

# *Triratna and Trisharana*

**Divine Wisdom, its Laws, and its Adept**



## Triratna or Ratnatraya

The Three jewels, the technical term for the well-known formula “Buddha, Dharma and Sangha” (or Sangha), the two latter terms meaning, in modern interpretation, “religious law” (Dharma), and the “priesthood” (Sangha). Esoteric Philosophy, however, would regard this as a very loose rendering. The words “Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,” ought to be pronounced as in the days of Gautama, the Lord Buddha, namely “Bodhi, Dharma and Sangha”; and interpreted to mean “Wisdom, its laws and priests,” the latter in the sense of “spiritual exponents,” or adepts. Buddha, however, being regarded as personified “Bodhi” on earth, a true *avatāra* of Ādi-Buddha, Dharma gradually came to be regarded as his own particular law, and Sangha as his own special priesthood. Nevertheless, it is the profane of the later (now modern) teachings who have shown a greater degree of natural intuition than the actual interpreters of Dharma, the Buddhist priests.

The people see the Triratna in the three statues of Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya Buddha; *i.e.*,

In “Boundless Light” or universal Wisdom, an impersonal principle which is the correct meaning of Ādi-Buddha;

In the “Supreme Lord” of the Bodhisattvas, or Avalokiteśvara; and

In Maitreya Buddha, the symbol of the terrestrial and human Buddha, the “Mānushya Buddha.”

Thus, even though the uninitiated do call these three statues “the Buddhas of the Past, the Present and the Future,” still every follower of true *philosophical* Buddhism — called “atheistical” by Mr. Eitel — would explain the term Triratna correctly. The philosopher of the Yogacharyā School would say — as well he could,

Dharma is not a person but an unconditioned and underived entity, combining in itself the spiritual and material principles of the universe, whilst from Dharma proceeded, by emanation, Buddha [“reflected” Bodhi rather], as the creative energy which produced, in conjunction with Dharma, the third factor in the trinity, *viz.*, “Sangha,” which is the comprehensive sum total of all real life.

Sangha, then, is not and cannot be that which it is now understood to be, namely, the actual “priesthood”; for the latter is not the sum total of all *real* life, but only of religious life. The real primitive significance of the word Sangha or “Sangha” applies to the Arhats or Bhikshus, or the “initiates,” alone, that is to say to the real exponents of Dharma — the divine law and wisdom, coming to them as a reflex light from the one “boundless light.” Such is its *Philosophical* meaning. And yet, far from satis-

ifying the scholars of the Western races, this seems only to irritate them; for E.J. Eitel, of Hongkong, remarks, as to the above:

Thus the dogma of a Triratna, originating from three primitive articles of faith, and at one time culminating in the conception of three persons, a trinity in unity, *has degenerated into a metaphysical theory of the evolution of three abstract Principles!*

And if one of the ablest European scholars will sacrifice every philosophical ideal to gross anthropomorphism, then what can Buddhism with its subtle metaphysics expect at the hands of ignorant missionaries?

## Trisharana

The same as *Triratna* and accepted by both the Northern and Southern Churches of Buddhism. After the death of the Buddha it was adopted by the councils as a mere kind of *formula fidei*,<sup>1</sup> enjoining “to take refuge in Buddha,” “to take refuge in Dharma,” and “to take refuge in Sangha,” or his Church, in the sense in which it is now interpreted; but it is not in this sense that the “Light of Asia” would have taught the formula. Of Trikāya, Mr. E.J. Eitel, of Hongkong, tells us in his *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism* that this “trichotomism was taught with regard to the nature of all Buddhas. Bodhi being the characteristic of a Buddha” — a distinction was made between

“Essential Bodhi” as the attribute of the Dharmakāya, *i.e.*, “essential body”;

“Reflected Bodhi” as the attribute of Sambhogakāya; and

“Practical Bodhi” as the attribute of Nirmānakāya.

Buddha combining in himself these three conditions of existence, was said to be living at the same time in three different spheres. Now, this shows how greatly misunderstood is the purely pantheistical and philosophical teaching. Without stopping to enquire how even, a Dharmakāya vesture can have any “attribute” in Nirvāna, which state is shown, in philosophical Brahmanism as much as in Buddhism, to be absolutely devoid of any attribute as conceived by human *finite* thought — it will be sufficient to point to the following:

- 1 The Nirmānakāya vesture is preferred by the “Buddhas of Compassion” to that of the Dharmakāya state, precisely because the latter precludes him who attains it from any communication or relation with the finite, *i.e.*, with humanity;
- 2 It is not Buddha (Gautama, the mortal man, or any other personal Buddha) who lives ubiquitously in “three different spheres, at the same time,” but Bodhi, the universal and abstract principle of divine wisdom, symbolised in philosophy by Ādi-Buddha.

It is the latter that is ubiquitous because it is the universal essence or principle. It is Bodhi, or the spirit of Buddhahood, which, having resolved itself into its primordial homogeneous essence and merged into it, as Brahmā (the universe) merges into Parabrahman, the ABSOLUTENESS — that is meant under the name of “essential Bodhi.”

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<sup>1</sup> [*i.e.*, formula of faith, as opposed to *formula doctrinae*, formula of dogma.]

For the Nirvānī, or Dhyāni-Buddha, must be supposed — by living in Arūpadhātu, the *formless* state, and in Dharmakāya — to be that “essential Bodhi” itself.

It is the Dhyāni Bodhisattvas, the primordial rays of the universal Bodhi, who live in “reflected Bodhi” in Rūpadhātu, or the world of subjective “forms”; and

It is the Nirmānakāyas (plural) who upon ceasing their lives of “practical Bodhi,” in the “enlightened” or Buddha forms, remain voluntarily in the Kāmadhātu (the world of desire), whether in objective forms on earth or in subjective states in its sphere (the second Buddhakshetra).

This they do in order to watch over, protect, and help mankind. Thus, it is neither *one* Buddha who is meant, nor any particular *avatāra* of the collective Dhyāni Buddhas, but verily *Ādi-Bodhi* — *the first Logos*, whose primordial ray is Mahābuddhi, the Universal Soul, *ĀLAYA*, whose flame is ubiquitous, and whose influence has a different sphere in each of the three forms of existence, because, once again, *it is Universal Being itself* or the reflex of the *Absolute*. Hence, if it is philosophical to speak of Bodhi, which “as Dhyāni Buddha rules in the domain of the spiritual” (fourth Buddhakshetra or region of Buddha); and of the Dhyāni Bodhisattvas “ruling in the third Buddhakshetra” or the domain of ideation; and even of the Mānushya Buddhas, who are in the second Buddhakshetra as Nirmānakāyas — to apply the “idea of a unity in trinity” to three *personalities* — is highly unphilosophical.<sup>2</sup>



“Buddha and Prince Siddhartha Buddha,” and “Buddhism is Inner Wisdom,” in the same series.

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<sup>2</sup> *Theosophical Glossary: Triratna, Triśarana*