Conditioned Co-production and Supreme Enlightenment

Etienne Lamotte


London. © Gordon Fraser Gallery Ltd.
Conditioned Co-production and Supreme Enlightenment

ETIENNE LAMOTTE

The four Noble Truths (āryasatya) and the doctrine of Conditioned Co-production (pratityasamutpāda) are the keystones of the teaching of the Buddhas. Although closely linked, the two doctrines do not have the same history. To the unanimous agreement of the texts, the Noble Truths were 'seen' by Śākyamuni in Urubilvā, on the banks of the river Nairaṅjanā, under the Bodhi tree, about the year 531 B.C., during the full moon of the month of Viśākha (April-May), in the course of the famous Night of Enlightenment. A few weeks later, the Buddha went to Kāśi country, to Vāraṇāsi, in the Gazelle Park, the Rṣipatana: there it was that, addressing the five mendicants who were to become his disciples, he expounded the Noble Truths for the first time.

With regard to the doctrine of Conditioned Co-production, there is no lack of sources but they disagree as to the exact moment that it was discovered. The details are not without interest for they set an important doctrinal problem, the solution to which enables us the better to grasp the true significance of Supreme and Perfect Enlightenment (anuttarā samyaksambodhi').

The present article will deal with the following points:

1. The connections between the Pratityasamutpāda and the Āryasatyas.
2. The discovery of the Pratityasamutpāda during or after Sambodhi.
3. The discovery of the Pratityasamutpāda before Sambodhi.

Connections between the Pratityasamutpāda and the Āryasatyas

Their close relationship is a result of the definitions given to them in the canonical texts:

Definition of the Āryasatyas in Vinaya, I, p. 10, 26-38; Samyutta, V, pp. 421, 19 — 422, 2; Catusparisatsūtra, p. 448, 1-15. This, O monks, is the noble truth of suffering (duḥkha):¹ birth is suffering, old-age is suffering, disease is suffering, death is suffering, union with whatever one dislikes is suffering, separation from whatever one likes is suffering, not to obtain one's desire is suffering: in brief the five aggregates of grasping (upādānakāndha) are suffering.

This, O monks, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering: it is the thirst (trṣṇā) which engenders a new existence, accompanied by sensuality and covetousness, which finds satisfaction here and there, namely the thirst [for the objects] of desire, the thirst for existence, the thirst for non-existence.

This, O monks, is the noble truth of the extinction of suffering: it is the complete extinction of that thirst through the complete renunciation of desire, by rejecting it, by eliminating it, by freeing oneself from it, leaving it no place.
This, O monks, is the noble truth of the path leading to the extinction of suffering: it is the noble eightfold path, from right view to right concentration.

Definition of the twelve-linked (dvādasānga) Pratityasamutpāda, sometimes functioning in direct (anulomam) order, sometimes in inverse (pratilomam) order, and respectively provoking the arising (utpāda) and extinction (nirodha) of suffering. This is according to Majjhima, III, pp. 63, 26 – 64, 12; Catusparśasūtra, p. 439, 11-23. This being, that is; through the arising of this, that arises, namely: 1-2. Conditioned by ignorance (avidyā) are karmic formations (samskāra); 3. conditioned by karmic formations is consciousness (vijñāna); 4. conditioned by consciousness is name-and-form (nāmarūpa) [or the five psycho-physical aggregates (skandha) of existence]; 5. conditioned by name-and-form are the six [internal] bases of consciousness (sādāyatana), the [five physical organs and the mental organ]; 6. conditioned by the six bases is contact (sparśa) [sensory and mental]; 7. conditioned by contact is feeling (vedanā); 8. conditioned by feeling is thirst (trāna) or desire; 9. conditioned by thirst is grasping (upādāna) [both affective and effective]; 10. conditioned by grasping is [action creating] existence (bhava); 11. conditioned by existence is birth (jāti); 12. conditioned by birth is old-age-and-death (jarāmarana) and also sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair. Such is the origin (samudaya) of the whole mass of suffering (duḥkhasamudaya).

This not being, that is not; through the extinction of this, that is extinguished: 1. through the extinction of ignorance by the total annihilation of desire there results the extinction of karmic formations and so on for the other links of the Pratityasamutpāda. Such is the extinction (nīrodha) of the whole mass of suffering.

The Noble Truths and the Conditioned Co-production are practically interchangeable.

For the former, suffering is in short the five upādānaskandhas; and for the latter, the series of skandhas which develop in the course of existences is the Pratityasamutpāda (Kośa, III, p. 60).

Avidyā, which appears at the top of the Conditioned Co-production and which I have rendered by ‘ignorance’, is less an absence of knowledge than a false knowledge, just as in Sanskrit the word amitra does not just mean a ‘non-friend’ but an ‘enemy’ (Kośa, III, pp. 88-89). Avidyā is a tissue of per-versions (viparyāsa) consisting of the non-knowledge (ajñāna) of the four Noble Truths (Samyutta, II, p. 4; IV, p. 256; Majjhima, I, p. 54). Its arising is the departure point of the origin of suffering (duḥkhasamudaya) dealt with in the second Noble Truth; its extinction provokes, step by step, the extinction of suffering (duḥkhanirodha) which forms the object of the third Noble Truth.

This is why, in dealing with the four Āryasatyas, the Āṅguttara (I, pp. 176-177) reproduces, for the first and the fourth, the wording of the Sermon of Vārānasī, but defines the second by stating the Pratityasamutpāda in direct order, and the third by the Pratityasamutpāda in inverse order.2

Under such conditions, it is difficult to see how one could acquire knowledge of the four Noble Truths without discovering through so doing the law of Conditioned Co-production and vice-versa.

However, if the two doctrines inter-relate, they do not seem to have been discovered simultaneously. It was during the Night of Enlightenment at Bodh-Gayā that Śākyamuni attained the knowledge (jnāna) and vision (darsana) of the Noble Truths. With regard to the detection of the Con-
ditioned Co-production, date and place are less certain and, plentiful though it may be, the information which we can assemble on this subject is more and more contradictory. Already on several occasions Professor E. Waldschmidt, in richly documented articles, has drawn attention to this problem of chronology.³

3. During the middle watch (madhyame yāme) of the Night.

4. The seventh night after the Night of Enlightenment.

Discovery of the Pratityasamutpāda during or after Sambodhi

Some sources which are not included among the oldest propose the following dates:

1. The evening that preceded the Night of Enlightenment. 

2. During the middle watch (madhyame yāme) of the Night.

3. The last watch (paścime yāme) of the Night.

4. The seventh night after the Night of Enlightenment.

1. The evening that preceded the Night of Enlightenment.

**Hsiu hsing pên ch'i ch'ing,** T 184, ch. 2, p. 470 b 27 - 470 c 10. After his meeting with the grass-cutter Svastika (Sotthiya), the Bodhisattva sat in concentration, achieved the four dhūṈās, penetrated the thirty-seven bodhipakṣyas, then examined the twelve nidāṇas in direct and inverse order. Followed immediately by Māra's attack.

2. Having conquered the pūrvanivāsanusmṛtijnāna constituting the fourth Abhijnā or first Vidyā, the Bodhisattva examined the Pratityasamutpāda in direct and inverse order.

3. The Bodhisattva spent the third watch in discovering the Pratityasamutpāda in direct and inverse order; then, at the beginning of the fourth, reached the stage of omniscience.

**Kuo chü hsien tsaiyin kuo ching,** T 189, ch. 3, p. 642 b 10. Immediately after the discovery of the Pratityasamutpāda, the Bodhisattva destroyed ignorance (avidyā), obtained the brilliance of wisdom (prajñāloka) and realized the knowledge of all aspects (sarvākārajñāna).

3. During the middle watch (madhyame yāme) of the Night.

**Mahāvastu,** II, p. 285, 7-18. The Bodhisattva achieved supreme and perfect enlightenment, namely (sayyathidam) the four Noble Truths, the knowledge of the complete destruction of the impurities (āsrava), the Pratityasamutpāda in direct and inverse order, and the fourfold dharmaddāna.

**Lalitavistara,** pp. 346, 1 – 348, 15. Here the examination of the Noble Truths. The Bodhisattva had acquired the knowledge and vision of the Pratityasamutpāda, his mind was freed from impurities and he obtained Deliverance (vimukti). Seven days later, as will be said further on, the Bodhisattva having become Buddha, devoted yet another night to meditating on the Pratityasamutpāda.

**Buddhacarita of Asvaghosa** (ed. and tr. Johnson), XIV, v. 49-86. The Bodhisattva spent the third watch in discovering the Pratityasamutpāda in direct and inverse order; then, at the beginning of the fourth, reached the stage of omniscience.

**Vinaya**, I, pp. 1-2. Same text as the above with the difference that in each of the three watches of the night the Buddha examined the Pratityasamutpāda in entirety, both in direct and inverse order (anulomapatilomam).
down cross-legged, holding his body straight and fixing his attention in front of him. He immediately dismissed the five nīvanās, eliminated the pāpakusaladharmas and finally reached the fourth dhyanā where he remained. He penetrated the thirty-seven bodhipakṣyas and, with that purified thought, the three Vidyās became clear to him, namely the pūrvanivāsavidyā, the paracittavidyā and the āsravakāyavidyā, as it is said in the Ying pên ch'i ching⁴ (Pūrvanimmittanidāna, T 185, ch. 2, p. 478 a 3-9).

Probably after a lacuna, the same Vinaya continues: Then, he got up and went to the village of Urubilvā. He had just been enlightened (prathamābhisambuddha). He sat at the foot of the tree and during the first watch he contemplated the twelve niñānas in inverse and direct order.

Fo pên hsing chi ching, T 190, ch. 31, p. 799 b 22 – 799 c 17. As we saw above, it was during the third watch of the Night of Enlightenment that Śākyamuni, still a Bodhisattva, discovered the Pratityasamutpāda. In the present passage it is as a Buddha that he examines it again: Then the Blessed One, who had just been enlightened (prathamābhisambuddha) under the Bodhi tree, remained at the foot of the tree for seven days and nights, sitting cross-legged and unmoving, tasting the happiness of Deliverance (vimuktisukhapratisamvedin). The seven days having passed, the Blessed One, attentive and reflective, withdrew from concentration (samādhi) and, seated on the lion-throne (simhāsana), passed the first watch of the night in meditating on the Pratityasamutpāda in direct order, the middle watch on the Pratityasamutpāda in inverse order, and the last watch in both orders together.

5. After the Buddha’s visit to the nāga-king Mucalinda.

Catusparisatsūtra, pp. 100-104, or pp. 439, 7 – 440, 20. The Blessed One, having resided according to his convenience in the dwelling of the nāga-king Mucalinda, went to the spot of enlightenment (bodhimanda). He himself spread a handful of grass there and sat cross-legged, holding his body straight and fixing his attention in front of him. He devoted seven days in a single sitting to considering the twelve-linked Pratityasamutpāda in direct and inverse order.

Vinaya of the Mülasarvāstivādins, T 1450, ch. 5, p. 126 a 15-23. Then the Blessed One returned from the bank of the pool to the Bodhi tree. On a handful of grass, holding his body straight and legs crossed, he sat according to the rules and considered the sequence of the dvādaśāṅga pratityasamutpāda in direct and inverse order.

Chung hsü mo ho ti ching, T 191, ch. 7, p. 952 b 21 – 952 c 3. Same text as above with the specification that the Buddha’s meditation lasted for seven days.

T'ai tszu jui ying pên ch'i ching, T 185, ch. 2, p. 479 c 17-19. After the conversion of the nāga Mucalinda, the Buddha recalled his former vow to save beings; he reflected on the origin of Samsāra, arising from the dvādaśāṅga pratityasamutpāda. A little later, he pointed out to the god Brahmā who had invited him to expound the Law how rare were those who could understand this Conditioned Co-production and he formulated the latter in unusual terms (cf. p. 480 b 14-23).

An examination of the sources which have just preceded shows that, unlike the four Noble Truths, the Conditioned Co-production is not exclusively accountable to the last watch of the Abhisambodhana, but that its discovery occurred somewhere about this great event. If, on the doctrinal level, the two doctrines inter-relate, they nevertheless have different histories. But there is more. As attested by this text Śākyamuni had some knowledge of the Pratityasamutpāda well before his enlightenment and, most probably, in his previous existences.

Discovery of the Pratityasamutpāda before Sambodhi

According to the Indian viewpoint which is also that of the Buddhas, beings undergo rebirth for all eternity: ‘Incalkulable is the beginning of this
faring on \((anamataggāyaṁ saṁsāro)\) — or, in the terms of the corresponding Sanskrit expression, is endless and beginningless \((anavarāgra)\) — impossible to discover any beginning \((pubbakoṭi)\) from which beings, bound to ignorance, fettered by ignorance, wander aimlessly from life to life’ \((Samyutta, II, pp. 178-190; Divyāvadāna, p. 197, 15-18; Prasannapadā, p. 218, 3-5)\).

Sākyamuni was no exception to the rule. In the course of his previous lives, under the most varied forms and conditions, he had the opportunity to hear, if only in the form of a single stanza, then to examine in his own heart several doctrines which he was to make his own after his accession to Sambodhi.

Once he had become a Buddha he pointed out a certain number of them by introducing them into stereotyped statements: 

\[\text{Pubbeva me bhikkhave sam Bodhā anabhīsambuddhassa bodhisattass 'eva sato etad ahosi} - '\text{Before my perfect enlightenment, O monks, when I was still an imperfectly enlightened bodhisattva, I had the following thought...'}\]; see for example Majjhima, I, pp. 17, 114, 163; Samyutta, II, pp. 10, 104; III, p. 27; IV, pp. 6, 97, 233; V, p. 263; Àṅguttara, I, p. 258; III, p. 240.

Some people like to believe that by expressing himself in this way Sākyamuni was referring to the first part of his last life, while he was still only a bodhisattva: this is to forget that in his previous existences he was the king Surūpa who gave as feed to a Yakṣa his son, wife and own body so as to hear the stanza \textit{priyebhyo jāyate sokaḥ} (Avadānasataka, I, pp. 187-192), the king Dharmagavesin who threw himself into a blazing fire so as to be told the stanza \textit{dharmani caret sucaritam} (ibid., I, pp. 213-222), the young brahman who flung himself from the top of a tree so as to learn from the lips of an ogre the second half of the stanza \textit{anityā bata saṁskārāḥ} summarizing the Buddhist tenet \((\text{Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra}, \text{T 374, ch. 14, pp. 449-451; T 375, ch. 13, pp. 691-693})\). The vast Buddhist literature of the Jātakas and Avadānas is inexhaustible concerning the superhuman sacrifices agreed to by the future Buddha in the course of his previous lives so as to obtain just a tiny part of the Law which later he was destined to discover and expound.

Moreover Guṇabhadra, who translated the \textit{Samyuktāgama} into Chinese, was in no doubt about it for he renders the Sanskrit expression \textit{pūrvaṁ me ‘nuttaraṁ samyaksambodhim anabhīsambuddhasya} by a clearer turn of phrase: \textit{‘I recall a previous existence (su-ming) when still not being perfectly enlightened, etc...’} \((\text{T 99, ch. 12, p. 80 b 25-26})\).

It was indeed in the course of a previous existence that the bodhisattva Śākyamuni discovered the old path already followed by the Buddhas who had preceded him in time \((\text{purāṇaṁ maggam pubbakehi sammāsambuddhehi anuyātam})\) and formulated the doctrine of the direct and inverse Pratityaśa-mutpāda by borrowing so as to define it, formulae identical to those he was to use later after his Sambodhi. A decisive text in this respect is the famous \textit{Nagaropamasūtra}, ‘Sūtra of the comparison of the town’, of undoubted
ESSAY BY ETIENNE LAMOTTE

antiquity and authenticity if we take into account the perfect agreement between the Southern tradition (Samyuttanikāya, II, pp. 104-107) and that of the North (Samyuktāgama, T 99, ch. 12, pp. 80 b 24 – 81 a 8; Nidānasamñyukta, ed. Ch. Tripāṭhi, pp. 94-106).

But, some might say, if Sākyamuni had already heard and formulated the law of Conditioned Co-production well before his Sambodhi, he was enlightened in advance. What new could the famous Night at Bodh-Gayā have brought him?

The objection is not valid and the answer is simple: Sambodhi had conferred on his previous knowledges a clarity and above all a new efficacity which assured him of Supreme Deliverance (anuttarā vimukti) and carried his qualities and attributes to the highest summit of accomplishment (sampad).

However, the subject is complex and, to see it clearly, we must allow ourselves to be guided blindly by the canonical sources which have dealt with it. There is no lack of these.

Sambodhi and its conquests

The canonical texts which deal ex-professo with the Enlightenment can be classified into two groups: the writings on the Abhisambodhana itself, and the explanations supplied by the Sermon at Vārānasī on the discovery of the Noble Truths with their threefold turning and twelve aspects. In these passages, the Buddha expresses himself in the first person ('Ich Bericht') and, in the case of the oldest sources, makes no mention of the Pratītyasamutpāda.

1. Among the accounts devoted to the Abhisambodhana, which occurred in the third watch of the Night at Bodh-Gayā, the following texts can be noted: Majjhima, I, p. 23, 11-25; p. 117; p. 249, 4-18; Vinaya, III, p. 5, 20-35; Aṅguttara, II, p. 211, 10-22; IV, pp. 178, 25-179, 8; Madhyama, T 26, ch. 40, p. 680 a 26-680 b 4; Ekottara, T 125, ch. 23, p. 666 c 14-19.

My mind being thus concentrated, purified, cleansed, spotless, purged of the minor defilements, supple, tractable, stable, come to immovable, I directed it towards the knowledge of the destruction of the impurities (āsavānaṁ khayaṁāna). I realised in accordance with reality: 'This is suffering (dukkha); this is the origin (samudaya) of suffering; this is the extinction (nirodha) of suffering; this is the path leading to the extinction of suffering (dukkha-nirodhabhāmarti patipadā)'.

I realised in accordance with reality: 'These are the impurities (āsava); this is the origin of the impurities; this is the destruction of the impurities; this is the path leading to the destruction of the impurities.'

While I was so knowing (jānato), while I was so seeing (passūto), my mind was delivered from the impurity of desire (kāmāsava), from the impurity of existence (bhavāsava) and from the impurity of ignorance (avijjāsava).

Being delivered, I had the knowledge (nāṇa) that I was delivered.

I realised: 'Birth is exhausted, the religious life has been practised; what had to be done has been done; now there will be for me no other existence than the present one.'
Festschrift for Walpolā Rahula

Mahāvastu, II, p. 285, 2-3, 18-21: Through a wisdom associated with a single moment of thought, I acquired supreme and perfect enlightenment (ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktyā prajñāyā anuttaram samyaksambodhim abhisambuddhe)...

All formations [arising from causes] are impermanent (sarvasaṃskārā anityā), all formations are painful (sarvasaṃskārā duhkha), all things are Not-self (sarvadhamma anātmanāḥ); this is what is calm, excellent, in accordance with experience, devoid of error, namely the rejection of all the substrata of existence (sarvopadhipratinihsarga), the appeasing of all formations (sarasamskārasamatha), the dissolution of things (dharmaṃ paccheda), the destruction of thirst (trṣṇāksaya), the suppression of desire (virāga), cessation (nirvāṇa), Lalitavistara, p. 350, 13-14: When the Buddha had reached supreme and perfect enlightenment through a wisdom associated with a single moment of thought (ekacittakṣaṇasamāyuktyā prajñāyā), the three knowledges (traividyā) were acquired.

2. In his Sermon at Vārānasi, after or before the definition of the four Noble Truths, the Buddha explained how and in what order he had penetrated their three turnings (parivarta) and twelve aspects (ākāra). Here again, he was manifestly referring to the Night of Enlightenment: Pāli Vinaya, I, p. 11, 1-32; Vinaya of the Mahīśasakas, T 1421, ch. 15, p. 104 c 7-17; Vinaya of the Dharmaguptakas, T 1428, ch. 32, p. 788 a 27-788 b 23; Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādins, T 1450, ch. 6, pp. 127 c 7-128 a 8; Catuspariṣatsūtra, pp. 142-152 (or revised text, pp. 445, 19-446, 30); Mahāvastu, III, pp. 332, 13-333, 17; Lalitavistara, pp. 417, 15-418, 21.

Among these sources there are certain divergencies in detail which Professor Waldschmidt has pointed out in his edition of the Catuspariṣatsūtra, pp. 140-152, in the notes. I will refer here to the text of this sūtra.

The Buddha explained to the group of five disciples how he penetrated, in Bodh-Gayā, the four Noble Truths (āryasatya) consisting of three turnings (parivarta) and twelve aspects (ākāra) at the rate of four aspects for each of the three turnings.

First turning — 1. This is suffering (idam duhkham); 2. this is the origin of suffering (ayam duhkhasamudayah); 3. this is the extinction of suffering (ayam duhkhaniruddhah); 4. this is the path leading to the extinction of suffering (ayam duhkhaniruddhagāmini pratipat).

Second turning — 5. Suffering should be perfectly known (parijnātavya); 6. its origin should be destroyed (prahātavya); 7. its destruction should be realized (sāksātkarita); 8. the path leading to its destruction should be practised (bhāvyātita).

Third turning — 9. Suffering is perfectly known (parijnāta); 10. its origin is destroyed (prahita); 11. its destruction is realized (sāksātka); 12. the path leading to its destruction has been practised (bhāvita).

To each of these twelve aspects is applied, like the refrain of a song, the following formula: Iti me bhikkhave pūrvam anānusūrate su dharmesu yo niyo manasikurvata caksuṣu udapādi jñānaṃ vidyā buddhir udapādi, ‘While I was reflecting correctly on these things not heard before, the eye arose, and also knowledge, learning, intelligence.’

The Buddha ended by saying: Ever since, O monks, regarding the four Noble Truths, there arose in me the eye with its three turnings and twelve aspects (triparivartaṃ dvādaśaṃ caksuṣu), and also knowledge, learning, intelligence, then I was liberated, freed, rid and delivered from this world (lokā) with its gods, its Māra and its Brahmas, with these people with their monks and brahmans; I installed myself firmly in the state of mind devoid of perversion (viparyāśāpateṇa cetasa bahulaṃ vyahāraṃ) and since then, O monks, I realised I had attained supreme and perfect enlightenment.

Mahāvastu, III, p. 333, 16-17: Knowledge came to me (jñānaṃ ca me udapāsi), and I realised the unshakeable deliverance-of-mind and deliverance-through-wisdom (akopyā ca me cetovimuktiḥ prajñāvimuktiḥ sākṣīkṛtā).
I realised the unshakeable deliverance-of-mind and deliverance-through-wisdom (akopyä ca me cetovimuktih prajñävimuktis ca sāksātikṛtā) . . .; knowledge and vision came to me (jñānadarśanam me udapādi).

These sources are focused on the 'deliverance' (vimukti) aspect of Sambodhi and are silent on the preparatory path which leads to it, as well as on the perfecting of the Buddha attributes which are its result. This fact leads us to deal briefly with the following points:

1. The preparatory path to Sambodhi.
2. Sambodhi as Deliverance.
3. The completion of the Buddha attributes.

1. The preparatory path to Sambodhi

Sambodhi is the culminating point of a long intellectual search. We have seen in the preceding pages that during the course of his previous existences the future Buddha had already formulated the doctrine of the Pratityasamutpāda. Before being reborn here and while still in the Tuṣita heaven, he possessed, according to the Lalitavistara, p. 9, 3-5, the pointed canine teeth and nails of the four Noble Truths (caturāryasatyasutikṣanakhadāmstrā) and a body gradually perfected by the discovery of the twelve-linked Conditioned Co-production (dvādaśaṅgapratityasamutpādānubodhānupūrva-samudgatakāya).

Having descended from the Tuṣita heaven, the Bodhisattva took on birth in Kapilavastu in the family of the king Śuddhodana so as to live his final existence there. His first meditation in the 'labourers' village', his four excursions to Kapilavastu, his six years of austerities were a direct preparation for his enlightenment. He was perfectly endowed with merit (punya) and knowledge (jñāna) when, at the age of thirty-five, he sat at the foot of the Bodhi tree. Having entered the fourth Dhyāna, he 'directed his thought' (cittam abhinirnāmayati) towards the Abhijñās and 'reflected correctly on the truths not yet heard in his time'. He knew in fact, as he was to declare later (Samyutta, I, p. 105), that correct reflection (yoniśo manasikāra), combined with correct effort (yoniśo samyakpradhāna), is the indispensable condition for the obtaining of supreme deliverance (anuttarā vimukti).

The Bodhisattva thus reached the end of a long intellectual search untingly and systematically pursued from time immemorial.

We do indeed mean an intellectual search for Bodhi is not an intuition which, by definition, has no recourse to reasoning. It has nothing in common with an irrational gnosis consisting of the perception of a mysterious Absolute simultaneously transcendant to and immanent in beings and things, such as the Brahman-Ātman of the Upaniṣads and the Vedānta. Bodhi is the clear and lucid vision of the law of causes and effects presiding
over the formation and evolution of the triple world, the knowledge of the general characteristics — impermanence, suffering and non-substantiality — of all things produced by causes with, in addition, the belief in an undefinable Nirvāṇa.

The discovery of these empirical realities is neither sudden nor fortuitous. It results from a long and patient quest pursued throughout the Bodhisattva’s career which, for Śākyamuni, was spread over three incalculable periods (asamkhyaeyakalpa) followed by a further ninety-one kalpas. In fact, unlike the Chinese ‘predisposed to grasp the truth by a direct and synthetic intuition’ (translated from P. Demieville), the Indian Buddhists made themselves for centuries the protagonists of a gradualist concept of deliverance. By so doing, they translated the profound conviction of their founder who was always repeating: ‘Just as the great ocean dips gradually, ebbs gradually, slopes gradually and not suddenly like a precipice, so in my doctrine and my discipline, the access to perfect knowledge (aṇāpaṭivedha) is achieved by a gradual practice (anupubbakikrīya), a gradual action (anupubbakiriyā), a gradual way (anupubbapatipadā) and not directly (na āyatakena).’ (Vin., II, p. 238; Aṅguttara, IV, pp. 200-201; Udana, p. 54; Madhyama, T 26, ch. 8, p. 476 b 22-26). Or again: ‘I deny that at the first attempt (ādiken īva) one may gain access to perfect knowledge; on the contrary, it is through a gradual practice, a gradual action, a gradual way that one gains access to perfect knowledge’ (Majjhima, I pp. 479-480; Madhyama, T 26, ch. 51, p. 752 a 27-29). If by ‘Awakening’ is meant a withdrawal from sleep, Bodhi is not an Awakening, contrary to a translation which is very widespread these days. In fact the Bodhisattva prepared for it by insatiable activity throughout the length of his career.

2. Saṁbodhi as Deliverance

The Buddhist ideal is to escape from the painful world of Samsāra and attain deliverance (vimukti). All the early accounts devoted to the Night of Enlightenment are focused on this essential goal to the point of neglecting its secondary aspects.

When Śākyamuni sat under the Bodhi tree, he was close to this goal but had not yet reached it: he was an ordinary man, a worldling (prthagjana). By means of the current procedures of study, reflection and recollection, he had eliminated a considerable amount of ignorance and perverted views, but had not reached the pure vision of the Noble Truths; he had eradicated the passions (klesa) which, in the past, had kept him tied to the world of desire (kāmadhātu), to the four spheres of subtle form (rūpadhātu) and the three lower levels of the formless world (ārūpyadhātu), but he had not broken the fetters (saṁyojana) which still chained him to the highest level of the formless world known by the name of the Summit of existence (bhavāgra).

In a single sitting, during the last watch of the night, he found the pure
vision of the truths, destroyed every passion and became Buddha. Every moment of that memorable watch deserves attention.

A. What is the pure vision of the truths? It is the wisdom devoid of impurities (prajñā anāsravā), the only one that is truly liberating, that interrupts the round of existence and puts a final stop to suffering.

There are three kinds of Prajñā (Dīgha, III, p. 219; Vibhaṅga, pp. 324-325): (i) Prajñā arising from the teaching (ṣrutamayi), founded on confidence in the authorized word of a master; (ii) Prajñā based on reflection (cintāmayi); (iii) Prajñā born of meditation (bhāvanāmayi), going straight to the thing, independent of words and cogitations.

However admirable they may be, these three wisdoms generally remain blemished by ignorance and delusion. There exists, however, a Prajñā arising from meditation (bhāvanāmayi) which constitutes the supreme right view (samyagdrsti). The Buddha defined it in the following terms (Majjhima, III, p. 72): 'I assert, O monks, that there are two right views. There is a right but impure (sāsavā) view, having only meritorious value (puññabhāgiyā) and only bearing fruit in this world (upadhivepakkā); there is a right view, noble (ariyā), pure (anāsavā), transcendental (lokuttarā) and linked to the Path (magganā). The latter view belongs to the noble mind (ariyacitta), the purified mind (anāsavacitta), conjoined to the noble Path (ariyamagga samangi) and cultivating the noble Path (ariyamaggam bhāvayan): this is wisdom (paññā), the faculty of wisdom (pannindriya), the power of wisdom (paññābala), the limb of enlightenment consisting in clarifying things (dhammavicayasambojjaṅga).

Since they only culminate in partial liberation, the other Prajñās are left stranded; only Prajñā anāsravā brings about total and definitive Vimukti. As we saw above, the Buddha who won it at Bodh-Gayā also designated it by the following names: eye (caksus), knowledge (jnāna), learning (vidyā), intelligence (buddhi).

In fact, explains the Kosavyākhyā, pp. 580-581, the Prajñā anāsravā is called caksus because its object is perceived directly (pratyakṣārthatvāt) and so as to exclude any knowledge by induction (ānumānākajñāna), jñāna because it is devoid of doubt (niḥsaṃsāyatvāt) and so as to exclude any subjective knowledge (ādhimoksikajñāna), vidyā because its object is real (bhūtārthatvāt) and so as to exclude any capricious knowledge (ābhimānākajñāna), buddhi because etymologically buddhi means pure thought (viśuddhā dhi) and so as to exclude any impure knowledge (sāsravajñāna).

The Prajñā anāsravā is the antidote (pratipakṣa) to the impurities (āsrava): ‘Whoever, through its light, knows and sees the four Noble Truths is assured of the destruction of the impurities (āsravānāṃ kṣaya)’ (Saṃyutta, V, p. 434). The āsravas are the blind and tenacious outflows which vitiate the triple world, from the Summit of existence (bhavāgra) to the Avīci hell. The early sūtras (Majjhima, I, p. 6; Saṃyutta, IV, p. 256, etc.) distinguish three kinds of them: 1-2. the kāma- and bhavāsravas, fetters
binding beings respectively to the world of desire and to the other higher worlds; 3. the avidyāsravas, the ignorances which throw man into confusion regarding the Truths. As long as the least of these āsravas persists, painful Samsāra will pursue its course.

B. The Bodhisattva required centuries to prepare for Bodhi; conversely, it was, if not instantaneously, at least very quickly that he reached, that Night in Bodh-Gayā, the perfect and definite comprehension (abhisamaya) of the Noble Truths. He saw them, he reacted to them and knew that his effort was at an end. In scholastic terms, he trod at great speed a threefold path (Kośa, VI, p. 247): 1. a path of vision (darśanamārga): This is suffering, its origin, its extinction and the path of extinction. 2. a path of mental exercise (bhāvanāmārga): Suffering must be known, its origin destroyed, its destruction realized, the path of its destruction practised. 3. the path of him who has no more to practise (aśaikṣamārga): Suffering is known, its origin destroyed, its destruction realized, the path of its destruction practised.

In the path of vision, the holy one is occupied in knowing what he did not know; in the path of mental exercise, he is knowledgeable, but in order to destroy the passions which remain for him, he knows again and on several occasions the truths which he already knows; in the path of the Aśaikṣa, he becomes aware that he knows (Kośa, II, p. 117).

Was the pure comprehension of the Truths which became manifest during the Night of Enlightenment instantaneous, single (eka) or gradual? The question preoccupied the masters and the schools were divided.10

The Theravādins believe that it was instantaneous (Kathāvatthu, pp. 212-220) and, as we saw above, the Mahāvastu (II, p. 285, 2-3) and the Lalitavistara (p. 350, 13-14) assert directly that the Buddha attained supreme and perfect enlightenment ‘through a wisdom associated to a single moment of thought.’ What is more, as the Buddha declared, whoever sees suffering sees [virtually and by that very fact] its origin, its extinction and the path to its extinction (Samyutta, V, p. 437), and as soon as the vision of the caducity of things appeared, the basic fetters (samyojana) — false view of the personality, doubt, belief in the efficacity of rules and rituals — disappeared at last (Kathāvatthu, pp. 109, 220).

In contrast, the Sarvāstivādins together with other schools are of the opinion that the penetration of the Truths is and can only be gradual (amupūrva). In support of their thesis they quote three sūtras from the Samyukta, illustrated by the examples of the storied mansion (kūṭāgāra), the four-flighted stairway (catuskadevara sopāna) and the four-runged ladder (catuspadikā niṣreni): cf. Samyukta, T 99, ch. 16, p. 113 a-b; Samyutta, V, p. 452; Kośa, VI, pp. 188-189; Kośavyākhyā, pp. 543-544. For them, Śākyamuni required thirty-four thought-moments to reach enlightenment and deliverance (Vibhāṣā, T 1545, ch. 153, p. 780 a 27; ch, 182, p. 913 c 21-22; Kośa, II, pp. 205-206; VI, p. 177), namely sixteen moments — from duḥkhe dharmaṇānakṣānti to mārge ‘nvayajñāna — to penetrate the four
Truths, then eighteen moments to destroy the nine categories of the passions which still tied him to the Bhavägra, by applying to each of them a process of destruction (prahänamärga) and a process of liberation (vimuktimärga).\textsuperscript{11}

However it may be, Śākyamuni’s final effort was crowned with success in one watch of the night.

According to the \textit{Mahävastu}, II, p. 285, 18-19, the penetration of the Truths brought in its wake the knowledge of the three general characteristics (sämänyalaksäna) of things: \textit{Sarvasaṃskärä anityäḥ, sarvasaṃskärä duḥ-khäḥ, sarvadharma anätmänäḥ}, a formula which we can freely translate in the following way: ‘All dharmas arising from causes are impermanent, all dharmas arising from causes are painful, all dharmas, whether or not they arise from causes, are impersonal.’ Combined with the asseveration of Nirvâṇa which is the supreme Calming (śänta), these three characteristics comprise the essence of the Buddhist doctrine and are rightly called the seals (mudrä) or summaries (uddesa) of the Law.

C. When Śākyamuni had, through the Prajñä anäsravä, penetrated the four Noble Truths, ‘his mind was freed from the three Äsravas: impurity of desire, impurity of existence and impurity of ignorance’, and he broke his last links with the triple world of suffering: in a word, he obtained Vimukti. The texts specify that this is a matter of a twofold deliverance: a \textit{cetovimukti} because his mind was freed from the passions and perversions; a \textit{prajñävimukti} because that deliverance originated in pure Prajñä. Besides, this Vimukti is unshakeable (akopyä) for the holy one cannot slip from it.

D. It is essential that the holy one become aware of this Vimukti, to the point that, for the \textit{Kosa}, VI, p. 282, Bodhi amounts to a twofold knowledge, a knowledge that the impurities are destroyed (äsravakṣayajñäna), a knowledge that they will not arise again (anutpädajñäna). By means of the former he knows in truth that the task is completed, by means of the latter that it is no longer to be completed. This is why the holy one, having reached the end, solemnly proclaims: \textit{Kṣīṇä mejätih}, etc.

Bodhi was to leave intact the five psycho-physical aggregates (skandha) of existence (rūpa, vedanä, saṃjñä, saṃskära, vijnäna) which the future Buddha assumed during his last rebirth, and these were to continue to be reproduced for forty-five years until his Parinirvänä. But, simultaneously with this, Bodhi develops a series of five pure aggregates called dharmaskandhas, lokottaraskandhas, anäsravaskandhas, and which develop outside of time: these are morality (śīla), concentration (samädhi), wisdom (prajñä), deliverance (vimukti), the knowledge and vision of deliverance (vimukti-jñänadarśana): see \textit{Samyutta}, I, pp. 99-100; V, p. 162; \textit{Aṅguttara}, III, pp. 134, 271, etc.

It is in these transcendental \textit{skandhas} and in them alone that Buddhists take their refuge in the Buddha (Vibhäsä, T 1545, ch. 34, pp. 176 c 29 – 177 c 24; \textit{Koša}, IV, pp. 76-80).

E. This conscious deliverance constitutes the very essence of Bodhi, and it is quite rightly that, in their accounts of the enlightenment, the ancient
sources concentrated their attention almost exclusively on it. There are, and that goes without saying, notable differences between the Bodhis of the holy ones (arhats or aśaikṣas) depending on whether a Śrāvaka, a Pratyeka-buddha or a Buddha is concerned, but with regard to conscious Vimukti, all these Bodhis are the same. The Buddha confirmed this several times (Aṅguttara, III, p. 34; Majjhima, II, p. 129; Sāmyutta, V, p. 410): as long as one is freed from the āsravas and has attained holiness (arhattva), I assert that there is, between deliverance and deliverance, not the slightest difference (ettha kho pan' esāham na kiṃci nānakaraṇam vaddāmi yad idam vimuttiyā vimuttim).

If the Buddha’s supreme deliverance (anuttarā vimukti) seems so complicated to us, it is because he must have arrived though his own powers at the pure vision of the Truths. For the disciples who benefited from his teaching, success was much easier: from the first weeks of Śākyamuni’s preaching, the Community counted no less than sixty Arhats among its members, not including the Buddha himself (Catusparīṣad, p. 212; Vin. of the Mūlasarv., T 1450, ch. 6, p. 130 a 17).

The formulae describing their accession to holiness are contained in a few lines; the simplest and most frequent is as follows: ‘While this expounding of the Law was being uttered, the mind of whomever was, through detachment [from existence], freed of impurities (anūpādāyāsraabhyaś cittaṃ vimuktam).’

Here the teaching of the Buddha plays the main role, but the inner dispositions of the disciples are not to be neglected for all that. Thus, during the Sermon at Vāraṇasi, Ājñātakaundaṇiya became an Arhat some time before his four companions, probably because his good roots (kusalamūla) were riper than theirs.

3. The completion of the Buddha attributes

In reading the early narrations devoted to the Enlightenment, we cannot escape the impression that the first disciples placed more emphasis on Deliverance and neglected the attributes of their Teacher. By so doing, they were conforming to the instructions left by the latter. ‘Just as the ocean has only one taste, the taste of salt, so my doctrine and my discipline have only one taste, that of Vimukti’ (Vinaya, II, p. 239; Aṅguttara, IV, p. 203; Udāna, p. 56). Conversely, the Buddha did nothing to draw attention to his person: ‘As long as the body of the Tathāgata subsists, so long will gods and men see him, but when his body is broken and his life departed, gods and men will no longer see him” (Dīgha, I, p. 46). ‘Just as the flame reached by a breath of wind goes towards stilling (atthaṃ paleti) and disappears from sight, so the Sage, casting off name and body (nāmakāya) enters stilling and disappears from sight. . . . Him who has attained stilling, no measure can measure; to speak of him, there are no words; what the mind might con-
ceive vanishes; every path is precluded to language’ (Suttanipāta, v. 1074-1076).

It might perhaps be over-daring to suggest that, in the history of Buddhist speculation, soteriology preceded buddhology. In any case, the Vimukti won by the Lord on the night of his enlightenment had its impact on the Buddha attributes.

When the Buddha, recently enlightened, set out for Vārāṇasī, he met the ājīvika Upaga (Upaka) on the way and announced to him: ‘For me there is no master, none is like me; I am in the world the only Saṃbuddha; I have obtained perfect and supreme enlightenment. I have overcome everything; I know everything (sarvavid); I am not defiled by anything at all; I have abandoned everything and am liberated from fear; having taught myself, to whom could I point as teacher? Unequalled and unparalleled, by proclaiming myself, I have attained Bodhi. I am the Tathāgata, the instructor of gods and men, omniscient (sarvajña) and endowed with all the powers’ (Catusparisad, pp. 128 and 443; compare, with E. Waldschmidt, Vinaya, I, p. 8; Mahāvastu, III, p. 326; Lalitavistara, p. 405). This is an utterance far beyond that Kṣinā mejātyi...

Before his enlightenment Śākyamuni possessed some of the Buddha attributes such as, for example, the thirty-two Mahāpurusalakṣanas which Asita and others were easily able to establish. The Mahāvastu, II, p. 261, goes so far as to posit that the Bodhisattvas are in possession of all the qualities of body, speech and mind when they go to take their place under the Bodhi tree.

However it may be, just as Sambodhi assured the Bodhisattva of the pure vision of the Truths which he had only imperfectly known before, so that same Sambodhi also brought to their ultimate accomplishment (sampad) the attributes and qualities which he had already previously possessed. It is given to man to perform discoveries of a philosophical or scientific order, but the sublimation of the Truths to the point of rendering them liberative is the exclusive prerogative of Anuttarā Samyaksambodhi.

The Buddha attributes are so varied and numerous that only the Bhagavat Buddhas would be capable of extolling them and in order to do this, they would have to prolong their existence for several asamkhyeyakalpas.

Condensing the subject as much as possible, the Kośabhāṣya, ed. Pradhan, pp. 415, 19 – 416, 5, commented on by its Vyākhyā, pp. 649, 13 – 650, 21, arranges the accomplishments (sampad) of the Buddhas under three headings: (i) accomplishment of causes (hetusampad), (ii) accomplishment of the fruit (phalasampad), (iii) accomplishment of benefit (upakārasampad). It is sufficient here to refer the reader to this small treatise on buddhology, remarkable for the clarity of its statements and the quality of the sources from which it draws inspiration. In it can be noted in particular that, unlike the other Arhats, the Buddha extended his omniscience as far as the knowledge of things in all their particular aspects (sarvākārajñatā) and, not con-
tent with destroying the passions (kleśa), eliminated the least pervasion (vāsanā) of them: ideas which were to be taken up and elaborated by the theoreticians of the Mahāyāna.

NOTES

1 On the meaning of duḥkha, which has no satisfactory equivalent in Western languages, see W. Rāhula, What the Buddha taught, 2nd revised edition, London, 1967, p. 17ff.

2 Passage already pointed out by H. Oldenberg (tr. A. Foucher), Le Buddha, sa vie, sa doctrine, sa communauté, Paris, 1934, p. 252.


4 The complete title of the Chinese version is T’ai tzujui ying pen ch’i ching.

5 There are some divergencies between the Pāli formula (Majjhima, I, p. 23; Aṅguttara, II, p. 211; IV, p. 179; Vinaya, III, p. 5) and the Sanskrit formula (Catusparśad, p.434; E. Waldschmidt, Bruchstücke buddhistischer Sūtras, p. 141; Kośavyākhyā, p. 642, 23-25).

Tassa me evan jānato evan passato kāmāsavā pi cittam vimuccittha, bhavāsavā pi cittam vimuccittha, avijjāsavā pi cittam vimuccittha, vimuttasmiṇī vimuttam iti nāṇam ahosi; kṣīṇā jāti, viśālam bhramācariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇyaṃ nāparam itthattāyaś abhannāsīm.

If the Sanskrit nāparam asmd bhavam is clear, the Pāli nāparam itthattāyā is more difficult. W. Rāhula, What the Buddha taught, p. 29, translates: Nothing more is left to be done.— F. L. Woodward, Gradual Sayings, II, p. 225: There is no beyond to this state of things. — I. B. Horner, Middle Length Sayings, I, p. 29: There is no more of being such or such. — H. Oldenberg, Reden des Buddha, Munich, 1922, p. 30: Keine Rückkehr gibt es mehr zu dieser Welt. — M. Winternitz, Der ältere Buddhismus, Tübingen, 1929, p. 11: Nicht wieder kehre ich zu dieser Welt zurück. — Also see the Critical Pāli Dictionary, Copenhagen, II, p. 283, s.v. itthatta.

Buddhaghosa in his Commentary on the Majjhima, I, p. 128, 8-10, explains itthattāyā by itthambhavato, imasṃ evampaṇkāraṇaṇaṃ, and adds the following gloss: Idāni vattamānakkhandaṃ asam pārappasam hantāyāṇaṃ mayham n’atiṣṭh. ‘Now there is not for me any series of aggregates following on the present series of aggregates’. So therefore nāparam itthattāyā would be an exact synonym of n’atiṣṭh dāni punabbhavo which is frequently encountered in the texts (cf. Pāli Tipiṭakaṃ Concordance, III, p. 304).6

The Pāli wording simply says that ‘in the world’ (loke, not lokāt) the future Buddha found enlightenment.

7 The knowledge of the general characteristic (sāmānyalakṣaṇa) of things is common to all Arhats without distinction. However, the Buddhas also possess the sarvākārajñatā ‘knowledge of things in all their aspects’ thanks to which they discern the special characteristics (sva- or bhimna-lakṣaṇa) proper to each thing. The details can be found in Kośa, III, pp. 188-190; IV, p. 225.


9 In my humble opinion, the problem is of little interest. The main point is that the Bodhissattva approached Sambodhi gradually, by stages, during the course of many existences. Whether Sambodhi itself, the ultimate conclusion of his effort, lasted for one, twelve, sixteen or thirty-four thought-moments is only a question of detail.

10 For details, see L. de La Vallée Poussin, La Morale bouddhique, Paris, 1927, p. 106.