

# Book Review

## *THE THREE JEWELS*

### An introduction to Buddhism

By *Bhikshu Sangharak-shita*. (Rider, 50s.)

Review by Marco Pallis

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THIS fresh work by the author of *A Survey of Buddhism* (Indian Institute of World Culture, reprinted 1966) displays the same gift of clear exposition which the previous work had led one to expect; the only difference is that the present book by comparison has a rather more "popular" character. It provides easy reading for anyone who is not already informed on the subject, but escapes any reproach of superficiality on that score.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which corresponds to one of the "three jewels," Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—the Enlightened One who was also the Founder, the Teachings as such, and lastly the Assembly of those who, in this world or elsewhere, are vocationally engaged in following the path traced by the Buddha or in helping other beings to do so.

Part I opens with a brief chapter situating Buddhism in its historical setting, including some mention of the influence which Buddhism, after its expansion both in India itself and beyond, exerted on other religions with which it came in contact. This is undoubtedly true of some of the examples mentioned, but worse than doubtful when it comes to claiming that Sufism, in the Islamic world, was the result of Buddhist influences. Sufism is unmistakably Koranic in all essentials; if it shows certain resemblances to Mahayana Buddhism as also to the Hindu *Vedanta*, this is an evident case of spiritual coincidence, whereof religious history provides many examples. Such coincidences are in no wise surprising, Truth being one and man's spiritual needs being much the same everywhere.

The remainder of the section on "The Buddha" covers all the essential ground, namely his earthly ministry and also the symbolical and mythological events which, coupled with the purely historical happenings, go to reveal the transcendent character of the Tathagata's mission: in this respect the author shows a clear appreciation of the polyvalent nature of the means whereby the tradition stemming both from the Buddha's historical personality and from his intemporal omnipresence is able to communicate itself to mankind.

Part II, devoted to the Dharma, includes metaphysical and cosmological doctrines at various levels; after which we are introduced to the way that leads through and out of *Samsâra*, the Round of changeful transmigration, towards the only goal fully worthy of a human vocation, namely that Enlightenment which the Buddha realized under the Bodhi Tree and now offers to all who are weary of an indefinite tossing to and fro on the ocean of passible existence.

The third "jewel," occupying Part III, has here been treated with particular originality. Bypassing conventional handling of the subject, our author has chosen to introduce his readers first of all to the Sangha through its most transcendent aspect, as the "glorious company of

Bodhisattvas": a Christian parallel would be to start off with the "Church triumphant" and then descend, as it were, to consider the "Church militant" struggling to emulate its heavenly counterpart at the level of human existence here on earth. Thus one is offered the Sangha successively as "celestial model," as the Monastic Order founded by the Buddha to provide the dedicated nucleus of spiritual life, and lastly as the Buddhist laity whose vocation, as the author shows, in no wise excludes the highest knowledge and virtue for those who, though still living "in this world," have ceased to be "of this world." The concluding chapter of this section deals with "popular Buddhism," that is to say with the life of piety under manifold forms as found in Buddhist lands and, here again, he shows that all the traditional institutions, when rightly understood, provide links and keys whereby the "three jewels" are kept continually in the minds of people like a seed which, ripened by good *karma*, will by and by flower in complete self-dedication to "the one thing needful."