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In Search of the Historical Gotama and the Unnamed Messengers of India

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Source note. Numbered citations refer to the source register at the end of the reader. Chapter 13 now states a positive historical test for the unnamed-messenger hypothesis. The archival master records the original keys, the full 278-claim ledger and distinctions among directly inspected printed comparisons, electronic readings and unexamined woodblocks.

“We make no distinction between any of His messengers.”

— Qurʾān 2:285 (excerpt; translated by Mustafa Khattab, The Clear Quran)

Preface: The Peace We Wish Him

I have reasons of my own for writing this book.

The persecution of Muslims in Myanmar is a public, documented history. United Nations reporting identifies both the military’s responsibility for atrocities against the Rohingya and the part played by Buddhist ultranationalist movements in spreading anti-Muslim hatred and encouraging violence. Those are findings about particular actors and institutions, not a verdict on every Buddhist.[1, 2]

My former spouse was Buddhist and used Buddhist reasoning to justify treatment I experienced as parental alienation and economic exile from my home. That is my account of a personal injury. It does not establish what Gautama taught, and I will not ask it to do the work of historical evidence.

But it does make one question impossible for me to avoid: what happens when a language of compassion becomes a justification for harm? Buddhism can go wrong in the hands of Buddhists. The same test applies to a Muslim who invokes Allah while injuring somebody. Neither name excuses what a person does.

I intend to read the Buddhist sources closely enough to encounter what challenges me as well as what confirms a suspicion. I can criticize what people have done in a tradition’s name without making its founder answer for my marriage. If the sources challenge my account of Gotama, the account must change.

A Muslim can encounter the Buddha through a statue, a history of philosophy, a sermon, or a conversation with somebody who takes refuge in him. The statue is the least useful introduction. It conceals the man in the public image that centuries of devotion have made of him.

His earliest recoverable world was a landscape of river valleys, small states, mendicants, merchants, and rival spiritual teachers. He spoke to people dealing with anger, illness, aging, family demands, and rulers who could destroy a community. His movement became a religious civilization with many languages and libraries. It also inherited disagreements about what he had said and what his awakening meant.

For a Muslim reader there is another opening. The Qurʾān speaks of messengers sent into every community and acknowledges that many of their stories were never told to Muhammad. The proposition is extraordinarily broad. It suggests a moral history larger than the named figures known from the Near East. It offers room for questions about India without identifying any particular Indian sage as a messenger.[3,4]

I want to investigate that opening without stealing a man from his historical world. Gautama deserves the courtesy of being heard in the sources that claim to preserve his teaching. A believer in Allah can recognize wisdom without first asserting that a revered teacher used Arabic theological categories. He can also read disagreement carefully, taking seriously passages that conflict with his hoped-for reconstruction.

The title will irritate some readers. *ʿAlayhi al-salām* is an Islamic blessing customarily associated with prophets and other figures honored in Muslim usage. Applied to Śākyamuni it expresses a hope about the ultimate provenance of his wisdom. Hope is appropriate to a question whose decisive historical evidence may be irrecoverable. Whether he was a messenger, an inspired philosopher, a severe moral reformer, or some combination is the subject of the inquiry.

This book will distinguish the historical teacher from the canonical speaker. It will further distinguish that speaker from the figures encountered in devotional Buddhism and political Buddhism. Once someone becomes a religious authority, later generations can make him speak in the vocabulary of their own disputes. Sometimes they preserve his insight. Sometimes they attach their own passions to his name.

There is a practical reason to pursue the history. Refuge in a teacher should change the conduct of the person seeking it. A Buddhist who turns toward compassion through remembering Gautama has encountered something valuable. A Muslim who remembers ʿAlī and becomes more just has also received practical guidance. The metaphysical explanations diverge, while responsibility remains a serious question in both traditions.

The very first question is simpler than prophecy. Who was the man?

Prologue: The King and the Birthplace

Sometime in the third century before the common era, an Indian emperor came to a place called Lumbinī. Aśoka, known in his inscriptions as Piyadasi, was already one of the great patrons of Buddhist memory. His visit produced an unusual kind of religious document: an inscription that commemorated the birth of the sage and changed the tax obligations of the village.[5]

The inscription survives on a stone pillar. In the twentieth year following his coronation, the emperor visited the place identified as Śākyamuni's birthplace, honored it, and granted the village

a favorable levy. The language of a royal pilgrimage crossed into the language of revenue collection. If we want to begin with the historical Gautama, this is a useful place to put our feet.

The emperor's stone is firm evidence that the story of a sage from the Śākyas had entered a durable public tradition by Aśoka's reign. It is also evidence that the place mattered enough for the monarch to intervene there. The exact day and year of the man's birth are beyond the pillar's reach. Nor does the inscription reproduce a teaching or report a witnessed miracle.

Many accounts still give the Buddha's birth as 623 BCE. That date belongs to a traditional chronology and is repeated in some official heritage descriptions. Contemporary specialists commonly favor a life in the fifth century BCE, while the precise dates remain disputed. This book will keep the difference visible rather than force the stone to answer a question it was never carved to answer.[6, 7]

There is something quietly moving about this particular record. People traveled, argued, recited, became ill, and died. An empire outlasted some of them. A king left a stone. The stone stayed long enough for strangers to read the name of a teacher who had already begun escaping the limits of his own lifetime.

Śākyamuni: the sage of the Śākyas.

That is an epithet. In the Pāli discourses he is usually Gotama. The Sanskrit form is Gautama. *Buddha* means an awakened one, a status; Siddhattha or Siddhārtha belongs to the familiar biography and needs its own source history. We will use these names with care. Even the name by which the world remembers a religious founder may have a biography of its own.[7, 8]

By Aśoka's time the teaching already had communities to preserve it, recitations to organize it, and supporters who could recognize the value of pilgrimage. How much earlier each piece arose is a problem for historical reconstruction. The emperor met a living religious tradition. The person whose birth he commemorated lay behind that tradition.

A Muslim holding the Qurʾān comes to this pillar with a further question. If messengers were sent to communities whose stories never reached the Qurʾānic narrative, is it conceivable that the Śākya sage was among them? Qurʾān 40:78 makes the general possibility available. Identification requires a particular argument about particular evidence.[4]

It is tempting to race forward to Dhū l-Kifl or the fig in Sūrat al-Tīn. The best route begins with the man whose name was attached to Lumbinī. We need to know what he said about the duties of a human being, who taught him, what kind of awakening he claimed, and what he understood the gods to be.

One of the oldest narrative strata presents him announcing that he had no teacher after attaining awakening. The same discourse recalls that he studied under named teachers before this event. It also describes Brahmā Sahampati approaching him and urging him to teach for the benefit of beings who might understand.[9]

A single text thus preserves a claim of self-awakening alongside an encounter with a divine being. In Buddhist theology Brahmā belongs within the conditioned world. He has neither the status nor

the identity of Allah. Still, the story warns readers against making the event smaller than the canonical account itself.

In another discourse Gautama speaks of an ancient path, once walked by awakened teachers of earlier ages, which he had rediscovered. The image is of a lost road through a forest leading to an old city. The recovery of the road occupies the teacher's mind more than the construction of a doctrine bearing his signature.[10]

Another early discourse presents a severe challenge to a Muslim reconstruction. The Brahmajāla Sutta treats an exalted being's belief that he is creator as a mistake arising from limited knowledge of prior existence. Its cosmology offers a positive account of why a creator claim can arise and be accepted. This material must be examined as evidence of early Buddhist thought, including where it sits in independent textual witnesses.[11]

The historical investigation therefore begins with an unusual pair of obligations. We will search for moral and spiritual teachings that a Muslim can recognize as wisdom. We will also keep the anti-creator and self-awakening material visible in the argument. The shape of the historical teacher may be stranger than either a modern Buddhist or an eager Muslim apologist expects.

Chapter 1: The Distance Between a Man and His Scripture

A story is already old when it is first written down. Somebody has remembered it, learned the correct sequence of its phrases, carried it between settlements, and repeated it to a person who would eventually teach it to someone else. The words may remain stable across this journey. The arrangement of stories can change. A disciple may preserve a difficult teaching because it matters intensely to a community. Later disciples may write a new introduction explaining why that teaching matters.

The surviving Buddhist discourses come to us through such histories of recitation. The best-known large body is the Pāli canon of the Theravāda tradition. Alongside it stand the Chinese Āgamas, translated from textual collections maintained by other early Buddhist schools, together with surviving Sanskrit and Gāndhārī material. The collections often preserve versions of the same discourse. Their agreements are valuable, and their disagreements can be more revealing.[12, 13]

Consider what the comparison establishes. If a teaching appears in two lineages that diverged centuries ago, a common ancestor of those lineages becomes a plausible explanation. Agreement raises our confidence that the teaching circulated early. It leaves open the time between Gotama's life and the common ancestor of the texts. The earliest recoverable tradition is a historical achievement, even where the historical speaker remains beyond our reach.

Roderick Bucknell has made this comparative task central to a reconstruction of early Buddhist practice. His work studies variation among recensions as evidence for how practices and doctrines developed in oral transmission. Bhikkhu Anālayo's investigations of Āgama parallels likewise show why the Pāli canon should be read alongside evidence preserved in Chinese translations.[12, 14]

The difference matters immediately for the famous declaration to Upaka. In the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* (MN 26), the mendicant asks Gotama which teacher he follows. Gotama replies from a position of realized awakening: he has reached knowledge on his own and acknowledges no comparable teacher. Earlier in that very discourse he describes learning from Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. Its logic concerns his final attainment. It is a claim of spiritual independence at the decisive moment, embedded within a biography of apprenticeship.[9]

The declaration carries an epistemic claim, and the book will respect its force. It belongs to a canonical narration of Gotama. Before using it as an answer to every question about the historical experience, we need to establish its textual history. Its rhetoric may also answer a particular social question: whose school can claim the newly awakened ascetic? He denies such a claim to living masters.

The next scene in the same sutta is worth prolonged attention. Gotama initially hesitates to teach the difficult doctrine. Brahmā Sahampati knows this hesitation and approaches him with a request that he share his discovery. After considering the capacities of human beings, Gotama agrees.[9]

A Muslim might hear a resemblance to the summons of a prophet. The resemblance raises an analogy whose evidentiary limits deserve examination. The text attributes awakening to Gautama's own realization and the request to a Brahmā who implores him. A Qurʾānic reader also possesses more than one category of guidance. Qurʾān 42:51 describes divine communication through revelation, a veil, or an appointed messenger. The range of Qurʾānic uses of *waḥy* elsewhere is broader than scriptural prophecy. These categories can clarify our questions without being imposed on the Buddhist account as its missing explanation.[15]

The old road introduces a further difficulty. SN 12.65 describes Gotama recovering a path followed by the awakened ones of previous ages. In this story awakening has an ancestry independent of any visible institution around him. The road is an image of wisdom recovered after neglect. We will ask whether this discourse has parallels that help date its formulation and how it relates to other accounts of knowledge newly obtained.[10]

The temptation to harmonize is powerful. The ancient road may sound like a primordial religion. It may be read as continuity with earlier Buddhas in Buddhist cosmology. Those are rival interpretations of a literary image whose historical ancestry still needs to be tested. The text's own identification of the road as the eightfold path has the first claim upon our attention.

The creator question resists a softer reading. In DN 1, an exalted Brahmā mistakenly imagines that his arrival before other beings establishes his status as their maker. The scene explains how limited memory and authority can produce a false cosmology. A historical thesis that Gotama taught direct worship of the creator would have to explain the presence, date, and circulation of such a passage.[11]

The first comparative pass establishes its central critique in the parallel DĀ 21, with further evidence surveyed by Anālayo. We still need a fuller alignment of the various recensions before proposing relative dates. For now it gives us an adverse claim whose theological content is plain. It deserves at least as much patient scrutiny as passages that appear to support the book's title.

This brings us to the rule that will govern the rest of the manuscript: every proposition must remain attached to its evidence. A stone inscription speaks firmly about a pilgrimage and a remembered birthplace. An early discourse speaks about what a school transmitted. A Qurʾānic verse speaks with authority within my faith and establishes the categories through which I interpret guidance. Moving from one kind of proposition to another is permissible only when the inference is made visible.

The inquiry can now return to the Śākya country. What manner of community formed Gotama? We will examine its relationship to the growing monarchies of northern India, then follow the evidence for his family and departure from household life. The familiar palace story will be investigated in the age and genre of its sources.

Chapter 2: The Śākya Country

The man we are looking for came from a country small enough that its political independence could be unsettled by a neighboring king. The Śākyas lived on the northern edge of the plains, in the country below the Himalayan foothills. Their remembered center was Kapilavatthu, Sanskrit Kapilavastu. In the same landscape lay villages, river crossings, cultivated fields and routes by which a person could walk south toward the great cities of the Ganges basin. The Buddha's epithet, Śākyamuni, says more about his place in this world than the title *prince* ever could. It calls him the sage of a particular people.[16, 17]

A popular biography gives Siddhattha an immense palace, a royal father, and the prospect of succeeding to an inherited throne. Visitors to Buddhist shrines encounter that narrative so often that its setting seems as secure as a dated inscription. Ancient biography operates by different rules. A well-known teacher acquires the architecture of kingship as generations narrate the magnitude of what he renounced. The question for the historian is when that picture entered the surviving sources, and whether early descriptions of Śākya public life support it.

Richard Gombrich describes the Śākya community as self-governing, with decisions made by leading householders meeting in council. The ancient texts refer to an assembly hall, *santhāgāra*, and give glimpses of the political manners of people who believed their lineage important. The council appears to have rested on rank and family standing. If we call this arrangement a republic, we must remember that the modern word invites expectations about citizenship and popular representation which cannot simply be carried back to the fifth century BCE. Gombrich is especially wary of calling these communities *tribes*, another English word that can obscure their social hierarchy.[16]

Imagine the difference this makes to an act of renunciation. The young Gautama may have belonged to a family whose men had substantial authority, property and obligations. Leaving such a household meant abandoning an inherited position among its ruling people. It need not have meant rejecting a crown. A person can leave a great deal behind without being the son of an absolute monarch. The early history is easier to understand when the moral drama depends upon actual social relations rather than on the size of the palace painted behind them.

Under the Kosalan horizon

South of the Śākya settlements lay Kosala, whose ruler appears in Buddhist discourses under the Pāli name Pasenadi, Sanskrit Prasenajit. His court belongs to the political world through which Gotama traveled as a teacher. A small clan community in this region had to account for much more powerful neighbors, including Kosala and the expanding power of Magadha farther southeast. Some historians describe the Śākyas as enjoying internal autonomy under Kosalan suzerainty. The amount of independence enjoyed at any particular moment, and the exact chronology of its loss, depend upon source traditions whose royal episodes often carry later narrative elaboration.[16, 18]

The familiar tale of the Śākya catastrophe concerns King Viḍūḍabha, born from a marriage freighted with conflict over lineage, who later attacks the community. It conveys how vulnerable an aristocratic group could become once its quarrel reached a larger court. The details appear in layered Buddhist narrative traditions. We cannot turn every dramatic episode into a dated event by placing it after a king's name. Still, the story's political landscape is plausible: a community could govern its own affairs, boast of its descent, and remain exposed to a power outside its assembly.

The Śākyas' internal standing also deserves attention. A religious tradition founded by a man who would later speak against pride of birth remembers him emerging from a community associated with pride of descent. In the *Ambaṭṭha Sutta* (DN 3), disputes over who may claim high birth become an occasion for argument about conduct and status. The discourse has its own literary construction and cannot be read as minutes of a council meeting, but it places family honor firmly within the moral world the tradition assigned to Gautama.[19]

This bears upon the historical plausibility of his preaching. The teacher was addressing an order of distinctions he knew. A renunciant who gives up household standing, receives gifts from rulers and commoners, and accepts pupils from different backgrounds has made a public choice about rank. His community had to decide how it would govern disagreement among people who had entered from different positions in society. Buddhist accounts of the early monastic order depict an institution deeply concerned with procedure, seniority and the rules of communal life. The possibility that Gautama carried some experience of assembly politics into monastic organization is worth investigating; evidence for the institutions does not tell us exactly how consciously he drew that connection.[16]

The town behind the name

Kapilavastu presents a different kind of problem. Unlike a teaching transmitted by generations of reciters, an excavated site has pottery, stratigraphy, walls and soil. The objects can be dated within limits. They cannot always tell us what a place was called when the earliest occupation began. Modern investigators have long debated the claims of Tilaurakot, in Nepal, and Piprahwa-Ganwaria, across the border in India. Both belong to the region in which the early Śākya traditions are set. Their interpretations have also been caught up in modern national claims to a sacred biography.[20, 21]

At Tilaurakot, archaeologists working with Nepal's Department of Archaeology, Durham University and the Lumbini Development Trust have investigated the walls, urban layout and monumental compounds. UNESCO's 2020 and 2021 accounts describe work at a central walled complex. Durham's own project report records new evidence about the ancient city's development while describing Tilaurakot as a location identified by many scholars with Kapilavastu. A large excavated structure tells us about the importance and changing use of a city. Calling it the exact palace inhabited by a man whom the sources do not securely identify as a prince requires a second argument.[22, 23]

Piprahwa offers another dossier. The reliquary inscription recovered there, excavated monastic structures and inscriptions associated with Kapilavastu have all been invoked in favor of its identification. The debate includes disagreement about how to date and interpret the inscriptions. A label appearing on a later monastic sealing may record the religious identity of the establishment, while leaving open the precise location of the founder's childhood home. Archaeologists who prefer Tilaurakot likewise need to distinguish secure occupational dates from an identification derived from ancient travel accounts.[20, 21]

The distinction between a sanctuary and the village of a man's youth deserves protection. Sacred memory preserves routes of pilgrimage, and a monumental complex may grow where devotees believed an event occurred. A pilgrimage tradition can be geographically stable without giving us direct observation of the original event. The Lumbinī pillar offers much firmer evidence for the established ancient identification of the birthplace by Aśoka's time than either modern claimant provides for the precise childhood residence.[5, 20]

Suppose future excavation identified the ancient administrative center beyond dispute. It would still leave a great deal about Gotama unknown. Material culture can tell us the scale of buildings, what people used and sometimes what they ate. The personal experiences described in a sacred biography belong to a different evidentiary world. The honest reconstruction lets the physical town and the narrated prince occupy their own places until evidence joins them.

His father's title

The name Suddhodana, remembered as Gautama's father, may belong to an old personal tradition. His political designation is harder to settle. In later biographies he becomes a king, and the renunciation is staged against the temptations of regal succession. Earlier material more readily evokes an aristocratic governing community. The term *rājā* itself could cover kinds of political authority that an English translation as *king* makes appear narrower. Older scholars such as T. W. Rhys Davids drew attention to this problem, and modern historians continue to distinguish a ruling family from a hereditary monarchy.[16, 24]

A Muslim historian will recognize the difficulty. A man honored for what he became acquires a childhood suited to the grandeur of his later memory. His followers preserve a story that expresses the moral magnitude of his sacrifice. The story may contain older domestic facts, even while its palace imagery grows more splendid. We have to judge the parts separately, as we would a report about any saint or Imam whose biography was amplified by grateful disciples.

One ancient claim remains stubbornly useful: Gautama belonged to the Śākyas. A historical community with that name and a regional landscape can be studied without deciding at once how accurately later birth stories describe him. This is enough for a first portrait. A member of a leading family left the life expected of him, entered a world of wandering teachers, and eventually drew others into a discipline that outlived the political order of his homeland.

His first act of leaving is the subject of legends. We will ask what those legends remember when we reach the palace chapter. Before then, the rivers and settlements of the Śākya country have established an essential constraint. The man whose title later traveled from Sri Lanka to China began among people who knew the price of land, the prestige of descent, and the proximity of a king's army.

Chapter 3: The Palace He May Never Have Lived In

A king's son leaves an upholstered life, meets old age on a road, and recognizes the misery of the human condition. His father had tried to protect him from every sorrow. The carriage makes four journeys; each journey brings a sight whose meaning the young man had been forbidden to learn. An old man, a sick man, a corpse, and a renunciant. Then the palace loses its hold on him.

This story has been told so often that it can feel older than the scripture. The historian has to ask whose story it was when it first entered the surviving record.

In the *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, DN 14, the famous series of four sights belongs to Vipassī, a Buddha imagined in a distant former age. A later narrative tradition places the same sequence in the life of Gotama. The movement of an episode from one awakened one's biography to another is itself evidence about the growth of Buddhist storytelling. It may preserve an older common pattern, or it may show the later tendency to make each Buddha enact a single sacred career. Either possibility has to be explored with the names of the characters still attached to the witnesses that supply them.[25]

Gotama does give an autobiographical account of a privileged youth. The *Sukhumāla Sutta*, AN 3.38 in one common numbering and AN 3.39 in another, describes a household wealthy enough for pools of different lotuses, fine textiles from Kāsi, attendants, and dwellings suited to the seasons. These are details a wealthy clan household might have recognized. The speaker recalls the arrival of an understanding about his own inevitable aging, sickness, and death. He approaches the problem through the person who sees the aged or ill and recoils, forgetting his own condition.[26]

The text's claim of refinement deserves to be taken seriously as testimony to a remembered social identity. Its monumental architecture is a different question. The noun usually rendered 'palace' can make an already lavish account resemble the residence of an imperial monarch when carried into English. A reader who has walked around a preserved royal enclosure naturally supplies towers and walls. The earliest Śākya setting, reconstructed in Chapter 2, leads us to examine the dimensions of that assumption. We possess no excavated room with Gotama's name written over its door.

A generous house can become a palace through translation. A palace can become three palaces through repetition. And a biographer, knowing the requirements of a prince's departure, may close every gate until renunciation acquires the dramatic force it needs. These possibilities concern the text's growth; they leave open the economic comfort Gotama says he experienced.

The mother's body and the speaking infant

An even more remarkable biography begins before a child can form a memory. MN 123, the *Acchariyabbhūtadhamma Sutta*, places a recital of astonishing events in the mouth of Ānanda. It describes the bodhisatta's extraordinary gestation, his birth, and his first steps. The newly born child walks seven steps and announces his supreme position in the world. Its Chinese parallel, MĀ 32, preserves comparable miraculous motifs. Their appearance in distinct collections establishes that the story had acquired a substantial transmission history. The agreement tells us how Buddhist communities remembered an extraordinary birth.[27]

The statement uttered by the infant serves the theological portrait of a destined awakened one. Such a declaration also belongs to a literary world in which miraculous births announce the stature of great teachers. The reason for counting the witnesses is to establish the history of the tradition. The speech of a child immediately after delivery lies outside the historian's ability to corroborate from those texts alone.

For a Muslim author, the comparison to the Qurʾānic infant ʿĪsā can be tempting. Qurʾān 19:29–30 makes the speaking infant a sign in the story of Maryam. Reading the Buddhist passage alongside it raises questions about what miraculous infancy does in religious narration. It cannot establish that Gotama spoke at birth, or that one story derives from the other. A comparison is useful when it forces us to distinguish theological testimony from independent historical identification.[28]

A household left behind

The famous renunciation has been polished by artists into a departure at midnight, accompanied by horses, sleeping women, and celestial intervention. The personal statements in MN 26 are more abrasive. Gotama says that while his parents were unwilling and weeping, he shaved his head, put on the ochre robe, and left home. The scene contains a family whose desires have been overridden by a man convinced that illness and death demanded his full attention.[9]

The mourning of his parents has a peculiar force. Some later biographies place his mother Māyā's death soon after childbirth and his upbringing with Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī. The parent language in the autobiographical formula creates an interpretive problem for anyone building a seamless chronology from all surviving stories. The Pāli term can be a conventional designation of the parents or of those who raised him. We should keep that tension visible and compare the equivalent Chinese phrasing before giving the text a precise cast list.[9, 29]

Women and children also disappear too easily from the spiritual origin story. The young man later has a son called Rāhula in the tradition, and the sources remember Rāhula as a monk whom the Buddha instructs. MN 61 speaks to a young Rāhula about truthful conduct; later lives assign the child an infancy, a named mother, and a poignant encounter with his absent father. The son is a plausible historical relationship, with the precise domestic chronology still demanding source-

level work. We should follow the sources as they become available, including what they say about the agency and burdens of the women who remained.[30]

Religious biography has its own economy of sympathy. The renouncer's courage attracts every kind of attention. The people losing him are granted a few gestures. A woman nursing a child, relatives worried about obligations, servants who must continue tending the house: their ordinary lives hold the moral cost of a departure that tradition remembers as holy. A historically alert biography leaves space for them without inventing dialogue.

The decisive feature of MN 26 is the problem Gotama states. He had been subject to birth, sickness, aging, and death, and had sought what suffered those same limitations. He then pursued a form of freedom whose value lay in escaping that cycle. The movement from self-description to teaching is visible. This is the kind of autobiographical evidence the historian can analyze even while remaining uncertain how faithfully an oral composition preserves any individual speech.[9]

Four encounters, one discovery

The late carriage story arranges human vulnerability into a sequence that an audience can recognize in a few pictures. The earlier autobiographical strand locates the transformation in a recognition about the witness himself. Its philosophical bite comes from a simple fact. The young enjoyer of luxuries is already aging while he looks at someone older.

This matters for the book's Islamic question. The Qurʾān calls people to look at what is near them and understand that it has an ultimate claim upon their conduct. A person's aging body provides an unavoidable lesson. Whether the teacher of that lesson was a prophet is a later problem. Gotama's remembered recognition concerns an obligation that arrives before the reader knows the technical vocabulary of either religion.

An honest historical reconstruction should end this chapter with a blurred residence, a credible attachment to a prosperous Śākya family, an early tradition of deliberate renunciation, and competing narrative accounts of how the decision was reached. The palace has acquired a life beyond the life it was built to describe. A man nevertheless walked away from a household. The people who knew him had to live with the consequences.

Chapter 4: Two Teachers and a Forest

The young renouncer enters a world already crowded with solutions. Someone promises release through disciplined attention. Another understands freedom as escape from all ordinary perception. Men seek liberation through austerity, insight, recitation, celibacy, or the cessation of desire. The road has teachers on it, and those teachers have students prepared to recognize a prodigy.

Gotama's own narrative gives two important names. Āḷāra Kālāma appears first. Uddaka Rāmaputta follows. Their place in the biographies deserves unusually close reading because the celebrated later declaration, 'I have no teacher,' has sometimes been used to erase the very people whose methods he studied.[9, 31]

Āḷāra's school

In MN 26, Gotama approaches Āḷāra in search of a practice that will carry him beyond ordinary distress. He learns the master's teaching rapidly. What begins as the repetition of what other students say becomes an attempt to enter the same meditative state directly. He succeeds and tells Āḷāra. The teacher offers a partnership in leading the community.

This is an extraordinary scene even if its conversation has been stylized. A young wanderer becomes capable of an attainment that his teacher treats as the center of his own instruction. The offer of equal leadership makes a later departure costly. A man who wanted disciples or reputation could have stayed.

The attainment is called the dimension of nothingness, *ākiñcaññāyatana*. Modern readers sometimes assimilate this to a mystical encounter with the One. The phrase belongs to an Indic account of meditative states, and the early Buddhist narrative describes a specific limit to its value. Gotama concludes that it can lead to rebirth in a high sphere while leaving the final problem of suffering unresolved. That assessment is part of the Buddhist retrospective account; it does not provide us with an independent copy of Āḷāra's teaching.[9]

An early teacher becomes known through the verdict of the pupil who surpassed him. The historian must remember the imbalance. We know almost nothing of Āḷāra apart from testimonies preserved by the religious community whose founder left his instruction behind.

Uddaka and Rāma

The second encounter contains a philological trap. Uddaka bears the designation Rāmaputta, son of Rāma. The Pāli account distinguishes what Uddaka teaches from the attainment attributed to Rāma. In an influential reading of MN 26 and MN 85, Uddaka makes Gotama familiar with his father's or predecessor's tradition, and Gotama reaches what Rāma had claimed to know. When Gotama reports his attainment, Uddaka places him in a leadership position.[31, 32]

Calling both Āḷāra and Uddaka 'Gotama's two teachers' is convenient. The surviving phrasing invites a finer distinction. The narrative directly calls Āḷāra a teacher; Uddaka may have acted as the custodian or fellow practitioner of an attainment associated with Rāma. Ānandajoti Bhikkhu draws attention to this distinction in his textual introduction. Modern translations of the relevant pronouns and relationships differ, so it remains a question to document in the original Pāli and the Chinese parallel.[32]

Uddaka's teaching concerns *nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*, the dimension of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Readers with a taste for metaphysics will enjoy the phrase. Its solemnity should never do the work of an argument. The text describes a highly developed contemplative achievement, judged insufficient for the release Gotama sought. Its breadth and austerity are easy to flatten when later Buddhist categories become the only available language for the earlier teachers.

Why does the Buddha's tradition retain the names and achievements of practitioners who failed its ultimate test? One reason may be historical memory. Another is pedagogy. The biographies place Gautama at the far end of the highest methods available before his awakening. This claim

glorifies the founder, yet it also leaves a trace of a crowded pre-Buddhist ascetic environment that a purely miraculous life might have omitted.

Learning as a historical fact

The road through the teachers clarifies the declaration to Upaka after the awakening. When Gautama says he has no teacher, he describes the authority of his decisive realization. The context and the later wording distinguish what he claims to have discovered from what he learned earlier. His earlier apprenticeship belongs to the same canonical account.

For the Islamic reader, this creates an analogy with the wider problem of inspiration. A person who says that no human teacher gave him his decisive knowledge has established a claim about his human intellectual debt. The theological question of divine source remains separate, especially when the person does not identify divine revelation as the event's origin. We should read his self-understanding carefully before considering whether it was complete.

There is a strong temptation to make Āḷāra and Uddaka into priests of an earlier monotheistic creed whose secrets were corrected through prophetic awakening. Their extant teachings are encountered through Buddhist narrative and Indic contemplative categories. Reconstruction from those categories is already difficult. The proposed monotheistic affiliation needs an independent source, which we do not possess.

The journey also shows how the Buddhist text handles competition. Rival attainments are taken seriously enough to be learned. Their proponents are treated as capable and honorable. Gotama leaves because his question has outgrown the answers he receives. The framework is polemical, but it is informed polemic. We can ask which portions of that scholarly generosity belong to historical memory and which represent the ideal teacher that later Buddhists wished to remember.

The place he chose

After these encounters, the path approaches the Nerañjarā river at Uruvelā. MN 26 remembers a pleasant piece of countryside, trees, accessible water, and a nearby village from which a mendicant could obtain food. The Chinese MĀ 204 preserves a comparable description, adding a fuller scene of the tree and resolve.[9, 29, 33]

There is a practical intelligence in the choice. An ascetic setting needs solitude and nourishment within walking distance. The image of a miraculous tree comes later in the narrative, and the man who would become the Buddha is described as making an environmental decision. He settles where serious work seems possible.

For a writer trying to recover the historical teacher, the geography is welcome. Great revolutions of thought require somewhere to sleep and something to eat. They emerge in landscapes traversed by ordinary people who have no idea that they are passing the man future generations will call the awakened one.

The two weeping parents

Anālayo's comparison of MN 26 and MĀ 204 finds the same domestic detail in both traditions: Gotama leaves while his parents weep. The Chinese has 父母啼哭, father and mother crying, and the Pāli also names the mother and father. In the Chinese discourse he is twenty-nine, a number absent from the corresponding sentence of MN 26. The scene is an early shared memory of renunciation that later readers may regard as too familiar to question. The difficulty is that other Buddhist narratives identify the birth mother Māyā as dying seven days after the child's birth. Taken as literal reports about a single woman, the two scenes have different chronologies.[34, 9, 29]

The straightforward solution of identifying the woman at the renunciation as a foster mother might be correct for one community's understanding of the life. A different explanation is that later texts brought together two narrative traditions whose storytellers attended to different purposes. MN 26 records the cost of a decision to leave home, with the tears of parents serving as the final sign of the household's claims. The miraculous infancy texts raise the Buddha from the beginning beyond ordinary human biography. A historian should give each strand its documentary place before resolving the discrepancy through a conjecture about family relationships.

The Chinese numerical age deserves similar treatment. Twenty-nine became part of the conventional sequence of the Buddha's life, and a reader encounters it in modern summaries as an established biographical fact. The first-hand historical warrant of a precise ancient age is much weaker than the frequency with which later books repeat it. Here one principal parallel reports it, while the corresponding sentence in the other principal parallel speaks more generally of youth. One can state what a recension says with confidence and remain cautious about the dated event it claims to remember.

This is why the comparison matters to the Islamic question. Any reconstruction of an Indian messenger begins by recovering the actual man from his religious biography. When even an ordinary household event has acquired competing explanatory forms, a private supernatural experience must be handled with still greater patience. Sympathy for the person who was remembered can survive a historian's refusal to treat all his remembered scenes as eyewitness testimony.

The renunciation as the schools remembered it

The scene of departure is among the most useful places to see what an early Buddhist biography can and cannot yield. In the Pāli *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, Gotama describes leaving while his mother and father have tearful faces. The corresponding Chinese discourse, MĀ 204, gives the same domestic gesture, then adds an unusually precise age. Its phrase *shèngnián nián èrshíjiǔ* (盛年年二十九) says that he was twenty-nine, in the prime of his youth. A traditional biographer can make twenty-nine the age of departure. A comparative biographer has to report that this detail is attached to a particular recension of the episode.[9, 29, 34, 35]

The Chinese proceeds through the parents' tears and the disapproval of relatives to the removal of hair and the assumption of monastic robes. The narrator reports his own decision. In the Pāli version the gesture is shorter. The details do not create two entirely unrelated stories; they show

how a recognized biographical scene could be extended without losing its narrative purpose. The community remembered a renouncer leaving a family that wished him to stay. Attributing every word of the Chinese elaboration to the historical Gotama would require evidence independent of its presence in the surviving translation.

The mention of his mother complicates later legend. Other Buddhist narratives describe Māyā dying shortly after Gotama's birth and her sister Mahāpajāpatī raising the child. The tearful mother could thus be explained as an adoptive mother, a category that makes human sense. Yet the early autobiographical passage does not identify her as Mahāpajāpatī. The stronger evidence is that distinct accounts of his life were transmitted in forms that need harmonization to produce the familiar seamless biography. Rather than write an invented farewell scene, we can leave the identity of the woman who wept undetermined. The uncertainty allows a glimpse of domestic loss that the polished biographies sometimes conceal.[9, 34]

His teachers are firmer figures within this shared narrative. Āḷāra Kālāma teaches an advanced attainment that Gotama reaches. Āḷāra offers him authority over the ascetics around him. The second narrative involves Uddaka and a superior attainment associated with Rāma. Chinese MĀ 204 has Uddaka speak of his father Rāma, whose realization supplies the model; the Pāli formulation requires equally careful reading of the difference between one who knew an attainment and one who taught it. The larger story has Gotama learning within recognizable north Indian contemplative lineages before he claims to surpass what they could offer.[9, 29, 34]

The difference reaches the teacher's death. Both recensions say Āḷāra had died seven days before Gotama first considered him as an audience for the new teaching. MĀ 204 says Uddaka had died fourteen days earlier; MN 26 says the previous night. Both versions have heavenly beings inform Gotama of the deaths, followed by his own reported knowledge. The agreement concerns the loss of two potential interlocutors. The dates are unstable. This is a useful warning about the rhetorical function of a timeline: exact numbers may emphasize that the opportunity to speak was missed, even when the recollections diverge about how long it had been missed.[9, 29, 35]

A second reason to preserve the heavenly messengers is that the broader documentary comparison is sometimes formulated as a contest between revelation from above and awakening from within. Both kinds of language appear in the Buddhist records. Divine beings can announce facts and invite the teacher to speak. Gotama nevertheless grounds the authority of his path in an awakening he understands himself to have achieved. The evidence must be sorted by the role assigned to each figure in the narrative. A heavenly messenger who delivers news about a dead teacher functions differently from one who dictates a final religious law.

Chapter 5: At Uruvelā

The body becomes an experiment. Gotama presses his teeth together, restrains his breath, and lets his diet dwindle until the people watching him begin to see an extraordinary holy man. His own recollection describes pain running through the head and abdomen. Each practice is meant to carry him toward release. The suffering it produces becomes part of the test.

MN 36 gives one of the fullest accounts, with a related extended version in MN 85. Both are placed in the Buddha's reported retrospective speech. Their vivid physiological details invite confidence, and their narrative shape invites examination. A founder's repudiation of extreme asceticism acquires greater force when he is shown pursuing it beyond what ordinary rivals could endure.[31, 36]

The account leaves much for the historian to evaluate. It preserves the social world of ascetic virtuosity, in which bodily hardship functions as a sign of commitment. It also explains the Buddhist 'middle way' as the result of an ordeal. The hardship may have a real biographical kernel; the exact catalogue of feats can grow in repeated performance.

The taste of enough food

Five companions attend Gotama while he practices. They regard him as a man capable of reaching some extraordinary state. Then he reconsiders the means by which he has been working. He remembers an experience of quiet concentration from his youth, seated in the shade while his father was occupied with work. The recollection proposes a startling possibility. Pleasure free from harmful desire may aid liberation. A starved body struggles to sustain concentration.[31]

He eats boiled rice and porridge. His attendants leave, believing that he has abandoned the rigorous project. The detail carries the human comedy of spiritual prestige: observers recognize holiness by emaciation and consider eating a betrayal. The future Buddha loses his immediate audience at the very moment the story places him on the path to awakening.

The change becomes important later in the first-sermon material. Both self-indulgence and self-mortification had been given social authority in different communities. Gotama's teaching redefines religious seriousness around attention, ethical conduct, and the cessation of craving. The body remains involved through meditative discipline, and ordinary nourishment permits the work to continue.

When a Muslim reads this, fasting comes readily to mind. Islamic fasting is embedded in a cycle of nourishment and ordinary duty. The Buddhist account concerns a quite different practice, and the similarities should be treated as ethical comparisons rather than claims of common ritual origin. Both traditions nevertheless ask what spiritual hardship does to the person undertaking it. A discipline that feeds vanity or cruelty has failed a purpose the discipline itself was supposed to serve.

Several nights under one tree

The familiar painting shows a continuous night beneath the Bodhi tree: Māra attacks, the earth witnesses, and morning arrives with enlightenment. The oldest recoverable narratives contain several ways of describing the decisive knowledge. MN 36 emphasizes a progression through meditative absorption and knowledges associated with remembering previous lives, seeing the death and rebirth of beings, and ending the mental influxes. MN 26 gives a comparatively terse report of attaining the deathless. MĀ 204 includes the Bodhi tree and a fixed resolve; its account also differs from MN 26 in the telling of Brahmā's invitation.[9, 29, 31, 33]

Anālayo's comparative study of awakening narratives tracks these different verbal schemes. His proposal is that the variations may offer different descriptions of an awakening whose immediate character resists full discursive formulation. Other scholars have read the divergences as evidence of doctrinal evolution. Those positions can be evaluated using the order and independence of textual witnesses. They are interpretations of the surviving accounts, rather than a historical recording of the event.[37]

The practical issue is what kind of knowledge is being claimed. Direct recognition of a law governing suffering and its cessation is central to the early descriptions. The canon also connects liberation with cosmological insight into past lives and the destinations of other beings. A modern reader who finds the ethical teaching compelling may be tempted to discard the cosmology as an ornament. Its presence across substantial early traditions requires a more serious account of how those claims developed.

A historical book can say that Gautama's community preserved the memory of a decisive contemplative transformation. It can reconstruct the problems, methods, and claimed consequences attached to that transformation. Whether a supernatural being intervened, or whether the religious event was communication from Allah, cannot be settled by counting the later attestations of supernatural scenes.

Two trees within walking distance

The botanical detail deserves attention because it will return in Chapter 15. The Pāli *Mahāvagga* states that Gotama rose from meditation at the Bodhi tree and went to the Ajapāla banyan. These are distinct locations in the story. At the Ajapāla tree a brahmin questions him about what makes someone worthy of the designation *brāhmaṇa*. In the same larger narrative cycle, Brahmā Sahampati later urges him to teach.[38]

Later accounts extend the period after awakening and arrange visits to several trees and shrines. The order and length of those visits vary. The Ajapāla tree is called a *nigrodha*, generally a banyan; the Bodhi tree is traditionally an *assattha*, a sacred fig. Both are members of the genus *Ficus*, which explains some loose cross-cultural descriptions. Their names designate different trees within the narrative. Botanical commonality cannot settle which tree a later Muslim exegete intended when he wrote about a fig.[38, 39]

There is a quiet irony. The site of enlightenment eventually becomes the heart of a vast sacred geography. The early narrative still remembers an ascetic walking from one shade tree to another and meeting someone whose questions concern status and conduct. Wherever the historian puts the boundary between memory and hagiography, the movement remains understandable.

When the first audience walked away

The five former companions reappear on the road to Bārāṇasī. The first community forms in the wake of a failed judgment by people who had known Gotama during his austerities. They had taken his nourishment as evidence that he had lost the path; he returned to them claiming to have completed it. The conversion story inevitably favors the founder. It nevertheless preserves a

recognizable scene of re-evaluation: a group that had rejected a teacher is asked to hear him again.

The rhetoric of awakening can obscure the long preparation it retrospectively gathers into one moment. Years of learning, hunger, disappointment, and reflection precede the claim of direct knowledge. The historical question is how much of this material can be carried through the lineages of recitation into a life in northern India. The religious question is what it would mean if some part of that experience was also guidance from Allah. Those questions will reappear when we turn from the tree to the unnamed messengers.

Chapter 6: The Road to Bārāṇasī

The man walking toward Bārāṇasī had already left two schools behind him. According to the account in the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, he had studied with Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, mastered the attainments to which their disciplines led, and judged those attainments insufficient. Neither teacher appears in the story as a fraud. The point is that their practices were serious enough to master and limited enough to leave.[9]

That distinction matters for the word *self-awakened*. The historical Gotama emerged from a crowded intellectual world. Renunciation, concentrated attention, karma, release from rebirth, and criticism of the sacrificial order belonged to disputes already under way. An awakening reached through one's own effort need not imply a mind that had never received instruction. The question was whether his final claim could be subordinated to an existing teacher's authority.

On the road he encountered a wanderer named Upaka in the Pāli telling. Upaka noticed the clarity of the traveler's expression and asked to whose teaching he belonged. The response contains the famous line *na me ācariyo atthi*: he has no teacher. The same stanza declares that no one stands as his equal. This is unusually forceful religious self-description. It sounds less like modest reminiscence than a public refusal to join another school's succession. The passage attributes these words to the Buddha; their attribution tells us what the transmitters wished audiences to hear. [P1, P14]

Now follow the story across languages. The Chinese *Madhyama Āgama* 204, conventionally called the *Rāma Sūtra*, preserves the journey and the encounter. Its wanderer's name appears as 優陀, commonly rendered Udra or Uda, whereas the Pāli witness calls him Upaka and identifies him as an Ājīvaka. The Chinese stanzas retain the central claim: the speaker is self-awakened, supreme in his attainment, and without a higher teacher. The Pāli line is therefore one formulation of a larger episode attested in two recensions. Their shared core is more defensible historically than the exact syllables of a supposedly verbatim roadside conversation. [P4, P14]

The Chinese discourse supplies another useful complication. When Gotama describes studying under Uddaka Rāmaputta, Uddaka attributes the highest attainment to his father Rāma. Gotama then reproduces it. The teacher's relationship to the claimed attainment is framed differently from the modern habit of giving every stage a single master. The biography has been organized around a succession of practices whose transmission can be told in more than one way.[29]

After awakening, both MN 26 and MĀ 204 have Gotama ask whom he should teach first. Both name his former teachers, report that they have died, and turn toward the five ascetics at the Deer Park. In MĀ 204 he hears of their deaths from a heavenly being and knows it himself. The presence of a heavenly messenger at this particular point matters because MĀ 204 has already passed over an even more famous heavenly intervention. [P1, P4, H3]

In MN 26, Gotama initially hesitates to teach. The teaching appears difficult, and he wonders whether a world absorbed in desire can receive it. Brahmā Sahampati then comes to him, paying respect and asking him to teach those capable of understanding. Gotama surveys the world and consents. The sequence has become so familiar in Buddhist narration that its presence can seem inevitable.[9]

MĀ 204 tells the episode otherwise. Once its narrator has attained awakening, he considers the possible first recipients of his teaching and proceeds with the journey. There is no hesitation requiring Brahmā to overcome and no entreaty by Brahmā. The transition works. The Chinese account remains intelligible from beginning to end. [P4, H3]

Anālayo examined this disagreement in a dedicated comparative study. Two explanations remain possible: the Chinese lineage dropped an episode, or the Pāli lineage acquired one. He observes that removal could have served a later Buddhist concern: the perfect teacher, supposedly preparing for countless past lives to rescue the world, ought hardly to need prompting to do what he came to do. Yet expansion is also a familiar tendency of oral transmission. The absence of an awkward join in MĀ 204 and the recurrence of similar omissions in some traditions of an earlier Buddha lead Anālayo to regard addition as probable. That remains an argued textual judgment.[40]

There is more evidence. The invitation appears as an independent narrative in SN 6.1, with a Chinese counterpart in *Ekottarika Āgama* 19.1. The Buddhist world knew the episode across more than one collection. Its circulation should be distinguished from its placement in the earliest recoverable form of Gotama's autobiographical discourse. Several witnesses repeat a scene; that alone cannot tell us whether the scene predates their common ancestor. [P5, P6]

A reader expecting the Brahmā episode to settle the Islamic question will be disappointed. In the story that includes him, Brahmā asks for teaching. He behaves as a subordinate admirer of Gotama, who has already attained the knowledge in question. Nothing in this narrative identifies the speaker as the creator of all existence, reveals a scripture to Gotama, or gives Brahmā the commanding role of Jibrīl in the Islamic account of Ḥirāʾ. The comparison can still illuminate the variety of ways a tradition tells the story of a reluctant teacher. Its evidentiary reach must be stated exactly.

This is a sharper result than the documentary's convenient pair of scenes, one cave and one tree. The encounter with Upaka concerns allegiance to human masters. The invitation of Brahmā concerns the founding of a teaching community. Both are narrated after the decisive awakening. A claim about the source of that awakening requires a different inquiry.

We can place before ourselves a historical ascetic who claimed exceptional understanding and gathered disciples after mastering other disciplines. We can also say that the common roadside

narrative presents him as unanswerable to a living teacher. We cannot make the mechanics of his private experience visible merely by choosing between two received sermons.

The five ascetics waited at the Deer Park. The early texts preserve their skepticism toward a man who had abandoned extreme fasting. They accused him, in effect, of surrendering the severity that had made his effort recognizable. Then they listened. Whatever else happened at Bārāṇasī, the new religious movement would survive through argument, attention, and the training of other human beings.

Two sentences that must be read together

The most tempting misuse of the roadside encounter with Upaka is to hear the Buddha's lack of a human teacher as a universal metaphysical declaration. The Pāli version gives him an emphatic claim: *na me ācariyo atthi*, I have no teacher. The surrounding verse says he has fully understood by himself and asks whom he could name as master. The Chinese parallel retains the encounter and the claim of independent awakening, though the wanderer's name and verbal arrangement vary. These are central elements of how the Buddhist community understood the authority of its founder.[9, 29]

The same pair of sources describe heavenly beings communicating factual news to Gotama. MN 26 also recounts Brahmā Sahampati's visit, imploring the awakened man to teach because some beings have little dust in their eyes. MĀ 204 proceeds without that invitation scene and has Gotama decide whom to approach. Anālayo argues that the longer Pāli episode must be assessed alongside its circulation elsewhere in the early collections. The evidence offers a textual history of the invitation; it cannot disclose whether the historical teacher experienced a particular celestial encounter.[40, 34]

In the narrative the epistemic question is therefore narrower than the familiar slogan allows. Gotama claims that no other ascetic has imparted his culminating realization. Divine beings can appear in the world described by his followers. Their appearances are not treated as the origin of the law of dependent origination, which is discovered and then taught. An Islamic reconstruction has to make its positive case for guidance received from Allah, rather than inferring it merely from the presence of a Brahmā or from the limits of a slogan about self-awakening.

That difference also explains why the name of a recipient of guidance cannot be settled by the user's experience of refuge. A devotee might find that remembering Gautama makes him patient, forgiving, and responsible. The change may be morally valuable without supplying a historical report about what Gautama believed regarding a creator. The historical title and the moral encounter need distinct arguments, even when they belong to the same search.

Chapter 7: Suffering Is a Moral Question

At the Deer Park, the former companions of Gotama would have recognized an uncomfortable fact. He had abandoned the austerities they considered evidence of his seriousness. Hunger could be displayed. The gaunt body of an ascetic made an argument without speaking. When a man who had nearly starved himself began eating again, his associates had to decide whether he had

recognized an error or surrendered to pleasure. The question of his authority was being tested in the behavior of somebody they thought they knew.[9, 41]

The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, SN 56.11, makes their encounter the occasion for a teaching organized around the middle way and four truths concerning suffering. The opening rejects devotion to sensual gratification and devotion to self-mortification. It introduces a path with eight features, beginning with right view and proceeding through intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. The structure gives conduct a central place. A listener seeking release must examine what he does with his body and what he permits his mind to rehearse.[41]

The title means the discourse on setting the wheel of *dhamma* in motion. That title is already a claim about what happened afterward. A canonical narrator knows that the first students became a community, that their teaching traveled, and that a vast body of traditions came to refer back to this occasion. Our historian must read the account in the light of its surviving parallels. The story is valuable evidence for the early Buddhist understanding of its foundation, and its several surviving forms help reveal which features became common property among different schools.

What the Chinese witness preserves

The Chinese *Saṃyukta Āgama* 379 contains a parallel first-sermon narrative. In that account Gotama teaches four truths and their successive modes of comprehension. The text makes the crucial distinction between recognizing a truth, undertaking the response it requires, and realizing that the task has been completed. The twelvefold arrangement, four truths considered through three phases, is also present in the Pāli account.[42, 43]

SĀ 379 is shorter. It lacks the developed preliminary account of two extremes found in SN 56.11 and does not supply the same extended definitions of the truths. The absence matters for a historian of composition. It cannot be turned at once into a firm date for those omitted elements. Anālayo's comparison considers the likelihood that the Chinese recension preserves an abbreviated account. Other Vinaya and discourse versions preserve some of the material missing from SĀ 379. We have evidence of recensional variation, including selective abbreviation; the surviving evidence does not establish the spoken length of the first sermon.[43]

The older common structure is nonetheless substantial. Suffering must be understood. Its arising must be relinquished. Its cessation must be realized. The path must be cultivated. Each statement has an object and an obligation. The verses about three turns describe a pedagogy that advances from knowledge of a problem to the fulfillment of a discipline. As the community transmitted the lesson, recognition of human distress acquired a precise grammar of responsibility.

The Pāli word *dukkha* is often rendered "suffering," and a person acquainted with bodily pain can enter the teaching through that word. Its canonical scope includes the instability of pleasures and possessions that a person tries to hold in place. Birth, illness, aging, death, separation, failure, and the fragile delight of getting what one wants are gathered into the exposition. We should resist translating that whole world into an account of ordinary sadness. The teaching confronts the way finite lives are organized around conditions they cannot control.[41]

What does the disciple do with this diagnosis? The common first-sermon tradition gives an active answer. He examines craving as a condition for the continuation of distress and trains in a path whose ethical terms govern how he speaks, earns, and acts. Here Buddhism's reputation for calm can conceal the stubborn labor prescribed by its earliest received sermons. One can be impressed by a teaching's tranquility while missing the difficulty of its commands.

Conduct before metaphysics

Consider the expression "right speech." It belongs to the eightfold path, yet its demands appear in contexts far removed from the Deer Park narrative. A person can repeat the Four Noble Truths fluently and still use his words to humiliate a frightened neighbor. A monk may regard his own monastic affiliation as a sign of purity while responding to criticism with rage. The Pāli *Brahmajāla* addresses this problem immediately. When the Buddha or the teaching is criticized, disciples are instructed to examine the criticism calmly and answer what is false. Rage interferes with the task. The Chinese DĀ 21 preserves a corresponding admonition.[11, 44]

A source-critical book should draw an important line here. Later acts of religious violence tell us much about later institutions and the people who perpetrated them. Those acts cannot certify or falsify whether a sentence attributed to Gautama originated in his lifetime. They do offer evidence about whether a community is fulfilling the demands it professes to inherit. When people invoke Buddhism while welcoming cruelty toward a Muslim minority, Buddhist texts give other Buddhists grounds on which to challenge them. The same measure applies to Muslims who profess allegiance to ʿAlī while excusing oppression.

The Sanskrit *Udānavarga* and Pāli *Dhammapada* preserve a maxim about the inability of hatred to end hatred, though one version emphasizes forbearance where the other uses non-hatred. This variation allows us to see a moral principle preserved through different words. One copyist or school may favor the endurance required to suffer an insult; another gives prominence to the absence of hostile intention. Both ways of speaking ask a person to interrupt the reproduction of aggression.[45]

The historian's caution about exact wording does not strip this ethical pattern of weight. On the contrary, a principle repeated across transmissions deserves attention precisely because it survived differences in language. We can identify a transmitted Buddhist norm without claiming that a modern translation reproduces sounds uttered by the man at the Deer Park. If a later community argues that ethnic violence is an act of piety, we can ask which surviving ethical texts it has followed and how it has explained their demands away.

Is the patient answer enough?

A Muslim might find the focus on craving too narrow. Moral life also requires justice between people, the protection of the weak, and the imposition of duties on those capable of harm. Gotama's discourses contain ethical obligations that go beyond personal serenity, but the theory of cessation is framed around a project of liberation particular to Buddhism. To identify its entire moral system with Qurʾānic *ʿadl* would obscure its practical architecture. Even shared admonitions need their proper contexts.

A related question concerns mercy. The suffering individual in early Buddhist teaching stands amid causal conditions, including his own intention, that can be transformed through practice. The Qurʾān places the person before Allah, who knows the deed and judges its circumstances. The Qurʾānic account of forgiveness in 42:40 specifically assigns reward to reconciliation and pardon; 5:8 forbids an enemy's hostility from distorting justice. These verses permit a Muslim reader to regard restraint and mercy taught outside his community as genuine moral goods. They do not settle whether the teacher who articulated them received revelation.[46, 47]

In our proposed comparison, a religious invocation is meaningful partly through its effect on the speaker. "Help me, ʿAlī" may call to mind the Imam's courage and obligate its speaker to act more courageously. Refuge in Gautama can bring to consciousness a discipline of forbearance. The benefits of practice can be examined while the worshiper's conception of ultimate reality remains subject to theological argument. We have no need to award an entire metaphysics to the person who performs a good deed before we can call the deed good.

Yet there is a trap in reducing Buddhism to a collection of agreeable ethical sayings. For the early transmitters, the four truths were an account of existence and liberation. Their authority rested on the awakened teacher's realization and the possibility that others could follow his path. The teaching of craving, cessation, and path has its own conceptual integrity. A historian who extracts the parts he already approves of risks losing the reason the original community remembered the teaching as revolutionary.

A different sort of first sermon

The canonical first sermon reports that the former companions came to understand something. Its narrator signals their acceptance with images of insight and the arising of a purified vision of the dhamma. The listeners cease to be spectators of a man whose fasting had disappointed them. They become students of an insight they are expected to test through disciplined living.[41, 42]

This is the historical datum available to us through the discourse tradition: a movement explained its beginning through a lesson about suffering, conditioned causes, and the cultivation of conduct. The threefold process of knowing, acting, and completing a task survived more than one recensional line. From that foundation we may investigate what its early practitioners meant by liberation and why they thought the person carrying the consequences of action could be described without a permanent self.

The road beneath the road was ancient, according to the next canonical image. We can now ask what kind of moral order an awakened teacher thought he had discovered.

Chapter 8: The Road Beneath the Road

A traveler becomes lost in an abandoned region. He notices an old track, follows it, and arrives at a deserted city. He tells the king. The place is restored and eventually inhabited again.

Gotama uses this picture to describe his own discovery. The *Nagara Sutta*, SN 12.65, calls the road ancient and identifies it with the noble eightfold path. It belongs to people of earlier ages who had attained awakening. The image invites a question that a Muslim reading Indian religious history

will recognize immediately: what if a true way of life can disappear from public view and later be recovered?[10]

Before attaching that thought to prophecy, we ought to establish what the Buddhist text itself is saying. Its subject begins with aging and death. Gotama traces the conditions under which suffering appears, then explores the cessation of those conditions. The old city follows the analysis of dependent arising. The road is a practical course of right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. It is called ancient because the path is known by previous awakened ones, not because the narrator has located a forgotten monument in an archaeological landscape.

The Chinese *Saṃyukta Āgama* 287 preserves a close version. It refers to the *ancient seers' road* (古仙人道) and describes the city, its palace, gardens, pools, and revived inhabitants. Its eightfold path appears explicitly. The passage confirms that this was a transmissible image shared across Pāli and northern Buddhist collections. It also reveals a choice of Chinese vocabulary. The prior travelers are *ancient seers* in this rendering, a phrase rich with Indian ascetic associations. It is methodologically safer than translating the phrase into an Abrahamic category the passage never uses.[48]

Sanskrit fragments associated with the *Nagara Sūtra* offer a further comparison. Editors have reconstructed material from Central Asian witnesses, and Piya Tan's side-by-side presentation sets a Sanskrit recension against the Pāli *Nagara Sutta* and a related Pāli account. The collation shows that the image circulated in traditions that later separated by language and school. The particular manuscripts are later witnesses to inherited discourse. Their existence gives us useful evidence of textual ancestry; their age cannot be projected backward into Gotama's lifetime.[49]

Here a tempting argument must be tested carefully. The Qurʾān repeatedly represents truth as something sent before and forgotten, distorted, neglected, or disputed. Gotama's road sounds, at the level of metaphor, like the recovery of a primordial way. A Muslim may ask whether ancient Buddhas were remembered witnesses to a succession of warners. The *Nagara Sutta* itself gives no historical identification of its former travelers, and the specific content of their road is Buddhist training. The resemblance establishes a promising comparative question, with the strength of a resemblance.

There is another issue of independence. Counting SN 12.65, SĀ 287, the Sanskrit remains, *Ekottarika Āgama* 38.4, and individual Chinese translations as five votes would be a statistical mistake. These texts often share older narrations and sometimes translate overlapping recensions. Our witness table records language, school when supportable, and the segment under comparison. Agreement between two translations of the same ancestor measures something different from agreement between separately transmitted schools.

The figure of the empty city is also less innocent than it looks. Gotama does not merely discover a private contemplative state. In the simile he makes a path publicly inhabitable. That may be the earliest moral explanation of what it means to recover wisdom: the discoverer has a duty to enable others to walk it. The king and the repaired city turn interior realization into a social project. The city fills with life because knowledge has been shared.

Who is permitted to recognize an old path?

The ancient-road story has an interesting order. First a solitary traveler follows marks that another intelligence left behind. Then he finds something that other people can inhabit. His insight becomes consequential only when he reports the discovery, and the city is rebuilt. A teacher who claims to recover a forgotten way is therefore placed under the responsibility of communicating the way in a form that can be practiced. A reader who admires the rediscoverer must still ask whether the road leads where the teacher says it leads.

That question complicates an Islamic identification. The Qurʾān's account of successive messengers creates room for the loss and renewal of guidance. Its historical narrative and the Buddhist discourse work with different kinds of evidence. SN 12.65 offers a religious community's remembered declaration about an ancient route to the cessation of suffering. Qurʾān 16:36 offers a theological claim about a messenger in every community. Their conceptual overlap licenses a comparison of restoration. A historical identification would require evidence concerning a particular teacher's relation to a particular divine disclosure. No name or chain of transmission inside the ancient city metaphor supplies that bridge.[10, 3]

Notice also the city. A restored settlement requires ordinary cooperation, including labor by people who may not have followed the original path themselves. The moral achievement of the narrative is public access to a difficult teaching. The eightfold path includes right speech and right livelihood, requirements that can be examined in the shared world. The image offers a discipline for later adherents who announce that their master has rediscovered wisdom. They become witnesses to that claim through the way they talk and earn their living. The tradition's most persuasive evidence in the present may be its willingness to make such conduct answerable to criticism.

This is why the old road matters more to the biography than an argument about whether a Sanskrit place-name resembles Arabic *kifl*. We can watch a tradition represent its founder as a restorer. We can trace that representation through related witnesses. Then we can ask whether any further historical evidence justifies the Islamic inference. The grammar of restoration is available for comparison. The identity of the source remains the missing question.

The ancient road after its discovery

The old city has another feature worth noticing. After the traveler reaches it, the king or his minister orders its restoration. In SN 12.65 this is a simile about the recovery of dependent origination and a practical way of life. The king inside the story is a figure of public capacity. Roads have to be cleared, walls repaired, and inhabitants permitted to return. Knowledge that had survived as a neglected track becomes available to people who never made the original discovery.[10]

The Pāli description calls the road purāṇamaggo purāṇañjaso, an old path and an old course, previously traveled by rightly awakened ones. The Chinese SĀ 287 calls it an ancient seers' path, 古仙人道. Across these witnesses the answer to the question of its content remains the eightfold path. The Chinese designation invites an inquiry into inherited Indian language for seers; it

supplies a lexical fact that must be carried through the traditions that used it. It has its own history before a Muslim reader gives the old sages an Arabic title.[10, 48]

The city also clarifies the task of a follower. A later Buddhist is invited to undertake right livelihood and right speech in a society where other people are affected by the results. The path includes meditative cultivation, although its public terms are open to criticism from a person who has never taken refuge in the Buddha. A merchant can be asked how an apparent profit was obtained. The monk speaking about his neighbors can be asked how he knows the alarming things he claims. Ancient vocabulary enters the present through decisions that have material consequences.

The comparative argument has a boundary that deserves keeping. The Qurʾānic principle of messengers to every community describes a history of divine address. The Buddhist city recounts recovery of a path already walked by previous Buddhas. A reader may recognize continuity in the two accounts. Their transmitted descriptions of what was recovered remain different, and the Chinese seers are identified by a Buddhist text rather than by any surviving Arabian witness.[3, 48]

I find the city more interesting when it is allowed to remain Indian. An early religious movement imagined the Buddha as the rediscoverer of a demanding way and represented that discovery through work others could join. That is an account of authority: the teacher comes into possession of a path, describes it, and makes its practice possible in a community. Its usefulness for an Islamic inquiry begins with those observable claims. The name of the ultimate giver of guidance remains a further question.

Chapter 9: Who Receives the Consequence?

Suppose a man steals from his neighbor and spends the following evening meditating on the impermanence of every experience. His meditation may sharpen his attention. The stolen goods remain in somebody else’s possession, and the owner has suffered a loss. What does awakening require of a person whose contemplative practice has become more impressive than his conduct? A religion that claims release from attachment must still explain why one ought to answer for an injury.

Early Buddhist discourse repeatedly returns to intentional action and the consequences that proceed from it. Its account of moral causation is woven into a wider account of conditioned experience. To investigate that account we need to separate several questions that modern readers often compress: whether events arise dependently, whether action is ethically significant, whether a person remains identical across time, and what becomes of that continuity at death. Answers to the first question do not automatically decide the others.[50, 51]

The *Paccaya Sutta*, SN 12.20, is a useful place to begin. It distinguishes the principle of conditionality from the particular conditioned phenomena through which the principle is known. The formula identifies relations such as ignorance conditioning formations and formations conditioning consciousness. It then says that this lawful structure remains whether awakened teachers appear in the world or do not. The Buddha discovers it and makes it known.[50]

We encountered a related image in the ancient-road story of SN 12.65. The teacher finds a neglected road used by earlier awakened people. With SN 12.20, the principle becomes sharper: the relation of cause to consequence is presented as something the teacher reveals through insight and explanation, while its existence is independent of the act of teaching. This is a strong account of discovery. It also poses a question about the meaning of a law that holds in a world without the Buddha who recognized it.

A law earlier than its discoverer

The Chinese *Saṃyukta Āgama* 296 supplies an important control. In Charles Patton's translation, the sermon distinguishes dependent origination from those events that arise through conditions. It retains the assertion that the pattern remains whether awakened teachers arise or not. The accompanying notes identify a Sanskrit parallel conventionally catalogued as SF 163, edited in Chandrabhal Tripathi's collection of *Nidānasaṃyukta* material. An Indic formulation beginning with ignorance as a condition for formations is preserved alongside the statement that this order persists regardless of a Tathāgata's appearance.[51, 52]

The shared teaching has thus survived in a Pāli collection, a Chinese translation, and an edited Sanskrit witness. These are three documentary witnesses, with the relations among their textual ancestors still to be assessed. Their agreement supports the antiquity of a discourse claiming that the law of conditioning stands independently of its discoverer. It does not tell us that Gautama personally invented the wording, and the texts' shared literary structure might come from ancestors already centuries removed from his life.

The Sanskrit expression *dharmatā* names the way things are according to the relevant law or nature. A Muslim reader may be tempted to substitute the Qurʾānic expression *sunnat Allāh*, God's established way, and to infer a divine lawgiver. Such an analogy is a philosophical interpretation supplied by the reader. The Buddhist sources are reporting conditions and their regularities. Their argument asks for insight into arising and cessation, and its formulation does not identify a transcendent personal author of the causal system.

That restraint matters because another Chinese sermon pushes even harder against attribution. SĀ 299 asks whether dependent origination is made by the Buddha or made by somebody else. The answer, in that text, rejects both constructions and treats the law as standing whether or not a Buddha appears. The immediate target is the proposal that a discoverer manufactures what he understands. It would take another argument to show that the phrase covers every imaginable account of a God who gives existence to contingent beings. SĀ 299 remains a valuable witness to the school's interest in independence from a teacher's creative agency.[53]

This distinction clarifies why the phrase "self-awakened" is not as epistemologically simple as it sounds. A teacher can claim to have found something through his own insight while describing what he found as objectively prior to him. He may refuse another human master because he has come to know the matter directly. The account of how knowledge was acquired leaves open questions about the existence of the object known. The source's insistence that the law is unmade by a discoverer answers one of those questions and gives the philosopher a specific matter to investigate.

The economy of conditioning

The familiar twelvefold sequence has become a diagram in countless introductions to Buddhism. Ignorance, formations, consciousness, name-and-form, the six sense fields, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, existence, birth, and aging-and-death are arranged in a causal relation. Translations differ, and later Buddhist schools dispute how to allocate parts of the sequence across lives or within experienced moments. The early discourse at SN 12.20 presents relations among these terms. It also describes cessation through the removal of the pertinent conditions.[50]

A diagram is useful only if we identify the questions it was designed to answer. The sequence describes the arising of suffering and its interruption through knowledge and discipline. It was transmitted as a practical account connected to liberation. A philosopher asking what caused the existence of the universe will find that this teaching reaches first for the conditions sustaining distressed experience. Calling it a rival cosmology may obscure the kind of problem the ancient discourse was solving.

An apparent tension appears when the same school criticizes creator explanations. In DN 1, beings come to believe that a Brahmā made them because he appeared before them and desired company. The narrative contests his conclusion about cosmic causation. In SN 12.20, causal law is said to persist whether or not a Buddha appears. These themes can belong to a common philosophical temperament, but their textual forms make different claims. A complete metaphysical argument against an uncreated author of reality would have to specify what such an author means and show why dependent phenomena exclude that source. The passages so far examined do not perform that entire demonstration.

The Muslim comparison needs comparable care. Within Islamic philosophy, one may conceive contingent beings as depending upon the Necessary Existent, while the regularities among contingents remain available to empirical investigation. Other Muslim schools give divine action and secondary causes different relations. A resemblance between a Buddhist account of conditioned phenomena and any one Islamic theory is not historical evidence that Gotama taught it. The resemblance can nevertheless identify where the philosophies disagree: the ontological status of the entire conditioned order, the intelligibility of ultimate causation, and the demands that follow for human action.

The person in the causal chain

A person grows older. Memory changes, bodily matter changes, and the conditions of his judgment change with experience. Across these alterations we continue to ask him to honor promises made yesterday. A Buddhist account of continuity must explain the sense in which the recipient of a consequence can be held responsible without treating identity as an unchanging object.

The doctrine commonly called *anattā* or *anātman* contests the notion of a permanent, independent self available as the owner of every experience. It became a defining feature of Buddhist tradition. The earliest received discourses examine what happens when a person treats body, feeling, perception, volitions, or consciousness as his enduring possession. Later philosophical treatments offer increasingly precise accounts of identity and continuity. A

historical inquiry must trace which articulations are found across early collections and which belong to subsequent systematic thought.

This manuscript does not yet possess a sufficiently complete Pāli–Chinese concordance of the non-self discourses to assign a precise early stratum to their individual formulas. The central doctrinal profile is indisputable as a feature of early Buddhist collections; the historical speaker's exact arguments need a separate dossier. A future version will compare the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, SN 22.59, and its Chinese relatives at the level of particular predicates and examples.[54]

How can karmic responsibility persist in this picture? The initial answer is that consequences proceed through a causal history involving intentions and actions. Responsibility need not be represented as a tiny immutable proprietor concealed inside the body. Later texts, such as the *Milindapañha*, elaborate this view through analogies of flame and continuity. Their literary dialogue is evidence of Buddhist philosophical elaboration; the dialogue cannot be treated as an interview with the historical Śākya sage.

A difficulty still remains, and it is substantial. If the continuities are understood exclusively as impersonal processes, a critic can ask what makes a future recipient of suffering appropriately answerable for an earlier intention. A defender can explain the causal relation and the absence of a separate permanent self. Whether causation alone secures desert, as opposed to merely explaining the occurrence of an outcome, is a live philosophical question. The distinction should be preserved when this book turns to Qurʾānic judgment and resurrection.

Against fatalism

The first-sermon tradition assigns tasks to people who have heard the teaching. It describes a path to be cultivated. A doctrine that rendered present intention irrelevant would sit awkwardly with that demand. Another early text makes the objection explicit. In AN 3.61, three sweeping explanations are presented for everything a human being experiences: deeds from a previous life, an all-determining creator's action, and absence of a cause. The critique is directed at how each explanation can drain meaning from deliberate moral effort.[55]

The Chinese MĀ 13 also puts a creator explanation among the alternatives and challenges its consequences for the distinction between proper and improper action. Both versions are useful evidence that Buddhist discourse communities linked metaphysical claims to practical accountability. Their precise arrangements and wording should be collated before we reconstruct a single speech.[56]

It is worth reading the objection as the argument it makes. Its target is a causal claim about *everything* a human being does or experiences. The point would apply equally to an absolutist interpretation of past karma and a position declaring events causeless. The source criticizes explanations that excuse present agency. Consequently it would be misleading to say that this discourse singles out a Muslim conception of Allah or settles every form of theistic belief. It is evidence that Buddhist teaching vigorously challenged one prominent form of creator-based fatalism.

Muʿtazilī theology supplies a fruitful conversation partner. Its defense of divine justice gives moral responsibility a central role and presses the question of how blame and reward can be

intelligible if human wrongdoing is attributed to irresistible divine determination. Qurʾān 99:7–8 makes acts, however small, answerable, while 5:8 insists upon justice in circumstances that invite partiality. These commitments can generate a practical convergence with the Buddhist refusal to make moral effort futile. They operate inside a Qurʾānic account of Allah and personal judgment whose ultimate explanations differ.[46, 57]

Somebody claiming refuge in a religious teacher while harming others attempts to separate the title of devotee from the burden of being an agent. The Buddhist causal discussion challenges the separation through intention and consequence. The Muslim invokes Allah as the judge before whom a deed remains answerable. In each case a person must explain what he did. The agreement on that duty belongs to ethical comparison. A claim that the traditions secretly share a complete metaphysical system would still need proof.

What we can recover

The evidence gives us a more securely reconstructible teaching than the picturesque details of the palace narrative. A law of dependent arising is said to exist independently of the one who discovers it, and substantial Pāli, Chinese, and Sanskrit witnesses carry the claim. The ethical project is organized around understanding conditions and cultivating a path through which suffering can cease. The criticism of doctrines that make present effort meaningless also circulates across traditions.

The remaining uncertainty concerns precisely what the historical Gotama meant by that lawful order. Did he see himself as discovering an impersonal structure? Was his awakening understood in categories that later schools sharpened into their characteristic philosophical language? Is there any affirmative trace of a source of guidance that a Muslim could, by historically warranted inference, call revelation?

A respectful inquiry has to permit the oldest evidence to resist its author’s hopes. The Brahmā narratives now stand in the way of easy answers. We can ask exactly how widely those narratives traveled, and which criticisms they made of the creator explanation itself.

Chapter 10: The God Who Remembered Too Little

The god arrives before his worshippers. That is the beginning of his mistake.

In one of the longest surviving discourses attributed to Gotama, the universe has already suffered a contraction. Beings have lived for an immeasurable time in a radiant heavenly realm. When a cosmos begins to expand, an empty palace appears. One being exhausts the term of his life or the merit sustaining him, leaves the higher company, and is born there alone. The palace contains no companions, and the silence becomes an affliction. He wishes somebody else would come. In time, others do.

What would it take to mistake their arrival for an act of creation? The sequence supplies almost everything: the first being occupies a splendid place, has a longer life than those around him, possesses powers they lack, and remembers wishing for their presence. His later companions know only that he preceded them. Their first shared explanation becomes a theology. He calls

himself Great Brahmā, the maker and father of living beings. They call him the same. Some eventually die, become human ascetics, and recall their former lives in meditation. They teach what they think they remember. The story of an eternal creator has acquired a transmitter.

The *Brahmajāla Sutta*, DN 1, makes this reconstruction part of its account of partial eternalism: the belief that one being persists forever while the creatures he supposedly made perish. This is a specific error about the status of a finite being. The text's quarrel is with how the claim became plausible and why the witnesses have mistaken it for knowledge.[11, 58]

The narrator does something that religious histories often hesitate to do. He grants the putative witnesses their experience. The first occupant was there; the others really arrived; a reborn ascetic genuinely remembers a previous state within the account's cosmology. The error appears when a memory is made to explain more than it contains. An episode becomes the origin of everything. A powerful person attributes causation to his wish, and his audience mistakes precedence for proof.

This may be the most philosophically interesting passage in the early Buddhist discussion of a creator. Its target is the *manufacture of certainty* through limited recollection. The story remains Buddhist to the roots. It assumes cyclical world formation, karmically conditioned rebirth, meditation that retrieves earlier lives, and the finite status of heavenly beings. We have to retain these premises in view, even when we think their ethical lesson has wider reach.

A claim preserved in three forms

The first substantial comparison of the episode spans the Pāli DN 1, the Chinese *Dīrgha Āgama* 21, and another Chinese discourse catalogued as T 21, the *Sūtra of the Sixty-Two Views*. Their agreements can be traced beyond the familiar statement that Buddhist teaching rejects a supreme creator. Each narrates a being ascending to authority through temporal priority, a subsequent population that attributes its appearance to that being, and the reappearance of the claim in the teachings of a human renunciant.[11, 44, 58, 59]

The Pāli account begins with the contraction of a cosmos and habitation of the radiant plane. A vacant Brahmā palace appears as the universe expands. The first resident longs for company. His wish precedes the rebirth of other beings in the same palace. He interprets that succession as his creative power, while those who arrive afterward confirm his inference. DN 1 then supplies an epistemological limit: a reborn ascetic recalls the heavenly lifetime without recollecting what came before it. The apparently permanent creator occupies the point at which the ascetic's memory runs out.[11]

In DĀ 21, the sequence starts at the beginning of an expanding era. A being from the Ābhāsvara heaven reaches an empty Brahmā heaven, delights in it, and wishes others would join him. The newcomers arrive as their previous lives end. The earlier resident claims to have appeared spontaneously, attributes great power to himself, and reasons that the newcomers are his own creations. They agree. After rebirth as humans, some recover memories of that realm through concentrated practice and set out the doctrine that Brahmā is permanent while his supposed creatures change and perish. The Chinese version adds a striking emphasis on sovereignty over a thousand worlds and the god's claimed mastery of meanings.[44]

T 21 contains the same explanatory mechanism, though its economy is different. As the old age ends, beings ascend to a higher heaven and some subsequently descend. A Brahmā is born in a high empty region. In this rendering, he describes himself as father of everything **before** the narrative recounts his wish for additional beings. Their arrival confirms his already extravagant opinion of himself. The newcomers concur that he produced them because he was there first. Later ascetics remember the heavenly setting and preach his permanence. The text retains the essential misattribution of creation while varying both chronology within the episode and the classification surrounding it.[59]

One should resist tidying these variations into a single invented quotation. They are three literary witnesses to a shared argument. The Chinese versions are neither autograph records nor convenient votes in a theological referendum. Their extant texts passed through translation and transmission, and each may have inherited its story from related ancestors. We can reconstruct a common narrative type more securely than we can recover a speech delivered on one particular day in Gotama's life.

The framework of DN 1 itself has traveled unevenly. In the Pāli transmission, the Brahmā episode is the first ground of *partial eternalism*, after the four grounds for full eternalism. DĀ 21 keeps that arrangement substantially intact. T 21's wording and enumeration around the scene are less straightforward. It should be aligned by the content of the episode and its position in the local text, rather than by assigning the Pāli verse or view number to an assumed Chinese equivalent.[11, 44, 59]

The problem of dates deserves even more restraint. DĀ 21 belongs to the Chinese long-discourse collection translated in the early fifth century CE. T 21 is traditionally assigned to Zhi Qian, but Jan Nattier and earlier catalogue scholarship question that attribution. The Sanskrit long-discourse tradition also contained a *Brahmajāla*. The Tibetan discourse can now be checked at Degé D 352, folios 75a–75b, in the Esukhia-Barom electronic transcription, while Anālayo independently identifies Weller (1934), §60 as its printed scholarly locus. The surviving electronic Tibetan supports the causal-error narrative directly. The fragmentary Sanskrit long-discourse manuscript lacks the creator episode in its surviving spans; the photographed Degé woodblock, the Peking counterpart and Weller's original printed folios remain outstanding direct controls. The parallel Tibetan words in Weller's edition are now accessible through Rico's 2022 synoptic transcription.[60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65]

When the Tibetan witness speaks

The Degé version gives this story an address precise enough for a reader to examine its words. In the archived Esukhia-Barom transcription of the Kangyur, the text begins with the explicit tag {D352} at folio 70b2 under the Tibetan title *Tshangs pa'i dra ba'i mdo*. The creator story runs from the dissolution and re-formation of a world at 74b6 into the first being's mistaken inference at 75a5, the followers' confirmation at 75b1 and the later ascetic's doctrine at 75b4–5. The source is a corrected electronic reading based on an earlier Degé eKangyur. These are direct observations of that electronic witness; photographic verification of the woodblocks remains a separate task.[64]

At 75a5 the first being thinks: སེམས་ཅན་དེ་དག་ནི་བདག་གིས་སྤྲུལ་ཏོ། In a close provisional translation, "Those beings were manifested by me." The decisive verb is *sprul*, here used in a first-

person claim of production or manifestation. The same sentence calls the putative creator *dbang phyug* (lord, sovereign) and *byed pa po* (maker, doer). At 75b1 the later arrivals reverse the grammar: བདག་ཅག་ནི་སེམས་ཅན་དེས་སྤྲུལ་པའོ།, “We were manifested by that being.” The transmitted Tibetan thereby preserves both halves of the error: a self-attribution of creation and the followers’ acceptance of it.[64]

DN 1 states the first conclusion as *mayā ime sattā nimmitā*, “These beings were made by me.” The Pāli *nimmitā* and Tibetan *sprul* permit a close semantic alignment at the claim-unit level, although they do not establish the Indic wording underlying the Tibetan translation. The broader sequence is especially instructive. The beings arrive through the ending of life, karma and merit in another heavenly state. Their predecessor remembers wishing for company, takes subsequent arrival as proof that his wish produced them, and receives confirmation from observers who know still less.[66, 64]

The story then gains a human author. At 75b2–5 a being dies, enters a human life, renounces household life, and through meditation remembers the previous heavenly existence. His recovered scene supports a claim that Brahmā is permanent while those supposed creations are impermanent. At 75b5 the Tibetan explicitly strings together *rtag pa*, *brtan pa*, *ther zug pa* and *rnam par mi ’gyur ba*, terms for what is permanent, stable, fixed and unchanging. The end of the episode is consequently a diagnosis of **partial eternalism**, made persuasive by the limits of memory.[64]

The direct Tibetan excerpt increases confidence in the shared literary mechanism already attested in Pāli and Chinese. It cannot date the scene to Gotama’s lifetime. Nor does its finite, born heavenly claimant by itself settle the distinct Islamic proposition of an uncreated Allah. The text gives us a particular argument about how an erroneous creator claim arises, and how recollection can preserve the error instead of correcting it.

Another Tibetan translation inside a commentary

The first Tibetan witness lived in a canonical collection. The second survived inside a commentary. A distinction in bookmaking has preserved a distinction in wording. The *Kangyur* version, Degé D 352, is a translation of the sūtra as a complete canonical work. Śamathadeva’s *Abhidharmakośaṭīkopāyikā*, preserved in the *Tengyur* as Degé D 4094, quotes the entire sūtra in a different Tibetan translation. Jens-Uwe Hartmann identified the two translations as independent of one another while assigning them to the same broad recension. Liudmila Olalde Rico presents their wording side by side, with Pāli DN 1, in her 2022 dissertation. That gives the electronic Degé reading a valuable second textual control.[65]

In the comparative edition, **§60** introduces the cosmic interval and the empty Brahmā residence. The first inhabitant’s longing and the later arrivals occupy §61. The decisive boast occurs at **§62**, with the first inhabitant connecting his earlier wish to the appearance of others. At **§63**, the newcomers agree that they were brought into being by him. The order matters. Every telling in this comparison asks the reader to identify the interval in which an event acquires an unwarranted cause. The human ascetic’s later recollection begins at §64.[65]

Rico reproduces the *Kangyur* version as **sems can de dag ni bdag gis sprul to**, the self-attribution of manifestation already read in the electronic D 352 at 75a5. The *Upāyikā* instead gives **sems can 'di ni ṅas sprul pa**, carrying the same first-person attribution through different wording. It then explicitly lists the supposed creator as *dbang phyug* and *sprul pa po*, a lord and an emanator, with *dṅos po rnams kyi pha lta bu'o*, one like a father of things. In both accounts the claim belongs to the heavenly being's own thinking. The text then places corresponding words in the mouths of those who have arrived.[64, 65]

The correspondence between the two Tibetan renderings is useful because the wording was selected through different translation decisions. Its value belongs to the history of a received discourse. The translations may preserve a common Indic recension, and their agreement cannot establish an eyewitness account of Gotama speaking about Brahmā. The creator sentence survives as a claim repeatedly carried by Buddhist textual communities.[64, 65]

Rico's comparison identifies a further textual relationship. Repeated abbreviations connect the surviving Sanskrit Dīrghāgama and the Kangyur translation, while the Upāyikā quotation and the known Central Asian Sanskrit fragments belong to different paths in her analysis. The pattern is evidence about transmission; it supplies no surviving Sanskrit maker sentence. An apparent multiplication of witnesses becomes less impressive when their shared ancestry can explain the agreement.[65, 67]

The Sanskrit *Dīrghāgama* manuscript presents a further discipline. Its surviving *Brahmajāla* leaves establish the text's place at the end of that collection, while the region corresponding to this creator story is absent. Rico's aligned column for the episode is empty. We can compare two Tibetan translations, Pāli wording, and the Chinese long-discourse account. We cannot place an unattested Sanskrit sentence in the mouth of an Indian reciter merely because the languages around it agree.[65]

That restraint gives the story its philosophical bite. The Brahmā who thinks his wish made the others has good evidence that his wish came first. He mistakes chronology for agency. A modern reader who turns a Tibetan agreement into certainty about the precise speech of Gotama commits a smaller version of the same error. The task is to determine what each surviving witness heard from its predecessor and how far its memory extends.

The distance between rank and knowledge

The story's Brahmā is extraordinary by the standards of most earthly lives. His superiority is one of its ingredients. Observers reasonably notice that he is older, more splendid, and more powerful. Those qualities make his explanation credible before anybody asks whether he remembers the beginning of the world. His authority is a social fact within the narrated heaven. His purported omniscience is an inference, and the earliest witnesses share the interest in why people accept it.

The pattern recurs in DN 11, the *Kevaṭṭa Sutta*. A monk wants to know where the four great elements cease. He ascends through a hierarchy of heavenly beings, each directing him toward someone more exalted. Eventually he reaches Great Brahmā, who announces his titles instead of

answering. Only when the monk presses him does Brahmā lead him aside and admit that he does not know the answer. His public authority has acquired an obligation to seem omniscient.[68]

The embarrassment is almost comic. What keeps Brahmā from saying he lacks the information? His audience expects certainty from him. The very people he is supposed to guide have trapped him inside the role they assigned him. Here the source criticizes pretension by giving the prestigious being a reason to deceive his followers. The narrator has no difficulty imagining a god who is ashamed to admit ignorance. Later Greek and Islamic philosophers would recognize this as a problem of epistemic authority: how does anyone know the speaker knows?

Other Buddhist passages take the discussion from alleged origins to moral action. AN 3.61 scrutinizes the claim that everything one experiences arises solely through the creator's agency. The discourse places that idea beside two other sweeping causal explanations and argues that each can undermine the reason to act ethically. Its objection concerns what happens when an account of causation makes personal effort pointless. It deserves reading beside DN 1 because the target has shifted from cosmic history to responsibility.[55]

This matters for the Muslim reading of Gotama. The Qurʾān repeatedly insists that human beings answer for what they do, and Qurʾān 5:8 commands justice even toward those one dislikes. A reader who accepts that demand can recognize the power of a Buddhist argument against the abuse of religious authority. If the creator a devotee imagines licenses his cruelty, the objection to cruelty can begin with the conduct. Neither text requires the historian to invent shared metaphysics in order to recognize shared moral pressure.[46]

The question of Allah

It would be easy for a Muslim writer to say that the Brahmā in this account is simply a false god, leaving Allah untouched. In the Islamic account, Allah is uncreated, without any predecessor, without dependence on a realm in which He has been born. DN 1 directs its mockery at a being who arrives through prior conditions and whose knowledge has a boundary. These are plainly different descriptions. The distinction is important for clarity about what the target is.

Yet the early Buddhist argument exists inside a wider religious conception in which the highest beings are subject to dependent origination and repeated existence. Its purpose is to explain why people come to believe that someone made them. The text itself never turns toward the reader to announce an uncreated transcendent Lord behind the lesser Brahmā. A monotheistic reconstruction therefore bears an additional evidentiary obligation. Where does the early tradition make that positive claim? Which words can bear it? What historical path would connect the teaching to an account of divine revelation?

DN 1 supplies an affirmative account of the creator **belief** as a mistake, with the result that the usual argument from compatibility provides less than a reconstruction of a prophet. The sharpness of that problem is one reason for the honorific on this book's cover. *ʿAlayhi al-salām* commits me to giving the historical teacher a fair hearing, even when the answer is inconvenient to a cherished possibility.

A later Chinese cosmological discussion, preserved in the *World Chronicle* section of the *Dīrgha Āgama*, returns to the empty Brahmā realm and the first inhabitant's self-exaltation. It confirms

that the episode was productive material inside a larger Buddhist textual tradition. Its position within the same translated long-discourse collection means that it cannot automatically be counted as a separate genealogical witness to Gotama's exact utterance.[69]

There is a comparable warning about another source. A later Chinese Buddhist text, the *Mahākaruṇā Sūtra* (T 380), makes the dispute much more explicit: a Brahmā who had claimed creative agency is corrected, and conditioned action rather than a personal creator explains the world. Its sharper formulation may illuminate how later Buddhists understood the problem. Its date and textual lineage need independent examination before it can be called testimony to the historical Gautama.[70]

The older narrative is sufficient to raise an uncomfortable possibility for every tradition, including our own. People may possess real experience, and they may faithfully report its narrow contents, while importing conclusions that outrun what they knew. It can happen to an ascetic on the road to Magadha. It can happen to a scholar citing an isnād. It can happen to a person who thinks invoking ʿAlī or Buddha has settled an ethical question. The remedy in the Brahmā story is to ask how the witness knows that his explanation follows from what he saw.

The god's longest-lasting error is the one the historian must take care to avoid: confusing the beginning of a surviving account with the beginning of reality.

The creator and the deed

There is another reason to give AN 3.61 more attention than a footnote. The *Brahmajāla* explains how a particular being becomes convinced that he created the people around him. The *Titthāyatana Sutta* asks what happens to human conduct when everything that a person experiences is treated as the product of an all-determining creator's action. The first story is about a mistaken witness. The second is a moral argument with people who maintain a theory of causation. Their combination tells us that the critique of creator belief in early Buddhist traditions extends beyond a single myth about a finite god.[55]

In AN 3.61 the creator explanation appears in a list with two other total explanations. Some teachers attribute all present experience to deeds performed in a former life. Others assign it to a supreme maker. Still others deny causation. The discourse's challenge is the same for the three: if these claims exhaust the explanation of what someone does, a person may find no adequate ground for effort, restraint, or distinction between acts to perform and acts to avoid. This is a conditional criticism of views whose total explanatory reach threatens responsibility. Its force depends on that totality.[55]

The Chinese *Madhyama Āgama* 13 preserves a comparable set of alternatives, including past acts, a Lord-God explanation, and absence of causes. Its rebuttal, too, presses the difficulties such accounts create for intentional conduct. The bilingual Chinese presentation lets us separate a modern translator's choice of "Lord God" from the original phrase 尊祐造. A comparative philology of that expression against the Indic terminology remains to be completed. What is secure now is the parallel argumentative function of the creator explanation.[56]

A reader familiar with the Islamic disputes over divine justice may feel the argument turn toward him. Can Allah judge a human being for an action entirely necessitated by a decree in which the

person's willing made no genuine difference? A Muʿtazilī scholar would recognize why that question matters to justice. The question is also alive within other Islamic schools, which have produced different solutions to the relation between divine creation and human acquisition of acts. Our manuscript should use those disagreements to identify which specific claims are being compared, rather than naming Islam as though it offered a single philosophical doctrine about causality.

Nothing in AN 3.61 provides an Islamic affirmation of divine sovereignty. Its creator-based fatalism is a genuine target for criticism. The preservation of its central argument in MĀ 13 increases confidence that an early Buddhist textual inheritance posed the problem this way. Whether the historical Gotama delivered precisely these words is still a question of attribution and dating. More urgently, a historian ought to acknowledge that a reconstruction of Gautama as an undisclosed monotheist must now explain two strands of inherited criticism: the mistaken creator in the *Brahmajāla,* and the universal-creator causal thesis challenged in AN 3.61.

What is meant by creation?

There is a second problem of translation that changes the conversation more than the familiar word *Brahmā*. The Pāli *Titthāyatana Sutta*, AN 3.61, calls the criticized principle *issaranimmānahetu*. The compound invokes a lord's creative activity as a cause. It is introduced by a sweeping claim about what a person undergoes. The text lists pleasure, pain, and neutral feeling, then says that all such experience is explained by one source. This matters because the discourse also attacks the attempt to explain all experience by previous karma, and the attempt to explain it without any cause or condition. The target is a total account that erases the distinct causes relevant to the present life.[55, 71]

The Chinese *Madhyama Āgama* 13, entitled *Crossings* in Charles Patton's translation, transmits the same three-party argument. Its opening formula is **人所為一切**, literally everything that a person does. For its creator term it has 尊祐造, a phrase Patton provisionally renders as the making or creation of a Lord God. The two Chinese characters 尊祐 describe an exalted or blessed figure. As Patton explains, the presumed Indic background *īśvara* is plausible from the Pāli parallel, yet the Chinese alone does not prove the exact Indic word. Its other appearances in Chinese Buddhist texts complicate the equation. The evidence asks for a reconstruction, and we should allow the reconstructed term to remain marked as such.[56, 72]

One version begins with experience, the other with action. The ensuing challenge names the killing of living beings, theft, sexual misconduct, false speech, and other forms of harmful conduct. It then asks what becomes of deliberate effort when the agent believes that everything has already been produced by the supposed master cause. Patton also notes an obscure Chinese phrase, 於內因內, whose grammar resists a confident translation. His suggestion that adherence to an external causal theory can become an internal reason for misconduct is explicitly tentative. The passage remains forceful with that clause unsettled.[56]

This philological distinction prevents me from writing a comfortable slogan such as 'the Buddha rejected the Creator' and passing it off as a translation of a single unambiguous proposition. The Buddhist speakers have attacked a comprehensive explanatory doctrine. They believe that

doctrine compromises the moral use of a human life. The two versions tell us that early Buddhist transmitters found the point important enough to preserve, while they give us a real difference in the formulation of the proposition being rejected.

Consider a ruler who orders a village punished and then says it occurred by divine decree. A listener can grant the abstract theological proposition that every event stands under providence and still ask why the ruler chose that order. Here the ethical problem is accessible without settling the metaphysics of the universe. If the ruler's doctrine entails that the judgment of his conduct has no meaning, the doctrine has swallowed the very distinction between justice and oppression. AN 3.61 is interested in the consequences of that move. Its treatment of prior karma is equally revealing: a Buddhist doctrine, misapplied as an exhaustive fatal explanation, receives the same interrogation.

There is genuine proximity here to a particular Muslim argument. Muʿtazilī theologians maintained that morally responsible people possess powers and choices of their own, and that rationally intelligible standards of justice govern our assessment of human conduct. The question for them was how Allah could justly hold a person to account for a deed that the person lacked any meaningful power to avoid. The school represented by al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār treats justice and moral obligation as essential to the intelligibility of divine reward, punishment, and guidance. His authored *al-Mughnī* is now our preferred primary point of reference; the surviving printed *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, often attributed to the judge, is the commentary of his disciple Mānkdīm upon his earlier work. The edition nevertheless testifies to the subsequent school's teaching and sometimes quotes the judge.[73, 74, 75, 76, 77]

The comparison becomes sharper when we ask about the moral value of an action. The Muʿtazilī theory of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* makes justice, truthfulness, and oppression intelligible to reason. Al-Jabbār even argues that a God capable of lying would deprive revelation of the assurance needed to guide a person toward salvation. This is a claim about the reliability of the giver of guidance. Buddhist AN 3.61 instead examines the conduct of the person who invokes a supreme explanatory agency. The philosophical encounter lies in the shared refusal to let a grand description of causality turn cruelty into innocence.[74]

We should retain the disagreement. Al-Jabbār affirms a creator who must be just; the Buddhist discourse constructs a morally effective path through conditions and intentional activity without positing that creator. A speculative identification of Gotama with a Qurʾānic messenger must accommodate what the Buddhist text says about gods and the status of awakening. It gains nothing by hiding the conflict under a modern word like 'spirituality'.

A Muslim reader has an especially good reason to avoid that evasion. Qurʾān 4:79 speaks of the harm that comes upon a person and of wrongdoing originating with that person; Qurʾān 13:11 makes change in a community inseparable from change within its members. The verses have interpretation histories of their own, including disagreements about divine causation. What matters for this comparison is the scripture's refusal to treat human conduct as irrelevant. The same Qurʾān that attributes ultimate dominion to Allah repeatedly summons human beings to give an account of their deeds.[78, 79]

The apparent clash between Buddhist antitheistic reasoning and Islamic monotheism therefore needs a more exact formulation. Which version of a creator's role is being rejected? Does it identify divine power with the immediate production of every harmful action? Does it make the acts of conscious creatures morally redundant? Those are claims we can compare with Muslim discussions of *jabr*, *ikhtiyār*, and *ʿadl*. The existence of a necessary creator, in the philosophical sense defended by Muslim thinkers, is a further proposition. It calls for an argument on its own terms.

The Brahmā story remains the harder obstacle to the prophetic hypothesis because its satire is aimed at religious authority as well as fatalism. The disciple is taught to see that even an exalted heavenly ruler may mistake his own success for universal knowledge. That warning is worth carrying into any theology in which men claim to speak for God. Our question is whether the historical Gotama stood behind the precise anti-creator teaching, and how the surviving recensions came to give it its present form.

A false creator and a question about ultimate cause

The creator-Brahmā episode contains a limited inference with an enormous consequence. A being already inhabiting a heavenly palace mistakes the arrival of companions for the result of his wish. Its later admirers know even less of the earlier causal sequence. The story therefore attacks a claim of universal creative authority made by a conditioned being with partial memory. An uncreated creator in Islamic theology is a different proposition, while the early Buddhist criticism of a supreme cause in AN 3.61 and MĀ 13 still raises a question that the Muslim philosopher must answer. That criticism is directed at an exhaustive explanation of human experience or conduct that can undermine moral effort.[11, 44, 71, 72]

The live philosophical problem concerns the reach of dependent origination. The Buddhist sources describe conditions that can be understood and transformed through discipline; a Muslim thinker can ask whether the entire order ultimately depends on Allah. Each interpretation requires its own argument. The textual history adds a further constraint, because the Tibetan and Chinese witnesses preserve the creator episode while rearranging some neighboring positions in the catalogue of wrong views. What remains shared can be identified more securely than the exact speech of Gotama.[80]

A net whose witnesses do not move in lockstep

The Tibetan *Tshangs pa'i dra ba'i mdo*, catalogued as Degé Toh 352, is one reason for resisting simple declarations about what Buddhist textual history has erased. Its *Brahmajāla* account was sufficiently substantial to survive in a separate translated collection, and Friedrich Weller published a Tibetan and Mongolian edition in 1934. Anālayo identifies the creator-Brahmā episode at §60 of that edition. Published comparative scholarship further reports an unusual ordering of the partial-eternalist positions that the Tibetan shares with the individual Chinese translation T 21.[63, 80, 81]

A common story and an uncommon order of doctrinal positions answer different questions. The first tells us that an account of an ignorant creator circulated beyond the Pāli school. The second

gives us a clue about how one or more lineages arranged the teaching's classification of errors. Texts can preserve a moral lesson while changing the position of examples, their vocabulary, or the dimensions of the cosmology invoked. A witness belonging to a separate language tradition provides additional evidence of circulation, while its value as an independent line of descent depends on the direction of borrowing and translation.

The Tibetan reading is now attached to the identified electronic Degé text at D 352, folios 74b6–75b7. The first being's claim of manifestation, the newcomers' acceptance, and the later ascetic's account of an apparently permanent Brahmā can be checked word for word in that witness. The electronic text establishes the attested Tibetan clauses while the photographs, Peking counterpart and Weller §60 remain independent controls. Appendix P records the Tibetan, provisional English and exact folio lines.[64]

Chapter 11: Refuge and the Responsibility of the Refugee

A man is told that someone has insulted his teacher. He becomes angry and prepares to defend the teacher's reputation. An early Buddhist discourse asks what that anger has done to his ability to judge whether the accusation is accurate.

In the opening of DN 1, one wandering teacher criticizes Gotama while the man's own disciple praises him. The monks become interested in the argument. When the Buddha hears about it, he tells them to examine criticism without resentment and to correct false claims on their merits. Their agitation, he says, would obstruct their own judgment. The corresponding introduction survives in Chinese DĀ 21. This is an unusually strong cross-traditional witness for an ethic of dispute, preserved in the very discourse that criticizes the deluded creator Brahmā. [P9, P12]

The comparison offers a direct test for present conduct. If a Buddhist commentator encounters a Muslim who suggests that Gotama was an inspired teacher, the commentator can answer historically. The early sources give serious objections to a prophetic identification. They supply ample material for a principled argument. Contempt for Muslims, celebration of persecution, and eagerness to humiliate an interlocutor contribute nothing to that argument. The ancient instruction becomes most visible when someone fails it.

The *Dhammapada* tells us that hatred is extinguished through non-hatred. A comparable verse survives in Sanskrit *Udānavarga* 14.11, showing that the moral formulation circulated beyond a single Pāli collection. The Sanskrit specifies *forbearance* where the Pāli names *non-hatred*, a difference worth preserving rather than ironing out. This is evidence for an established Buddhist ethical inheritance; it cannot tell us how every later Buddhist applied it.[45]

The Qurʾān is stern on the same practical terrain. Qurʾān 5:8 warns that hostility toward a people must not drive believers away from justice. Qurʾān 42:40 gives reward with Allah to the person who pardons and repairs a wrong. Forgiveness is an act for which an individual remains answerable. Compassion cannot be delegated to a teacher whose name one invokes. [Q5, Q6]

This book's use of *refuge* begins there. A Muslim saying *Yā ʿAlī Madad* can seek the aid of ʿAlī's example when confronted with cowardice, oppression, or resentment. Someone praying to be saved by Jesus may find that the teachings attributed to ʿĪsā move him to forgive. A Buddhist

reciting *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* can turn the mind toward Gautama's path. The theological interpretations of mediation vary. The ethical question is whether taking refuge changes the refuge-seeker's conduct.

There are dangers in making this purely functional. A religion is more than a behavioral intervention, and Buddhist refuge has textual, ritual, and devotional histories of its own. Some Buddhist practitioners ask Buddhas and bodhisattvas for help in ways that a narrow account of ethical remembrance cannot describe. Some Shīʿī traditions of *istighātha* make claims about intercession that exceed remembering a moral exemplar. A comparison should permit each speaker to explain what the invocation means before translating it into a single psychological operation.

Yet the accountability question survives those differences. If receiving guidance makes someone kinder to an adversary, the change has moral significance. If devotion is invoked as an excuse for cruelty, the person's chosen teacher deserves to be heard in judgment of that cruelty. That is an important place to distinguish Gotama, the early scriptures, modern Buddhist institutions, and political movements drawing on Buddhist identity. Responsibility follows deeds and agents. Historical continuity of religious names cannot establish the founder's endorsement of events two millennia later.

The persecution of the Rohingya belongs to an analysis of modern Myanmar, state power, ethnic exclusion, propaganda, and the actions of specific organizations and people. It is an essential subject for the later chapters of this book because atrocities carried out amid Buddhist nationalist politics raise a hard question about religious responsibility. We must document whose words mobilized whom, what officials did, and which Buddhists opposed the violence. Conflating a founder with every later adherent would repeat the historical shortcuts we have spent these chapters challenging.

A refuge that asks its seeker to see

One early Pāli passage gives the word *refuge* a specific cognitive demand. In *Dhammapada* 188–192, frightened people seek shelter in mountains, woods, groves and shrines. The poem moves to refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha. Its decisive clause concerns the person who **sees the four noble truths with right understanding**: *cattāri ariyasaccāni sammappaññāya passati*. The poem ties the safety of refuge to a way of seeing suffering, its arising, its cessation, and the path that leads to cessation. The familiar threefold formula stands inside a larger teaching about understanding.[82, 83]

This construction matters for a Muslim who hears *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* as a prayer to a rival god. The line belongs to an inherited Buddhist language of allegiance, training and protection. The Dhammapada passage identifies refuge through its connection to awakened instruction and the disciplined insight it cultivates. Its grammar does not settle what a contemporary worshiper believes about Buddha-nature, supernatural intervention, or the powers of bodhisattvas. Such beliefs have their own histories. For this early witness, however, a person cannot replace the work of recognition by identifying the right object of reverence. The refuge calls for a changed understanding.[83]

The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN 16, supplies another striking form of the obligation. Speaking to Ānanda amid the account of his own bodily decline, the Buddha instructs the monks to live with themselves as their island and refuge, and with Dhamma as their island and refuge. The Pāli expressions include *attadīpā attasaraṇā* and *dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā*. The discourse explains the practical meaning immediately through contemplative attention to the body, feelings, mind and mental qualities. The students have to develop mindfulness while overcoming attachment and distress concerning the world. The instruction appears in the story at a moment when the community must imagine life after the teacher's death.[84]

These two texts complicate any description of Buddhist refuge that consists entirely of dependence on an exceptional person. The Dhammapada names Buddha, teaching and community together, while DN 16 presents a discipline of reliance on oneself and Dhamma at an intensely vulnerable moment in the biography. Both belong to canonical textual transmission and have to be read with the same manuscript caution as every other saying in this book. They nevertheless expose a demanding early Buddhist answer to the question of how a teacher helps: the listener becomes capable of seeing and acting. The teacher's importance appears in the training he leaves behind.

An Islamic analogy can begin at this point without appropriating the formula. A Muslim may ask Allah for guidance through a prophet's remembered practice, and a shia may invoke ʿAlī while trying to acquire his courage or restraint. Those gestures can contain theological claims about intercession beyond remembrance. Their moral effect can still be tested in a person's dealings with others. The Dhammapada and DN 16 offer a Buddhist internal test for refuge: understanding grows where the refuge is taken seriously. An account of the teaching that rewards anger toward outsiders has to explain how that anger belongs to the discipline described in these passages.

Fear, authority and the capacity to judge

The Dhammapada opens its discussion with people frightened by danger. This matters because fear can make a community especially eager to surrender judgment to someone who promises absolute security. A teacher, monastery or religious movement may acquire authority through the genuine comfort it offers, and then acquire political power through the loyalty of its beneficiaries. Such a transformation can preserve a tradition's learning while also insulating the institution from the correction demanded by its own scripture. The difference becomes visible when a believer is asked to assess whether a particular act of cruelty was justified by religious fear.

A reader could translate the Dhammapada's promise into a simple instruction: look at suffering, look for what produces it, understand the possibility of its end, and undertake the path that addresses those causes. That paraphrase leaves aside deep disagreements about the metaphysics of rebirth and liberation. It nevertheless follows the movement of verses 188–192. Their argument locates refuge in an intelligible transformation of the refugee's relation to suffering. In a dispute between a Buddhist and a Muslim, this is a more demanding standard than a contest over which honorific the parties are permitted to say.[83]

The older teaching contains an especially exacting demand. Even when Gotama himself is criticized, his followers are asked to distinguish accurate claims from false ones before allowing

the injury to their pride to become their method of judgment. Refuge, under that standard, is tested by the quality of the mind and by what the body does afterward.

Chapter 12: Whose Words Are These?

Three monks can tell the same story differently without any of them having witnessed the event. Three monasteries can preserve the same account for centuries and give it distinct beginnings. When the texts finally reach a printing press or a screen, their agreements look immediate. They are separated by lives, languages, lost manuscripts, and repeated decisions about which words belong in a sacred recitation.

Our problem begins with a sober fact. Gotama did not write a book that survives under his signature. The oldest recoverable discourses come to us through communities whose members learned, recited, explained, and eventually wrote and translated inherited material. The Pāli Nikāyas preserve one extensive account of this early tradition. Chinese collections called Āgamas preserve overlapping accounts transmitted through other lineages. Fragments in Sanskrit and Gāndhārī complicate the picture further. A multilingual parallel can take us closer to an earlier form of a discourse. It cannot travel back in time to turn us into eyewitnesses.[12, 13]

This book therefore needs a better instrument than quotation followed by admiration. It needs a passage ledger. For every important scene we will identify the literary witness, the recension, the relevant passage, and what can be established by comparing versions. An inscription, a Chinese translation, and a philosophical argument answer different questions. We will keep the questions separate.

A test at the Brahmā palace

Consider the setting of the *Brahmajāla*. In DN 1, Gotama is traveling between Rājagaha and Nāḷandā with a large following. A wanderer criticizes him while the wanderer's pupil praises him. The monks overhear the argument. Gotama tells them that anger clouds the ability to test the claims. The discourse then addresses virtue, wrong livelihood, and a catalogue of speculative views.[11]

DĀ 21 begins with the Buddha traveling in Magadha to a royal lodging at a bamboo grove. Its crowd is larger, and the introductory narrative gives the Buddha a supernatural mode of hearing the monks' conversation. The same quarrel between teacher and disciple leads to the same ethical instruction.[44]

T 21 takes place in another geography. Its opening carries Gotama from Kuru country toward Śrāvastī and the Jetavana monastery. The two critics accompany him, but the route differs. The source preserves the teacher-and-pupil dispute and the response about praise and blame.[59]

If we were pursuing an itinerary, these differences would matter a great deal. All three versions preserve the narrative's work: a religious community hears praise and criticism, then receives an instruction about how to answer. The site of delivery is less secure. It would be a mistake to construct an exact route across northern India by choosing one frame and silently discarding the others.

Now move forward within the discourse to the supposed creation of the inhabitants of Brahmā's realm. DN 1, DĀ 21, and T 21 each contain recognizable stages: a cosmic cycle, a splendid being born earlier than his companions, an ungrounded creator claim, the other beings' acceptance, and the eventual repetition of the claim by a human renunciant. There are variations in the order of the first being's boasts, in the way his powers are described, and in the explanation of the meditator's memory. The common sequence is therefore the appropriate unit of comparison.[11, 44, 59]

We should also attend to the shape of the larger catalogue. DN 1 calls the belief a species of partial eternalism. DĀ 21 uses a closely corresponding exposition. T 21 gives a markedly compressed account in which the relation between its local enumeration and the Pāli sequence requires separate study. Translators can condense, reciters can rearrange, and editors can place inherited episodes under new doctrinal labels. Their decisions sometimes preserve a story whose original argumentative setting has faded.

Some similarities will be striking enough to tempt us into statistics: three narratives with five common events, perhaps even a ratio of agreements to differences. The temptation needs resisting. Manuscripts are related by descent, translation, contamination, and reuse. A single ancestor copied three times yields three readable texts and much less than three independent attestations. A later edition can preserve old words more faithfully than an earlier manuscript. A brief independent quotation may support only one clause. Those qualifications shape every confidence judgment in the ledger.

The translator is a historical person

A Chinese text has a transmission history of its own. The *Dīrgha Āgama* preserved as Taishō 1 is conventionally dated to the translation associated with Buddhayaśas and Zhu Fonian in the early fifth century. The label gives us a place in the history of Chinese scripture. It says little directly about when an earlier Indian telling first circulated. A translator's rendering of *Brahmajāla* into a Chinese title may also preserve a change in sound or meaning: DĀ 21 appears as *Brahmā's Shaking* in one modern translation, while the familiar Pāli title means *Brahmā's Net*. Studies of Middle Indic forms have proposed a confusion between *-jāla*, a net, and *-cāla*, movement.[44, 61]

An argument based on title alone would barely begin to tell us the age of the doctrinal passage. The narrative must be read inside the body of the translation. A different title is a clue to the life of the text, one that becomes informative when combined with the relevant Chinese wording and its parallels.

T 21 presents a more serious issue. The Taishō catalogue transmits it under the name Zhi Qian. Modern specialists have questioned that attribution. The Chinese Buddhist Canonical Attributions project records Nattier's rejection of the traditional ascription and notes older doubts in catalogue scholarship. We cannot use an uncertain translator name to date the creator episode confidently to Zhi Qian's lifetime. Even if the early date were secure, the date of translation would provide a latest possible date for the translator's source, while the words spoken by the historical Buddha would still be centuries earlier.[62, 85]

The difficulty is useful. It demonstrates why a book about a man in fifth-century BCE India must spend time discussing fourth- and fifth-century CE translators. Their existence is our means of

access, and their distance imposes our limits. To learn what the early community remembered, we have to identify which pieces survived through separate chains of copying and translation. Occasionally a major scene appears in one recension and disappears in another. Brahmā Sahampati's invitation to preach in MN 26 and its absence from MĀ 204 was our first example.[40]This second pass turns to a passage attested more broadly and asks how much of its contents remain stable.

What the Sanskrit and Tibetan evidence can say

The long-discourse collections survived in more than the Pāli and Chinese branches. Scholarship identifies a Sarvāstivāda or Mūlasarvāstivāda Sanskrit *Brahmajāla* in a long-discourse sequence, as well as relevant Tibetan witnesses and citations. Anālayo's studies discuss how the various versions diverge in order, opening narrative, and ethical exposition. Their work is essential for mapping a textual family.[61, 86]

Anālayo gives Weller §60 as a locator for the beginning of the Tibetan cosmological episode. Rico's comparison places the actual maker boast at §62 and the followers' acceptance at §63. The Degé electronic witness permits an additional reading of the Tibetan: D 352, folio 75a5, has the first being claim that the others were manifested by him, and at 75b1 the others adopt that explanation. The locators identify distinct moments of the argument, and the photographed folios remain due for inspection.[40, 63, 64, 65]

What have we earned, then? A stronger description of the canonical tradition. The three fully accessible versions preserve a substantial common construction in which a finite Brahmā's creator claim comes from misunderstanding a sequence of events, while their narrative details have changed. The materials provide evidence that such a critique circulated in distinct textual settings. We can reasonably make it part of a reconstruction of early Buddhist doctrinal inheritance. The leap from that conclusion to an autobiographical memory of Gautama's precise view remains a separate hypothesis.

A Tibetan witness with an address

Our earlier draft left the Sanskrit and Tibetan branch of the *Brahmajāla* as a largely undifferentiated research obligation. That description was too cautious in one respect. We can now identify a specific published Tibetan textual witness and a precise scholarly locator for the episode under discussion.

Friedrich Weller published the Tibetan and Mongolian texts of the *Brahmajālasūtra* in 1934. The edition is digitized by Heidelberg University Library. In his study of Brahmā's invitation, Anālayo explicitly directs the reader to the creator-Brahmā episode at §60 of the Tibetan *Brahmajāla*, referencing Weller's page and line. He lists the corresponding Chinese passages in DĀ 21 and T 21 and identifies later scholastic quotations in Chinese and Tibetan. This establishes that the creator narrative has a Tibetan discourse witness at a textually specified location, rather than merely a thematic resemblance reported for an unidentified manuscript.[40, 63]

The edition of D 352 in the Esukhia-Barom eKangyur now supplies an independently read Tibetan passage, from the dissolving world at 74b6 to the classification of partial eternalism at 75b6.

Individual claims and their folio markers appear in Appendix P, including a provisional direct translation of the mutual creator claims. The B01–B14 apparatus has not yet been rebuilt into a four-language concordance, and the survival of the relevant Sanskrit sentences still requires manuscript checking.[61, 63, 64]

The translator's name deserves a further entry. Anālayo's 2010 comparative study calls the Tibetan translator unknown. Jonathan Silk's 2019 survey identifies an early Tibetan catalogue, the *Lhan dkar ma*, which credits the *Brahmajāla* translation to Ye shes sde. These reports concern different levels of assurance: an attribution in a catalogue and a secure identification of the historical translator. Our working apparatus records both, together with Silk's caution about the text's possible relation to Chinese sources. The 84000 catalogue lists Toh 352 with its translation in progress, and Otani separately catalogues its Peking Kangyur correspondent. The direct electronic Tibetan reading is reported separately from the outstanding image and edition controls.[87, 88, 89, 90, 64]

There are distinct dates to keep on the page: the textual ancestry of the Indic discourse, the Tibetan translation, and the surviving physical impressions from the Degé blocks. Tohoku University provides a photographed canon catalogue, while Source Library identifies a Library of Congress/BDRC scan of Degé volume 76 alongside the folio-aligned Esukhia electronic text. The Library of Congress notes that its 103-volume edition was acquired in 1908 and probably printed in the late nineteenth century from blocks completed in 1733. A modern catalogue's approximate date for an entire miscellaneous sūtra volume cannot date the translation of D 352. The maker-claim passage has been read from the electronic text and Rico's synoptic edition, while the individual photographed woodblock lines await collation.[88, 64, 65, 91, 92, 93]

A later quotation may independently confirm that a specific sentence circulated in a scholastic setting, without making the quotation a separately inherited discourse. The Tibetan and Chinese scholastic locators recorded by Anālayo should be read as quotation witnesses. Their eventual contribution will depend on the exact text they cite and whether they reproduce the same transmission as the Tibetan full discourse. Counting manuscripts is easy. Explaining what their agreements mean requires a genealogy.

The wider literary shape of the *Brahmajāla* supplies a warning about that genealogy. Anālayo's 2014 comparison shows that versions differ markedly in the elaboration of morality sections as well as in their opening narratives. A shared doctrinal story can travel within literary frameworks expanded at different stages. The degree of agreement in the creator passage cannot be inferred from the amount of shared introductory material. We must establish the extent of textual overlap in each region separately.[61]

A quotation can preserve a second translation

The passage in Śamathadeva's *Upāyikā* is an unusual textual witness. In Degé D 4094 a Buddhist scholastic work quotes the *Brahmajāla* at length. The version inside it follows the same narrative route as the *Kangyur* sūtra, yet Hartmann regarded it as separately translated into Tibetan. The result is more specific than an additional manuscript of the same translation: one Indic recension may have been rendered into Tibetan along two transmission routes. A second translation can reveal the stable claim beneath the choice of words.[65]

The comparative edition supplies a practical lesson about source levels. I have read Rico's reproduction of Weller's *Kangyur* text and the *Upāyikā* transcription. I have independently read an electronic D 352 text with folio markers. I have yet to collate the same lines against photographed *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* folios. The print edition proves which readings a named scholar made available, while the e-text lets us test the semantic shape of the *Kangyur* witness with a separate transcription process. Each adds a different form of control.[64, 65]

Rico's text also demands care with shelfmarks. The *Kangyur* sūtra is **D 352**. Śamathadeva's large *Tengyur* commentary is **D 4094**, with the maker claim in the *Upāyikā* quotation around **145r4–145r5** and the followers' response around **145r6–145r7** in her synoptic table. Those reference systems must remain distinct from the Peking *Kangyur* parallel **Q 1021** and the Peking scholastic commentary **P 5595**. A matching story does not make the volumes interchangeable.[81, 65]

Three kinds of antiquity

The question "How old is this teaching?" has at least three documentary meanings. The oldest extant physical witness supplies evidence that a given text existed at that date. A recensional comparison can point toward an ancestor earlier than any surviving copy or translation. Attribution to a historical teacher concerns an event still earlier and requires another inference. The intervals between those stages are often measured in centuries.

A Tibetan version produced relatively late could preserve a very old Indian passage. A Chinese translation produced earlier might shorten that passage. A Pāli recension can elaborate the surrounding commentary while preserving a compact phrase already shared with another tradition. The only reliable way to detect those patterns is to align the relevant clauses and examine their places within larger textual families. The age of the script or translation gives a terminus for a document; the age of the teaching is a historical argument.

This matters beyond the Brahmā material. Our new first-sermon dossier compares SN 56.11 with SĀ 379. The Chinese sermon is shorter, yet they preserve the structure of four truths taught in three phases. The dependent-origination dossier compares SN 12.20, SĀ 296, and the Sanskrit SF 163. Their shared conditionality formula survives across linguistic boundaries. These cases give us multiple points of comparison through which to test how a Buddhist teaching expands, contracts, and keeps its core.[41, 42, 50, 51]

A historical reconstruction of Gotama will emerge from the intersection of these cases. It should identify where the same message survives distinct transmissions, and where the later tradition has turned it into biography or metaphysical system. A Muslim writer hoping to discover an unnamed messenger in ancient India has particular reason to respect these distinctions. They protect the historical teacher from the meanings that every later community, including our own, is eager to lend him.

The folio that became easier to find

A change in the conditions of research happened in April 2026, long after the collection we are trying to understand was transmitted. Tohoku University announced the public availability of its two databases for the Degé Tibetan canon on 20 April. The catalogue offers high-quality, IIIF-

compatible images and identifies the works through a bibliographic system maintained by a university library. An earlier edition of this book could only point the reader toward a likely repository. An image archive now gives a future collation a more practical starting place. This is a statement about access to evidence in our own time, not about the date of the Buddha's teaching.[94, 95]

The catalogue's announcement describes a project of 103,516 images covering the Kangyur and Tengyur. That large total is a measure of the archive's breadth. It does not tell us whether the relevant image is legible, how faithfully its colour and edges reproduce the physical surface, or whether an entry numbered D 352 has been assigned the same volume and folio bounds as the electronic text already used here. Those questions require inspection of the particular record and its image metadata.[94, 95]

A complete test would start with the title Tshangs pa'i dra ba'i mdo under Degé D 352 in volume 76. The investigator would open the woodblock face designated 75a, identify line 5, and read the phrase that attributes the manifestation of others to the first Brahmā. The next face, 75b, would be checked where the companions repeat that claim. The image identifier, library object number, viewer address, transcription, and any differences from the proofread electronic Kangyur should be recorded together. An analogous exercise is required for D 4094 in the Tengyur, using its own numbering. Peking Q 1021 remains a separate physical edition with a separate folio series.[64, 65, 95]

These are small distinctions with major consequences. An electronic Tibetan line can establish what that electronic edition reads. A digitized photograph can establish the inked letters visible on a particular woodblock impression. Two independent translations can support a common Indian recensional formulation. Each inference must stop where its evidence stops. The full creator episode already has comparative literary support; the newly accessible archive is an opportunity to make its exact quoted words more accountable to the surfaces that preserved them.

Two patterns inside the same net

The Brahmajāla is a catalogue of views as well as a story about a mistaken creator. That distinction becomes important when its texts are compared. In a 2010 survey, Bhikkhu Anālayo divides the sixty-two views into eighteen directed toward the past and forty-four toward the future. The number and broad subject matter survive across several Buddhist transmissions, but the arrangement of the earlier views does not stay fixed. A similar maker story can therefore occupy a recognizably different literary map.[96]

A cluster composed of Pāli DN 1, Chinese DĀ 21, and the Brahmajāla quotation in the Śāriputrābhidharma places the discussions of eternalism, partial eternalism, spatial limits, equivocation and fortuitous origination in that order. T 21, the Tibetan Kangyur discourse and the quotation in Śamathadeva's Upāyikā arrange the same past-oriented themes differently. After partial eternalism, the two grounds for fortuitous origination appear before the treatment of spatial limits and equivocation. Anālayo reports that these traditions agree on the sequence of the forty-four views about the future. The divergence is local, substantial and measurable.[96]

Inside the four cases of partial eternalism there is another variation. The first case in both configurations is the tale of the being who arrives in an empty Brahmā world, wishes for company and later takes the arrival of other beings as evidence that he produced them. The second case in DN 1 and DĀ 21 concerns heavenly beings corrupted by pleasure. In T 21 and the two Tibetan versions, the next case instead involves a view attributed to Brahmā that makes some phenomena impermanent while treating others as eternal. Those are differences within a recognized catalogue, and they matter for tracing how a school classified an inherited polemic.[96, 80]

It would be tempting to count each surviving manuscript as another independent witness to Gotama's words. A copy of the same translation supplies evidence about the survival and reproduction of that translation. A second translation of a related Indian recension can constrain a reconstruction of its shared antecedent. A quotation inside a commentary may reproduce a discourse that was already authoritative for its compiler. These objects supply different information even when every one contains the sentence that Brahmā claimed to be creator. The two Tibetan renderings are especially useful for checking the stability of the creator claim, but their agreement is not the testimony of two people who heard Gotama teach.[96, 65]

This distinction changes the historical argument. The shared maker story is a serious obstacle to a claim that the earliest recoverable Buddhist movement centered its teaching on worship of a creator. Its survival through several textual settings increases the work an advocate of an original monotheistic Gotama would need to do. The precise branching of the recensions remains uncertain, and the creator story is absent from the surviving spans of the long Sanskrit manuscript, which leaves the lost wording unrecoverable. The strongest conclusion is about inherited Buddhist teaching; an attribution of a precise utterance to the historical man requires further evidence.[96, 65]

Our source diagram accordingly records which witnesses share an arrangement and which clauses they preserve. It gives the chronological age of an extant manuscript its proper place, labels probable recensional relationships as hypotheses, and keeps Sanskrit lacunae distinct from intentional omissions. The purpose is modest: to prevent the appearance of six books on a shelf from becoming six independent memories of a conversation in ancient India. The details and their remaining controls appear in Appendix AC of the archival master.

When a historical argument becomes theology

For a Muslim reader this distinction cuts in two directions. The claim that Gotama was an otherwise unknown messenger of Allah needs affirmative historical signs, especially where the early canon's articulated cosmology appears to exclude a creator. A competing claim that Gotama personally uttered every sentence of DN 1 also runs ahead of the evidence. Our method subjects both assertions to the same source question: which ancient witnesses transmit what?

The meaning of *refuge* becomes clearer in this setting. When a Buddhist says *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*, the speaker enters a community whose teaching has reached them through an extended chain of human custody. A Muslim who says *Yā ʿAlī Madad* may similarly receive an Imam's guidance through remembered sayings and exemplary conduct. The two invocations operate inside different theologies, yet each raises a question about the history of the instruction

being followed. If the invocation is to change a life, which teaching is doing the work? How old is it? What human beings transmitted it? What does it demand from the person speaking?

The historian needs to care about a minor textual variant for the same reason that a believer ought to care about a small act of injustice. Words and deeds are the places where the general claims meet reality. A gorgeous account of supreme compassion may hide a cruel sentence. A supposedly ancient doctrine may turn out to rest on a comparatively late addition. The reverse can happen too: a poor manuscript with awkward language may preserve a sober moral instruction that later eloquence obscured.

We have now put our first hard objection to the prophetic hypothesis on a firm footing. The creator-Brahmā polemic is substantially attested. Its textual witnesses have histories of their own. A theory about the historical Gotama may respond to that evidence, but it must state what would make it true and what evidence could count against it.

Somewhere beneath these manuscripts lived a teacher whose speech was heard by real people. The surviving versions are the tracks left by the people who kept speaking after he died. The tracks can sometimes tell us which road they shared. They cannot give us the sound of his voice.

The Sanskrit book that ends with the net

A long strip of birch bark changes what the word *parallel* means. The so-called new Sanskrit *Dīrghāgama*, associated with manuscript finds from greater Gandhāra, preserves the closing portion of a *Brahmajāla* at the end of its collection. Jens-Uwe Hartmann reported that the final folio, numbered 454, places the discourse at the conclusion of the manuscript and is followed by a collection-ending colophon. The Pāli *Dīgha Nikāya* opens with its *Brahmajāla*. A Chinese long-discourse collection locates its version elsewhere. These arrangements are evidence about the formation of collections, even when the works within them share a recognizable argument.[97]

Hartmann's paper describes the material available to researchers at the beginning of the century. It is a record of what a named physical manuscript then supplied, with the caution that much of the collection had not been recovered. A more recent dissertation, Liudmila Olalde Rico's study of four discourses from that Sanskrit *Dīrghāgama*, records the *Brahmajāla* portion among the surviving late folios. Its catalogue gives folio 445 and material from 452r1 onward. The relevant folio inventory must be used as a guide to what exists, rather than assuming that every passage present in DN 1 is also present in the recovered Sanskrit leaves.[98]

The surviving Sanskrit Brahmajāla leaves attest the discourse's place in the collection, and Rico's synoptic edition leaves the creator-claim cells empty for the preserved Sanskrit material. That blank concerns what the extant manuscript preserves. It supplies no warrant for assigning the supposed creator's words to a lost Sanskrit leaf or for declaring that an earlier Indian recension lacked the episode.[97, 65]

Rico also observes that some repeated formulae appear in abbreviated form in the Sanskrit Dīrghāgama and the Kangyur version. In the Upāyikā other stretches are shortened still further. A shortened formula in a surviving manuscript is a textual feature that can be compared against its longer parallels. A physically missing leaf gives us a different kind of silence. These questions

have to be settled one passage at a time, since the degree of abbreviation varies within the discourse.[67, 65]

The Tibetan case has a more useful address. The *Tshangs pa'i dra ba'i mdo* is catalogued as Toh 352 in the Degé Kangyur, volume 76, folios 70b–86a. It also appears in the Peking Kangyur as P 1021, folios 72b8–88b8. Anālayo's study points to §60, page 22 line 29 of Friedrich Weller's 1934 edition for the creator-Brahmā story. Later scholastic quotations appear in a Tibetan *Abhidharmakośa* commentary and a Chinese Abhidharma text. The independently catalogued witnesses make the textual map more precise.[40, 63, 99]

The electronic D 352 witness has since supplied the missing Tibetan lines. The claim and its confirmation at 75a5 and 75b1 can be read with the folio markers, although Heidelberg access to Weller's scanned pages was unavailable in the earlier audit. Rico's printed synoptic edition now mediates Weller's wording at §§60–64 and a separately translated *Upāyikā* passage. Direct comparison with the original Degé woodblock photographs, Peking Q 1021 and Weller's own scanned pages remains outstanding. Appendices P and R record the current e-text and edition-level readings.[65]

The particular order of the Tibetan list

Anālayo's 2010 collation provides a more specific comparison of the Tibetan *Brahmajāla* than its mere inclusion in a catalogue. In DN 1 and DĀ 21, after the first partial-eternalist account involving Brahmā, the subsequent accounts proceed through devas destroyed by pleasure, devas caught in prolonged attention to others, and a theorist reasoning toward partial eternity. In T 21, the Tibetan discourse, and the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* quotation, the second position instead concerns hearing Brahmā proclaim that matter changes while consciousness is eternal. The pleasure-corrupted devas become third and those disturbed by fixation upon others fourth. The general order is documented in Anālayo's published collation. In this revision the corresponding electronic Tibetan sequence was located, while a complete independent translation of all four positions remains to be done. Rico's additional *Upāyikā* text now permits a second Tibetan comparison for the first case.[80, 64, 65]

The ordering matters because a statement such as 'the Tibetan has the creator myth' can hide the way recensions classify knowledge and error. The shared first view travels with different neighboring explanations. A later compiler, translator or memorizer may have preserved the broad philosophical map while changing one entry or the sequence in which examples were taught. The result lets us study living textual traditions through concrete variants. The direct electronic reading establishes the creator's claim and the followers' agreement in Tibetan, with folio references supplied in Appendix P. Further collation can test the arrivals' causal vocabulary, local enumeration and dependence on Chinese or Indic ancestors against additional textual witnesses.

One negative particle

There is a second manuscript whose philosophy survives in the fibres of its writing surface. The Robert Senior collection contains a birch-bark scroll, RS 22, bearing six Gāndhārī discourses. The

second is an early version of the discourse on non-self, edited by Mark Allon, Stephanie Majcher, and Ian McCrabb. The editors date the scroll to approximately 140 CE and describe its findspot as uncertain, probably near Haḍḍa in present-day Afghanistan. The manuscript is now at the University of Washington. Its physical date gives a precious anchor for the survival of the teaching, even though Gotama had lived centuries earlier.[100]

The discourse attributed to him speaks to five monks in the Deer Park after awakening. It asks whether body, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness can rightly be taken as a lasting 'I'. The argument is practical before it is metaphysical. If any of these were the self in the sense under examination, the possessor ought to have command over it. Bodies fall ill; feelings arise against our plans; perception does not always obey. The reader recognizes the inability to make the body and mind become exactly what one would wish. The teaching then loosens the attachment that calls the changing aggregate 'mine' or 'my self'.[54, 100]

The physical Gāndhārī witness is particularly useful because modern discussions have sometimes treated the Pāli reading as if it had been transmitted in one perfectly stable line. An important Chinese parallel, *Saṃyukta Āgama* 34, contains a local reversal in the conditional argument. Tsai Chilin compares the sentence in Pāli SN 22.59 with Chinese SĀ 34 and related Chinese texts. The Pāli denies the ability to make form conform to one's wish. At one point SĀ 34 instead uses 得, which permits or enables the wish, where the argument's context expects the opposite. Tsai's study tests thirteen witnesses and concludes that the Chinese passage is corrupt at that location. His historical judgment about Gotama's own wording remains an inference; the disagreement between preserved textual forms is concrete.[101]

The philosopher in the study is a single negative. The Pāli phrase *na ca labbhati* carries the impossibility of ordering bodily form at will. The disputed Chinese sentence allows the ability it has just denied. Depending on how the reader resolves the clause, the argument either proceeds toward non-self from lack of control or threatens to assert the contrary. This is why it would be inadequate to present every ancient translation as simply one more unanimous endorsement of a doctrine. The precise character matters.

Nor does the scholarly identification of corruption make the Chinese translation worthless. An error with a recognizable location may help reconstruct the earlier argument. Different branches of transmission can preserve the surrounding passage intact, while a negation slips during copying, recitation, editing, or translation. Determining the mechanism is a further question. The Gāndhārī scroll invites a better comparison: its edition supplies the diplomatic evidence, a proposed reconstruction, a translation, and manuscript images aligned with individual written units. The text needs to be checked at the exact control-of-form clause rather than praised for antiquity in the abstract.[100]

The philosophical stakes extend beyond what Buddhists have long understood by *anattā*. A Muslim philosophical reader may be tempted to equate an impermanent aggregate with the body and posit an enduring soul behind it. That would substitute a solution before hearing the Buddhist argument. The discourse examines the claim to selfhood in each aggregate as it is encountered. It also belongs to a larger Buddhist picture in which intentional acts produce consequences in an

ongoing series without a permanent personal substance. Our comparison with Islamic resurrection and responsibility must take that account seriously on its own terms.

The notion of a self may be denied in one sense and practical responsibility defended in another. We can recognize the distinct work these propositions perform. The Buddhist argument against identifying a mutable feeling as one's permanent master is partly phenomenological. The account of karma and rebirth supplies a further moral continuity, and the details of that continuity vary across schools. A Muʿtazilī argument about earned punishment asks different questions of the acting subject. The two inquiries can help interrogate each other without forcing an answer both authors would reject.

Most of all, the manuscript teaches humility about textual certainty. From a sentence that seems perfectly intelligible in one canonical language, a reader may obtain the opposite philosophical result in another. Before invoking Gautama as a figure in an Islamic controversy, we need to know which language is speaking and which witness stands behind it. That is the historian's responsibility to a man whose voice no living witness has heard.

The scroll that was already old

A birch-bark scroll tells a different story from a scripture printed in a modern volume. Its script can be dated within a range. Its language locates it within a community of readers and reciters. Its physical survival proves that somebody wrote those words at that time. It does not record the day on which the story was first told, or the identity of the person whose words it purports to preserve.

The British Library Kharoṣṭhī fragments were acquired in 1994. The University of Washington's Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project reports that the larger Gāndhārī manuscript discoveries under study span roughly the first century BCE to the third century CE. These are among the earliest surviving Buddhist manuscripts. Their dating changes the documentary horizon of Buddhism, while leaving an interval of centuries between the scrolls and the lifetime usually proposed for Gotama.[102]

One group deserves to be considered at the level of its actual contents. The Robert Senior collection consists of twenty-four birch-bark scrolls containing at least forty-one Buddhist texts, generally assigned to the early second century CE. The Gandhāran Buddhist Texts project identifies the collection as a deliberate anthology, selected from a wider literature known to its scribe. This matters because a manuscript can be old and still embody an editorial decision. The physical object carries evidence about what a community wished to gather, preserve, and perhaps venerate.[103]

The Robert Senior collection was reportedly recovered in an inscribed pot, and its original findspot has not been independently documented. The Gandhāran Buddhist Texts project considers ritual deposition at a stūpa likely. If the manuscripts were commissioned and interred as sacred objects, their survival depended in part on devotional practice. This changes the question we ask when counting copies. The accidents of survival also have institutions behind them.[103]

The Library of Congress holds a particularly instructive Gāndhārī scroll, dated approximately to the first century BCE or first century CE. Its account surveys earlier Buddhas and introduces the future Buddha Maitreya. A tradition of repeated awakened teachers thus appears in a surviving manuscript close to the beginning of our physical record. The scroll supports the antiquity of a literary interest in predecessor Buddhas; the narratives it preserves make their own claims about periods of time whose events the manuscript cannot independently corroborate.[104]

This supplies an additional control for the ancient road examined in Chapter 8. That discourse speaks of an earlier path used by previous awakened ones. A separate old scroll remembers a series of Buddhas. Both attest Buddhist ways of imagining spiritual ancestry, while their literary purposes and genealogies remain to be established. Their proximity in subject cannot alone make them independent reports of the same event. We need the actual text of each witness, the manuscript date, and the path by which the narratives reached their surviving forms.[10, 104]

A Muslim considering Qurʾānic messengers among unnamed peoples will find the early manuscript record important for a specific reason. It gives Indian and northwestern Buddhist communities a visible history of transmitting accounts of teachers who came before Gotama. The texts identify those predecessors within Buddhist cosmology. The inference that any of them were messengers of Allah belongs to a further inquiry, whose burden includes names, chronology, and evidence of the religious message. An old manuscript advances that inquiry by telling us which tradition existed by a given date. Its antiquity deserves admiration for exactly what it proves.[3, 104]

Chapter 13: The Names Allah Did Not Tell

We have arrived at an awkward point for a Muslim who wishes to pronounce peace upon Gautama. The historical sources have supplied an ancient Indian teacher whose followers transmitted a demanding ethics, a distinctive account of conditioned existence, and an argument against treating a high god as the maker of everything. None of the examined Buddhist discourses identifies a revelation from Allah as the origin of Gotama's awakening. We have also learned that a scriptural attribution to the Buddha is a proposition with a long journey behind it. Our wish to honor him should now meet the Qurʾān with the historical evidence still on the table.

The Qurʾān's geography of guidance is larger than the geography of its named characters. In 16:36, Allah says that a messenger was raised in every community with a summons to worship Him and avoid *ṭāghūt*, false or transgressive objects of allegiance. In 35:24, the formulation speaks of a warner having passed among every community. In 40:78, Muhammad is told that some messengers have been related to him and others have not. The verses authorize the possibility that ancient communities possessed messengers whose biographies were never included in the Qurʾān's narrated history. They supply no list by which Gotama can be identified.[3, 4, 105]

What should we imagine when the text says 'every community'? The word *umma* has acquired modern uses involving religious affiliation and nationhood, but the verse is not a modern atlas. India contained many linguistic worlds and overlapping ritual communities in the age to which we assign Gotama. Political boundaries shifted, teachers traveled, and a message could be received by some people while remaining unknown to a neighboring community. The principle of

widespread guidance does not tell us how many such messengers lived or which names later historical traditions preserved.

The invitation to look eastward is therefore legitimate as a theological question. It can become a historical argument only by encountering the evidence found there. The Qurʾānic verses cannot stand in for an early Indian inscription naming a divine messenger, or for a Buddhist text explicitly describing guidance from a transcendent creator. Historical identity requires particulars: names, practices, teachings, places, and a chain by which one tradition could retain a memory of the other.

The Christian tradition supplies a useful caution. A Muslim can regard ʿĪsā as a prophet while knowing that Christian literature contains doctrines the Qurʾān disputes. For a historical scholar, the differences between canonical and noncanonical texts are part of the reconstruction. They cannot be swept aside by declaring that the original teacher must have shared the Muslim conclusion. Any comparable claim about Gotama would need a credible model of textual change. Our cross-recension collation is relevant precisely because it distinguishes traditions broadly inherited across schools from innovations visible in later layers.

The modes of receiving

Qurʾān 42:51 describes divine communication to human beings in several modes: inspiration, speech from behind a veil, or a messenger sent with Allah's permission. The passage bears directly on our inquiry because it broadens the range of possible experiences while preserving a distinction between God and the recipient. It still leaves a question that can be answered only by evidence from Gotama's own tradition: did he understand the ultimate source of his awakening in anything resembling those terms?[15]

Two other Qurʾānic passages warn us against making a narrow image of revelation the whole category. In 28:7, Allah inspires the mother of Moses, who acts upon the instruction without becoming one of the scripture's messengers. In 16:68, a similar Arabic verb describes divine inspiration given to the bee. The second example is a creaturely instinct expressed in the Qurʾān as divine communication. Neither passage can establish that a contemplative attainment in India was prophetic revelation. They allow the Muslim reader to think about guidance as broader than public scripture and the ministry of a named messenger.[106]

Within Muslim philosophy, acquired knowledge, prophetic knowledge, and the work of the imagination received different explanations. Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and later thinkers worked through the relation between intellectual discovery and religious instruction. Some of their arguments give the prophet an extraordinary intellectual capacity through which truth becomes intelligible and communicable. This does not make every unusually intelligent or spiritually gifted thinker a prophet. It does make the familiar opposition between 'finding it yourself' and 'being given it from above' too crude to describe the whole Islamic debate.[74]

The Buddhist roadside dialogue with Upaka is a serious textual obstacle. Gotama says, in the transmitted account, that he has no teacher and has realized the truth for himself. We have found the exchange in Pāli MN 26 and in a Chinese parallel. This attestation is a reason to take it seriously as part of an early remembered teaching. What the historical man experienced beneath

the tree remains inaccessible to direct inspection. An interpretation of the dialogue as secret monotheism would need positive supporting evidence. The historian cannot supply it merely from the conviction that Allah ultimately gives all knowledge.

A Qurʾānic believer might say that every sound act of knowing depends upon Allah in its ultimate cause. That is a theological position about the world. It need not imply that the person who knows is conscious of receiving an addressed revelation. The difference matters. Otherwise every astronomer, healer, and child who learns to speak could be counted as a prophet. The scriptural distinction between ordinary guidance and messengership would collapse under an overly generous analogy.

The criterion of responsibility

The question becomes more promising when we consider what a message calls people to do. An unnamed messenger in 16:36 summons a community away from false authority and toward worship of Allah. A modern Buddhist reading of Gotama often hears a call to end greed, aversion, and delusion. The moral discipline is evident across early Buddhist transmissions. The historical challenge is to establish whether those ethical teachings originally carried a claim about the one God, or whether they operated inside the broadly noncreator metaphysics the preserved texts give them.

For Muslims of a Muʿtazilī disposition, divine justice adds another reason to listen carefully. In *al-Mughnī* volume 13, page 187, al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār distinguishes rationally intelligible obligations from those learned through revelation, with duties arising differently according to an agent's circumstances. The doctrine of *luṭf* considers forms of divine help that make right action more accessible. Guidance may increase a person's capacity to choose good while the person remains answerable for the choice. The obligation to avoid oppression is intelligible even to somebody who has never encountered a particular Arabic formula.[77, 107]

That is close to what prompted this book. In a conversation with Buddhists, the Muslim reader may hear the refuge formula, *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*, as an invocation of help through the teaching. If recalling the Buddha produces forbearance and a refusal to dehumanize one's opponents, a moral improvement has occurred. The Muslim can thank Allah for whatever true wisdom moved the person. The Buddhist can understand the transformation through practice, karma, and the Dharma. Historians need to describe both explanations faithfully. A verdict about the teacher's prophetic station is a further question.

The ethical test has limits. Human beings can imitate a noble instruction for bad reasons, and a movement can preserve genuine wisdom while developing institutions that harm people. A tradition's cruelty does not by itself disprove an ancient teacher's insight. Its kindness supplies evidence of the effects of practice, while leaving the origins of the teacher's private knowledge unresolved. This helps keep contemporary religious conflict from becoming a substitute for a study of sixth- or fifth-century BCE northern India.

We must also grant that the earliest recoverable Buddhist teaching has doctrines that complicate the Muslim hypothesis. The criticized creator in DN 1 is a finite being whose supposed authority begins with a memory error. AN 3.61 attacks an all-encompassing doctrine of divine agency

because it undermines responsibility. This is substantial evidence for a religious movement that did not organize its path around surrender to a creator. An authentic reconstruction needs to say what that evidence implies about the historical Gautama, and what degree of continuity we can establish between him and the surviving texts.

The disciplines of a hopeful historian

Our options are narrower than our imagination. We may discover evidence that Gotama received a divine message, or we may fail to find such evidence. We may establish that the earliest Buddhist schools shared certain assertions about gods and dependent origination, while remaining unable to assign their exact formulations to one historical voice. A believer may still pray for the man and leave his standing to Allah.

Several levels of judgment should remain distinct. The broad Qurʾānic doctrine about unnamed messengers is a textual finding. Its application to India is a theological possibility. The claim that Gautama is one of those messengers is a hypothesis requiring historical support. His identification with Dhū l-Kifl is an additional hypothesis involving Arabic etymology and Indian geography, which we examine in a later chapter. Each step carries a new evidential obligation.

A hypothesis that can meet a source

A historical identification ought to come with a discovery that could change its standing. The Qurʾān's statement that messengers were sent into communities unknown to its audience makes India a legitimate place to investigate. For the particular claim about Gotama, evidence must connect this individual to something more specific than a moral resemblance or an appealing place-name. The reader should be able to say what a newly recovered inscription, manuscript, or early quotation would contribute before any such document appears.

An early Indian witness that attributed Gotama's decisive knowledge to communication from an uncreated source beyond the conditioned heavenly beings would matter. Its words would need to be dated as a *witness*, its textual ancestry examined, and the sense of its claim translated within its own vocabulary. Even that evidence would establish what a Buddhist community transmitted before it could identify the experience of the historical teacher. The distance between a written attestation and an event in a man's life remains a problem in any such reconstruction.

A second kind of evidence would trace a change in the teaching across recensions. A demonstrably older form might describe the source of awakening one way, while a later, dependent form gives it another explanation. Our present comparison supplies a widely transmitted account in which a conditioned Brahmā mistakes arrival for creation. The independent Tibetan translations preserve the boast and the followers' acceptance, as Rico's synoptic edition shows at §§62–63. Their agreement helps reconstruct the inherited discourse; it remains distinct from eyewitness testimony about Gotama's own belief.[65]

The Sanskrit manuscript leaves place a further limit on certainty. Rico's table has no surviving Sanskrit clause opposite the crucial Tibetan and Pāli lines. A gap in the preserved record leaves the wording of those lost leaves unavailable. Should another Sanskrit folio surface, we could ask whether it transmits the same creator narrative, an abbreviation, or a substantively different

account. Each outcome would alter the reconstruction of transmission, while the identity of a divine messenger would remain a larger historical inference.[65]

Ṣidqī's 1913 proposal belongs to a later category. His interpretation of the fig is evidence that an Egyptian Muslim reader understood Qurʾān 95 as potentially referring to the Buddha. Its dated appearance lets us reconstruct an episode of Islamic intellectual history. The historical identity of Dhū l-Kifl would need a linguistic bridge from an Indic name or title into Arabic, and a further explanation of when that identification became possible. Neither proposal can serve as its own independent ancient witness.[113]

There is an ethical reason to keep the tests explicit. When a source challenges a cherished identification, the author should let it change the argument. A reader can still pray for peace upon a teacher whose recovered sayings have helped people resist cruelty. The prayer expresses a theological hope while historical judgments remain attached to the material that can bear them.

Some readers will ask whether the honorific on the cover has already crossed the line. *ʿAlayhi al-salām* is a prayer for peace. As a formula of respect it may express the writer's hopeful judgment, which should be disclosed. In a community that reserves the formula strictly for prophets, its use will sound like an assertion of certainty about a person whose status is unknown. The preface explains why we have chosen it. A reader deserves to know that this is a choice of theological voice made before the historical inquiry has reached a verdict.

We can now return to the material world the teacher inhabited. His teaching did not survive as disembodied philosophy. It traveled through reciters, scribes, translators, kings, and monasteries. One early birch-bark manuscript agrees with an argument found in much later recensions; another translation preserves a stray negative in the wrong place. A powerful creator-god is mocked for speaking beyond the limits of his memory. These are the kinds of facts from which a human history can be made.

The Qurʾān leaves some names untold. Our task is to avoid pretending that silence speaks a name for us. It gives the historian permission to investigate and the worshipper a reason to be humble.

Chapter 14: How Does Guidance Arrive?

A man becomes conscious of a truth that changes the conduct of his life. His neighbors ask where it came from. The question sounds simple until we notice the different things an answer might mean. One person describes the event in terms of a voice or a visitor; another remembers the long work of attention that preceded a sudden understanding. The description may concern how the knowledge appeared in consciousness. Its claim about the origin of the knowledge requires further argument.

The distinction matters whenever we call a philosopher inspired, a sage enlightened, or a messenger commissioned by Allah. Revelation has a source, a recipient and a message. A text can preserve the recipient's account of his experience while the ultimate source remains debated. The Qurʾānic account of divine communication supplies a range of cases for a Muslim inquiry, though it also has conditions that prevent every striking discovery from becoming prophecy.[15, 106]

The historical Gotama, as presented in MN 26 and MĀ 204, claims a decisive attainment through his own discovery. Their corresponding Upaka episodes preserve the absence of a human teacher for that attainment. MN 26 also reports his prior education under Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, an important distinction between learning practices and obtaining the final insight as he understood it. The sentence about having no teacher belongs to a specific conversation after awakening, in a discourse transmitted by people many generations later. It is important testimony about what Buddhist communities thought the founder claimed, though it gives us limited access to the event itself.[9, 29, 108]

The speech that comes by more than one road

Qurʾān 42:51 describes divine communication to a human being through revelation, from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal by divine permission. The verse belongs to a Qurʾānic framework in which Allah initiates and governs communication. Its enumeration is significant because a Muslim reader can recognize that the phenomenology of receiving guidance is not exhausted by the remembered arrival of Jibrīl in the cave of Ḥirāʾ.[15]

The word *waḥy* also operates in other Qurʾānic settings. The mother of Mūsā is inspired to place her child in the river, and the bee receives a command about its dwellings. Qurʾān 28:7 and 16:68 use the same Arabic root while describing recipients whose spiritual offices differ from those of a scripture-bearing prophet. The linguistic fact is secure. The theological work begins when we ask which usages supply a legitimate analogy to an ancient Indian ascetic's awakening.[106]

An inference that Allah can guide beyond the named biblical figures follows from 16:36, 35:24 and 40:78. A particular identification requires some positive historical trace. Someone might be guided in an aspect of moral life while holding cosmological propositions that Islam rejects. Others may receive a genuinely illuminating insight with little reliable record of how they acquired it. A Qurʾānic category describes what could occur; the Buddhist manuscripts give evidence about what their preservers believed had occurred.[3, 4]

Consider the claim that a person's newly understood truth must have a wholly human source because the person remembers discovering it through contemplation. This is a metaphysical argument disguised as a description. A Muʿtazilī thinker who regards human reason itself as a gift from Allah may call the understanding divinely sustained without claiming that the thinker consciously received a prophetic message. The event's causal origin, its subjective experience and its religious authority belong to distinguishable questions. We gain analytical clarity by asking each one in turn.

Yet the argument cannot be used to convert all Buddhist insight into hidden Muslim revelation. The *Brahmajāla* narrates a being named Brahmā who mistakes the sequence of appearances in a world system for evidence that he has created others. Across Pāli and Chinese recensions, the teaching challenges the reliability of an exalted being's creator claim. An early Buddhist doctrine that develops a causal account without reference to a maker is part of what our historical evidence must explain.[11, 44, 59]

A proposed reconstruction that Gotama originally preached tawḥīd and that his followers completely reversed the teaching would have to explain how that reversal became established

across separate recensional lines. Literary communities can reshape teachings, and their reshaping is visible in some parallel passages. The stronger the proposed reversal, the greater the evidence needed to place it before the common sources of our surviving recensions. No accessible witness has yet supplied that affirmative claim.[40, 87]

The god who supposedly made the deed

The comparison of AN 3.61 with MĀ 13 directs the debate away from the prestige of awakening and toward the conduct of ordinary people. The discourse subjects several sweeping explanations of human experience to a practical test. In the Pāli version, a person's pleasant and painful experiences are said, according to opposing teachers, to arise entirely from past deeds, from a supreme creator's activity, or without cause. The speaker investigates how those claims affect the willingness to undertake good actions and abstain from bad ones.[55, 56]

The Chinese parallel frames the target as everything a person does. Charles Patton's translation makes this difference apparent at the start of MĀ 13. The difference affects how narrowly the initial proposition may be stated, since an account of felt experience need not assert exactly the same causal thesis as an account of actions. In both versions, the ethical target is a total explanation that leaves moral training without a practical foothold.[56, 72]

The creator thesis under criticism resembles an especially severe determinism. If a supreme being directly causes all wrongful deeds in the sense under discussion, a transgressor might argue that his conduct was fixed by that being's action. The discourse holds its opponents to the consequences of the claim. It is a critique of the moral function of an exhaustive explanation. The text supplies evidence that early Buddhist teachers disputed creator accounts, while its precise argumentative scope limits what it can establish about other theories of divine sovereignty.

One might respond from Islamic theology by distinguishing creation of a world and its powers from compulsion of each moral choice. Muʿtazilī authors developed that distinction through their insistence on divine justice and on the reality of human capacity. Their texts offer our comparison a concrete alternative to a creator who is treated as the immediate author of every wrongful decision.

A judge who asks what the agent could do

ʿAbd al-Jabbār lived roughly fifteen centuries after the historical Gautama. He served as chief judge of Ray and became a major architect of late Muʿtazilī thought. His *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl* was begun in 360/970 and survives as a substantial authored work. For this chapter the relevant part of the text is its discussion of *taklīf*, the imposition of moral or religious obligation, and the circumstances that make an obligation appropriate to a rational agent.[76]

An original Arabic passage of *al-Mughnī*, volume 13, page 187 in the online Cairo edition, distinguishes *taklīf ʿaqlī* from *taklīf sharʿī*. The former concerns what reason obliges, while the latter concerns scripturally established obligations. The passage adds a qualification of considerable philosophical importance. Rational obligation is shared among rational agents in the relevant general sense, but the specific duty to return a deposit, make amends or repent depends on whether a person stands in the circumstance that gives rise to that duty.[77]

A debt cannot be returned by a person who never received the entrusted property. The wrongdoer has the obligation of restitution or repentance in virtue of acts for which another person cannot be blamed. Through those mundane examples, the jurist ties moral accountability to causes within the life of the particular agent. The theory concerns actions human beings can be required to perform; it also addresses justice in applying praise and blame. Its argument is especially relevant to the Buddhist critique of an account that makes an individual powerless before his own deeds.

The surviving printed *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* adds a celebrated formulation of divine justice. The text says that describing the Eternal as just and wise entails that He neither does nor chooses what is morally evil. That formulation is valuable as a witness to the late Muʿtazilī school's conception of God. Its authorship requires an important correction to the reference often printed on its title page.[109, 76]

Daniel Gimaret showed that the famous printed text attributed to ʿAbd al-Jabbār is the *Taʿlīq* or supercommentary associated with his Zaydī disciple **Mānkdīm Shashdīw**, who worked upon the judge's earlier commentary. Wilferd Madelung records that Mānkdīm sometimes quotes his teacher and at other points criticizes him. The printed edition therefore contains material indebted to ʿAbd al-Jabbār, mediated through another author and his teaching circle. The passage defining divine justice will be cited as part of that Mānkdīm recension, with its relationship to the lost original left explicit. We possess a far safer primary witness to the judge's own wording in *al-Mughnī*.[76, 110]

The textual history is instructive in its own right. A Muslim's own philosophical tradition can carry a passage for centuries under a name that later manuscript analysis complicates. We have just spent chapters asking whether the Buddhist transmission kept Gautama's speech intact. The attribution of the famous *Sharḥ* asks us to apply comparable care when the script on the page is Arabic and the ideas are close to our preferred theology. The theological argument may survive the correction. Its chain of custody must still be identified.

Action, divine aid and a moral life

A comparison of Buddhist action with Muʿtazilī justice has to preserve the distinct histories of their concepts. In AN 3.61, the target includes fatalism arising from excessive emphasis on past *kamma*. Present effort matters because a practitioner is capable of training and thereby altering the future course of suffering. The text also rejects the proposition that moral experience occurs without cause. Human agency is thus set within a causal world.[55]

ʿAbd al-Jabbār's school frames the issue as the worthiness of a rational agent to receive command, blame or reward. Allah is just and must not command the impossible as though refusal were culpable. The elaborate Muʿtazilī doctrine of *luṭf*, divine assistance that makes right action easier while preserving the relevant freedom, offers a further conceptual bridge. A teacher's wise words can function as assistance toward goodness; a believer may understand all beneficial knowledge as given through Allah's providence. These are theological claims within Islam, however, and they do not turn an Indian philosopher into a Muslim by definitional fiat.[77, 107]

There is a limit to the analogy that matters for the proposed history. Buddhist accounts explain the persistence of moral consequences through conditioned continuity across lives. Classical Muʿtazilī theology presupposes personal resurrection and divine adjudication. Even where both systems require an agent capable of action, their explanations of identity and the final judgment remain different. The agreement on the injustice of punishing a helpless person helps illuminate a shared problem; it supplies no proof of common institutional origin.

Take the simplest imagined case. Someone has caused injury to a neighbor and claims that an irresistible higher power made the deed inevitable. An early Buddhist moral teacher asks whether this account destroys the motivation to restrain the next harmful intention. A Muʿtazilī judge asks how responsibility, and therefore just blame, can attach to a person without meaningful capacity. The questions can be asked together in a conversation without either author having met the other. Their proximity is philosophical evidence about the kinds of problems reflective humans encounter.

The Qurʾān itself insists on accountability for deeds and repeatedly invites human beings to use their intelligence. It also describes Allah as the giver of guidance, and its schools have disagreed over how divine action and human agency are joined. The historical Gotama's own account of awakening enters that living argument as an object of inquiry. If the man discovered a preexisting path and made other people more responsible for their conduct, a Muslim can admire the result while remaining candid about the cosmological statements his surviving texts attribute to him.

The difference between a possibility and a name

The figure called Dhū l-Kifl appears without a biographical account detailed enough to locate him securely. Nothing in the historical evidence brought forward in this chapter adds Kapilavastu to the Qurʾānic text. The apparent proximity of *Kifl* to a syllable of that place-name requires a historical pathway of language and transmission that remains unestablished. The same caution applies to the suggestion that the fig of Sūrat al-Tīn points to the Bodhi tree. A modern exegetical possibility should retain its date, the name of its proponent, and the rival explanations against which it must be judged.[111]

There remains room for an educated hope. The possibility that divine guidance reached India arises within the Qurʾān's own broad geography of messengers. What is most readily recoverable from the earliest Buddhist witnesses is the character of a teaching community and a cluster of arguments about suffering, moral effort and the limits of false claims to knowledge. These are substantial historical achievements. Our next task is to distinguish further between the wisdom people receive through a teacher and the religious language by which they ask him for help.

Chapter 15: Dhū l-Kifl and the Fig

There is an Egyptian doctor in this story, writing in 1913, who deserves to be named before the anonymous sages of the speculative literature. He read English books about Christianity and comparative religion. He wrote fierce criticism of inherited Christian accounts of Jesus. He also believed that the Qurʾān could reveal a forgotten prophet in India, standing beneath a fig tree. The

doctor was Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī. His argument reached the Damascus exegete Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, whose commentary reproduced it without giving his name. A twentieth-century reader who opens *Maḥāsin al-Taʾwīl* may therefore encounter an apparently anonymous theory that had a definite author, a publication history, and an identifiable place in the intellectual world of Muslim reform.[112, 113, 114]

This changes the question we ask of the fig. A religious reading can be persuasive to the believer long before it has supplied the historian with an adequate genealogy. Recovering the genealogy allows us to examine the interpretation in the form its first known author gave it. It also protects Ṣidqī's quite original thought from being quietly transferred to the better-known commentator who preserved it.

The man with the unfilled name

Dhū l-Kifl is named in the Qurʾān at 21:85 and 38:48. Both passages list him among people commended for virtue. The first places him with Ismāʿīl and Idrīs, calling them patient and stating that Allah admitted them among the righteous. The second associates him with Ismāʿīl and al-Yasaʿ, as people of excellence. The verses provide neither geography nor an episode from his life. Their wording does not establish a direct equivalence between Dhū l-Kifl and an Indian teacher of the fifth century before the common era.[115]

The title itself offers more than one way forward. Arabic *dhū* means the possessor of something. The noun *kifl* can convey share, allotment or undertaking; the earlier exegetical reports treat it as an earned designation. Al-Ṭabarī preserves reports of a righteous man assuming unusual obligations. Depending on the narration, he undertakes to fast through the day, worship at night, judge fairly and remain free of anger even when provoked. A report attributed to Mujāhid declines to call him a prophet. This variety should travel with any confident identification of the man.[116]

The stories have ethical interest because a ruler's patience is tested by petitioners who can interrupt his own desires. In a Buddhist comparison the temptation is obvious. Gautama's career includes instructions concerning anger and discipline. Similarity of virtue, however, is a widespread human inheritance. To identify two persons we would need a sufficiently unusual cluster of shared events or a reliable bridge between their names. A tradition of patient judgment cannot by itself bear that historical weight.

The proposal that *kifl* preserves the *Kapila* of Kapilavastu is associated in modern Muslim writing with Ḥamīd ʿAbd al-Qādir and *Būdhā al-Akbar*. Its geography is intelligible. Kapilavastu was the place associated with Gautama's youth; to call him a man associated with that place would have made sense to an observer familiar with his biography. The linguistic passage remains unproved. One needs a dated intermediary form showing how the Indic name reached Arabic, how its syllables were removed or transformed, and why the Arabic title acquired its present possessive construction. The proposed identification cannot presently claim the support that a demonstrated historical loanword would receive.[117]

Another historical difficulty lies in the Qurʾān's own texture. It employs Dhū l-Kifl as a designation whose moral reputation the audience can apparently be asked to respect. That observation leaves

open whether the title was familiar from local lore, some lost tradition, or a name whose referent later readers could no longer agree upon. Any identification with Gautama must account for the passage between India and the linguistic world of late antique Arabia. The range of imaginable contact is large; a demonstrable transmission remains the desideratum.

The earliest named Muslim advocate of the fig theory

Our oldest currently identified *named* advocate of identifying the fig in Sūrat al-Tīn with the Buddha's tree is Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī (1881–1920). His publication appeared in the March 1913 issue of the Egyptian journal *al-Manār*, volume 16, in the second installment of his article *Naẓariyyatī fī qiṣṣat ṣalb al-Masīḥ wa-qiyāmatihī min al-amwāt* [My Theory concerning Christ's Crucifixion and His Resurrection from the Dead], beginning at p. 193 in that installment; Johanna Pink cites the article at pp. 113ff. and 193ff. across its two installments. Ṣidqī's treatment of the fig is an excursus attached to the argument about Jesus. The issue catalogue for **8 March 1913** separately lists the article continuation beginning on page 193 and the excursus, *Istiṭrād lā baʾsa bih*, beginning on **printed page 216**. The archive indexes the next article, al-Fahm wa-l-tafāhum, from p. 222, fixing the excursus to pp. 216–221 in that issue. Individual scans of those six pages are linked in the archive; a letter-by-letter reading of their Arabic remains pending.[112, 113, 118]

That provenance matters in several ways. Ṣidqī was a physician, a prolific writer on religious questions, and a critic of inherited textual authority. His controversial arguments for Qurʾānic primacy and against compulsory reliance on many transmitted verbal reports supply a necessary part of the setting. By 1907, however, he had published a specific concession concerning the *practical* Sunnah. In "Kalimat Inṣāf wa-iʿtirāf," *al-Manār* 10:140, he acknowledged error in rejecting a religious practice accepted by successive Muslim generations, naming the prayer's units as his principal case. He continued to distinguish that enacted inheritance from verbal reports whose binding authority he disputed. His formulation now spoke of two foundations, the Book and the Prophet's path as preserved in established practice. His later use of an inherited practical Sunnah in the fig excursus thus follows his published concession rather than an unchanged, absolute Qurʾān-only position. Johanna Pink suggests that the wider controversy may explain why al-Qāsimī chose to introduce him as an unnamed contemporary, although the reason for the omission cannot be established by the quotation alone.[112, 119]

The doctor's article had begun elsewhere. It tried to reconstruct what happened around the crucifixion and reported appearances of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. The Mount of Olives appeared repeatedly in his discussion. Once he reached that mountain, Ṣidqī moved to the Qurʾānic oath that mentions the olive, the fig, Mount Sīnīn and the secure city. The order of thought is recoverable: New Testament geography drew him toward a Qurʾānic image, and the image suggested a world history of prophetic religions.

Ṣidqī introduced the excursion under the modest Arabic heading *istiṭrād lā baʾsa bih*, a digression worth making. The surviving Arabic text then identifies the fig with the Buddha's tree, calling Buddhism a religion whose first teaching had undergone substantial alteration through later transmission. Ṣidqī argues that oral memory and eventual written codification separated followers from an original message. The historical claim about Buddhist texts is broad and would need a separate account of manuscripts and recensions before it could be accepted at face value.

His deeper motive is clear: he wants to recognize a message from Allah while explaining why contemporary Buddhist theology differs from his own.[112, 113]

He offers the striking formulation that Gautama was a truthful prophet. His confidence is conditioned in his own sentence by the success of his proposed interpretation of the Qurʾānic verse. He refers to Gautama as Śākyamuni or Gotama, describes revelation at a great fig tree, and casts Māra's temptation as a parallel to the Christian story of Jesus' temptation in Luke 4. The preserved Arabic names the tree *Ajapāla*.[113]

The paragraph's path into *Maḥāsin al-Taʾwīl* is now traceable. Al-Qāsimī reproduces Ṣidqī's discussion almost entirely, including the assertion about the great religions, while omitting the explicit parallel with Jesus' temptation. Pink identifies a smaller change in the Arabic verb used for the devil's action: Ṣidqī's *yujarribahu*, to test him, becomes *yaftinahu*, to tempt or put him to trial. Al-Qāsimī adds the conventional phrase *wa-Allāhu aʿlam*, and God knows best. These interventions show that copying a source can itself become interpretation. A later reader who relies only on al-Qāsimī receives a slightly different comparison from the one Ṣidqī composed.[112, 114]

The chronology is unusually helpful. Al-Qāsimī died in 1914, and his commentary had been drafted before the 1913 article. His son reported that he continued correcting and enlarging it until near his death. Pink treats the almost verbatim correspondence with Ṣidqī's dated article as evidence that this passage was a late insertion. It would therefore be a mistake to date the hypothesis by the first printed publication of the completed commentary alone. The likely direction of borrowing runs from the 1913 *al-Manār* contribution to the subsequently revised commentary.[112]

The bibliographic gain exposes a textual risk. Arabic Wikisource provides a readable transcription of Ṣidqī's 1913 article, including the discussion of the fig. The al-Sharekh Archive identifies seven individual page-image addresses, numbered 216 through 222; the dated issue catalogue places Ṣidqī's excursus at pp. 216–221 and the next article at p. 222. The images themselves were inaccessible to direct inspection in this review. The source is therefore located at its original printed-page addresses, with its lettering and footnotes still awaiting photographic comparison.[113, 118, 120]

Why Ṣidqī brought the Buddha into a book about Jesus

The doctor had an argument about the history of religions. On his reading, Allah sent guidance throughout the inhabited world, and communities transmitted it with unequal fidelity. He had already developed the broad premise that some prophets were known and others unnamed in writing published in 1905, as Pink shows from his later collected *al-Dīn fī naẓar al-ʿaql al-ṣaḥīḥ*. The Buddha proposal belongs to an earlier framework rather than appearing suddenly as an isolated discovery in 1913.[112]

Ṣidqī arranged four religious traditions under the objects and places invoked in Qurʾān 95:1–3. The fig evoked Buddhism. The olive evoked Christianity through the Mount of Olives. Sinai evoked Mosaic revelation, and the secure city evoked the mission of Muhammad in Mecca. He then read the sequence as an ascent in the reliability with which the four communities preserved their original guidance. In his assessment Buddhism had been altered most extensively, Christianity

less so, Judaism less again, and Islam most faithfully preserved. His view was an apologetic judgment about religions, presented as the inner logic of the Qurʾānic oath. The order is a feature of Ṣidqī's modern theory, rather than a position expressed in the Qurʾānic text itself.[113]

He also drew a division between traditions of mercy and traditions of justice. Buddhism and Christianity he named as religions of *raḥma* or moral indulgence and benevolence, associated with fruits. Judaism and Islam he associated with *ʿadl*, judgment and firm obligation, symbolized by a mountain and a protected city. In the doctor's argument historical humanity had to learn gentleness before it could bear a more exacting law. This is a picture of progressive religious education, with the final Qurʾānic revelation positioned as the culmination. Its symmetry is more impressive as a piece of religious philosophy than as a demonstrated claim about the religions' actual histories.[113]

The contrast is especially relevant to the present book because it gives a preexisting Muslim precedent for receiving the Buddha as a teacher of mercy. The question we have been asking about refuge, anger and moral transformation is close to Ṣidqī's interest in what wisdom does to the person who follows it. Yet his classification also risks flattening Buddhism and Christianity into two versions of gentle ethics, and Judaism and Islam into two versions of juridical strictness. Buddhist Vinayas contain stringent discipline; Jewish and Islamic scriptures have large languages of mercy. A comparative historian must let the texts disturb the theory.

For Ṣidqī, a scripture could retain an authentic kernel through centuries of distortion. That framework allowed the doctor to hold two propositions together: Gautama had originally received divine guidance, and the doctrinal Buddhism inherited by later communities need not convey that original guidance without alteration. This is an internally coherent possibility within his theology. The problem comes when one tries to specify which passages are original and which arose later. Such assignments require identifiable textual evidence. An appeal to corruption cannot automatically remove whichever doctrine stands in the way of a favored reconstruction.

That concern matters especially for creator theology. The critique of a Brahmā who mistakes his own precedence for omnipotence occurs in several transmitted versions of the *Brahmajāla*. It cannot simply be pushed to the margins by declaring everything discordant with the Qurʾān a late accretion. A religious believer may hold that the lost historical prophet taught something now unrecoverable. A historian must mark the point at which this becomes a theological speculation rather than a conclusion drawn from surviving words.

The fig and the second tree

There is a test of Ṣidqī's theory embedded in his own description of the tree. The awakening is normally placed beneath the Bodhi tree, commonly identified with *Ficus religiosa*, the sacred fig called *assattha* in Pāli. The Buddhist narrative also has an Ajapāla *nigrodha*, a banyan, under which the newly awakened teacher stays after the awakening. The first book of the Pāli *Mahāvagga* marks the succession of locations. Ṣidqī names the Ajapāla while describing the tree of revelation and temptation, thereby conflating episodes that an early Buddhist textual account distinguishes.[38, 112]

The botanical connection has probably helped the equation endure. Both trees belong to the genus *Ficus* and can be called fig trees in English. That broad classification is sound. It does not explain why an Arabic oath in the Qurʾān should refer to the later tree, a later temptation episode, or the precise scene named by a modern Egyptian doctor. Species, place and sequence of narrative need separate treatment. The agreement on the word fig cannot substitute for evidence of the intended reference.

The temptation comparison adds another layer. In developed Buddhist narrative, Māra contests the aspiring Buddha's liberation. Christian Gospel tradition has the devil tempt Jesus in the wilderness. Ṣidqī set the episodes together as evidence of corresponding prophetic patterns. The exercise belongs to his criticism and reconstruction of Christian history. It may also draw on nineteenth-century European comparative-religion literature, which often juxtaposed legendary episodes from several founders in search of borrowings and universal patterns. Pink notes that Ṣidqī's exact source for all of the Buddhist details remains unidentified. She examines his reading of English works and references, while avoiding an unwarranted assertion that one specific encyclopedia or book furnished the whole paragraph.[112]

Such parallels can illuminate what a narrator wants to say about sanctity. Their mere existence leaves open the question of whether two events happened in the lives of the men concerned. A trial by a tempter is a motif with a long career, and traditions can converge through shared conventions of biography. The sound comparison asks which accounts can be placed earlier, which details move between communities, and whether independent evidence identifies an actual event.

An earlier Muslim reading of the sacred landscape

Ṣidqī did not invent the possibility of treating Qurʾān 95 as a sequence of sacred sites. Classical exegetes recorded figurative and geographical interpretations beside the reading of the fig and olive as ordinary fruits. The language of the oath itself contains words of several kinds: fruits, a mountain, and a protected town. An interpreter concerned with the unity of the passage can reasonably ask how the four relate.[121]

Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr offered an arrangement in which the fig-and-olive region pointed toward Jesus and the lands of biblical prophecy, Mount Sinai toward Moses and Mecca toward Muhammad. Early twentieth-century writers reopened the issue from different perspectives. Muḥammad ʿAbduh, for instance, read the fig with the human beginnings pictured in Genesis and the olive with Noah's world, locating the images in a philosophy of history and human dignity. Al-Qāsimī assembled classical positions, extended the discussion of the biblical geography, and then included Ṣidqī's altogether wider itinerary, which carried the first item into India. Pink reconstructs the sequence of interpreters and their disagreements in detail.[112]

This puts a constraint on the claim that the fig interpretation was simply forgotten by Muslims for fourteen centuries and then rediscovered. The same verse generated varied sacred-geographical readings before Ṣidqī, but the particular identification with the Buddha has a traceable modern point of entry. One can appreciate the doctor's imagination while acknowledging the lack of an early chain to Gautama.

There is an additional difference between the two hypotheses commonly discussed together. The identification of Dhū l-Kifl with Gautama is an attempt to resolve an enigmatic proper designation. The fig theory is a reading of a Qurʾānic oath. Either could be proposed independently of the other, and each needs its own evidence. A writer who stacks the two hypotheses risks making two conjectures appear mutually corroborating because both concern the Buddha. They become genuine independent support only when their histories can be shown to arise from different and informative channels.

A Muslim hope with an archival address

There is a temptation to treat Ṣidqī's declaration that the Buddha was a prophet as though it settled the matter on Islamic authority. He was a twentieth-century Muslim physician who made a striking exegetical proposal. His act is evidence of Muslim interpretive history, not independent evidence of a meeting between Gautama and a divine messenger in ancient India.

His courage deserves historical acknowledgment. Ṣidqī was willing to extend the family of guidance beyond the familiar Near Eastern geography, and he had enough curiosity about Buddhist narrative to learn several names. His contemporaries might have dismissed the question as irrelevant or imprudent. He also accepted an apologetic framework that made the Qurʾān's position secure before the Buddhist evidence had finished speaking. The book can learn from his hospitality without reproducing his confidence.

The distinction between an original teacher and later religious tradition provides our real research program. The Śākya recluse is recoverable through overlapping recensions, archaeological dates and textual forms. Even a broad shared passage can be later than the man's death. An identification with Dhū l-Kifl or the fig asks for a further chain extending into Arabic revelation and exegesis. At present the evidence is stronger for Gautama's moral and contemplative teaching than for either specific identification.

Ṣidqī's words also remind us how history is made by transcription. A journal editor printed an article. A commentator copied a passage while withholding a name. Later authors repeated the commentator and forgot the doctor. His surviving Arabic paragraph now allows a modern historian to reverse the process and restore authorship. Recovering the ancient Gautama is far harder. The same discipline applies: trace the witness, recognize its circumstances, compare the versions, and let the missing evidence remain missing.

The doctor's fourfold order, read in his own Arabic

The original excursus rewards a close reading because one word changes the argument. Ṣidqī first calls Buddhism and Christianity *dīnay al-faḍl*, religions of graciousness or moral generosity. He places Judaism and Islam under *dīnay al-ʿadl*, religions of justice. A few lines later he uses *dīnay al-raḥma*, religions of mercy, when interpreting the fig and olive as fruit-bearing symbols. The three Arabic terms are related, but Ṣidqī has made a deliberate progression within his own theory. His account begins with gracious forbearance, passes through the imagery of mercy, and ends with an argument about more demanding legal obligation.[113, 122]

One could easily report the classification as a harmonious recognition of the Buddha and Jesus. The sentence that follows shows a harsher evolutionary theory underneath. Ṣidqī writes that the proper training of human beings starts with generosity and tolerance before moving toward severity and justice. He makes Islam's own early gentleness followed by later punishment an illustration of the same historical movement. His religious history therefore imagines an education in stages, in which earlier communities prepare the ground for a more complete final legislation. He places the four traditions in pairs and explicitly treats their order within each pair as chronological. The arrangement lends the Qurʾānic oath an architecture of human civilization. That architecture belongs to Ṣidqī's interpretation and cannot be assumed to be the meaning of the seventh-century Arabic passage.[122]

His ranking of textual preservation is equally explicit. Buddhism occupies the lowest rung because, in his account, its teachings passed through oral transmission and later writing. Christianity stands above Buddhism; Judaism above Christianity; Islam occupies the summit. His confidence in the Qurʾān and a practical, collectively transmitted Sunnah reflects the particular reformist Muslim debate of his own lifetime. Each move raises a historical question. The Buddhism of which manuscripts? Which Christian text or community? What constitutes corruption when differing textual witnesses preserve recognizable common doctrinal formulae? A relative judgment of the four religions cannot emerge from the mere observation that one community wrote its sacred discourses down later than the life of its founder.[122]

The historical problem is sharpened by the work already done in this book. A Pāli version of the noble search, a Chinese parallel, several Sanskrit fragments, and distinct Vinaya collections preserve overlapping memories of a renouncer and his two teachers. Their differences matter. They also permit certain elements to be checked across traditions. Inherited Buddhist scripture consequently presents an evidence structure more complicated than a single continuous process of deterioration. A historian should test each passage, rather than treating transmission as a single moral quantity called purity. Ṣidqī could identify a historically meaningful difference between Buddhist and Qurʾānic modes of canon formation. He had too little comparative manuscript evidence to infer the degree of fidelity he assigned to each religion.

The paragraph on the Buddha moves between assertion and reservation in the same breath. Ṣidqī calls Gautama a truthful prophet but conditions the statement upon the validity of his interpretation of the verse. His Arabic brings unusual certainty to a conclusion resting on an explicitly contingent premise. He says, in effect, that if his proposed interpretation of Sūrat al-Tīn is correct, the Buddha's prophethood is established. The point of uncertainty has been moved upstream into exegesis. This helps explain how later admirers can quote the confident phrase while overlooking the conditional clause. The historian must retain both clauses.[113, 122]

The doctor's illustration of Māra is more than an ornamental resemblance. In Luke 4, Jesus undergoes temptation by the devil, an episode that Christian and Muslim writers have approached within different accounts of his mission. Ṣidqī places an analogous test of Gautama by Māra near the moment when Gautama receives revelation beneath a tree. That gives two religious lives a shared prophetic pattern. It also imports vocabulary that does substantial theological work: the tree becomes the place of *waḥy*, the temptation becomes a test of prophecy,

and the Buddhist teacher becomes a messenger whose former message has been altered. Each interpretive transfer may be intelligible within a Muslim theological reading. Each requires independent evidence when the subject is the recoverable life of Gautama.

The condition nested inside the verdict

The sentence at the center of Ṣidqī's proposal contains its own limit. The Arabic transcription gives his judgment as "والراجح عندنا بل المحقق - إذا صح تفسيرنا لهذه الآية - أنه كان نبيًّا صادقًا". The cadence moves from what is probable in his judgment to what is, he says, established, and places a conditional clause between the assurance and the conclusion: if his interpretation of this verse is correct. The grammatical point has historical importance. His confident verdict depends upon a reading of Qurʾān 95 that he has just proposed, while his Buddhist evidence comes from modern summaries of a distant religious tradition.[113, 123]

That dependence can be written as an argument with a premise that has to be investigated. Ṣidqī interprets the fig as the tree associated with Gotama. He regards the oath's four places or images as a sequence of divinely guided religions. He then infers an Indian prophet from the connection. The Quranic oath supplies the starting words, and the identification of those words with a Buddhist sacred tree supplies the disputable bridge. Historical acceptance would require a source independent of his interpretation. The article's own chronology and the manuscript comparisons examined in earlier chapters do not yet furnish that bridge.[112, 113]

His Arabic calls the tree Ajapāla in transliteration. The older Buddhist narrative distinguishes the Bodhi tree of awakening from the Ajapāla banyan where Gotama is said to have stayed afterward. The identification of both as kinds of fig tree makes an English botanical shorthand possible; it does not reconcile the two episodes or demonstrate what a seventh-century Arabic listener understood by al-tīn. The name is valuable evidence of Ṣidqī's source horizon in 1913. It is a historical test of the argument because a confident identification has inherited the looseness of a mediated account.[38, 113, 123]

He was also proposing a hierarchy of textual fidelity. In the same paragraph, Buddhism comes first as the religion he considered most altered; Christianity, Judaism, and Islam follow in an order he regarded as progressively better preserved. The assertion uses the late writing of Buddhist teachings as part of its explanation. Our surviving Pāli, Chinese, Gāndhārī, Sanskrit, and Tibetan witnesses disclose variation and sometimes impressive agreement. The historical question concerns particular propositions in these surviving transmissions. A single scale of corruption cannot perform their collation, especially when the theory would remove the early Buddhist claims that complicate the prophetic identification.[113, 100, 65]

An honest Muslim reading may retain the possibility that Allah sent unnamed guides among the peoples of India. Its warrant comes from the Qurʾān's broad account of guidance. The name Gotama has to be brought into the argument through historical evidence about Gotama. Ṣidqī's conditional sentence is a useful model for keeping the two levels visible, even when his rhetoric briefly lets certainty outrun the condition that supports it.[3, 4, 123]

The sword in a religion of mercy

Ṣidqī's classification of Christianity as a religion of graciousness becomes more complicated when read beside his own treatment of Jesus in the same article. Before the digression on the fig, he examines Luke 22, where Jesus tells his disciples to obtain swords, and the episode in which a follower cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant. He sets these scenes against the Gospel commands to love enemies and offer the other cheek. His Arabic argument then asks whether the peaceful sayings belonged to an earlier period of weakness and whether their teacher departed from them as his strength grew. These are polemical questions put by an Egyptian Muslim critic to the Christian narratives, and their force belongs to that controversy.[113]

The tension changes the way we should read the doctor's table of religions. His description of Christianity as a tradition of faḍl or raḥma is a place assigned within a theory of progressive religious education. It is hardly a consistent biographical judgment that Jesus always practiced pacifism. In one passage Ṣidqī uses the mercy label to locate Christianity on a ladder of religious history; in another he questions whether the Gospel narratives sustain the ideal of nonviolence as his Christian opponents describe it. The fourfold scheme is the doctor's interpretive construction. Reading it with the surrounding polemic makes that construction visible.[113, 122]

The language returned to print later that year. In a separate August 1913 article, "Naẓra fī Kutub al-ʿAhd al-Jadīd wa-Kutub al-Naṣārā," Ṣidqī again juxtaposed Luke's instruction to obtain swords with Matthew's command to love enemies. Umar Ryad locates that later piece at al-Manār 16/8, pages 598–599. The March discussion before the fig excursus and the August article are distinct dated publications, which allows their arguments to be traced without assigning both passages to the same printed pages.[124]

The wider quarrel then reached the colonial administration. Drawing on Rashīd Riḍā's diary, Ryad describes objections by missionaries, British official pressure, and November 1913 meetings involving Egyptian government figures over the journal's anti-missionary polemic. Riḍā subsequently ceased publishing Ṣidqī's contentious contributions. That account illuminates the political cost of the doctor's writing in occupied Egypt. It remains a secondary reconstruction here: the November diary and the August article have not been examined directly for this book.[124]

The implication reaches the comparison with Gotama. Ṣidqī's argument requires Buddhism to represent an early dispensation of mercy, yet the Buddhist Vinayas regulate the lives of monks through detailed disciplinary obligations, and the early discourses include exacting arguments about wrongdoing and its consequences. The two Indian and Christian careers become too narrow when made into representatives of one temperament. A source-critical Muslim history can receive Ṣidqī's invitation to consider India while allowing the particular sources to overrule the personality he assigned to a religion.[125, 113]

There is an instructive small error at the centre of the scene. Ṣidqī names the sacred fig as *Ajapāla*. In the opening of the Pāli *Mahāvagga*, the newly awakened teacher remains under the Bodhi tree and later goes to the Ajapāla banyan. The trees belong to the wider fig family, which makes the confusion understandable in English-language summaries of Buddhism. Their distinction in the transmitted narrative remains decisive for interpreting the doctor's particular source. A misplaced botanical name does not disprove the possibility of an unnamed Indian messenger. It

tells us that this proposed Qurʾānic identification was constructed through a modern reader's imperfect knowledge of the Buddhist narrative.[38, 122]

The last qualification is essential. Sūrat al-Tīn does not name Gotama, Kapilavastu, Ajapāla, or the Bodhi tree. Nor does Ṣidqī produce a dated chain by which an Indic designation of the tree travelled into the interpretive community of late antique Arabia. His argument proposes that the Qurʾān's fig gestures toward a sacred site whose meaning had been obscured. A Muslim may find such a gesture beautiful and worth pondering. Historical acceptance would require positive evidence from earlier exegesis, transmission routes, or more precisely attributable wording.[126, 112]

Mercy, law and the danger of assigning religions personalities

Ṣidqī's fourfold division has a surprising consequence for the ethic of refuge examined elsewhere in the book. If Buddhism is identified with mercy and Islam with justice, a cruel Buddhist and a harsh Muslim may appear as failures or exaggerations of their respective religious types. Yet the historical traditions make specific demands that refuse these assigned personalities. The Pāli canon asks monks to inspect their intentions before and after action. Islamic scripture orders justice even toward people one dislikes, while mercy is among the divine names and an obligation repeatedly commended to the believer. In both settings the appeal to a respected teacher is answerable to the consequences of conduct.[11, 127]

This is also where Ṣidqī's interest in textual preservation becomes ethically uncomfortable. A Muslim who presumes that earlier wisdom must be severely corrupted may cease to listen when that wisdom judges his own behaviour. A Buddhist who holds that the Buddha's attainment has superseded every other source of spiritual knowledge may do the same. Such failures can be described without drawing a single scale of which religion is more forgiving. The relevant action is visible: what one says about a persecuted family, whether one delights in their suffering, whether one restrains one's anger, whether one offers protection. The values invoked in sacred texts become legible when the devotee has a chance to bear a cost for them.

For the historian, Ṣidqī's scheme belongs to the history of Muslim encounters with modern comparative religion. His position differs from the commonplace picture of Islam meeting Buddhist teaching for the first time in an abstract debate over monotheism and atheism. He read Gautama through debates about Christ, scripture, progressive revelation, and the reliability of religious history. The fig was useful because it joined those debates in one image. The image eventually travelled into commentary, detached from the author's name. Recovering the doctor makes it possible to see the intellectual machinery that produced his interpretation, including what he knew and what he had misunderstood.

This book can borrow the generosity of his intuition that Allah's guidance may reach peoples unmentioned by name in the Qurʾān. His specific historical claims still require the same scrutiny that we would apply to an Islamic hadith report, a Buddhist biography, or a passage from the Gospel of Luke. I would preserve his proposal as a witness to the breadth of modern Muslim thought, and subject his argument to the textual discipline he wished to apply to other religions.

Chapter 16: Help Me, O Teacher

A person overwhelmed by anger remembers a teacher whose wisdom he trusts. He speaks the teacher's name aloud. The words may be a petition, an act of recollection, a ritual, or a way of returning attention to a discipline learned long ago. The speaker's intention belongs to the meaning of the invocation, although its public setting and received theology also matter. In the language of a Muslim invoking ʿAlī, a Christian asking Jesus to save him, or a Buddhist taking refuge in Gautama, the history of a revered figure can become a practical resource for changing the present moment.

A comparison of these expressions has to begin with what each tradition teaches its followers to seek. The Pāli formula *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* declares refuge in the Buddha. The familiar complete refuge extends to the Dhamma and the Saṅgha, the teaching and the community. It belongs to Buddhist religious identity, and the formula can be recited with quite different levels of devotional intensity. Its grammar is a statement of going for refuge. The mere act of saying it cannot tell a historian whether the speaker holds a teacher to be a creator, an extraordinary enlightened being or the exemplary source of a path to liberation.

The *Dhammapada* makes the ethical structure explicit. In verses 188–192, people seek safety at mountains and shrines when frightened. Refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha is joined to understanding the noble truths and the path that ends suffering. The passage gives content to the refuge. It involves the work of insight; a name alone cannot substitute for that work.[82]

A Muslim asking ʿAlī for help may intend something close to this practical phenomenon. The remembered Imam's conduct supplies an example of courage in the face of an unjust ruler, generosity toward a poor neighbor, or a refusal to abandon judgment under pressure. Other practitioners understand *Yā ʿAlī madad* through the language of intercession, saintly presence and divine permission. The phrase has a religious history and multiple interpretations. Islamic schools dispute the permissibility and metaphysical implications of directly invoking a deceased person, a disagreement that should be identified rather than suppressed.

A plea to ʿĪsā can likewise be heard within distinct theological frameworks. A Christian may regard Jesus as divine. A Muslim who asks to be rescued by the mercy exemplified in ʿĪsā's teaching places the ultimate source of that help in Allah. The same surface words need not do the same conceptual work for every speaker. What the invocations share for our immediate inquiry is their potential to direct a person toward the moral qualities attributed to a revered teacher.

A rescue that happens inside conduct

Consider a quarrel in which a person has already imagined the cruel sentence he wants to say. He remembers the Qurʾānic instruction in 41:34 to respond to evil with what is better. The anger remains, but he revises the sentence. The guidance has altered an action. Qurʾān 42:40 connects forgiveness and reconciliation with reward from Allah, giving the moral change further theological meaning.[47, 127]

A Buddhist may remember *Dhammapada* 5, in which hatred is overcome through non-hatred, and refrain from repeating an insult. He might attribute that help to his reliance on the Buddha's path.

A Muʿtazilī Muslim could regard the acquired wisdom as among the circumstances through which Allah facilitates freely chosen good. That additional interpretation belongs to the Muslim theologian. The Buddhist has his own language for the efficacy of the practice. Our analysis needs to preserve each person's report of what moved him while examining the action to which it led.[45, 77]

This is a defensible way to describe *refuge in wisdom*. It deliberately captures one significant function of religious recollection. It would be incomplete as a total description of Buddhism, whose devotional traditions include ritual offerings, merit transfer, aspirations for rebirth and relationships with Buddhas and bodhisattvas that extend well beyond moral self-improvement. The same caution applies to Islamic supplication and Christian prayer. A philosopher can isolate the ethically transformative dimension for comparison without representing that dimension as the whole of a living religious life.

The Qurʾān calls attention to people who listen and follow the best of what is said (39:18). A Muslim reader may take that counsel into the encounter with Gotama. His response to a piece of wisdom can be to receive the beneficial advice, examine the evidence for its attribution, and place its ultimate value before Allah. This position does not require an advance ruling that the speaker was a prophet. The usefulness of a moral instruction is something a reader can test in conduct, whereas the identity of its first teacher may remain uncertain.[128]

Refuge under pressure

There is a harsher test. Imagine someone who claims devotion to a teacher of compassion and then celebrates harm directed at another religious community. The problem enters the realm of publicly assessable conduct. The speeches, recommendations, organized campaigns and individual acts involved can be weighed against teachings of restraint and non-hatred. Medieval and modern Buddhists are diverse, and the actions of a particular nationalist organization cannot stand for the beliefs of all who call themselves Buddhist.

The persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar gives this issue historical gravity. The record must be grounded in documented actions, decisions and institutional responsibility, including the military's role, the public rhetoric of particular monks and the interventions of Buddhists who opposed the violence. The present chapter sets out an ethical method, with the detailed historical investigation reserved for Chapter 19. A comment beneath an interfaith video, however cruel, is not a substitute for documentary evidence about an atrocity. Nor does the atrocity excuse treating a religious population as though its members shared one intention.

The Buddhist critique can begin with texts already examined in this book. DN 1 and DĀ 21 contain a warning against allowing criticism of the teacher to produce uncontrolled anger. The verse tradition associated with *Dhammapada* 5 forbids feeding hatred with hatred. These teachings offer standards by which a devotee's conduct can be judged from within the tradition he professes.[44, 129, 45]

A parallel Muslim examination asks whether invoking ʿAlī bears any relation to the justice demanded of the person who utters his name. One may appeal to an Imam and continue to wrong a neighbor, in which case the invocation becomes religious performance accompanying moral failure. Qurʾān 5:8 makes the duty of justice effective even where a person feels hostility. The

lesson demands practice under the very emotional conditions in which one is tempted to exempt oneself.[46]

A further Qurʾānic question follows. If a person receives helpful moral knowledge from a teacher whose ultimate religious station remains unknown, what does Allah judge? Qurʾān 99:7–8 directs attention toward deeds of even the smallest weight. The theological claim about God's reward belongs within the wider Islamic account of faith, intention, capacity and mercy; its application to particular individuals is known to Allah. We can say confidently that the Qurʾān instructs the Muslim to take justice and good conduct seriously. It offers no license to infer the hidden fate of people from the sounds of their prayers.[57]

What a historical book can judge

The historian can determine whether a particular text presents refuge as understanding a path. He can examine the dating of the formula and the growth of ritual practice. In a much later setting he can identify whether a preacher used religious language to incite injury or urged protection for threatened neighbors. He can describe what was said, when, by whom, and with what foreseeable consequences. The hidden state of a person's soul exceeds that evidence.

The theologian then asks what sort of guidance Allah may grant through the speech and example of a human being. Islamic answers depend on distinctions between prophetic revelation, nonprophetic inspiration, spiritual intercession and the ordinary learning of moral instruction. Such categories can be articulated carefully enough that admiration for a Buddhist moral insight carries no disguised commitment to the Buddhist creator critique. A Muslim may find help in a teaching while remaining a Muslim in worship, and a Buddhist may receive that Muslim's respect without being redescribed against his will.

The practical experiment is quiet. A person remembers a sentence, changes an intention, then behaves differently toward someone he could easily have harmed. The ethical content of the refuge has entered the world. A writer can observe the act and name its sources. The ultimate accounting belongs to Allah.

When wisdom is invoked as a witness against oneself

The phrase *Yā ʿAlī madad* is capable of carrying a moral request. A person calls upon the remembered justice of ʿAlī and asks for assistance in becoming more just himself. Another might say, "Save me, Jesus," in the hope that an encounter with ʿĪsā's forgiveness will break a cycle of resentment. The early Buddhist taking of refuge in the Buddha can likewise identify a discipline that one freely submits to, including restraint from injury and a cultivation of goodwill. Islamic debates over *tawassul* concern further questions about the address and agency of such invocations. The moral transformation that the speaker seeks remains intelligible apart from any agreement about those debates.

The meaning of refuge becomes testable in the moment when its cost appears. Consider a listener who knows that a neighbouring family has been driven from its home, and who finds himself wanting to explain why the family's suffering was deserved. If an appeal to the Buddha's example permits him to restrain that impulse and help the family, his refuge has changed an action. If the

remembered justice of ʿAlī brings a Muslim to recognize the dignity of a person he resents, the invocation has also entered conduct. The language of guidance is grounded in a small human decision whose consequences another person may experience.

Ṣidqī's division of Buddhism and Christianity as traditions of mercy, alongside Judaism and Islam as traditions of justice, offers a less reliable way to predict these decisions. Buddhist ethical and monastic texts contain exacting judgments; Qurʾānic discourse often joins divine mercy to the demand for justice. Within an Islamic theology of accountability, acts of mercy do not cease to count when their agent belongs to another community. Qurʾān 99:7–8 describes the disclosure of even the smallest good and evil. Qurʾān 5:8 makes injustice toward disliked people a matter for direct rebuke. These teachings provide a criterion for evaluating the moral use of refuge while preserving the more difficult theological questions about ultimate authority.[127, 122]

There is an acute historical reason to keep this distinction. Violence against the Rohingya was committed by identifiable military and political actors, while religious nationalist advocates helped circulate hostile narratives. Individual Buddhist clergy and laypeople also challenged the persecution. All these people acted within institutions, incentives, fears, and choices that require documentation. A text written in the fifth century BCE did not order the twentieth- and twenty-first-century conduct of a modern nation-state. The recorded teachings give modern practitioners an ethical vocabulary through which to judge that conduct.[1, 130, 2]

The book's salutation *ʿalayhi al-salām* has a similar practical implication for me as a Muslim. The blessing is a petition for peace. The reader should be able to trace the discipline that petition imposes on the way I quote a Buddhist passage, attribute motives to Buddhist readers, and account for violent wrongdoing. Fair treatment of opponents is one place where the proposal of divine guidance bears fruit. Whether Gautama was among the unnamed prophets remains an open historical inquiry whose answer cannot be supplied by the pleasure of agreement.

Chapter 17: From Discourses to Institutions

There is an abrupt change in scale after a teacher dies. Arguments that once ended in a conversation with him must be resolved through people who remember what he said. The discipline of a small mendicant community turns into a legal and social system. Someone needs to decide who can enter, who has violated a rule, which recitation should be taught to novices, and how property offered to the community can be used.

The Buddhist traditions tell their own stories about this change. In several Vinaya recensions, a first council follows the Buddha's death. Elders gather at Rājagaha; Ānanda recites discourses, and Upāli recites rules. The meeting stands at the origin of a claim that the community's collective recollection can carry the teacher's words into the future. It also gives particular elders authority over the shape of that recollection.[125]

A famous detail complicates the picture. One Vinaya tradition has the monk Purāṇa arrive after the elders' recitation and declare that he will continue to remember what he himself heard from the Buddha. The anecdote has often been read as an admission that the community never achieved perfect unanimity. The historicity of the individual confrontation remains uncertain,

since council narratives themselves are preserved in later developed Vinaya texts. Their literary interest is plain: a tradition establishing its authority has also retained the image of a respected dissenter.[125]

The price of a rule

Discipline becomes an especially clear site of religious history. Rules about the possession of goods, communal confession, sexuality, food, and the handling of conflict imply a body of people whose lives are linked in practical ways. Different Vinayas preserve shared structures while differing in their legal elaboration. These differences offer material for comparison, though two agreeing traditions may have inherited their wording from a common earlier source.

A second council at Vesālī is associated in the traditions with disputes about monastic discipline, including handling money and other practices. The accounts often place it about a century after the Buddha, using chronologies difficult to reconcile with independent dates. Modern research tends to recognize a historical setting of conflict behind some council stories while questioning whether their detailed proceedings can be recovered.

An ancient religious movement encounters politics before it possesses an empire. Supporters give food and land. Royal officials seek out influential monks. Community authorities must define the boundary between a legitimate disagreement and a rupture. The fundamental term *saṅgha* can designate a local monastic community as well as, in wider usage, the collection of those who follow the discipline. Confusing those meanings makes the subsequent schism stories look more centralized than the historical evidence warrants.

Aśoka's inscriptions supply unusually valuable external witnesses. His so-called schism edicts concern the maintenance of communal discipline and his power to intervene. Herman Tieken, reviewing this evidence and earlier scholarship, emphasizes that the inscriptions appear to address divisions within local saṅghas rather than the separation of universal Buddhist doctrinal churches. An emperor can regulate an institution that has acquired social and political standing. A stone edict tells us little about the Buddha's actual voice centuries earlier.[131]

A king's advice to believers

Another edict shows how a Buddhist-associated king could understand disagreement across religions. Major Rock Edict XII calls for restraint of speech when discussing other communities, warning that devotion to one's own sect can injure it through excessive disparagement of others. It commends hearing the teachings of different groups. The inscription belongs to Aśoka's policy and ethical vocabulary. There is no historical warrant for converting it into a lost verbatim sermon of Gotama.[132]

It nonetheless belongs in this book because it documents a response to religious rivalry from within a political environment shaped by Buddhism. The ruler expected a complex realm of competing traditions to endure. His command was a practical one: cultivate the essential qualities of one's tradition and learn to hear another.

The history is morally untidy. Kings who praise restraint still command armies and collect taxes. Monasteries that preserve compassionate teaching can benefit from wealth and patronage. The

early movement's demands on individuals develop into corporate interests that extend beyond any individual mendicant's intention. Those interests produce teachers, texts, medicines, buildings, and procedures for distributing help. They also offer religious elites means of compelling others. The consequences must be examined by institution and circumstance.

The inscription's authority and its limits

Major Rock Edict XII deserves a closer reading because it is carved evidence of an Indian ruler publicly seeking control over religious quarrels. In published transliterations of the Girnar inscription, the expression conventionally represented as *vacaguti* or *vācagupti* concerns restraint of speech. Translators differ in the details of rendering the Prakrit, while the emphasis on measured discussion of other religious communities is stable. The king criticizes indiscriminate praise of one's own group when it is joined to disparagement of another. He commends contact and attentive hearing among communities. The instruction is public and political, addressed to an imperial society in which religious affiliations had material consequences.[132]

The word translated as religious sect or community is commonly rendered *pāsaṃḍa* in the inscriptional context. An English phrase such as *all religions* can sound as though the inscription describes the same bounded, privately chosen belief systems recognized by a modern constitution. Ancient Indian ascetics, householders, ritual specialists and institutional communities did not occupy categories made for the administrative vocabulary of a modern republic. Attention to the original term is consequently part of the political history. The edict concerns the growth of the essentials of various communities within the king's dominion, as he understands those essentials.

Robert A. Yelle has argued that Aśoka's *Dhamma* is better approached through the problem of state authority and a shared public ethical language than through the image of an early modern secular state. His 2022 essay challenges retrospective claims that the emperor had already solved the modern question of church and state. This is a valuable critical check on the use of Rock Edict XII as an uncomplicated declaration of religious freedom. The injunction to learn about other communities was issued by a ruler with officials, punishments and a program for ordering public life. The structure of command remains visible even when the command favors restraint.[133]

The historical question then becomes precise. The inscription can demonstrate that this emperor, at the time of its issue, wished to regulate speech between religious communities and presented restraint as desirable. It can contribute to a history of Buddhist-associated imperial ethics. Any assertion about Gautama's words centuries earlier needs other evidence. Nor can the ruler's inscription by itself tell us how a particular district officer treated a dissenter. An imperial recommendation and its social performance belong to different registers of proof. Aśoka's recorded ideals deserve examination alongside his powers and the traditions that later adopted him as an exemplary Buddhist king.

There is a further practical consequence for the present book. If the emperor wanted people to understand others before they disparaged them, an author invoking his example owes readers accurate quotations of traditions with which he disagrees. Buddhist pluralism becomes historically intelligible through a rule about speech, an administrative setting, and a ruler's own

interest in social order. Its application today depends on particular people's choices. The stone makes an ancient demand visible; it leaves the moral conduct of a living reader to that reader.

Many Buddhas, many texts

Past Buddhas already appear in early discourse strata, including DN 14. Later Buddhist traditions enlarge the cosmological horizon, develop bodies of scripture associated with new understandings of the bodhisattva path, and cultivate devotion to celestial Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Their historical dates and relationships are matters for philology. The existence of a religious claim within Buddhism gives us the date and character of its earliest surviving attestation, with the event it claims requiring independent investigation.

The movement into Mahāyāna is difficult to reduce to a single council or revolt. Different manuscripts, inscriptions, and ritual practices show that devotional and philosophical innovations emerged within complicated monastic and lay networks. The contrast between a 'pure original Buddhism' and everything later is itself a retrospective construction. We should instead ask which elements of any practice can be traced through actual witnesses.

This methodological demand has an Islamic echo. Transmission collections, jurists, movements of devotion, and political institutions gradually acquire the ability to speak for a founder whose lifetime they did not share. Their testimony may be indispensable. Their power to select and authorize material needs study on its own terms.

If Gotama was inspired, this institutional history remains part of the life of his message. If he was a philosopher, the same question persists. How do people who admire an ethical teacher construct a durable authority around his name, and what happens to the ethical demand when the authority becomes wealthy enough to evade it?

Chapter 18: From Nava Vihāra to Baghdad

In Balkh the world of Indian Buddhism met the political and linguistic networks of Iran and the caliphate. The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang, traveling in the seventh century, described a Buddhist center with numerous monasteries and monks. Near the city stood a celebrated establishment called Nava Vihāra, the New Monastery. Arabic and Persian sources later knew a place called Nawbahār. These names carry an important geographical memory across languages.[134, 135]

The Arabic histories sometimes describe Nawbahār as a Zoroastrian fire temple. Encyclopaedia Iranica records the discrepancy and explains the Buddhist Sanskrit name. A building can survive in records whose authors classify it according to the religious categories most familiar to them. The later description is evidence for what a Muslim author believed or had been told, while the earlier travel and institutional evidence helps explain why the description needs revision.[134, 135]

A family at two temples

The Barmakids came from Balkh and became one of the outstanding administrative families of the early Abbasid court. Their history is often told as a leap from the guardianship of a Buddhist monastery to mastery of a Muslim empire. The word *Barmak* has been linked with Sanskrit

pramukha, a term for a chief, although the etymology retains uncertainties. Their exact genealogy and inherited institutional office require careful reconstruction.[134]

The family story gains firmer outlines by the Umayyad reign of Hishām. Early reports place an ancestor Barmak at the court, where he converted to Islam. His son Khālid later took part in the Abbasid cause and was entrusted with army and revenue administration. In the first Abbasid reign, household ties grew through reciprocal nursing relationships that created Islamic milk kinship. The next generations entered the inner circles of caliphal government.[134]

Within a few generations the descendant of a frontier religious establishment had become the administrator of the state's intimate business. The career offers historical evidence of movement between civilizational worlds; it cannot tell us which doctrines the original Barmak believed, or whether a Buddhist philosophy survived in his descendants' minds. The distinction between administrative continuity and theological transmission is essential.

It would be absurd to deny the cultural importance of Buddhist and Indian learning in the wider world of Abbasid scholarship. Medicine, astronomy, mathematics, literary material, and the circulation of people created many opportunities for transmission. Each asserted influence needs an actual path: a person, a translation, a quotation, an institution, a dated manuscript, or a recognizable problem taken from one language into another.

What survives conversion

There is a tendency to describe the Barmakids as if a whole Buddhist monastery stepped into the Abbasid chancery. A family actually crossed the frontier through successive households and political relationships. Ihsan Abbas's entry in Encyclopaedia Iranica follows the early Muslim reports to the Umayyad court of Hishām, where Barmak is said to have converted, and then to his son Khālid's participation in Abbasid administration. The later family entered an imperial system that rewarded skill in revenue collection and proximity to the caliph. The sources differ in how they describe the earlier sanctuary and the ancestors' office.[134]

The distinction matters for the history of religion. A man who receives the name Muslim at a court may continue to know how his parents and grandparents organized a school, arranged patronage, spoke several languages, or kept account of agricultural estates. Those skills can persist while his ritual allegiance changes. The language in which an Arabic biographer describes the earlier institution may also reveal how little he knew about its practice. Calling Nawbahār a fire temple could be an act of classification by a Muslim narrator who understood Iranian religious history through familiar categories. The Sanskrit explanation nava-vihāra gives us a reason to investigate the Buddhist establishment on its own terms.[134, 135]

A useful historical claim about transmission should name its carrier. For the Barmakids one carrier is a family with documented later offices and earlier reported ties to Balkh. For the history of translation another may be a book whose Sanskrit material arrived in an Arabic milieu through identifiable scholars and patrons. The two networks could overlap. An administrative family's Buddhist ancestry alone says little about what its ministers believed of nirvāṇa or non-self. Claims that the family imported a particular metaphysical doctrine require a quoted text, a demonstrable translation, or a record of instruction.[134]

The years between the reported conversion under Hishām and the family's success under the Abbasids deserve the same care as the centuries separating Gotama from the Chinese Āgamas. Court narrative compresses generations. A ruler's generosity and a sage ancestor's predictions can become signs that a dynasty's triumph was foreordained. Such stories report how a successful family wished its history to be understood. They may preserve people and places accurately while embellishing the gestures that made the outcome seem inevitable.

The movement from a monastery's neighborhood into the capital's administrative world was therefore made by persons, languages and habits. It offers a test of the book's hypothesis about religious custody. A teaching can travel when somebody carries its words. Its social setting can travel when descendants carry institutions and skills. Only a close reading of the surviving record will tell us when these paths joined.

The sage whom an empire forgot

Al-Bīrūnī, writing in the early eleventh century, mastered remarkable material about Indian learning. His knowledge of Buddhism was thin. Edward Sachau, the translator and editor of *Alberuni's India*, drew attention to the disproportion: the great investigator had sophisticated Brahmanical informants and texts, while Buddhist doctrine entered his account through meager, mediated reports.[136]

The result is historical rather than mysterious. Learned men can have extraordinary language skills and still lack a community capable of explaining a vanished or geographically distant tradition. Al-Bīrūnī's knowledge depended on where he traveled, whom he could consult, and which books survived in his world. This makes the task of a modern Muslim recovering the Buddha's original teaching resemble his in one respect. The breadth of one's intellectual ambition does little to conjure missing primary witnesses.

The book's earlier discussion of Buddhist communities in Afghanistan now acquires a second use. A religious tradition can leave immense monuments and administrative traces after its doctrines have become opaque to the people who live around them. A later scholar may recognize an ancient object without recognizing its makers. Memory preserves the surface and loses the explanation.

The prince who became a Christian saint

There is a further, extraordinary instance of the Buddha's journey across religious boundaries. The story of the Indian prince who discovers suffering, learns from a holy man, and abandons inherited expectations was transformed through Iranian, Arabic, Georgian, Greek, and Latin narrative traditions. In medieval Christian literature the prince became Josaphat, with Barlaam as his spiritual guide. The transmission history of this story reaches back to versions of the Buddha's life.[137]

The names themselves bear traces of the route. Forms resembling *Būdāsaf*, *Yūdāsaf*, and *Ioasaph* occur across Arabic and subsequent versions, with *bodhisattva* regularly proposed as an ultimate source. Specific intermediate forms and scribal changes remain matters of philological research.

The broad transformation is now well established in scholarship, including a Cambridge study of the Buddha's unexpected Christian afterlife.[137]

An unusual consequence follows. A Christian reader could admire an Indian saint, encounter the transformed story of Gautama through him, and remain unaware of its Buddhist ancestry. In the route through Arabic, the narrative had already traveled across Islamic literary territory. The once-unfamiliar religious teacher entered another tradition as a figure whose story could be adopted and retold.

This supplies a caution for our title. A writer who names the historical Gotama an unnamed Qurʾānic prophet should understand the older history of religious adoption. The adoption may be sincere and productive. It can also rewrite a figure so that his own difficult teachings disappear. The present book should seek every opportunity to return to the earlier sources before applying its theological language.

How a bodhisattva became Josaphat

The path from an Indian religious narrative to the Christian saint Josaphat has a more visible textual history than the proposed passage from Kapilavastu to Dhū l-Kifl. A story about the prince who discovers suffering and renounces his inherited life circulated through Central Asian and Iranian religious worlds. Medieval Arabic versions were among the stations through which it reached Christian literature. Scholarship traces its transformations through Georgian and Greek retellings, and eventually Latin and European vernacular versions. The medieval Christian hero is recognizably descended from a life of the Buddha, although the stories assign him different teachers and a different religious destiny.[137]

Names are evidence here. Variants such as Būdāsaf and Yūdāsaf appear in different linguistic traditions before the later Josaphat. Their association with bodhisattva has been examined through attested written forms. Sound change, scribal readings, and translation belong to an actual sequence of surviving texts. The chain is uneven, and its minor branches require the work of specialists, yet it supplies the kind of middle terms that an etymology of Kifl from Kapilavastu would need to establish.[137]

The transmission is also a reminder that an Islamic society can preserve a Buddhist story without continuing to believe the religious explanation that originally surrounded it. An Arabic reader could encounter a prince instructed by an ascetic and understand the lesson through an account of true worship very different from the Indian tradition. The text was useful enough to adapt. The same process eventually furnished Christian audiences with an exemplary life that they could love while being unaware of its ancestry.

A striking feature of the transformation is its success. A story can grow more persuasive in a new language as its principal character becomes answerable to the doctrines of the new audience. Someone studying the Christian Josaphat alone might find a devout saint who appears entirely at home in Christianity. Following the intermediate witnesses reveals the historical work through which that familiarity was made. This is relevant to my own book, because the salutation in its title is another act of religious reception.[137]

The comparison establishes the right kind of humility. In the Josaphat case, a series of texts makes the route of reception traceable. In the fig and Dhū l-Kifl proposals, the crucial late-antique bridge remains an open research task. The existence of one astonishing movement of a Buddha story through Islam shows that such cultural transformations occurred. It gives the historian a concrete standard for assessing another proposed transformation.

The school beyond its walls

Nava Vihāra and the Barmakids tell us about institutions and people who crossed an expanding political frontier. Al-Bīrūnī shows the limits of learned contact. Josaphat shows that a story can survive through major changes in religious meaning. Each example belongs to a different evidentiary class. Together they indicate how the world Gotama inspired continued to touch the societies that eventually read the Qurʾān.

We should resist giving that contact an imaginary final scene. No surviving document shows a monk of Nawbahār explaining the historical Buddha to the Prophet Muhammad. The Qurʾānic lists of unnamed messengers contain no recoverable itinerary through Balkh. What history offers here is a network of real routes through which ideas and stories moved. Their traces deserve far more attention than a manufactured encounter would receive.

Chapter 19: Justice after the Teacher

The men who organize persecution often speak of protection. They say a community is endangered, that its shrines or inherited customs will disappear, and that severity is an obligation toward the ancestors. From this language a familiar moral displacement can occur. The threatened majority becomes the injured party in its own story, while the people living under its power become a danger to be removed.

In Myanmar, anti-Muslim Buddhist nationalism acquired institutional voices, public demonstrations, and campaigns against the rights of minorities. The Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim people concentrated historically in Rakhine State, faced long-running discrimination and restrictions on citizenship and movement. Following attacks on security posts in August 2017, the Myanmar military carried out operations that killed civilians, destroyed villages, and drove enormous numbers across the border to Bangladesh.[1, 138]

The United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, in its 2018 and 2019 reports, documented severe crimes by Myanmar security forces and concluded that senior military figures should be investigated and prosecuted for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. That finding is a documented institutional judgment, with responsibility assigned to specified actors. The record includes policies and forms of incitement that extended beyond the soldiers carrying out the operations.[1, 138]

Religious authorities had a role in the political climate. The 969 movement and Ma Ba Tha promoted versions of Buddhist national identity centered on an alleged Muslim threat. Some monks used sermons and mass communication to circulate prejudice, while advocates pressed for discriminatory legislation and restrictions involving marriage and religion. The UN’s subsequent

reporting addresses the part played by ultranationalist rhetoric and the amplification of hate through media.[2]

A Buddhist teacher living two and a half millennia earlier did not issue an order in twentieth- or twenty-first-century Rakhine State. Assigning responsibility requires the names of present institutions and people, together with evidence of what they said, did, knew, and controlled. A doctrine can be invoked as justification; its most faithful practitioners can contest that use through their own textual resources.

The refuge that justifies anger

Buddhist refuge begins with an invitation to direct one's life toward awakening, teaching, and a disciplined community. Some devotees express that commitment through ritual formulas and devotion to revered figures; others emphasize meditation and moral cultivation. A modern person who says he takes refuge in the Buddha may sincerely intend to become less violent and more attentive. His conduct supplies the evidence of how the vow has shaped him.

The *Dhammapada* teaches that hatred is calmed through non-hatred. DN 1 instructs disciples to control anger when outsiders criticize their teacher, answering unfounded claims by explaining what is false and why. These injunctions already place a burden on a person whose religious loyalty has turned into animosity. Their moral meaning grows more concrete when the person faces a real minority whose safety depends upon the majority's actions.[11, 45]

There is an especially revealing excuse in debates about Buddhist responsibility: the idea that an inflammatory sermon is karmically innocent because the speaker did not consciously intend the later injuries. Karma in many Buddhist accounts turns on intention, and intention has a serious role in distinguishing an accident from a chosen act. The practical question is what the speaker intended while cultivating fear, repeating false accusations, or seeking discriminatory treatment. A sophisticated moral theory of intention asks for scrutiny of those purposes.[130]

My Qurʾānic concern reaches the same event by another route. Qurʾān 5:8 requires justice even in the presence of hostility. Qurʾān 99:7–8 makes each person's smallest good or evil visible. Such passages offer no permission to convert a religious grievance into domination. The one who invokes Allah or an Imam and then persecutes an innocent person is accountable for the deed. A Buddhist invocation supplies a different theology while raising an equally concrete question about what refuge has made of the refugee.[127, 139]

The traditions' explanations of action across death differ. Their argument over selfhood, causation, and divine judgment remains real. At the site of a destroyed village, a survivor's suffering does not await the settlement of those metaphysical disputes. We can investigate the claims of perpetrators and advocates in terms they themselves understand, with the evidence supplied by the actions that followed.

Before the villages burned

A legal category can prepare the conditions for a much later campaign. Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Law established a framework in which recognition of belonging was tied to a hierarchy of citizenship and designated national races. The Rohingya were excluded from the

official list and repeatedly confronted documentation requirements that many could not satisfy. The UN's 2019 fact-finding work describes how these restrictions affected movement, schooling, health care and livelihood. The legal decisions preceded the mass expulsions of 2017, shaping the population's ability to defend its home and claim protection.[1, 140]

The years surrounding 2012 matter for this chronology. Communal violence in Rakhine led to displacement and segregated living conditions, while restrictions and the language of threat helped make persecution part of ordinary public administration. One can study military operations as discrete events while missing the daily regime within which a family had to ask permission to travel or maintain a place of residence. The history of Rohingya suffering has administrative documents as well as destroyed villages.[140]

The moral question arising from that history is concrete. If a public officer refuses a child a document because of the child's identity, his action becomes part of the machinery of exclusion. The governing instruction may have preceded him, and the official may have inherited it from others. The law records an institution's decisions, while the person using its authority still makes choices about the treatment of those before him. A religious justification for national belonging cannot make the injury disappear. This is the kind of accountability the book has been trying to describe through the older teachings on intention and justice.

A campaign using familiar screens

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar published an analysis in March 2024 of 43 Facebook pages operating between July and December 2017. Some presented themselves as ordinary entertainment or celebrity pages. The investigators found shared administrative and technical links connecting them to a coordinated network with clear ties to the Myanmar military. Their review identified more than 10,000 posts considered hate speech. This was a means of manufacturing apparent public sentiment at the time soldiers were carrying out the campaign against the Rohingya.[141]

The mechanism matters more than any isolated insult. People reading different pages could believe they were hearing unrelated speakers, while posts repeated the same hostile claims in concert. Accusations that a minority endangered the nation and Buddhism gained force through their apparent ubiquity. The report concerns a particular network, a defined period and material that investigators were able to analyze. It supports a stronger attribution of organized propaganda than a claim based solely on inflammatory sermons circulating online.[141]

The religious element entered this apparatus through portrayals of the Rohingya as an existential danger to Buddhism. Military propagandists drew on a vocabulary already available in nationalist movements, and the state's ability to coerce made that language dangerous to those it excluded. Investigating a post's origin, its amplification, and the actions taken around it gives us a way to follow responsibility. The word refuge offers little moral shelter to a person who knowingly supplies a persecutor with an audience.

Houses after the inhabitants fled

Expulsion has an afterlife in property records and construction contracts. In September 2025 the Myanmar investigative mechanism published a report on seven village tracts in northern Rakhine. Its sources included witness accounts, satellite imagery, video and official records. Investigators identified the destruction of homes, farms, markets and mosques after the 2017 violence, followed by construction of Border Guard Police bases on former Rohingya land. Its public report named security institutions and commercial entities involved in remaking those places.[142]

The example of Myo Thu Gyi offers a measure of the change. According to the mechanism, more than 800 homes, shops, markets and mosques existed in the relevant tract before the violence. Investigators found that over 411 acres had been burned and flattened by 2018, with a large police base subsequently built where Rohingya villages had stood. These are findings about land, institutions and physical replacement, separate from the evidence used to reconstruct each killing. Their significance reaches directly into the terms of return. A family can survive across a border and still find that the road home leads to a police installation.[142]

When governments speak of repatriation, the wording can reduce restoration to moving people from one jurisdiction into another. The 2025 evidence requires more exact questions. Who now occupies the land? Which institution authorized a change in its use? How will a dispossessed person document ancestral residence when records and buildings have been destroyed? The mechanism's report addresses an investigation of the past with consequences for restitution. Repair must deal with the places people lived, worked and worshipped.[142]

The violence continued under new authorities

The record has moved beyond the 2017 military campaign. Reporting by OHCHR in August 2025 documented abuses against Rohingya by both the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army amid fighting in Rakhine State. It described killings, detention, forced recruitment, displacement and restrictions affecting ordinary life. The Arakan Army, which came to control much of northern Rakhine, acquired power over people already deprived of equal citizenship. Its denials of some reported abuses were recorded alongside testimony and findings from OHCHR's verification work.[143]

The report published on 25 August 2026 covers June 2025 through May 2026. OHCHR documented further abuses against Rohingya by the military and the Arakan Army, including allegations of arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, forced labor, recruitment and the seizure of property. The struggle over armed control changes the identities of people with immediate power over a village. Families facing violence need their rights upheld by whoever holds that power. The UN report gives the contemporary history a dated evidentiary basis.[144]

I want the chapter to resist a convenient account in which one atrocity committed nine years ago answers every question about the present. The military's campaigns and organized incitement remain part of the historical record. The contemporary record also demands that commanders of other armed organizations be scrutinized wherever civilians suffer under their control. A claim to liberate a region acquires substance through how its residents are treated. The Rohingya have

experienced what happens when their rights can be suspended by the next authority to take possession of a road.

The principle of responsibility reaches beyond religion. Nationalist Buddhist rhetoric helped prepare a climate of persecution, military institutions planned and executed operations, and later armed authorities exercised coercive power. These relationships can be documented at their appropriate levels. The older Buddhist instructions on anger and the Qurʾānic instruction to act justly remain worth discussing because they speak to people capable of choosing what they do with authority.

The monks who refused the invitation

There were Buddhists in Myanmar who contested anti-Muslim hostility. Harvard's case study on Buddhism and conflict describes monks and laypeople organizing peacebuilding, interfaith understanding, and humanitarian aid for displaced Muslims. Their work belongs in the historical record alongside the nationalist campaigns. It matters because it prevents a religious population from being treated as a single political person and allows individual choices to become visible.[130]

These Buddhists faced their own forms of pressure, including accusations that concern for Muslims endangered the majority. Their presence is important for a moral analysis grounded in agency. Where religious identity becomes politically charged, participants still choose whether to assist victims, repeat the accusations, or retreat from public responsibility. The available options and the risks of each choice differ by person. The historical inquiry should record those constraints rather than issue a verdict upon people from a distance.

Aśoka's Rock Edict XII, written centuries after Gotama, offers an older institutional statement about the treatment of other communities. The king asked subjects to restrain their speech and listen to rival traditions, warning that extravagant praise of one's own sect could injure it. The inscription belongs to the history of a Buddhist-associated emperor. Its ethical appeal can still be placed beside the sermons that helped create hostility in a later Buddhist-majority state.[132]

The moral question runs through these examples without requiring a theory of collective guilt. A specific monk who organized discrimination can be studied through his speeches and actions. A layperson who hid a persecuted neighbor can be studied through that courageous choice. A military institution's orders, policy, and conduct demand a different archive. The categories of responsibility should follow the people and institutions capable of acting.

The monastery that opened its doors

The Harvard Divinity School case study records a monk named U Withuta sheltering more than eight hundred Muslims during anti-Muslim riots. He reportedly faced an angry crowd and refused to give up the people inside his monastery. When interviewed afterward, he described his action as something demanded by the Buddha's teaching. The account supplies a particular person, a particular use of religious space and a choice taken at personal risk. Its reported details should be checked against the original interviews in any future full historical chapter.[130]

I am interested in what his refuge required him to do at the door. A monastery commonly signifies protection for those who belong to its community. In that episode the monk extended

protection to people an incited crowd had marked as alien. The building's religious identity became an instrument of safety for the persecuted. A historian of Buddhist nationalism has to include such deeds when documenting how monastic authority was used.

There are wider evidentiary obligations. One moving report about an individual rescuer cannot measure the number of Buddhist opponents of the campaign or the distribution of opinion among monks. It can establish that the choice to protect Muslims was present within a Buddhist ethical understanding, and that it could exact a cost. The source takes us past an abstract discussion of whether a tradition is compassionate. The people who arrived at the monastery needed someone to open the door.[130]

The anger hidden in a peaceful word

An online religious exchange begins with courtesy. Somebody suggests that Gotama could have been inspired by Allah; another explains why Buddhist awakening is understood differently. The discussion might become useful because the participants disclose what they believe and the evidence they accept. It may also become an identity struggle in which any historical question is treated as an attack on the community.

There is an understandable reason Buddhists can object to a Muslim’s proposal to call Gautama a prophet. The proposal can appear to absorb their founder into a religious system whose central creator theology many Buddhist schools reject. A careful Muslim historian should state the grounds and limits of that proposal. This book’s title is deliberately situated within Islamic hope; it gives the Buddhist reader a reason to demand our evidence.

The corresponding responsibility lies with the Buddhist who answers the proposal. A serious objection deserves a serious explanation. Contempt toward Muslims or approval of their persecution has to be examined by the moral rules the respondent claims to honor. Criticism of Islam and Islamophobia are distinct kinds of speech with different consequences, and a historian needs the particular words before classifying an exchange.

The most revealing response to an adversary may be a religious refusal to participate in cruelty. Within the Islamic invocation *Yā ʿAlī madad*, help can arrive through the recollection of ʿAlī’s justice. Within the Buddhist refuge, help can arrive through a remembered instruction to relinquish hatred. These are theological interpretations held within different traditions. They become morally relevant when remembrance changes a person’s action.

The historical Gotama remains separated from these modern arguments by extraordinary distances of time and textual transmission. Yet his early canonical voice is often severe about anger, vanity, and cruelty. Those teachings furnish a standard by which Buddhists themselves can argue about their inheritance. A Muslim who takes them seriously has reason to do the same with his own religious authorities, including any who invite him to despise another people.

Epilogue: Peace Be Upon Him?

A man leaves his household in the eastern Gangetic world. He studies among renunciants, pushes his body almost to collapse, and comes to believe that he has found a way to bring suffering to an

end. He gathers followers. They organize teachings around him. Centuries pass, and an emperor writes his birthplace on stone. More centuries pass; the man's life reaches distant languages, crosses an Islamic court, and enters Christian hagiography under another name.

The historian can reconstruct part of that journey. The oldest recoverable textual witnesses preserve a recognizable teacher and a set of concerns whose relationship to his geographical and intellectual environment makes sense. They also preserve cosmological claims, miraculous episodes, and differences between schools. The more precisely we compare the texts, the more we see what a community believed and how it transmitted the belief. The precise experience under the tree stays beyond reconstruction.

The Qurʾān announces messengers whose names Muhammad was never told. That opens the Muslim imagination toward peoples whose revelations, if they received them, have no surviving Arabic equivalent. It encourages inquiry into the moral lives of teachers whom Islam's later institutional memory did not classify. Their actual identities must be established by evidence appropriate to their time.

This book has followed the strongest available argument for calling Gautama one of those messengers. It has also traced counterevidence that deserves sustained attention: his remembered claim to self-awakening, the early Buddhist critique of a creator-Brahmā, and the lack of a recoverable line linking Dhū l-Kifl to Kapilavastu. The comparison has led us to a more interesting question about how an intelligent person recognizes moral truth and what kind of guidance such recognition may be.

The title's blessing remains a conscious Muslim act. A prayer for peace upon a man who appears to have devoted his life to overcoming cruelty need not declare that every later doctrine attributed to him is true. It expresses the hope that wisdom worthy of the name has a source in Allah and that a teacher may be rewarded for the good he brought into the world. The authority to decide his ultimate condition belongs to Allah.

One difficulty will remain for some Buddhist readers. From the Buddhist view, Gotama's awakening is understood within a universe ordered by dependent origination, and the traditions may see the attempt to describe it as prophetic revelation as a foreign reinterpretation. They are entitled to press that objection. The historical inquiry gains from hearing it.

For the Muslim reader the danger lies in treating the honorific as a substitute for the work. The title should invite examination of early witnesses, languages, manuscripts, dates, and concrete ethical obligations. The man deserves to be recovered before we use him to prove ourselves right.

In one Qurʾānic register, those who listen to speech and follow its best have received guidance. In an early Buddhist register, the path to the cessation of suffering has to be walked. The reader who closes the book can return to his own life and ask what has become easier to forgive, what cruelty he has ceased to excuse, and which obligations he is now prepared to fulfill.

For the claim-unit ledger G-001–G-270, Tibetan and Arabic source apparatus, and a witness-order matrix, consult the archival 00.23 master.

Critical notes on the principal witnesses

1. The Sanskrit lacuna.

The surviving Sanskrit long-discourse manuscript ends with a Brahmajāla, but its extant leaves do not preserve the relevant creator sentence. Rico's synoptic table therefore leaves the local Sanskrit cell empty. That is an absence in a surviving physical witness, with no conclusion about a lost exemplar. See Rico, Brahmajāla, chapter 5, and the §62 collation.[65, 67]

2. The two Tibetan renderings.

The canonical Kangyur version is D 352, with the first being's claim at 75a5 and the followers' response at 75b1 in the Degé electronic witness. The Upāyikā quotation in Śamathadeva's D 4094 supplies another Tibetan rendering, locally at 145r4–7 in Rico's table. The complete quotation has conflicting folio bounds in the dissertation's apparatus.[64, 65]

3. The Weller numbering.

Section 60 introduces the cosmological setting. The attribution of creative agency belongs to §62, and the subsequent assent is at §63. These section numbers serve different purposes from the folio addresses in the photographed Kangyur. Weller's 1934 original images remain uncollated here.[63, 65]

4. Related recensions.

Rico's analysis of recurring abbreviations suggests a closer transmission relationship between the Sanskrit Dīrghāgama and the Kangyur. The Upāyikā and Central Asian Sanskrit fragments require separate placement. The comparisons speak to a literary genealogy, while the historical speaker remains an additional question.[67]

5. Ṣidqī's printed pages.

The issue of 8 March 1913 assigns the Buddha-and-fig excursus to al-Manār 16:216–221. Al-Sharekh's article viewer supplies JPG addresses for those pages, alongside page 222, where the issue catalogue begins another article. The Arabic transcription supports the working interpretation of the fourfold scheme. The original printed letters, punctuation and footnotes remain uncollated.[113, 118, 120]

6. The Qurʾānic identification.

Qurʾān 16:36, 35:24 and 40:78 establish a broad theology of guidance and unnamed messengers. A historical identification of Gotama would require an additional positive witness. The book's honorific names the author's devotional hope while the earliest Buddhist textual evidence is weighed separately.[3, 4, 105]

7. The 2026 image-catalogue release.

Tohoku University announced public availability of its digitized Degé catalogue on 20 April 2026. The collection's searchable metadata and IIIF photographs make a future original-image comparison practicable. This edition has verified the release announcement, but has not read the specific D 352 75a–75b or D 4094 145r images in the viewer. The original 1913 al-Manār volume is likewise discoverable as a 689-page public facsimile, with its relevant printed-page pixels still uncollated.[94, 145, 95]

8. The arrangements of the sixty-two views.

Anālayo's comparative survey (2010), particularly pp. 25–27, groups DN 1, DĀ 21 and the Śāriputrābhidharma quotation by one ordering, and T 21 with the Tibetan discourse and Śamathadeva's quotation by another. This is a comparison of transmitted textual patterns, not a settled manuscript stemma. The accessible Sanskrit manuscript does not preserve the creator episode in its extant portions. See[96], [80], and[65].

9. The two sword articles and the 1913 press controversy.

The March 1913 article's discussion of Luke 22 is directly visible in its searchable Arabic transcription before the fig excursus. Umar Ryad identifies a separate August 1913 publication on the same topic, al-Manār 16/8:598–599, and examines the later confrontation with missionary critics and colonial officials. These claims are documented at a secondary-source level until the August print and Riḍā diary can be read independently. See[113], [124].

10. What evidence could change the messenger hypothesis?

The claim is tested through positive historical witnesses, demonstrable recensional changes, and documented transmission into Arabic. The creator-Brahmā episode remains a substantial adverse witness to a simple monotheist reconstruction; a missing Sanskrit leaf is an absence of testimony. Rico's parallel table, pp. 238b–239b (PDF pp. 262, 264), has been visually inspected for §§62–63. Original woodblock and al-Manār printed-page checks remain open. See numbered source notes 11, 65 and 113.

Numbered source notes

Notes follow the order of first citation in the reader. Repeated references retain the same number. Documentary source codes are shown for comparison with the archival master. Numbering proves traceability; original-image verification is recorded separately in the source audit.

1. [U1] United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar*, A/HRC/39/64 (2018), archived UN record. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1648304/
2. [U4] UN Human Rights Council, A/HRC/43/18, on ultranationalist monks and anti-Muslim rhetoric. UN document record: https://documents.un.org/access.nsf/get?DS=A%2FHRC%2F43%2F18&Lang=E&OpenAgent=
3. [Q1] Qur'ān 16:36, parallel translations and Arabic corpus: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=16&verse=36
4. [Q2] Qur'ān 40:78, parallel translations and Arabic corpus: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=40&verse=78

5. [A1] Lumbini Museum, “Emperor Asoka's Historic Visit.” https://lumbinimuseum.org/emperor-asokas-historic-visit/

6. [A2] UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Lumbini, the Birthplace of the Lord Buddha.” The site's chronology incorporates traditional dates; do not treat 623 BCE as independently established. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/666

7. [H1] Alexander Wynne, “Gotama, the Historical Buddha,” *Oxford Bibliographies in Buddhism* (2022). https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195393521-0278

8. [H2] Charles Willemen, “Selected Materials for the Study of the Life of Buddha Śākyamuni.” https://www.shin-ibs.edu/documents/pwj3-13/PWJ3-13.pdf

9. [P1] *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta*, MN 26, translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu. Includes Gotama's teachers, Brahmā Sahampati's request, and the encounter with Upaka. https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN26.html

10. [P2] *Nagara Sutta*, SN 12.65, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi. https://www.dhammatalks.net/suttacentral/sc2016/sc/en/sn12.65.html

11. [P3] *Brahmajāla Sutta*, DN 1, translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu. https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/DN/DN01.html

12. [EB1] Roderick S. Bucknell, *Reconstructing Early Buddhism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009236539

13. [EB2] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “Chinese Āgamas,” *Oxford Bibliographies in Buddhism* (2017, reviewed 2021). https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195393521-0250

14. [EB3] “Early Buddhist Texts: Their Composition and Transmission,” scholarly discussion of multiple recensions. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8789374/

15. [Q3] Qur’ān 42:51, parallel translations and Arabic corpus: https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=42&verse=51

16. [H11] Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo*, second edition (2006), chapter 2 on Śākya society. Accessible excerpt: https://tidipa.github.io/Books/Gombrich---Therav%C4%81da-Buddhism-%282006%29

17. [H12] G. P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, entry “Sakyā, Sakka, Sākiyā.” https://aimwell.org/DPPN/sakya.html

18. [H13] U. N. Ghoshal, “Political Status of the Sakyas of Kapilavastu” (1945), historical discussion of their autonomy and Kosalan relations. https://aryanculture.org/records/2945

19. [P32] *Ambaṭṭha Sutta*, DN 3; disputes over descent and conduct, modern translation. https://suttacentral.net/dn3/en/sujato

20. [H14] Chris Hellier, “Competing Claims on Buddha's Hometown,” *Archaeology* 54.2 (2001), Tilaurakot and Piprahwa. https://archive.archaeology.org/0103/newsbriefs/buddha.html

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24. [H18] T. W. Rhys Davids, *History and Literature of Buddhism*, historical chapter on the Śākya polity and the later royal biography. Bibliographic witness at IGNCA: https://ignca.gov.in/Asi_data/8682.pdf

25. [P37] *Mahāpadāna Sutta*, DN 14, the four sights explicitly narrated for Vipassī. https://suttacentral.net/dn14/en/sujato

26. [P34] *Sukhumāla Sutta*, AN 3.38 (PTS), AN 3.39 in some editions, autobiographical recollection of refined upbringing and the three seasonal residences. https://find.dhamma.gift/accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.038.than.html ; numbering note https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN3_39.html

27. [P35] *Acchariyabbhūtadhamma Sutta*, MN 123, extraordinary birth narrative; Chinese MĀ 32 parallel indexed at the correspondence table. https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN123.html ; https://www.dhammatalks.net/suttacentral/sc2016/sc/mn123.html

28. [Q13] Qurʾān 19:29–30, the infant ʿĪsā speaks. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=19&verse=30

29. [P4] *Madhyama Āgama* 204 (羅摩經), bilingual Chinese and English, with alignment of the road episode. https://dhamma.gift/bw/parallels/ma204.html

30. [P36] *Ambalaṭṭhikarāhulovāda Sutta*, MN 61, address to Rāhula on truthfulness and intentional conduct. https://suttacentral.net/mn61/en/sujato

31. [P38] *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, MN 36, austerities, memory of youthful jhāna, and return to sufficient nourishment. https://suttacentral.net/mn36/en/bodhi

32. [P39] Ānandajoti Bhikkhu, introduction to *Bodhirājakumārasutta* (MN 85); discusses the distinction between Uddaka, Rāma and the teachers in MN 26. https://ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Bodhirajakumara/00-Introduction.htm ; annotated Pāli https://ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Bodhirajakumara/04-The-Meeting-with-Uddaka-Ramaputta.htm

33. [P40] MĀ 204, Chinese *Rāma Sūtra* parallel to MN 26 with Bilingual text. https://dhamma.gift/bw/parallels/ma204.html

34. [S4] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “Brahmā’s Invitation: The Ariyapariyesanā-sutta in the Light of Its Madhyama-āgama Parallel,” *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 1 (2011): 12–38. Sustained Chinese translation and notes on MN 26 / MĀ 204, Āḷāra, Uddaka/Rāma, parents at renunciation, and the missing Brahmā invitation. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/brahma-invitation.pdf ; searchable reading: https://test.dhamma.gift/bw/ebt-study/macomp/mn26comp.html

35. [S6] *Madhyama Āgama* 204, 羅摩經, T 26, Taishō I 776b–777b, side-by-side original Chinese and English; checked the age, crying parents, teacher lineage, heavenly death notices, and the absence of Brahmā's invitation. https://dhamma.gift/bw/parallels/ma204.html ; CBETA locator https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/T01n0026_p0776b03

36. [P41] *Bodhirājakumāra Sutta*, MN 85, extended quest narrative; read beside MN 26 and MN 36. https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN85.html

37. [H23] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “The Buddha's Awakening,” *Mindfulness* 12 (2021), 2141–2148, comparing variants in narrative descriptions of realization. DOI https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-021-01649-x ; accessible text https://tidipa.github.io/Articles/An%C4%81layo---The-Buddha%27s-Awakening-%282021%29

38. [P42] Pāli *Vinaya*, *Mahāvagga* I, opening chapters on awakening, the Bodhi tree, and Ajapāla banyan, with Pāli text and translation. https://origin.dhammatalks.org/vinaya/Mv/MvI.html

39. [H24] “Brahmā at the Ajapāla Banyan Tree: Re-Examining Paintings at the Sulamani Temple, Bagan,” *Religions* 11 (2020) 171; compares variant post-awakening tree cycles. https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/11/4/171

40. [H3] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “Brahmā's Invitation: The Ariyapariyesanā-sutta in the Light of its Madhyama-āgama Parallel,” *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* 1 (2011), 12–38. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/brahma-invitation.pdf

41. [P25] *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, SN 56.11, translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu; includes the two extremes, four truths, three rounds, and eightfold path. https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/SN/SN56_11.html

42. [P26] *Saṃyukta Āgama* 379, Chinese first-sermon parallel in English; shorter text preserving three rounds. https://dhammatalks.net/suttacentral/sc2016/sc/en/sa379.html

43. [H9] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “The Chinese Parallels to the Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta (1),” *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies* (2012), comparison of SN 56.11, SĀ 379, and other parallel versions. https://wisdomexperience.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/dhammacakka1.pdf

44. [P9] *Dīrgha Āgama* 21 (梵動經), Chinese parallel of DN 1, Charles Patton translation. https://canon.dharmapearls.net/01_agama/dirgha/DA_21.html

45. [P13] *Dhammapada* 5 and Sanskrit *Udānavarga* 14.11, parallel verses; note Sanskrit *kṣāntyā* (“through forbearance”) for Pāli *averena* (“through non-hatred”). https://ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Texts-and-Translations/Udanavarga/14-Droha.htm

46. [Q5] Qurʾān 5:8, obligation of justice even amid hostility. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=5&verse=8

47. [Q6] Qurʾān 42:40, forgiveness and reconciliation. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=42&verse=40

48. [P7] *Saṃyukta Āgama* 287 (城邑), Chinese source and parallels; also translated as “An Ancient City.” https://dhammatalks.net/suttacentral/sc2016/sc/lzh/sa287.html and https://buddhistcanon.ru/en/chinese_canon/sa/sa3-5.html

49. [P8] Piya Tan, “Nagara Sutta, Mahā Sakyamuni Gotama Sutta & Nagara Sūtra,” comparative Sanskrit–Pāli study, *Dharmafarer* SD 14.4. https://www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/14.4-s12.10-s12.65-Skt-comp-study-piya1.pdf

50. [P27] *Paccaya Sutta*, SN 12.20, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi; conditionality and dependently arisen phenomena. https://suttacentral.net/sn12.20/en/bodhi

51. [P28] *Saṃyukta Āgama* 296, Charles Patton's bilingual translation, notes identifying SN 12.20 and Sanskrit SF 163. https://canon.dharmapearls.net/01_agama/samyukta/03/SA3_14.html

52. [H8] Chandrabhal Tripathi, *Fünfundzwanzig Sūtras des Nidānasaṃyukta*, 1962, pp. 147–152, SF 163, referenced with Indic excerpts in Patton's notes to SĀ 296 [P28]. Original edited text to be reviewed independently.

53. [P29] *Saṃyukta Āgama* 299, Charles Patton translation; a discourse rejecting the claim that dependent origination was made by a Buddha or another. https://suttacentral.net/sa299/en/patton

54. [P30] *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, SN 22.59, Pāli non-self discourse, used here only as a future collation target. https://suttacentral.net/sn22.59/en/sujato

55. [P18] *Titthāyatana Sutta*, AN 3.61, translated by Bhikkhu Sujato; critique of attributing all pleasure and pain to a creator's action. https://suttacentral.net/an3.61/en/sujato?lang=en

56. [P31] *Madhyama Āgama* 13, Charles Patton's bilingual Chinese/English presentation of the three explanatory views and moral practice. https://canon.dharmapearls.net/01_agama/madhyama/MA_013.html

57. [Q7] Qurʾān 99:7–8, deeds and moral consequence. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=99&verse=7

58. [P15] DN 1 *Brahmajālasutta*, Pāli original, SuttaCentral/World Tipiṭaka edition. https://suttacentral.net/dn1/pli/ms?lang=en

59. [P16] T 21, 佛說梵網六十二見經, Taishō 1 no. 21, original Chinese with provisional unverified English paraphrase (T1.0266b06 creator passage). Verify original; traditional translator attribution contested. https://www.wisdomlib.org/buddhism/book/taisho-chinese-buddhist-canon/d/doc1853106.html

60. [H4] Bhikkhu Anālayo, *Dīrgha-āgama Studies* (introduction and transmission overview; DĀ translated in 413 CE). https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/dastudies.pdf

61. [H5] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “The Brahmajāla and the Early Buddhist Oral Tradition,” *ARIRIAB* XVII (2014): 41–59; study of introductory narration, ethics, collection formation. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/brahmajala.pdf

62. [H6] Chinese Buddhist Canonical Attributions project (Michael Radich and colleagues), T0021 梵網六十二見經; cites Jan Nattier (2008), Zürcher, and Sakaino in questioning the received attribution to Zhi Qian. https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/814/

63. [H10] Friedrich Weller, *Brahmajālasūtra: tibetischer und mongolischer Text*, Leipzig, 1934, published Tibetan/Mongolian text, §60 for the creator-Brahmā episode as located by Anālayo [H3], p.22 l.29 in the cited edition. Digitized by Heidelberg University Library. https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/weller1934/0001

64. [S11] Esukhia-Barom, *Digital Derge Kangyur*, archived GitHub repository, volume 076 (text/076_མདོ་སྡེ།_ཚ།.txt), Git blob SHA d245735e25d7f795670a16f335bf87be1da436d8, marker {D352}, folios 70b2–86a2, creator episode 74b6–75b7. Direct electronic text consulted; physical woodblock image and Q 1021 remain uncollated. https://github.com/Esukhia/derge-kangyur/blob/master/text/076_%E0%BD%98%E0%BD%91%E0%BD%BC%E0%BC%8B%E0%BD%A6%E0%BE%A1%E0%BD%BA%E0%BC%8D_%E0%BD%A8%E0%BD%B1%E0%BD%BE%E0%BD%BF.txt ; project method https://github.com/Esukhia/derge-kangyur

65. [S14] Liudmila Olalde Rico, *Vier Lehrreden aus der Langen Sammlung (Dīrghāgama)*, doctoral dissertation, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (2022), especially introductory discussion p. 8, chapter 5 pp. 161–162 and the *Brahmajāla* synoptic table around printed pp. 238a–240a (PDF pages 262–265). Reports Hartmann's finding that the *Kangyur* and Śamathadeva's *Upāyikā* were translated independently into Tibetan while belonging to the same recension; sets Weller's 1934 Tibetan edition beside an *Upāyikā* quotation, D 4094, and Pāli DN 1. Directly inspected university PDF and table renderings. Different full-quotation folio spans appear in the chapter note and table header; the claim clauses are independently located within the table. https://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30799/1/Olalde_Rico_Liudmila.pdf

66. [S12] *Brahmajāla Sutta*, DN 1, Pāli text, at the Brahmā episode, "Mayā ime sattā nimmitā" and the arrival of other beings from Ābhassara. A searchable transcribed edition; used for unit-level reading rather than reconstruction of the lost Vorlage behind the Tibetan. https://buddhadust.net/dhamma-vinaya/pali/dn/dn.01.pali.bd.htm

67. [AA1] Liudmila Olalde Rico, Vier Lehrreden aus der Langen Sammlung (Dīrghāgama), LMU Munich dissertation (2022), printed p. 168, on abbreviations shared by the surviving Sanskrit Dīrghāgama and Tibetan Kangyur, and distinct transmission patterns in the Upāyikā and Central Asian fragments. PDF image p. 180 (zero-based p. 179). https://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30799/1/Olalde_Rico_Liudmila.pdf

68. [P17] *Kevaṭṭa Sutta*, DN 11, translated by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu; Brahmā publicly asserts omniscience but admits ignorance privately. https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/DN/DN11.html

69. [P19] DĀ *World Chronicle*, T 1 volume 22, 世本緣品第十二; Brahmā's priority and alleged creation retold in the same Āgama collection. https://www.dachengfayuan.com/tripitaka/T0001/22

70. [P20] T 380, *Mahākaruṇā Sūtra*, first fascicle, Chinese; later creator dialogue explicitly attributes beings to karma and conditions. Textual dating and relation to early discourses remain unresolved. https://tripitaka.zensoul.org/T/T0380/1

71. [R1] *Titthāyatana Sutta*, AN 3.61, Pāli and Bhikkhu Sujato translation. https://suttacentral.net/an3.61/en/sujato?lang=en and https://www.audtip.org/an/main/an03/index.html

72. [R2] Charles Patton, *Madhyama Āgama* 13, "Crossings," bilingual Chinese and English with detailed lexical notes on 人所為一切 and 尊祐造 (updated 20 August 2024). https://canon.dharmapearls.net/01_agama/madhyama/MA_013.html

73. [R3] "Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Religion," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2023), §§1.1, 5, 7.1; cites ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, and *al-Mughnī*, VI/1, pp. 52–70. https://plato.sydney.edu.au/entries/arabic-islamic-religion/

74. [R4] Atif Khalil, "Ethics in Islam," *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology* (2025), §§4–5. https://www.saet.ac.uk/Islam/Ethics

75. [R5] George F. Hourani, "The Rationalist Ethics of ʿAbd al-Jabbār," in *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (1985), 98–108; Cambridge abstract accessible. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511570780.012

76. [M2] Wilferd Madelung, "ʿAbd-al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* I/2 (1982), 116–117, with specific discussion of Mānkdīm and erroneous published attribution. https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/abd-al-jabbar-b-ahmad/

77. [M3] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl*, Cairo edition, vol. 13, p. 187, Arabic on rational and revealed obligation. https://ablibrary.net/book_content/b/9453/187?lang=ar

78. [Q8] Qurʾān 4:79, personal responsibility and divine good. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=4&verse=79

79. [Q9] Qurʾān 13:11, change within a people. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=13&verse=11

80. [S3] Bhikkhu Anālayo, "The 'Sixty-two Views': A Comparative Study," *Fuyan Buddhist Studies* 5 (April 2010): 23–42, especially pp. 26–29 (eternalism and partial-eternalism) and creator-Brahmā witness inventory. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/sixty-two-views.pdf

81. [S8] Tibetan canonical inventory for *Tshangs pa'i dra ba'i mdo*, Degé D 352, Peking Q 1021; compared against Weller 1934 and Anālayo 2010 locators. Catalogue data, not a word-level Tibetan reading. https://mahayanaindonesia.blogspot.com/p/derge-sutr.html ; Weller and references in [S3], [H10].

82. [P33] *Dhammapada* 188–192, refuge in Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha joined to understanding the four noble truths. https://www.dhammatalks.net/suttacentral/sc2016/sc/en/dhp.html

83. [P44] *Dhammapada* 188–192, *Buddhavagga*: Pāli original and English translations, including the lines *yo ca buddhañca dhammañca saṅghañca saraṇaṃ gato* and *cattāri ariyasaccāni sammappaññāya passati*. Pāli facing the English: https://saddhamma.github.io/dhp/dhp188-192.html ; translation comparison: https://nanda.online-dhamma.net/tipitaka/sutta/khuddaka/dhammapada/dhp-contrast-reading/dhp-contrast-reading-en-chap14/

84. [P45] *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN 16, self- and Dhamma-refuge injunction to Ānanda with four foundations of mindfulness in its immediate exposition. Pāli tradition, English translation by Sister Vajira and Francis Story at https://vipassana.org/canon/digha/dn16.html ; parallel rendering by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu at https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/DN/DN16.html . Passage-level reading of the received Pāli is established; separate recension collation remains open.

85. [Y2] Chinese Buddhist Canonical Attributions (CBC@), text T0021, 梵網六十二見經, edited entry by Michael Radich, documenting the Taishō attribution to Zhi Qian alongside Jan Nattier (2008), who rejects its reliability. https://dazangthings.nz/cbc/text/814/

86. [H7] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “The Brahmajāla and the Early Buddhist Oral Tradition (2),” *ARIRIAB* XVIII (2015): 79–94; comparison of placement of DN 1 and DĀ parallels among long-discourse collections. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/brahmajala2.pdf

87. [H19] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “The Sixty-Two Views: A Comparative Study,” *Fuyan Buddhist Studies* 5 (2010), study of DN 1, DĀ 21, T 21, Tibetan and ancillary sources. https://scdd.sfo2.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/uploads/original/2X/a/a44888b1d0c7630dcf2831bcc0c5400a2054cf62.pdf

88. [H20] Jonathan A. Silk, “Chinese Sūtras in Tibetan Translation: A Preliminary Survey,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology* 22 (2019), 227–246; *Lhan dkar ma* 261A attribution to Ye shes sde in discussion of D 352. https://openphilology.eu/publications-jonathan-silk/articles_2019b_sutras.pdf

89. [H21] 84000, General Sūtra Section, Toh 352 “The Sūtra of Brahmā’s Net,” thirty-two pages, translation In Progress at time of consultation. https://84000.co/canon/general-sutra-section

90. [H22] Otani University Chinese/Tibetan Canon catalogues, Peking Kangyur P 1021 *Tshangs pa'i dra ba'i mdo*, 72b8–88b8. https://web.otani.ac.jp/cri/twrpe/peking/tibet.php?key=peking_vol&page=0&re_num=-1&word=mdo+sna+tshogs%2C+ke

91. [Y1] Tohoku University Library, "The Derge Edition of the Tibetan Tripitaka" and "TOHOKU Derge Canonical Catalogue," opened April 2026, searchable canon catalogue with image records and IIIF manifests of the woodblock edition. The date of a photographed exemplar must be kept distinct from the translation date of a particular work. https://touda.tohoku.ac.jp/collection/en/database/tibet/collection/derge ; https://touda.tohoku.ac.jp/collection/en/database/tibet/collection/derge/canon

92. [Z2] Source Library, Degé Kangyur, volume 76, a Library of Congress copy digitized by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center, with Esukhia Tibetan text aligned to original folio scans. The generic catalogue estimates for composition and translation apply to a miscellaneous volume and are not specific dates for D 352. https://sourcelibrary.org/book/derge-kangyur-vol-76

93. [Z3] Library of Congress, Tibetan Collection research guide, Asian Division/BDRC Degé Kanjur: acquired by Rockhill in 1908, probably printed in the late nineteenth century from printing blocks completed in 1733; digitized 2007–2008. https://guides.loc.gov/tibetan-collection/digital-collections

94. [AB1] Tohoku University Digital Archives, “The Derge Edition of the Tibetan Tripitaka: Databases Now Available!”, dated 20 April 2026. University statement that the Kangyur and Tengyur image catalogues have been publicly launched. https://touda.tohoku.ac.jp/collection/en/database/tibet/news/2026-04-20

95. [AB4] Tohoku University, “TOHOKU Derge Canonical Catalogue”, public catalogue description of the Degé Kangyur and Tengyur and IIIF-compliant full-colour images; release announced 20 April 2026. Specific D 352 and D 4094 scanned faces remain uncollated. https://touda.tohoku.ac.jp/collection/en/database/tibet/collection/derge/canon

96. [AC1] Bhikkhu Anālayo, “The ‘Sixty-two Views’: A Comparative Study,” Fuyan Buddhist Studies 5 (2010), pp. 23–42, esp. 25–27. Direct PDF text and page images inspected for the grouping of the views; the grouping is a literary comparison, not a proof of shared Indian wording. https://www.buddhismuskunde.uni-hamburg.de/pdf/5-personen/analayo/sixty-two-views.pdf

97. [R6] Jens-Uwe Hartmann, “Further Remarks on the New Manuscript of the Dīrghāgama,” *Journal of the International College for Advanced Buddhist Studies* 5 (2002), 133–150, at pp. 133–135 on final folio 454. https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/21372/1/21372.pdf

98. [R7] Liudmila Olalde Rico, *Vier Lehrreden aus der Langen Sammlung (Dīrghāgama)*, dissertation, LMU Munich, cited from catalogue excerpt at p. 161; access to the complete PDF timed out during this pass. https://edoc.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30799/1/Olalde_Rico_Liudmila.pdf

99. [R8] 84000 catalogue, *Brahmajāla* Toh 352, Degé vol. 76, fols. 70b–86a; Otani Peking Tripitaka catalogue, P 1021, 72b8–88b8. https://84000.co/canon/general-sutra-section ; https://web.otani.ac.jp/cri/twrpe/peking/tibet.php?key=peking_vol&page=0&re_num=-1&word=mdo+sna+tshogs%2C+ke

100. [R9] Mark Allon, Stephanie Majcher, and Ian McCrabb, “Aṇatvalakṣaṇa Sutra,” *Journal of Gandhāran Buddhist Texts* (2020), edition of RS 22.02, c. 140 CE, with physical metadata, text and parallel catalogue. https://gandhari-texts.sydney.edu.au/edition/a%E1%B9%87atvalak%E1%B9%A3a%E1%B9%87a-sutra/

101. [R10] Tsai Chilin, “Philology Versus Dogmatics: A Comparative Study of the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya,” Chinese text with English abstract; identifies Pāli *na ca labbhati* against Chinese SĀ 34's 得 reading and compares thirteen witnesses. https://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/FULLTEXT/JR-MAG/mag211878.pdf

102. [W1] University of Washington, *The Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project*, research-group description of British Library acquisitions in 1994, broad Gāndhārī manuscript dates, and the wider international collections. Project page examined directly on 27 October 2026. https://asian.washington.edu/early-buddhist-manuscripts-project

103. [W2] University of Sydney, Gandhāran Buddhist Texts, *The Robert Senior Collection*: 24 scrolls, at least 41 texts, deliberate anthology, lost findspot, dating near 140 CE, pot and dedication, probable stūpa deposit and two index scrolls. Scholarly collection page examined directly on 27 October 2026. https://gandhari-texts.sydney.edu.au/collections/robert-senior-collection/

104. [W3] Library of Congress, *Gandhara scroll*, catalogue 2018305008, and Asian Division research guide, digital physical manuscript images and descriptions. Dating range about 1st century BCE–1st century CE; includes 13 previous Buddhas, Gotama and the future Maitreya. Metadata and content descriptions consulted; original Kharoṣṭhī signs not newly transliterated. https://www.loc.gov/item/2018305008/ ; https://guides.loc.gov/south-asian-manuscripts/gandhara

105. [Q10] Qurʾān 35:24, every community and a warner. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=35&verse=24

106. [Q4] Qurʾān 28:7 and 16:68 (nonprophetic contexts of *waḥy*). https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=28&verse=7 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=16&verse=68

107. [R11] Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth, “ʿAbd al-Jabbār's view of the relationship with God through divine assistance (luṭf),” scholarly chapter abstract. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-mono/10.4324/9780203965375-3/abd-al-jabb%C4%81r-view-relationship-god-divine-assistance-lu%E1%B9%ADf-maha-elkaisy-friemuth

108. [P14] MN 26, Pāli original, including Upaka's dialogue. https://dhammatalks.net/suttacentral/sc2016/sc/pi/mn26.html

109. [M1] Mānkdīm Shashdīw (published under ʿAbd al-Jabbār's name), *Taʾlīq Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, printed as *Sharḥ*, Beirut edition, p. 203, Arabic on divine justice. https://ablibrary.net/book_content/b/9281/203?lang=ar

110. [M4] Hassan Ansari and Jan Thiele, “A Twelfth-Century Controversy on Mānkdīm’s *Taʾlīq Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*: Zaydis Debating Accidents, Attributes, and Optics,” *Shii Studies Review* 8 (2024), 260–288; summarizes Daniel Gimaret’s 1979 attribution findings. https://brill.com/view/journals/ssr/8/1-2/article-p260_6.pdf

111. [I1] Scholarly discussion of modern identifications of Buddha and Dhū l-Kifl, including Hamid ʿAbd al-Qādir. Treat as history of interpretation rather than evidence of identification. https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/rt/printerFriendly/6608/19545

112. [S1] Johanna Pink, “The Fig, the Olive, and the Cycles of Prophethood: Q 95:1–3 and the Image of History in Early 20th-Century Qur’anic Exegesis,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, eds. Majid Daneshgar and Walid A. Saleh (Brill, 2017), 317–338, especially 331–335. Full volume: https://almuslih.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Daneshgar-M-and-Salih-W-Islamic-Studies-Today-.pdf

113. [S2] Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī, “Naẓariyyatī fī qiṣṣat ṣalb al-Masīḥ wa-qiyāmatihī min al-amwāt,” *al-Manār* 16 (March 1913), two installments, esp. 193ff., excursus “Istiṭrād lā baʾsa bih,” original Arabic text transcribed at https://ar.wikisource.org/wiki/مقالات_مجلة_المنار/نظريتي_في_قصة_صلب_المسيح_وقيامته_من_الأموات/2 . Journal facsimile and exact page boundaries to be checked independently.

114. [T3] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsin al-Taʾwīl*, commentary on Qurʾān 95:1–3, pp. 6199–6201 in the online edition; reports an unnamed contemporary's Buddha-fig interpretation. https://www.islamweb.com/ar/library/content/217/4041/

115. [Q14] Qurʾān 21:85–86 and 38:48, Dhū l-Kifl's two occurrences. https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=21&verse=85 ; https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=38&verse=48

116. [T1] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, Qurʾān 21:85, Arabic narrations about Dhū l-Kifl, undertaking and patience; includes Mujāhid's nonprophetic identification. https://tafsir.app/tabari/21/85

117. [T4] Z. Awang et al., “Muslim Views on Other Religions: With Special Reference to Buddhism,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* (2021); surveys Hamid ʿAbd al-Qādir, Muhammad Hamidullah, and Dhū l-Kifl hypotheses. https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/6608/19545

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The bracketed source codes in the chapters refer to the entries below. *These entries identify documents and scholarship; they do not certify that every statement has been independently verified against an autograph.*

Original-image collation remains open for Ṣidqī's al-Manār excursus, 1913, pp. 216–221, and the specific Degé, Peking and Weller Tibetan folios. The scholarly transcription and catalogue evidence cited in the book retain their stated grades.