



BUDDHA

AND HIS MESSAGE

C. JINARĀJADĀSA

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M E S S A G E

BY

C. JINARÂJADÂSA

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BUDDHA AND HIS MESSAGE

AMONG all the great personalities who stand out as revealing the genius of Asia, Buddha is the foremost. The spirit of Asia, when Asia is at her noblest, is the spirit of Buddha. Above all other teachers of India, above Confucius and Lao-Tse of China, this great Teacher of India dominates Asia. The peoples of Asia, from the Tartars of Russia and Turkestan in the West to the Chinese and Japanese peoples in the far East, from the Mongolians in the North to the Annamites, Siamese, Cambodians, Burmans and Sinhalese in the South, all alike reverence him as their guide and teacher. Tens of thousands of temples have been built in his honour, to express the gratitude which millions feel to this Teacher whose spirit of compassion and tenderness has modified the harshnesses in human nature and taught men to tread the way of peace.

For two thousand five hundred years, Asia has grown under the peace-making and refining

influences of Buddhism. And now, that same influence is being felt in Europe also. There are Buddhist Societies in France, England and Germany ; several magazines, dedicated to Buddhism in European languages, show that the interest in Buddha's teachings is steadily growing. Why has Asia come under the sway of the Buddha's teachings, and why are thousands in Europe and America today moulding their lives as if they were born in Buddhist lands and not Christian ?

Not one writer but a thousand are needed to explain the significance of the Buddha's message. I can narrate only one aspect of his great work. To me, the most significant fact in his teachings is that he appeals to man, and not to God. Let me explain what I mean.

BUDDHA'S TEACHING

We know that Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, base their teachings on the idea of God. These religions say that till a man believes in God, he cannot begin to live a truly righteous or useful life. We know that millions in these religions do live lives of charity,

purity and holiness because they worship their God and obey His commandments. But the strange fact is that lives of charity, purity and holiness are also lived by thousands who follow Buddha who never asked men to worship any God as the first step towards their salvation. Buddha taught men to rely upon themselves in order to achieve their own salvation, and not to look to any external saviour. He never assumes the role of a saviour ; he never says : “ Believe in me ; give me your trust ; and I will free you from your sins and save you.” On the contrary, Buddha proclaims that he is not a saviour but a teacher, that he is not one who carries you on his shoulder over the obstacles in your path to salvation, but rather one who has trodden that path in advance of you and so can show you your way.

SUMMED UP IN “ DHARMA ”

All the teachings of Buddha can be summed up in one word : *Dharma*. Dharma is the Sanskrit form ; in the language of Pâli which Buddha spoke, it is softened to Dhamma. But Dharma, the Sanskrit form, is better known.

What is Dharma on which all Buddhist teachings are based ?

Let me first tell you what Dharma means in Hinduism. Buddha was born a Hindu ; all his disciples were Hindus. He spoke to Hindu audiences. He used words and phrases of Hinduism. Yet he did not teach Hinduism, for he revealed new meanings in the old Hindu ideas. Now, all Hinduism is based on Dharma. In Hinduism, Dharma means Duty. It is the duty which is imposed on you by the will of God. It is God, says Hinduism, who weighs your good and evil, and sends you to be born in this or that race or religion, and as a man or as a woman. This is your Karma, the result of your good or evil in a previous life, which God gives you as your reward or punishment when you are born again. When you are born according to your Karma, God imposes upon you your Dharma or duty. If you are born in the Brahmin or priestly class, your Dharma or duty is to teach and to perform ceremonies of worship ; if you are born into the fighter's caste, as a Kshattriya, your duty is to fight for your King and to protect the people. If you are born a Vaishya, in the merchant caste, your Dharma

is to engage in trade, and to spend much in charity. If you are a Sudra, in the servant's class, your duty is to be the servant of the other three castes and loyally do the work for which you are paid. Each man and woman, says Hinduism, has certain Dharmas or duties, allocated to him or her by God.

DHARMA IS LAW

Now, when Buddha made Dharma the central theme of all his teachings, he never said that Dharma was the will of God. He never mentioned God. On the contrary, he proclaimed that Dharma exists in a man's own heart and mind. Dharma is law, said Hinduism, the law of God. Dharma is law, said Buddha, the law which is at the heart of a man's conscience. Buddha appeals to man to be noble, to be pure, to be charitable, to be tender; not in order to please any God, but in order to be true to the highest in him, in order to be at peace with himself.

As Buddha proclaimed Dharma, this inner principle of goodness and holiness, which resides in a man's inmost self, he proclaimed that

Dharma exists in the universe also. All the universe is an embodiment or revelation of Dharma. The laws of nature which modern science has discovered are revelations of Dharma. If the sun rises and sets, it is because of Dharma ; for Dharma is that law inherent in the universe which makes matter act in the ways studied in physics, chemistry, zoology, botany and astronomy. Dharma is inherent in the universe, just as Dharma is inherent in the heart and mind of man. Dharma is the principle of righteousness, the basis of the highest morality. If a man will live by Dharma, he will escape misery and come to salvation.

A RELIGION OF CONDUCT

How shall a man discover Dharma, which will lead him to salvation ? Is it by accepting Buddha as a saviour ; is it by praying to him, or worshipping him at his temples ? This is not the way. On this, we have very clear teachings from Buddha himself. Buddha never puts himself forward as a mediator between you and your final salvation. He cannot help you, unless you help yourself. He can tell you what to do,

because he has done it himself, and so knows the way ; but unless you yourself act, Buddha cannot take you to your goal. Though you may “take refuge in Buddha”, as is the Buddhist phrase, in the simple ceremony of pledging yourself to live a righteous life, it must not be with any blind belief that he can save you. He can point out the way ; he can tell you of its difficulties and of the beauties which you will find as you tread the way ; but he cannot tread it for you. You must tread the way yourself.

It is not by any kind of prayer, by any ceremonies in temples, or by any appeal to invisible agencies like Devas, that a man will discover Dharma. He will discover it only in one way—by developing his own character. I do not mean by developing his character the practice of Yoga or magic to acquire occult powers. The development which is necessary is a control of the mind and a purification of the emotions. Until a man stills the storm in his heart, until he radiates from him the spirit of goodwill to all, he will not find the first step of the way to salvation.

Buddhism is essentially a religion of conduct. It is by the life which a man lives that he

determines for himself whether he is proceeding on the right road or the wrong. It is therefore necessary that a man should first understand himself ; for how shall he proceed rightly until he knows what is his baggage, his equipment of good and bad thoughts, or good and bad feelings ? Like as a traveller up a difficult mountain path must rearrange his baggage, and discard much that will be merely a hindrance as he climbs to the higher levels where the air is rare, so must the traveller on the road to salvation examine his character and decide what he must discard from it. He must understand himself, so as to be prepared for the obstacles on his path. What are these obstacles ?

BLINDED BY DESIRE

They are certain evil elements in our own character. Buddha says that three great currents of force are sweeping each one of us on the road to misery, just as the swift current of a river will carry with it all the helpless logs which have fallen into it. Of these three currents, the first is Râga or desire. Râga means desire in all forms. The sensuality of the body whether

coarse like that of a mere animal, or more refined in ways that our social conventions permit, this sensuality is Râga. It makes us selfish, so that we think only of our own need for gratification ; and it makes us unscrupulous, if not cruel to others. And this Râga when once gratified is never satisfied ; it clamours for further gratification. It carries us on like helpless logs on a stream. What happens to us when desire sways us is well described in a Japanese proverb, referring to drunkenness. No man who begins drinking a little wine or a little arrack or whiskey dreams of becoming a drunkard ; he would be horrified if he saw that that was to be his future. Nevertheless it is true, as says the Japanese proverb :

First the man takes a drink ;

Then the drink takes a drink ;

Then the drink takes the man.

There are forms of Râga that are not the lusts of the body, but the more refined lusts of the emotions. We want to be praised, and are hurt if we are not properly appreciated. Or we are jealous, if someone whose admiration we desire gives that admiration to another and no longer to us. All this is Râga or desire. This

Râga is like a thick mist such as we meet when climbing mountains. Then we cannot see which way the path goes. Sometimes at sea, when ships enter a territory of fog, and nobody can see what lies ahead, two ships will collide, and perhaps both sink. When men are blinded by desire, they are carried away by a powerful current, and they do not realize whither they are going. If many are blinded by desire, and they desire the same things, there is jealousy and rivalry. As they act to satisfy their desires, they hurt each other. This is our life of competition, our social life of wanting pleasures, amusements, wealth and rank ; each thinks only for himself. The end of it is suffering.

THE FOG OF ANGER

Râga or desire is one current which carries us along to misery. But there is a second current which equally leads us to misery. It is called Dosa. The word means ill-will or hatred. It is that instinct in us which resents any action of another which challenges our right to what we desire. Our natural instinct is to dominate over others ; we want them to obey our will. We

want our servants to obey us instantly ; we want our children to be obedient to us, that is to say, to suppress their wills in order to carry out ours. In all sorts of ways, we feel sure of our individuality, of our uniqueness as egos, only when no one opposes us.

But when someone opposes his will against our will, then our action is like that of a dog with a bone when another dog approaches. There is instant resentment. In a hundred ways, we are irritated by our inferiors, equals or superiors. Our irritation may be slight, or it may burst out in a fury of anger. Sometimes we may suppress all outward manifestation of our anger, because it is dangerous to express it. Then we go on feeding our anger day by day, till it grows into a deep hatred. The anger in a man leads to crime ; we say that an angry man is "beside himself". That is absolutely true ; he is being swept along by a torrent of hatred, one part of which is his own anger, but another part of it is like an invisible storage battery of anger which exists in the world.

If Râga or desire envelops a man in a fog so that he does not see clearly, a thicker fog which surrounds him is the fog of Dosa. Many are

its gradations ; first there is in us a mild irritation ; then it becomes a resentment. If we do not get out of the stream which is carrying us on, the stream gathers speed, and our resentment turns to anger, and later to hatred. All of us are surrounded by a fog of Dosa or hatred ; with some of us the fog is light, and with a little struggle we manage to look through it ; but with others the fog is so thick that they see nothing beyond, and are aware only of their hatred, which eats into them like an acid.

THE MAGIC OF DELUSION

There is yet a third current which carries us to misery. It is called Moha or delusion. This is far more subtle, and even the cleverest of us become hypnotized by it. Moha is that instinct which makes us want to feed our individuality. We want the whole world to turn to us ; we want to become the world's centre. We feel we are nothing unless we have our own possessions. Our " I " is precious and without it we lose our sense of individuality. So a man thinks and says : My money, my house, my property, my child, my rights, my country. He draws a

circle round himself, and then says : " These things are mine. Those things are not mine."

Under the subtle magic of Moha, a man plans continually, with the thought : " My happiness, my future, my immortality." Year after year, he feeds his ambitions for personal happiness, for personal knowledge, for personal growth. It is impossible for him to understand that his " I " is like a malignant growth or cancer which ever grows as he dwells more and more upon himself. Then, one day he finds that all men have turned against him, that the world does not want him any longer ; he may be powerful, but he is feared and not loved. And as he grows old, he is alone. He blames others ; he does not know that in himself is the poison which has made a healthy world around him into a diseased world. He does not know that as he fed the fire of his ego with his ambitions, with his refusals to look beyond his own needs, he has been wrapt in a deep fog of delusion.

It is these raging torrents of Râga, Dosa, Moha—of desire, hatred, and delusion—which bar our way, as we try to find peace and happiness. We long for peace, and yet we blunder

and create confusion ; we long for happiness, and yet unhappiness is what we obtain. Our intentions are good, and yet we fail. Why ? Because, says Buddha, we are like logs carried along helplessly in the streams of desire, anger and delusion ; or, to use the other simile, because we are continually surrounded by a fog created by these defects in our character. If we are to find happiness, we must step outside the stream, we must dissolve the fog. And how ?

It is here that the technique of salvation which is characteristic of Buddhism is so different from that of all other religions. They say : " Turn to God ; pray to Him ; give yourself utterly to Him ; become one with Him." The Buddhist technique is to still the raging torrents of desire, anger and delusion, not by prayer to any God but by a careful self-culture. " Save thyself by thyself ", " Rouse thyself by thyself ", are phrases of Buddha. He sounds a trumpet-call, as it were, giving us an order to act. Our action must be carefully planned ; it must be as scientific as the methods of a physician to cure a malady. The method very briefly is as follows.

AN END OF MISERY

If we are to escape from Moha or delusion, we must remove our ego from ourselves ; we must substitute the world for our ego. We must become aware that others are like ourselves, seeking happiness and finding sorrow. We must develop in ourselves the sense of affection and pity. We must develop one attribute in us, sympathy. Somewhere in us, in all of us, in even the most brutal of men, there is the capacity for sympathy. It may be sympathy for a man or woman or child, or even only for a dog. We must nourish that little flame with thoughts of kindness for others. Little by little, the fog of delusion thins ; we begin to find how interesting are other people, other nations, the whole world. We discover a new and friendly world.

How shall there be an ending to anger ? By understanding that there is no injustice, and that the universe is one of law. If a man is opposed to me, if he injures me, I am but reaping the unhappy harvest of a selfish and careless sowing. Understanding the law of Karma, that as a man sows, so does he reap, I shall not be resentful,

but feel patient. And I shall try to learn from the lesson set before me. That lesson tells me that the ill-will of others which I resent is only my ill-will of the past which returns to me. My enemy is only my own evil self in a past life which is returning to me. For if another hates me, and I hate him in return, he is showing me to myself, as in a mirror. If there is no hatred in me, I shall not mind how many thousands hate me ; I shall be serene and send them thoughts of pity for their ignorance and delusion. If I am always truthful, do I get angry if I am called a liar ? No ; smile and remain unmoved. But if I get angry, it is only because there is still somewhere in me a part that likes to tell lies. It may not be telling lies to others, but only to myself, about myself. All this is Karma, and when a man knows that justice rules his life, the fog of hatred dissipates little by little.

And lastly, there is the ending of desire. Desire is in all of us like a raging thirst, which cries : " Water ! Water !" We cry : " I want ; I must have ; I cannot do without." The things which we want are for ourselves. There is no evil in wanting happiness, knowledge, peace or even power. Misery enters only when in what

we desire there is no place for others. Let us desire such things as we can share with others, and then our desires become wiser, more unselfish. Let us desire wealth, but only in order to do works of mercy and charity ; let us desire happiness, but only in order to create a world of happiness around us. Slowly the fog created by desire begins to dissipate, and at last we begin to see clearly into the meaning of life for the first time.

In this manner, as we control Râga, Dosa and Moha, we discover in ourselves the great principle of Dharma. Dharma is Wisdom ; it is Power ; it is Peace. We discover that we do not need wealth in order to be happy ; we have a new wealth of our own in our thoughts of love and pity, in our thoughts of courage and tenderness. Then a little flower is as rich in wealth to us as a handful of gold. A tender heart becomes a nobler object of ambition than wealth or land or titles. As problems of life come before us, we discover in ourselves the wisdom which will tell us how to act rightly. We then know the joy of forgetting our little ego in the delight of seeing the beauty of mankind and the world.

It is Dharma which will guide us so to live that our little ego will be like a mirror or the World Ego, till our ego contains the Universal Ego.

NIRVANA

It is when the three streams of Desire, Anger and Delusion have died down and ended in a man's heart and mind, that he has an intuition of that wonderful state called Nirvana. Nirvana is not a state of annihilation or nothingness ; what is annihilated, like the light of a lamp that dies down because the oil is ended, is the inner turmoil in a man caused by the turbulency of the three streams. So wonderful is the state called Nirvana that it cannot be described in words ; its nature cannot be understood by any process of mind. It must be experienced by each directly and for himself. It is a state where all the limitations of the individual self have dropped away ; perfect wisdom gives insight into every problem ; and the individual merges all that is purest, highest and noblest in him with all that is highest and noblest in his fellowmen in one immense wave of tenderness and compassion.

EVERY MAN HIS OWN SAVIOUR

The very especial characteristic of Buddha's gospel is the emphasis which he lays on the idea that each individual must, to use his phrase, "work out his salvation with diligence." Each man must himself quieten the storm of the passions and the ambitions which are ever creating a turmoil within him. This result is to be achieved not by prayer to any deity, nor by the aid of rites and ceremonies conducted by priests ; there is only one way, which is by a life of the highest morality. Buddha has summed up for us his whole gospel in one verse of four lines. The verse is :

*Sabba pâpassa akaranam,
Kusalassa upasampadâ,
Sachittapariyodapanam ;
Etam Buddhânasâsanam.*

" Not to do evil,
To increase good,
To purify the mind ;
This is the teaching of the Buddhas."

I ask you to note the last line : " This is the teaching of the Buddhas ", that is to say,

Buddha declares that it is not only his teaching but that of all the Buddhas who have preceded him. To come to salvation by producing in the heart and the mind purity, peace and love, says Buddha, is the eternal law.

A PLAN OF LIFE

In order to help his listeners to live in such a manner that they may feel even now something of the wonder to come, Nirvana that is their goal, Buddha has carefully mapped out the moral life which must be lived. Like an engineer who constructs a pathway up a difficult mountain, so Buddha has constructed a code of morality. First come the Five Precepts, as they are called. These are :

1. Not to kill.
2. Not to steal.
3. Not to commit adultery.
4. Not to lie.
5. Not to take intoxicating liquors or drugs.

These are not Buddha's commandments, the breaking of which entails sin. They represent the preliminary ideals of a virtuous life which a

man is to accept wholeheartedly, if he is to call himself a Buddhist. He does not promise to Buddha not to break the precepts ; he gives the promise to himself. For the phrase is : " I accept the precept to refrain from taking life," and so on with the other precepts. Each man, as he repeats the precepts, puts himself upon his own honour to do his best not to break them.

And if he breaks them ? Then the only repentance, which is constructive, is to make the pledge to himself again, indeed, as many times as necessary, day after day, month after month, year after year, till he wins in the struggle against his lower nature. A man must win the goal of purity and nobility by himself. Not Buddha, nor all the Devas, can bring a man to salvation.

Upon this groundwork of harmlessness, self-control and purity, the individual is to build a perfect life. Buddha carefully tabulates the duties which surround us men and women of the workaday world, and he explains how we should perform them. He considers one by one the mutual relations which exist between (1) parent and child, (2) teacher and pupil, (3) friend and friend, (4) the Buddhist monk and

layman, (5) husband and wife, (6) master and servant. What are the duties of a man towards his wife, of a wife towards her husband, of a master towards his servant, and of a servant towards his master, and so on, are all tabulated, so that men may live a life of kindliness and helpfulness, supporting each other in joy and sorrow.

GREAT IDEALS

I have said that a man must "work out his salvation with diligence," and that he must not look to another to do his work for him. Yet he is not left alone and unaided at this difficult task. His help will come to him not from any vicarious saviour, but by contemplating and uniting himself with three great ideals. These three ideals are Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. A Buddhist repeats the phrases: "I go to Buddha for refuge, I go to Dhamma for refuge, I go to Sangha for refuge." Now, "going for refuge to Buddha" does not mean that Buddha is waiting as a saviour to save his devotee. Buddhist tradition is positive that Buddha has "passed into Nirvana," and is

beyond the reach of any suppliant. What, then, does it mean to "take refuge in Buddha"? It is not going for aid to a particular Buddha, but rather going for inspiration to a natural fact that, always, from the beginning of time to its end, Buddhas have appeared and will appear. Each Buddha toils during hundreds of lives to discover the Truth so as to reveal it to mankind; each reveals the same fundamental morality, the same laws of human relations. Each when he discovers the Truth, "attains Buddhahood" as is the phrase, appears to show men that the road to Nirvana is open, and that no man who struggles for Liberation is alone. For Buddhas appear not only on this earth, but in all the planets and stars; there are Buddhas always somewhere in the universe, even if at any given epoch no Buddha moves on this earth. It is this invisible mystical fellowship with all Buddhas, who have triumphed, which the earnest man is to remember as he fights his way to his Liberation.

When he says, "I take refuge in Dhamma," once more he contemplates an ideal and takes refuge in it. It is the ideal of universal law, the law which orders the invisible electrons and

protons within an atom to move according to mathematical laws, which orders planets to circle round their suns according to law, and which orders the smaller suns to circle round larger suns. It is this same Dhamma or Law which is Karma, and declares that as a man sows, so he shall reap ; it is Dhamma dwelling in a man's heart which states that " hatred never ceases by hatred, hatred ceases only by love." All the noblest and loveliest virtues of pity, charity and renunciation are within a man's heart, for Dhamma is a creative power within him. The Dhamma or doctrine which Buddha stated is only a revelation or reflection of what dwells in every man ; in saluting Buddha's Dhamma, in " going to refuge " to his Dhamma, a man goes as to a refuge to the highest which is within him.

THE NOBLE ONES

The Sangha is that band of noble souls who are striving to become Buddhas, so that they may lead mankind some day from misery to happiness, from darkness to light. They form a Brotherhood of the Saints or Noble Ones, and

each is a centre of compassion and wisdom. The yellow robed Buddhist monks were, in Buddha's days, all pledged to this work of helping the world, and each was a leader and guide. Today, the monks are that in name ; they do not know by direct experience the way to Nirvana. When a Buddhist says : " I take refuge in Sangha ", he is recollecting that there is still, somewhere, if not in Buddhist lands today, the true Sangha, or the Noble Brothers who live as the Buddha trained them to live. He contemplates the inspiring fact that their eyes dwell on him in compassion, and that they share their strength with him.

So, while no Buddhist is to look outside himself for aid, yet he is invisibly encouraged by the power of certain ideals to which he has given his trust—Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha.

VITAL SAYINGS

There are three sayings of Buddha which I desire to quote, as they express more than anything else I know, in Buddha's own words, the spirit of his teaching and the message of his life. They both tell us how the true Buddhist must

live, always with thoughts of love. In *Metta Sutta*, the Discourse on Compassion, he says :

“ As a mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her son, her only son, so let him cultivate goodwill without measure among all beings. Let him cultivate goodwill without measure toward the whole world, above, below, around, unstinted, unmixed with any feeling of differing or opposing interests. Let a man remain steadfastly in this state of mind all the while he is awake, whether he be standing, sitting or lying down. This state of heart is the best in the world.”

In another sermon he says :

“ And he lets his mind pervade one quarter of the world with thoughts of love, and so the second, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around and everywhere, does he continue to pervade with heart of love, far reaching, grown great and beyond measure.”

The third saying is :

“ All the means in this life, ye monks, to acquire religious merit have not the value of a sixteenth part of love, the liberation of the mind.”

BUDDHA'S GREATNESS

It is because Buddha taught these truths that all Asia has bowed in reverence before his greatness. He never claimed to be divine ; he never asserted that he was different from other men, except that he had won his victory, while they are still in the middle of the battle ; and he insisted that all men could become like him. Though he descended to our level and stated that he was as we are, yet the intuition of Asia has sensed his greatness—a greatness beyond all the Gods of her Scriptures. To his name tens of thousands of temples have been erected during the last two thousand five hundred years. Yet the power of Buddha is not in his temples but in the hearts of the men and women who look to him and say : “ I take refuge in Buddha.” And to take refuge in him is not by repeating formulas and by offering flowers ; it is : By not doing evil ; By developing the good ; and By purifying our thoughts.

I am a Buddhist by birth ; but I am a Theosophist first and a Buddhist after. For to be a Theosophist is to realize that all religions are like the seven colours of the solar spectrum, into

which the blinding white ray of the sun is separated by a glass prism. Who shall say that in the solar spectrum the colour blue is better than the green, the yellow better than the red? My love and reverence for Buddha do not make me feel that I am holier and nearer to salvation than the Christian or Mohammedan or Hindu. Yet I know this: that help comes to me as I contemplate the ideals represented by Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. It is the help which I have received which I would share with you. I hope I have given to those of you who are already Buddhists more light on your faith. I hope that when you repeat: "Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammâ-sambuddhassa", "Praise be to the Lord, the Holy One Perfect in Wisdom", you will have a more definite idea of him and of his greatness. I hope that in those who are not Buddhists I have roused some interest to know more of a teacher who has truly been called "the Light of Asia".

THE BUDDHA'S ENLIGHTENMENT

Yea ! and so holy was the influence
 Of that high Dawn which came with victory
 That, far and near, in homes of men there spread
 An unknown peace. The slayer hid his knife ;
 The robber laid his plunder back ; the shroff
 Counted full tale of coins ; all evil hearts
 Grew gentle, kind hearts gentler, as the balm
 Of that divinest Daybreak lightened Earth.

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The Spirit of our Lord

Lay potent upon man and bird and beast,
 Even while he mused under that Bodhi-tree,
 Glorified with the Conquest gained for all,
 And lightened by a Light greater than Day's.

The Light of Asia

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