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*The Threefold Refuge in the Theravāda Buddhist Tradition*, John Ross Carter, ed. Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1982, vi + 89 p.

*Buddhist Images of Human Perfection*, by Nathan Katz. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982. xix + 320 p., 100 Rs.

These two otherwise dissimilar books have two features in common: they are both about Theravāda Buddhism and both are concerned to rectify what the authors perceive as prevalent misinterpretations of their subject matter.

The first slim volume is comprised of essays by four different authors dealing with the traditional threefold refuge—the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Saṅgha—to which all Theravāda Buddhists turn. The significance of “going for refuge” for each item is analyzed. George Bond sees going to the Buddha for refuge as providing a center of devotion, a factor underemphasized by most Western scholars in favor of the rational and moral aspects of Theravāda—an overdue suggestion. So too this embodies the sense of the super-historical reality of Buddhas, who enter the world at appropriate intervals and are essential to human salvation. Hence “salvation in the Theravāda tradition turns out to be not as ruggedly individualistic as it has sometimes been portrayed” (p. 31). Nor is devotion to the Buddha to be viewed as a lower-level, merely popular Buddhism; it is a prime essential. Though Carter notes that “there is no need of a savior, as Buddhists continually remind one,” his view is not necessarily at odds with Bond’s. The Dhamma is also a gift of grace (my phrase) as is the Buddha, as the remainder of the sentence shows: “not because man is his own savior but because of the efficacy of the Dhamma when made the integral basis of one’s life” (p. 14). Indeed, the Dhamma is eternal in the heavens, so to speak, it is “the teacher even of the Buddha” (p. 34). Its embodiment in one’s life results in, is indeed inclusive of, Nibbāna itself. Carter uses commentarial materials almost exclusively to confirm solid traditional usages. Edmund Perry and Shanta Ratnayaka, using Pāli Canon materials, emphasize and clearly demonstrate that the primitive Buddhist saṅgha included laymen as well as monks. Layman also attained the higher states of the *Ariyan*, enlightened life; and lay life is as legitimate and efficacious amode of seeking arahantship as the monastic life. This is an important and valid point. But surely—as they limitedly acknowledge—it has been as much obscured in Theravāda Buddhism itself as by Western scholarship. Some monks, as Heinz Bechert has shown, are willing to say that *only* monks are true

Buddhists. And certainly the prevailing Burmese Buddhist tradition and practice is that only monks are able to seek Nibbāna (enlightenment) directly. Perhaps contemporary lay meditation is rectifying the balance (also the purpose of the authors?); but the tradition that the arahant *must* enter the saṅgha does persist. In any case, as a "refuge" the saṅgha embodies the Buddhist ideal and continually presents the Dhamma teaching.

The volume by Nathan Katz is a more ambitious venture, having as its purpose the restructuring of contemporary (Western) views of the Theravāda arahant (perfected, enlightened one) as the embodiment of human perfection, and the rectification of the presumed Mahāyāna slur upon the arahant ideal when compared to the bodhisattva.

What is the basic nature of arahantship? After a preliminary discussion of the formulae and symbols referring to the arahant in the Pāli Canon (*suttas*) the author analyzes the nature and meaning of arahantship in terms of meditational achievement, comparison with the Buddha, psychology, relation to society, and arahant philosophy. The analysis is thorough, perceptive, and well grounded in Pāli (and some Tibetan) texts, with knowledgeable references to English-translation Mahāyāna texts. The chapters will not be individually outlined, but discussion centered around a few main points.

The techniques of meditation are the major but not sole means by which an individual reaches arahant status; this is equivalent to Buddha-attainment *if the jhāna techniques are used as the Buddha did*. By then, the arahant, usually a monk, is perfected and completely freed from all saṃsāric bonds. But Katz would agree with Perry and Ratnayaka that the lay life is as good as the monk's for such achievement, since selfless detachment, however achieved, is the essential factor. "Meditation" seems to be always and exclusively identified here with the *jhānas*, those techniques inherited from Hindu Brahmanism. But the crucial and uniquely Buddhist ingredient here is the insight that the *jhānas* in themselves do not produce enlightenment. Indeed, they may be a snare and delusion if they are clung to and their psychic states prized for themselves. The method of insight (into the empty, suffering, delusory) quality of all things, including *jhānas* (peaceful abidings, trances), is the Buddhist essence. With all this I emphatically agree (cf. my *Theravāda Meditation: the Buddhist Transformation of Yoga*, chapter V.)

Still, I have difficulty with Professor Katz's interpretation of *vipassanā* as essentially analytical and intellectualistic, and quite separate from the *jhānas*. Certainly, *vipassanā* (insight) medita-

tion came to be practiced independently of the jhānic 8-stage progression—Buddhaghosa speaks somewhat disparagingly of the “bare insight workers”—but the classic use (implicitly that of the Buddha himself) seems to have made *vipassanā* an *integral part of the whole process*. After every jhānic trance experience up to the highest (neither perception nor non-perception) there is a *vipassanā* “review” of the just-experienced jhānic trance, essential for progression toward final Path attainment and enlightenment. And the very highest this-world *experience* of Nibbāna, *nirodha-samāpatti* (cessation of perception and consciousness)—curiously not mentioned by Katz at all—is possible only to those perfected in jhānic skills and vipassanic attainment, i.e. the *anāgamin* and arahant! (Likewise, *vipassanā* even by itself has a jhānic quality in its direct perception of Nibbāna.) Hence, *vipassanā* should be seen as classically integral to meditation, in creative tension with jhānic practice (cf. my *Theravāda Meditation*, chapter V).

The discussion of the Mahāyāna stereotype of the “inferior arahant-producing” (Hīnayāna) tradition is pertinently and interestingly discussed. In Katz’s reading of Tibetan and Mahāyāna literature (1) the inferior śrāvaka (mere disciple vehicle) does not include the Theravāda arahant at all, only those mired in clinging to jhānic states; (2) there are other Mahāyāna passages clearly indicating that the arahant is as fully enlightened as the bodhisattva; (3) even when some distinction is made between the two, the difference is one of degree, not kind of enlightenment. I do not question that these differing interpretations are found in the vast and varied Mahāyāna canon, but have difficulty with Katz’s interpretation of the *Lotus (Saddharmapuṇḍarīka) Sūtra*. When the “Hīnayāna” arahant Śāriputra (and others) exclaim: “Now we, O Lord, are disciples and shall proclaim supreme enlightenment everywhere. . . Now we have become Arahats” (p. 271), this seems to me to be a *consequence* of having heard the (Mahāyāna Eternal) Buddha give this new (Mahāyāna) discourse, *not* a confirmation of their previous arahantship.

I also have trouble with the portrayal here of the arahant as a socially active individual, *in the final analysis*. Yes, Spiro is too strong when he says that even moral action is inimical to nibbānic salvation (p. 169) in the monk; moral action is integral to nibbānic achievement. And the Supreme Arahant, the Buddha, was “socially active” in teaching after enlightenment. So too I agree with Katz’ point that teaching is part and parcel of the quality of arahantship. *But the quality of that teaching seems conduc-*

ive to social aloofness in the attainer of enlightenment; he is now free from all worldly constraints except teaching others by example and word about the emptiness of worldly activity and effort. Katz is noticeably provisional in language here as, for example: "... he [the monk] is virtuous (*sīlavā*), the virtue perhaps entailing positive action" (p. 167); the role of the virtuous monk as a field of merit, receiver of lay gifts, "entails a very active receiving" (p. 186); the emphasis on merit-producing action in Buddhism is more notable among "the devotees," i.e., lay disciples (p. 187). Certainly the Mahāyāna lay-saint, Vimalakīrti, superior to the heavenly bodhisattvas themselves, would scarcely be found to be a Theravāda arahant, even though, scripturally, properly motivated ethical actions "would no longer lead to continued rebirth" (p. 179) for *either* monk or layman.

A final, and I think important, point is to be raised about the arahant's "philosophy." Actually it is a philosophy of no philosophy, foreshadowed in the Buddha's reply to Mālunḅyāputta, who came asking for answers about the status of the saint after death and the finitude or infinitude of the universe; to him the Buddha replied in the famous poisoned-arrow analogy, which he concluded by saying that he taught only the pain and misery of life and the way to their cessation in Nibbāna. He was totally free from theories, but thoroughly conversant with human psychology. In Katz's interpretation there are no "innocent" questions that are not set in a motivational/existential context *and this is the only thing the Buddha (arahant) is interested in*, for "... the truth or falsity of any given religious statement is not to be determined by any external criteria of truth and falsity, such as a principle of verification, but by an existential analysis of the context or situation in which that language is expressed" (p. 232). All our intellectual constructs embody a hidden agenda of preferences, self-attachment. The only important ones are psychological/existential, not metaphysical. Buddhism is a religion of freedom from theory.

I, too, have elsewhere maintained that Buddhist ultimates are essentially existential/experiential, not ontological or metaphysical (cf. my "The Existential Nature of Buddhist Ultimates," *Philosophy East and West*, 33, 3, pp. 263-71). Yet I cannot blink two facts of Buddhist tradition away—neither can Professor Katz, though perhaps I misunderstand him. One fact is the presence in Buddhism of elaborate philosophies and cosmologies. There is much of this in the Pāli Canon. Professor Katz notes that the Buddha himself believed in his own magical powers, consequent upon his arahant attainments, by which, for exam-

ple, he wafted himself and his disciples through the air over a swollen river (pp.110–111). It was a world in which many super-humanly powerful gods appeared. But secondly, even in that seemingly innocent statement to Māluṅkyāputta, there are embedded, taken for granted, several all-important metaphysical presuppositions: all beings are endlessly reborn; their lives are shaped by their own voluntary deeds (karma); this chain of re-birth can be cut. *Indeed implicit in, necessary to, the achievement of arahant status is a particular kind of world and human constitution.* Could arahantship be achieved if this were not so, or in other terms and traditions, such as Muslim or Christian? That the Buddha's "no theories" approach is one of centering on the existential importance of the human situation rather than upon metaphysical theorizing I can agree; but that there should be a significant life-style, such as Buddhism is, without any metaphysical grounding or assumptions, I cannot accept.

The fact that such questions are raised—and many others—by Professor Katz's book attests to its value and importance in ongoing Buddhist studies.

Winston King

*The Word of the Buddha: the Tipitaka and its Interpretation in Theravāda Buddhism*, by George D. Bond. Colombo, Sri Lanka: M. D. Gunasena & Co., 1982. Pages xii + 221. Paperback, S.L.Rs. 56/50.

In accord with recent theoretical developments in religious studies, quite a few colleagues in Buddhist studies have been turning their attention to those modes of enquiry known as hermeneutics and semiology. This recent trend has not arisen out of an historical compulsion that whatever is current in the West must be found in ancient Buddhist scriptures. Such thinking is a relic of a well-forgotten past when Buddhism itself was on an ideological and neocolonial defensive. Rather, such research is being done in the firm conviction that the Buddhist traditions have genuine contributions to make towards an intellectual discussion that should not be confined to the West. In the context of this surge of scholarly activity, Professor George D. Bond's recent book, *The Word of the Buddha*, is a welcome and valuable contribution.