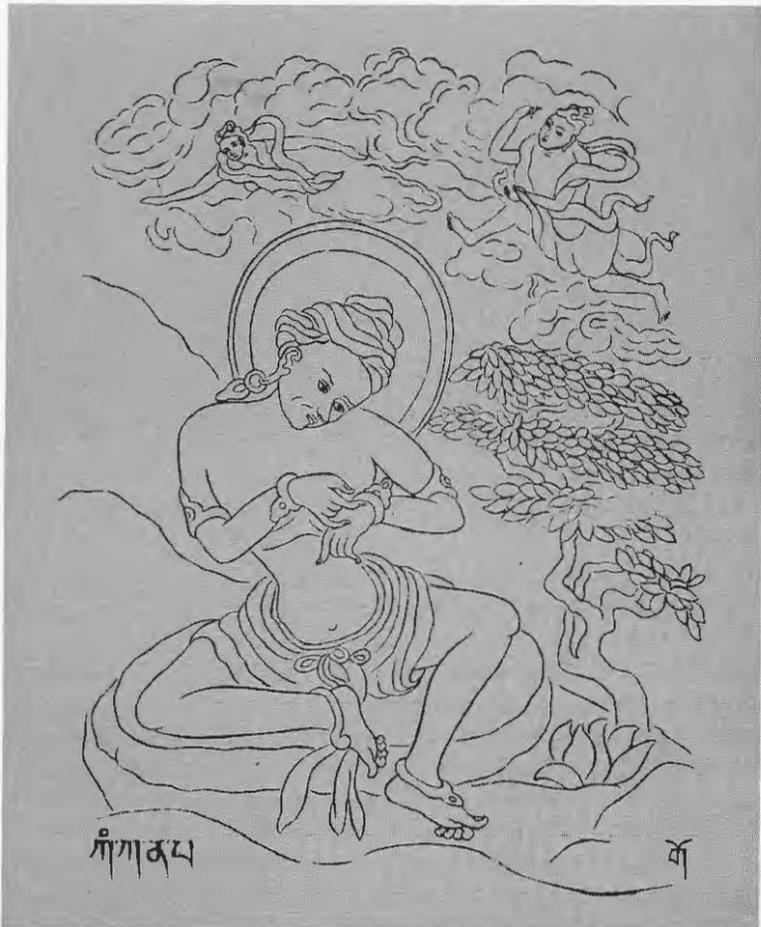
How did this anti-Vedic doctrine, which made gods and sacrifices and the entire structure of the caste system superfluous get into the Upanishads? Only through the influence of the ancient traditions of the anti-Vedic religions of Buddhists and Jains, or by the influences of the Śrāmanas. But who were the Śrāmanas? It seems to be no accident that the Buddha himself called himself the great Śrāmana and that he was recognized by his contemporaries as such. His order was originally not founded on monastic rules but consisted of homeless wanderers, a kind of religious community without any fixed dwellings. Only when dwellings were given to them by rich adherents and the numbers of his followers grew to unmanageable proportions did it become necessary to create certain rules. But these rules were, as it seems, not imposed by the Buddha, but grew out of the necessities of communal life, so that the Buddha shortly before his demise left it to his followers to abolish or to maintain the rules which had been established in this way. Since the majority of his inner circle of followers had in the meantime settled in monastic communities, abandoning the life of wandering Śrāmanas for the greater comfort of established monasteries and vested interests, they voted for maintenance of those rules which secured their dominance over the lay adherents. Even Ananda, one of the earliest disciples and companion of the Buddha (who was emotionally connected with the Buddha), was dismissed from the council that took place after the *Parinirvana* of the Buddha because he had shown some human feelings for his life-long friend, and he was readmitted only after some time.

The whole Buddhist tradition was therefore fixed according to the consensus of monks, and only after four hundred years of monkish rule was it fixed in writing. Therefore, the *Vinaya* — or the rules for monastic communities — were the oldest part of the Tripitaka. Thus the revolt of the Siddhas was an attempt to re-establish the Śrāmana ideal and to restore the liberty of the individual against a privileged class of professional monks and a consolidated, established, frozen society. Buddhism was based on individual experience, neither on faith in theological principles nor in dogmas and popular hearsay. Therefore Saraha sang, “na manta, na tanta, na deo, na dharana” (no mantras, no tantras, no gods or dharmas): “asamala citta”, only the pure mind, spontaneous awareness, can lead to liberation.

In the highly symbolic language of the Siddhas, experiences of meditation are transformed into external events and external events are transformed into experiences of meditation. If for instance it is said of certain Siddhas that they stopped the sun and the moon in their course, or that they crossed the Ganges by holding up its flow, then this has nothing to do with the heavenly bodies or the sacred river of India, but with the “solar” and “lunar” currents of psychic energy and their unification and sublimation in the body of the yogin. In a similar way, we have to understand the alchemistic terminology of the Siddhas and their search for the “philosopher’s stone” and the “elixir of life”. In the center of the stories which deal with the mystic alchemy of the Eighty-four Siddhas stands the guru Nagarjuna whose Tibetan inscription reads *hphags-pa-klu-sgrub* (see Figure 1), who lived around the middle of the seventh century (not to be confused with the founder of the Madhyamika philosophy who bore the same name five hundred

years earlier, although Tibetans are convinced that he is the same man!) Even Padmasambhava is said to have lived both in the Buddha's and in Asoka's time, while others believe him to be a reincarnation of Gautama Buddha and an emanation of Amitabha. From this standpoint you might even nowadays find the living Siddhas of more than a thousand years ago living in Tibet, because there the spiritual succession is regarded as more important than a single lifetime or an historical fact.

So it was said that Nagarjuna in his Siddha incarnation had changed an iron mountain into copper, and it was thought he would have transformed it into gold



KANKANA-PA

(Figure 2)

tib.: KANKANNA-PA



ŚAVARI

(Figure 3)

tib.: SAVARI-PA

if the Bodhisattva Manjusri had not warned him that gold would only cause greed and quarrel among men instead of helping them as the Siddha had intended. The justification of this warning, which from the Buddhist point of view had deprived the material side of alchemy of its *raison d'etre*, very soon became apparent. In the course of the guru's experiments it appeared that even his iron alms-bowl had turned into gold. One day while he was taking his meal, a thief passed the open door of his hut and seeing the golden bowl immediately decided to steal it. But Nagarjuna, reading the mind of the thief, took the bowl and threw it out of the window. The thief was so perplexed and ashamed that he entered the guru's hut, bowed at his feet and said: "Venerable sir, why did you do this? I came here as a

thief. Now that you have thrown away what I desired and made a gift of what I intended to steal, my desire has vanished and stealing has become senseless and superfluous." The guru replied, "Whatever I possess should be shared with others. Eat and drink whatever you like." The thief was so deeply impressed by the magnanimity and kindness of the guru that he asked for his teachings.

But Nagarjuna knew that, though the other's mind was not yet ripe to understand his teachings, his devotion was genuine. He therefore told him, "Imagine all things you desire as horns on your head (i.e., as unreal and useless). If you meditate in this way you will see a light shining like an emerald." With these words he poured a heap of jewels into a corner of the room, made the pupil sit down in front of it, and left him to his meditation.

The former thief threw himself assiduously into the practice of meditation and, as his faith was as great as his simplicity, he followed the words of the guru literally — and lo — horns began to grow on his head! At first he was elated at the success and filled with pride and satisfaction. With the passage of time however, he discovered with horror that the horns continued to grow and finally became so cumbersome that he could not move without knocking against the walls and the things around him. The more he worried the worse it became. Thus his former pride and elation turned into dejection, and when the guru returned after twelve years and asked the pupil how he was faring, he told the master that he was very unhappy. But Nagarjuna laughed and said, "You have become unhappy through the mere imagination of horns on your head. In the same way all living beings destroy their happiness by clinging to their false imaginations and thinking them to be real. All forms of life and all objects of desire are like clouds. But even birth, life and death can have no power over those whose heart is pure and free from illusions. If you look upon all possessions of the world as no less unreal, undesirable and cumbersome as the imagined horns upon your head, then you will be free from the cycle of death and rebirth. Now the dust fell from the Chela's eyes, and as he saw the emptiness of all things his desires and false imaginations vanished, and with them the horns on his head. He attained *siddhi*, the perfection of a saint, and later became known as Guru Nagabodhi, successor of Nagarjuna.

Another Siddha, whose name is associated with the guru Nagarjuna, is the Brahmin Vyali. Like Nagarjuna, he was an ardent alchemist who tried to find the elixir of life (*amrita*). He spent his entire fortune in unsuccessful experiments with all sorts of expensive chemicals, and finally became so disgusted that he threw the formula-book into the Ganges and left the place of his fruitless work as a beggar. But it happened that when he came to another city farther down the river, a courtesan who was taking a bath in the river picked up the book and brought it to him. This revived his old passion and he took up his work again while the courtesan supplied him with the means of livelihood. But his experiments were as unsuccessful as before until one day the courtesan, while preparing his food, by chance dropped the juice of some spice into the alchemist's mixture — and lo — what the learned brahmin had not been able to achieve in fourteen years of hard work, now had been accomplished by the hands of an ignorant low-caste woman! The story

then goes on to tell, not without humor, how the brahmin, who spiritually was apparently not prepared for this unexpected gift of good luck, fled with his treasure into solitude because he did not like to share it with anyone or to let others know about his secret. He settled down on the top of a rock which rose up in the midst of a terrible swamp. There he sat, with his elixir of life, a prisoner of his own selfishness — not unlike Fafner, the giant of Northern mythology who became a dragon in order to guard the treasure for which he had slain his brother after they had won it from the gods! But Nagarjuna, who was filled with the ideals of bodhisattvahood, wanted to acquire the knowledge of this precious elixir for the benefit of all who were ripe for it. Through the exertion of his magic power he succeeded in finding the hermit and in persuading him to part with his secret.

The details of this story, in which the elements of popular fantasy and humor are mixed with mystic symbolism and reminiscences of historical personalities, are of secondary importance. But it is significant that the Tibetan manuscript in which the story is preserved mentions mercury (*ngul-chu*) as one of the important substances used in the experiments of the brahmin. This proves the connection with the ancient alchemical tradition of Egypt and Greece which held that mercury was closely related to the *prima materia*. He who realizes the *prima materia* of the human mind has found the philosopher's stone, the metaphysical emptiness or plenum void which is the basis of the universe. It is the creative void in which all forms are contained; it is not a substance but a principle, the precondition of all that exists — just as space is the precondition for all material things (*Shunyata*).

This idea is illustrated in the story of guru Kankanapa, one of the Eighty-four Siddhas (see Figure 2). Once there lived a king in the east of India who was very proud of his wealth. One day a yogi asked him, "What is the value of your kingship when misery is the real ruler of the world? Old age and death revolve life like a potter's wheel. Nobody knows what the next turn may bring. It may raise him to the heights of happiness or throw him into the depths of misery. Therefore, let yourself not be blinded by your present riches." The king said, "In my present position I cannot serve the Dharma in the garb of an ascetic. But if you can give me advice which I can follow according to my own nature and capacity, without changing my outer life, I will accept it." The yogi knew the king's fondness for jewels so he chose the king's natural inclination as a starting point and a subject of meditation, thus in accordance with Tantric usage, turning a weakness into a source of strength — by what you fall, by that you rise! "Behold the diamonds of your bracelet. Fix your mind upon them and meditate thus:

"They are sparkling in all colors of the rainbow;  
yet these colors which gladden thy heart have no nature of their own.  
The mind alone is the radiant jewel  
from which all things borrow their temporal reality."

And the king, while concentrating upon the bracelet on his left arm, meditated as he was told by the yogi until his mind attained the purity and radiance of a flawless jewel. The people of his court, however, who noticed some strange change coming over him, one day peeped through a chink in the door of the royal private

apartment and beheld the king surrounded by innumerable celestial beings. Now they knew that he had become a Siddha and asked for his blessings and guidance. And the king said, "It is not wealth that makes me a king, but what I have acquired spiritually through my own exertion. My inner happiness is my kingdom." Since then the king was known as guru Kankanapa.

The Siddhas, thus, were not "sorcerers" as some European scholars pretend, not knowing that *siddhi* means accomplishment. Otherwise, even the Buddha whose



MIHINA-PA (MATSIENDRANĀTH

(Figure 4)

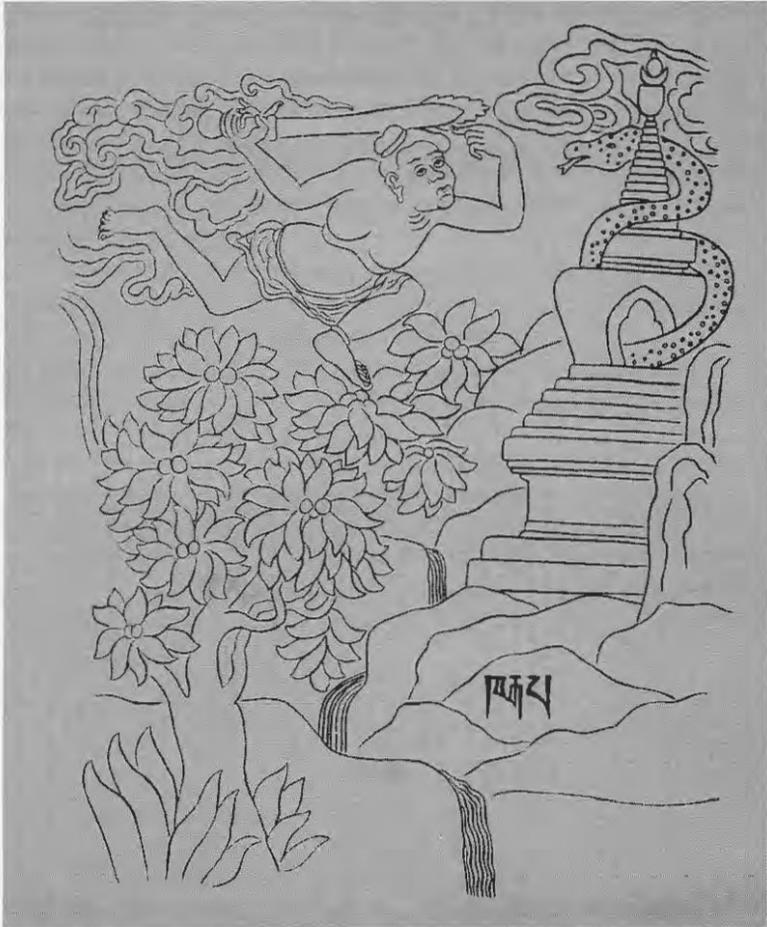
tib.: MINA-PA

name was Siddhartha should have been described as a sorcerer. With the same justification, Christ, who is credited with many miracles, would have been a sorcerer. It is a strange habit to denigrate Buddhist saints to the lowest possible degree and to uphold the same phenomenon in Christianity as a sign of holiness. It is time to show greater respect also to non-Christian achievements. So, for instance, we should not speak of "Medicine Buddhas", implying something like voodoo, or the medicine men of primitive cults, but of Buddha as a great healer of human ills (*Heiland* in German, which means "savior"); and likewise we should not speak of ritual dances as "devil dances" but rather as "mystery plays"; nor of "shunyata" as nothingness, but rather as "no-thingness", the primordial ground of all things and events, the plenum void from which all creation proceeds.

From this point of view, we begin to understand the questions of Kevaddha (in the *Majjhima-Nikaya*), who went into the realm of the gods in order to inquire about the origin of the four elements, earth, water, fire and air. But none of the gods could give him an explanation and referred him to a higher group of beings. In this manner he finally arrived at the heaven of Brahma and he put the same question to him. But Brahma did not want to admit that he did not know the answer. Instead of that he sang his own praises, repeating again and again, "I am the great Brahma, the ruler of all gods, the highest, all powerful, the leader of gods and men, etc . . ." But Kevaddha answered, "Dear Sir, I have not asked you who you are, but where the four elements come to an end." Thereupon Brahma had to admit that he did not know the answer and that the only being capable of answering him would be the Buddha, the Enlightened One. So, he returned to the earth, from where he had come, and asked the Buddha where the elements of which this world is composed would come to an end. And the Buddha answered, "Consciousness is the place from which all elements appear and in which they come to an end," quoting the following important words: "*Viññānam anidassanam, anāntam sabbato pabham; eta āpo ca pathavi, tejo, vāyo na gadhati,*" (In the invisible, infinite, all-radiant consciousness, there neither earth nor water, neither fire nor air can find a footing.)

We probably have in this verse the origin of the Viññānavādins, one of the main philosophical schools of Buddhism, who, without denying the ultimate principle of Shūnyatā, maintained that for all practical purposes consciousness was the last instance of human experience, and therefore the most important factor of all living beings. The Yogacarins were therefore the legitimate successors of the Viññānavādins, who put their philosophy into practice and thus created the vast edifice known as Tantrism. It came actually into existence through the Siddhas.

But the Siddhas played another important role. They were the first who made use of paradoxes to highlight the incommensurable nature of life by reversing the lowest and the highest, by using their logic to refute logic, by leading the human mind into situations which could not be solved rationally or epistemologically, by showing reality as outside the laws of linear logic and causal thinking. But their use of paradoxes was never casual or arbitrary, it only pointed to surprising situations which flash-like revealed the true nature of things. When the mind is baffled and thrown out of its habitual thinking, it may suddenly see the truth in an unex-



KHADGA-PA

(Figure 5)

tib.: KARGA-PA

pected occurrence or situation. This was actually the beginning of Ch'an or Zen, and from scriptural evidence we may come to the conclusion that there was an historical connection between the Siddha-tradition and what we now know as zen Buddhism. In order to prove it, I will recount one very characteristic Siddha story and its equivalent in zen scriptures as reported by D. T. Suzuki. Here is the Tibetan version (*Grub-thob-brgyad-bzhihi nam-thar*):

“There was once a great hunter called Shavari (see Figure 3). He was very proud of his strength and his marksmanship. The killing of animals was his sole occupation, and this made his life one single sin.

One day, while he was out hunting, he saw a stranger, apparently a hunter, approaching him from afar. 'Who dares to hunt in my territory?' he thought indignantly. As he approached the stranger, he found the latter was not only as big and sturdy as himself, but — what surprised him still more — looked exactly like him!

'Who are you?' he demanded sternly.

'I am a hunter,' said the stranger, unperturbed.

'Your name?'

'Shavari.'



MAHI-PA

(Figure 6)

'How is that?' the hunter exclaimed. 'My name too is Shavari! Where do you come from?'

'From a distant country,' the stranger said evasively.

Shavari regained his self-confidence and, trying to impress the stranger, he asked, 'Can you kill more than one deer with the shot of a single arrow?'

'I can kill three hundred with one shot,' the stranger answered.

This sounded to Shavari like tall talk, and he wished only for an opportunity to expose his rival's ridiculous claim.

However, the stranger — who was none other than the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara, who had assumed this shape because he felt pity for Shavari — immediately created a herd of five hundred deer through his magic power.

Shavari, who was delighted when he saw the deer emerge from the forest at not too great a distance, asked gleefully, 'Will your arrow be able to go through all those deer?'

'It will go through all five hundred!' the stranger replied; but Shavari suggested, 'Let your arrow miss four hundred and kill one hundred only.'

The stranger accomplished this feat with the greatest of ease, but now Shavari began to disbelieve his eyes.

'Fetch one of the deer,' said the stranger, 'if you have any doubt.' And Shavari went as he was told.

But, alas! When he tried to lift one of the deer, he found it so heavy that he could not move it from the spot.

'What?' exclaimed the stranger, 'You, a great hunter, cannot even lift a deer!' And he laughed heartily.

Now the hunter's pride was completely broken. He fell at the stranger's feet and asked him to be his teacher.

Avalokitesvara agreed. 'If you want to learn this magic shooting art,' he said, 'you must first purify yourself for a month by not eating meat and by meditating on love and compassion toward all living beings. I will return and teach you my secret.'

Shavari did as he was told, and when the teacher returned, the hunter was a changed man, though he did not yet know it. He asked the guru for his promised initiation into the secret art of shooting.

The teacher drew an elaborate mandala (a concentric diagram, used as an aid in meditation), decorated it with flowers, and told Shavari and his wife to look at it carefully.

Since both of them had seriously practiced meditation for one full month, they gazed with undivided attention upon the mandala, and lo! the ground below it seemed to become transparent, and it was as though they looked right into the bowels of the earth. There was smoke and fire, and agonizing shrieks pierced their ears.

'What do you see?' asked the guru.

The hunter and his wife were unable to utter a word. But when the smoke had cleared away, they saw the eight great hells and the agony of innumerable beings.

'What do you see?' the guru asked again.

And when they looked closer, they recognized two painfully contorted faces.

'What do you see?' the guru asked for the third time.

And suddenly, full comprehension came over them like a flash, and they cried out, 'It's ourselves!'

They fell at the feet of the guru, imploring him to show them the way of liberation. But they entirely forgot to ask for the initiation into the secret shooting art.

Shavari continued to meditate on love and compassion and became one of the Eighty-four Siddhas."

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It is interesting and instructive to see the main features of this story in the garb of Ch'an or Zen, as related in *Chuan-teng Lu* and translated by Prof. D.T. Suzuki in his *Essays on Zen Buddhism*:

"Shih-kung was a hunter before he was ordained as a zen monk under Ma-tsu. He strongly disliked Buddhist monks, who were against his profession. One day, while chasing a deer, he passed by the cottage where Ma-tsu resided. Ma-tsu came out and greeted him. Shi-kung asked, 'Did you see some deer pass by your door?'

'Who are you?' asked the master.

'I am a hunter.'

'How many can you shoot with one arrow?'

'One with one arrow.'

'Then you are no hunter,' declared Ma-tsu.

'How many can you shoot with one arrow?' asked the hunter in his turn.

'The entire flock with one arrow.'

'They are living creatures, why should you destroy the whole flock at one shooting?'

'If you know that much, why don't you shoot yourself?'

'As to shooting myself, I do not know how to proceed.'

'This fellow,' exclaimed Ma-tsu, all of a sudden, 'has put a stop today to all his past ignorance and evil passions!'

Thereupon, Shih-kung, the hunter, broke his bow and arrows and became Ma-tsu's pupil.

When he became a zen master himself, he had a bow and arrows ready to shoot, with which his monks were threatened when they approached him with a question.

San-ping was once so treated. Shih-kung exclaimed, 'Look out for the arrow!'

Ping opened his chest and said, 'This is the arrow that kills; where is the one that resuscitates?'

Kung struck three times on the bow-string. Ping bowed. Kung said, 'I have been using one bow and two arrows for the past thirty years, and today I have succeeded in shooting down only a half of a wise man.'

Shih-kung broke his arrows and bow once more, and never used them again."

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In this story we find that paradoxes are used on a new level. They consist in the unexpected and sudden jumping over a number of logical conclusions, thus demonstrating the suddenness of spiritual understanding or sudden enlightenment. Thus paradoxes are not merely confronting the mind with baffling or miraculous situations, but with something that in the first moment seems to defeat logic, because it arrives at a result which leaps over several stages of gradual logic and, therefore, appears to us paradoxical. This is in conformity with the oldest buddhist teachings. The *Paticcasamuppada*, for instance, was not always taught with the usual twelve links, but we find that the Pāli texts very often leave out a number of links, in order to show that each link can be followed by any other link and that our gradual logic is merely a supporting device of our thinking process, but not a law of nature.

Another strange parallel, but this time to an older source, either through Jewish, Christian or Mohammedan tradition, is the story of Minapa, which apparently is borrowed from the biblical story of Jonah and the whale. Both men are swallowed by a big fish which later is caught by a fisherman who discovers, on opening the fish's stomach, the living victim. According to the buddhist story, the fish had gone to the bottom of the sea, where it hid below the palace of the Ruler of the Sea. In this way Minapa heard the secret teachings which one of the gods or bodhisattvas was giving to the Ruler of the Sea. When he was freed from the stomach of the fish, he jumped out and, remembering what he had heard, became a saint. What astonishes me in the rendering of this scene (see Figure 4), is the use of a style which not only completely differs from the classical Tibetan style, as we find it on thankas and frescoes, but that it uses bold foreshortenings in order to indicate the swift movement, and also typical Indian features, a characteristic which is found in most of the old stone engravings of this series. This shows that we have to do here with a very old tradition and that the stones must have been gathered long before they were fixed in the courtyard of a monastery, or overpainted by later generations. It would have been logical to dismiss the name of this Siddha as a later invention in order to arrive at the number eighty-four, which is certainly a conventional number, like our dozen or one hundred or one thousand. But the fact that this Siddha is well-known under his Indian name, namely as Matsiendranath and is closely connected with Goraksha, another well-known Indian saint, proves his historicity. Even nowadays, the caves in which this saint lived are well preserved and visited by many pilgrims (including the writer of this article.)

Yet, the miracles which were performed by many of the Siddhas are either symbols of spiritual attainment or summaries of their teachings, though sometimes these are given in longer or shorter dissertations. Many of the writings of the Siddhas have been lost, and only those which were preserved either in Apabramsa or in Tibetan translations have survived. They were the first who wrote in the popular language of their time, instead of Sanskrit which was understandable only to scholars and clergy. Thus they became the fathers of an indigenous literature which later developed into present-day Hindi and Bengali, etc. Their movement was, thus, of far-reaching importance, and many more of the Siddhas may one day be discovered in old Bengali literature. People like Anirvan, a saintly scholar of



KRISHNACHARYA

(Figure 7)

NAG-PO CHOS-PA

our days, about whom Lizelle Raimond, a well-known Swiss writer has written extensively, show that the teaching of the Siddhas is not yet extinct, and also Swami Muktananda refers to himself as a follower of the Siddhas. Buddhists and Hindus alike sing their praises. Though the stories contain all sorts of magic feats and miraculous properties or forces, acquired by assiduous meditation and dedication, yet each of them makes it clear that all the so-called Siddhis or supernatural accomplishments lose their value for those who have reached enlightenment. This is because a fully enlightened one has no more need to demonstrate his superiority over the laws of nature, because he has realized the necessity of these laws and

finds that his liberation does not consist in defeating but in understanding them. Nirvana is not eternal happiness or an escape from this world but, as Lobzang Latungpa points out, the complete understanding of Samsāra. This is demonstrated in many of the stories of the Siddhas, whose accomplishment consisted not in the display of miracles, but on the contrary in the overcoming of miracles and magic and in showing the greater achievement, namely that of ultimate liberation and enlightenment. The following story is typical. It is the story of Siddha Kadgapa, the "Sword Siddha" as he was later called (see Figure 5).

There was once a robber, who wanted to be the most powerful man. One day he met a yogi on the road, and as he had nothing that was worth robbing, he asked his advice, how he could acquire the invincible sword that would make him the mightiest man in the world. The yogi answered, "That is not difficult if you follow faithfully my advice. In the vicinity of Benares, there is a very famous stūpa, which you cannot miss. Go there, and circumambulate the sanctuary, which displays the image of Avalokiteshvara in a niche that opens in its middle. If you circumambulate this stūpa for three weeks, reciting the mantra of Avalokiteshvara and performing the Sādhanā (religious practices) which I will give you, with full devotion and unflinching concentration, without diverting your thoughts, — then at the end of the third week, a deadly black snake will emerge from the opening of the stūpa. It will devour you, unless you seize the snake immediately behind the head, before it has time to emerge completely from the opening. If you fail to do so the snake will swallow you. But if you have faithfully carried out your Sādhanā and my instructions, the snake will not harm you, and will transform itself into the invincible sword."

The robber thanked the yogi and did as he was told. He devoted himself heart and soul to the religious exercise, and when the snake finally emerged from the hollow of the stūpa, he seized it behind the head, and lo! — he held in his hand the invincible sword of wisdom. But he had no more interest in miraculous powers, because, in the meantime, he had become a saint, and as such he had no more use for an invincible sword.

A similar thing happened in the story of Mahipa (see Figure 6). He was by profession a wrestler and it was his ambition to become the strongest man in the world. He, therefore, asked a yogi what he could do to achieve his aim. The yogi said, "You must meditate on the infinity of space. Once you have succeeded and have become one with it, you will be invincible." The wrestler followed the yogi's advice to the letter and was so successful that his mind became as wide as space. But in this moment there was no longer anyone to fight. He had become as the whole universe, and there was nothing more to oppose him. He had become a saint and was forthwith known as the Siddha Mahipa.

But not everybody was led to liberation through miraculous powers or magical achievements; the story of Nagpochōpa (Figure 7) makes clear that acquisition of magic powers may also constitute a great danger insofar as they can divert us from our real aim. They are like blackberries which we pluck along the path, without

being diverted from our path. Nagpochöpa is generally depicted with honorific umbrellas descending from the sky, but riding on a witch. The umbrellas acknowledge his powers, the witch signifies that he is still fallible to temptation. So, for instance, it is said that one day he walked on the water, and suddenly it came to his mind: "Look here! I am able to walk on water! What a great achievement!" But at this moment he sank down into the water and would have drowned if his guru had not saved him at the last moment. When his guru was about to die he nevertheless gave him a chance to save his life by allowing his pupil to fly to the Himalaya in order to bring him some life-saving herb that only grew in high altitudes. Nagpochöpa immediately flew to the Himalaya, found the herb, and was on the return journey when he heard some crying and wailing, as if somebody was in deep distress. He was seized by compassion, forgetting the purpose of his flight and, descending to where the cries came from he gave away the precious medicine, which he had collected for his guru. Hardly had he done so than he realized that he had been deceived by a witch who had assumed human form to prevent him from saving his guru. By the time he went back to the Himalaya it was too late and the guru died before his return. The story demonstrates that compassion without wisdom is as disastrous as wisdom without compassion. Therefore Dölma or Tārā is shown with the eye of wisdom in her giving hands because giving without wisdom can lead to great unhappiness and not to the noble purpose as intended. We must give not only with an open heart, but with open eyes.

In this way the stories of the Siddhas contain valuable truths, and if we understand them properly we will not regard them as fairy tales of "sorcerers" but as a valuable contribution of Buddhist literature and iconography. These few examples may suffice to convince future historians and all those who see more in Buddhist literature than a mere subject for academic studies.

