The *Abhiseka* Rite of the Thai Coronation Ritual: *A reconsideration in the Buddhist context*

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The Thai coronation ritual has been studied in the recent past by Thai scholars, but in Western scholarship the main source of information is still Quaritch Wales who published his book on Thailand's coronation ritual in the year 1931. A fascination of this ritual lies in the fact that it is an amalgam of progressive modifications of an original Brahmanic ritual; therefore, it reflects an aspect of the Thai cultural continuum that has been created by Brahmanic and Buddhist interactions. These interactions, which began in the 5th century BC when the Sakyamuni first preached his religion, are seen everywhere in Southeast Asia in relics and monuments that bear mixed images of the two religions.

In the last few colonial centuries, Thailand has kept its independence as well as the monarchy through feats of diplomacy, luck, and not least by adapting its institutions to meet the demands of world progress. This evolution creates constant tensions between traditional and modern values. A successful management of new challenges—a creation of true democracy or a full participation in the world-wide market economy—depends not only on technical expertise but also on a healthy integration of modern and traditional institutions in society in such a way that all social strata benefit from the fruits of progress. A successful social integration depends in part on understanding the traditional culture which must bend its values to the demands of the modern world. Studying rituals and their meanings helps us to understand these values, whose true significances are often packed into their symbolic forms. Through such forms that elicit responses, people perceive and adhere to social values. Adaptations of ritual forms also represent the ways that values have been modified in the past and may perhaps suggest how they may be, or ought to be, modified in the future.

Since the dawn of the Chakri Dynasty, the coronation ritual has undergone changes made partly by monarchs who had a strong hand in determining the overall arrangement of this week-long ceremony. In the original theory, a would-be monarch is the commissioner (*yajamana*) who reaps the benefits of a ritual that he commissions a Brahmin to perform on his behalf. A commissioner has a purpose in mind and accordingly asks for a certain ritual to be performed; he does not control or alter the nature of a rite and its symbolic meaning as described by ancient ritual texts. Again, in theory, the sacrificer, namely, the Brahmin-priest, knows a rite's meanings and the god to whom it is sacrificed. This knowledge is essential for the successful outcome of the ritual, for it is believed that a priest may render a ritual effective only through a knowledge of the nature of the sacrifice and the god to whom it is sacrificed (*Brhaddevata* 1. 1–21, Macdonnell 1904, 1–5). This knowledge is, so to speak, the Brahmin's special technology, which alone has the power to install the commissioner, i.e., the would-be king, on his throne.

The Thai coronation ritual is perplexing because it contains Brahmanic and Buddhist elements, symbolizing contradictory ideals in two quite different theories of kingship. Quaritch Wales, the author of *Siamese State Ceremonies*, sees the coronation ritual as a predominantly Brahmanic one and thus describes it as a process of installing a king by a high priest (Wales 1931). In Brahmanism, the ritual of royal installation, called the *Rajasuya*, is an extended and costly sequence of rites containing an intricate complex of symbols. In this ancient ritual there is no crowning. The ritual, on the whole, symbolizes and consecrates the king's rebirth as a god. The king partakes of a god's divinity and rules on earth as a deity ruling over mortals. He is, in short, a god-king (*devaraja*).

Prince Dhaninivat, in a small volume entitled *Phra Boromarachaphisek*, disagrees with Wales' interpretation of the god-king concept in the Thai coronation ritual. He states that Thai monarchs do not perceive themselves as god-kings, for they are Buddhists who attach only a superficial importance to the idea of divinity. Thai people, says Prince Dhaninivat, do not firmly believe that extrinsic rites and paraphernalia can turn a king into a god, like Siva. The Prince asserts, furthermore, that a Thai monarch's role is to protect and support religions. A king's divinity, associated with Siva in the Thai coronation ritual, is mainly ceremonial and secondary to the Buddhist ideals of kingship (Prince Dhaninivat 1946).

Some Western scholars, such as S. J. Tambiah and Richard Gombrich, look for and find Buddhist ideas and ideals of kingship in the often cited *Aggañña-sutta* of the *Dighanikaya*. This *sutta* is sometimes called the Buddhist book of Genesis because it tells of the origin of world, humans, and society. According to it, kingship originally arises from the need for good government. In the beginning humans live happily eating of the land where they do not toil for their subsistence. As time passes, they begin hording food and amassing private stores; they fall to fighting. A king is chosen because his morality and wisdom make him the ideal keeper of peace and justice in society. The function of a king is

precisely to prevent quarrels and hatred by insuring that goods are fairly apportioned and securely protected.

Scholars generally view the coronation ritual, like the concept of kingship, through discrete categories of Brahmanism and Buddhism: a rite is known by its features and its meanings as a Brahmanic or a Buddhist rite. Such a rite is analyzed according to the principles of one or the other religion, within its proper, respective cultural and social context. In this paper, I will suggest, however, that historically and at present Brahmanism and Buddhism, in all countries where both religions exist, share the same cultural milieu; their rites belong in the same functional and semantic continuum. Even where Brahmanism and Buddhism are most opposed, such as in their respective doctrines of the existence of the self, *atman*, and the nonexistence of the self, *anatman*, their arguments are complementary opposites, sharing the same fundamental assumptions, beliefs, and logical techniques. Showing the complementarity between these two religions, I will examine the rite of sprinkling, the *abhiseka*, which is central to the coronation ritual in Thailand. In this examination, features and meanings that are commonly shared by Buddhist and Brahmanic ritual semantics will be highlighted.

The idea of "abhiseka"

"*Abhiseka*" is derived from the Sanskrit root *siñc*, meaning "to sprinkle upon," or "to shower upon." Associated with water and the waters, the "sprinkling" is the heart of the coronation ritual consisting of a sequence of rites. The entire ritual can be schematically divided into five main parts:

1. preparing the lustral water to be sprinkled, engraving the king's name and birth chart, and carving his seal;

2. consecrating the water which has been collected from various rivers, this blessing being performed by monks reciting Buddhist mantras;

3. sprinkling a shower of water from the roof of the ritual pavillion onto the seated initiate's head, installing the king on the eight-sided throne made of fig wood (Thai อัฐทิศ Sanskrit *astadis*) where he sips water proffered by Brahmins and high officials, and finally installing him on the throne called ภัทรบิฐ (Skt. *Bhadrapitha*) where the king takes possession of his regalia and kingdom;

4. the new king appearing before the great assembly, installing the queen, declaring himself supporter of Buddhism, honoring the relics of former kings and queens, and inaugurating the palace;

5. undertaking royal processions by land and by water (see แสงสูรย์ ลดาวัลย์ 1983).

These processions are comparable to the ancient Indian *digvijaya*, or the king's victorious march in all directions to display his sovereignty over the kingdom.

When Thai kingdoms arose in Southeast Asia, the coronation ritual must have been a powerful technology imported by Brahmins who alone had the knowledge to invest a king with divinity, install him on the throne, and seal his rulership over a newly built or conquered city. A look at founding myths in the chronicles of old kingdoms reveals accounts of their origins in two paradigms, Buddhist and Brahmanic. City-founding myths of the Brahmanic model usully tell of an ascetic who miraculously raises a divine foundling to manhood and consecrates him by sprinkling as king over a city. The Buddhist model typically consists of the Buddha's prediction of a city's establishment. The story proceeds in this manner: At a certain time, the Buddha travels to a certain place and leaves an imprint of his august body there, predicting that at that spot made sacred by his presence a man will rise to power in the future. The king, founder of the city, is the very incarnation of that being so ordained by the Buddha's prophecy and destined to be anointed king. The monarch attains this status through lifetimes of storing up powers and perfections until he finally fullfills the Buddha's decree.

In the last one and a half centuries of modernization and adaptation to the international climate of scientific rationality and

technology, Theravada Buddhism, Thailand's state religion, is officially viewed as a "rational" religion. Thai intellectuals aver that its doctrines are based on critical analyses of reality acccording to the law of causality. Theravada Buddhism is officially presented as a religion characterized by an absence of devotion to a god: it not only discourages blind faith but indeed advises adherents to rely on reason to work out their own salvations according to their experiences and capabilities.

Buddhism as practiced in society, however, is far from being the rational religion described by its doctrines. While magic and mysteries are considered the art of Brahmins and Brahmanism, esoteric practices beyond the pale of the orthodox doctrines are revealed by studies to be prevalent in popular Buddhism (see Tambiah 1976; Terwiel 1969). In the case of the *abhiseka* ritual, the waters collected from rivers are combined in one vessel and consecrated by the Buddha's *mantra*, or พระพุทธมนตร์, recited by monks over the vessel. The Buddha's *mantras* are similarly recited for the sake of an auspicious performance of the main *abhiseka* rite. Such recitations are not an act consistent with "rationality." What, then, is the function of the Buddha's *mantras*? How do they become efficacious in this ritual?

Efficaciousness: transference and contagion

In order to understand this "extra-rational" function of Buddhist rites, and the duplication of Buddhist and Brahmanic segments in one ritual, it must be seen that the *abhiseka* is a general form common to Buddhist and Brahmanic ritual semantics. It becomes a particular rite with a specific function and meaning when used in a sequence of rites comprising an entire ritual process. A ritual sprinkling consecrates the king by transforming him from an ordinary mortal into a divinity, in identifying or unifying the king with a divine figure. In one ritual, the king may be identified with several gods in a sequence of rites; these gods are such as Indra, Mitra, Varuna, and Siva, for example. Similarly in Buddhism, the *abhiseka* consecrates the king's sacred status by identifying him with Buddhahood by transferring the Buddha's qualities to the king.

In the *Aitareya Brahmana*, it is explained that an *abhiseka* transfers a god's powers to the king. Because a god, anointed by a certain rite, was victorious, a king, anointed by the same rite, will be similarly victorious. A typical example can be seen in the *Indrabhiseka*. When the divine sacrificer Prajapati anoints Indra, it is stated that Indra

> ...became the supreme authority, as connected with Prajapati. Anointed with this great anointment Indra won all victories, found all the worlds, attained the superiority, pre-eminence and supremacy over all the gods, and having won the overlordship, the paramount rule, the self rule, the sovereignty, the supreme authority, the kingship, the great kingship, the suzerainty to this world, self-existing, self-ruling, immortal, in yonder world of heaven, having obtained all desires he became immortal. (*Aitareya Brahmana* 8.14, Keith 1920, 331)

It is said further:

> If he who knows thus should desire of a Ksatriya, 'May he win all victories, find all the worlds, attain the superiority, pre-eminence and supremacy over all kings, and overlordship, paramount rule, self rule, sovereignty, supreme authority, kingship, great kingship, and suzerainty; may he be all encompassing, possessed of all the earth, possessed of all life, from the one end to the further side of the earth bounded by the ocean, sole ruler,' he should anoint him with this great anointing of Indra (*Aitareya Brahmasna* 8.15, Keith 1920, 331).

The passage tells us that by this anointing the king will obtain all that Indra has obtained. The king becomes a great and immortal ruler, like Indra who became a great and immortal ruler because he was anointed by the very same rite.

In Brahmanism, interpretations of rituals made in the genre of literature called the *Brahmana* are further developed in later literature by the hermeneutical tradition called the *mimamsa*. No such tradition

exists in Buddhism. Monks are forbidden under pains of expulsion from the *Sangha* from using magic or boasting of their superhuman powers. Thus, their role in reciting the Buddha's *mantras* can be properly interpreted as a blessing which confers auspiciousness on the assembly. The meritorious force of the blessing derives from the Buddha himself; the powers of his auspicious person and his acts are transferred after his death to his relics, icons, and sacred texts. Finally, this force is passed on to the *Sangha* and individual monks who follow the Teacher into the religious life. When monks perform rites and recite *mantras*, the entire ritual enclave is encircled by a sacred thread (สายสิญจน์) secured to the Buddha's image. The efficacy of the *mantras* falls upon worshipers who are enclosed in the circle made by this thread. It is to be noted that the word "สิญจน์" (*siñc*) can be traced to the Indic root *siñc*, "to sprinkle," from which the word "*abhiseka*" is derived. "สายสิญจน์" literally means "the filament of sprinkling," i.e., the filament circumscribing the sprinkling.

In theory, no magical formulas can be recognized by the orthodox Theravada Buddhism, but monks regularly create lustral water to be used for sprinkling on various occasions, such as the inaugurations of businesses and buildings, the ceremonies for curing sicknesses and dispelling bad luck, and so on. According to a monk at Wat Suthat, mantras are คาถา selected from Buddhist sacred literature. Their efficacy issues from the power of the reciter's truthfulness (สัจจาภินิหาร). The paradigm for this mantraic efficacy consists in a vow once made by the Buddha that, by the force of his truthfulness, a body of water blessed by him be a cure for a cholera epidemic. A textual basis supplies this popular secondary elaboration of the miraculous curative efficacy of *mantras*: originally, the efficacious utterance take the form of a vow. In this way, Theravadins who are reluctant to believe in magic can rationally explain the efficacious nature of mantraic formulas.

Despite the "rational" explanation of the efficacy of verbal recitations, we see that in the installation ritual the lustral water produced by Buddhist *mantras* has the power to identify a king with the Buddha: for when a person becomes a king, his honorific title is พระพุทธ, meaning the "Lord Buddha." The king is considered an offspring, or a shoot of the Buddha (หน่อพระพุทธเจ้า). A common person addressing the king calls himself ข้าพระพุทธเจ้า, meaning, "the slave of the Lord Buddha."

After the coronation ritual, the king's person is sacred and unapproachable. Elaborate court protocol of the old days forbade contact with the king even by sight. Laws that used to absolutely segregate royals, nobles, and commoners were somewhat relaxed in the early period of modernization from the reign of King Rama IV onward. A king's majesty, the source of his forbiddenness, has two trajectories: he is the "Lord of life," on the one hand, and a refuge of the people through his meritorious powers and perfected virtues (บารมี) on the other (see เทพรัตนราชสุดา 2525, ch. 6).

Tambiah provides an answer for the transference of the Buddha's powers to the king. In Tambiah's study of Buddhist saints in Thailand, the author has found this transference in the form of charisma: transferred from the Buddha to saints and kings. The Weberian concept of "charisma" denotes the peculiar quality of an extraordinary, revolutionary leader, enabling them to bring about radical changes in a new paradigm. Charisma is defined as "the quality which is imparted to persons, actions, roles, institutions, symbols, and material objects because of their presumed connection with "ultimate,' 'fundamental,' 'ritual,' 'order-determining' powers" (See Tambiah 1984, ch. 21). Charisma, passed down from the Buddha, becomes institutionalized in kings who are perceived as incarnations of a *Bodhisattva*; charisma is also invested in forest saints who in turn bestow their charismatic powers to amulets and other potent objects. In millennial Buddhism, Tambiah finds that people may follow a charismatic leader believed to be charged with meritorious powers (ผู้มีบุญ). These charismatic figures are believed to be intimately linked with powers transferred from the Buddha, and they are often taken to be the future Buddha (พระศรีอาริย์) who will usher in the utopian society.

Tambiah's theory of the institutionalization of charisma in kings and saints is supported by

passages from Buddhist scripture. In the *Dighanikaya* 3.76, the Buddha predicts the advent of a wheel-turning, universal monarch (*cakkavattin*) who will arise at the same time as the future Buddha, Metteyya.

> Among such humans, brethren, at Ketumati the royal city, there will arise Sankha, a Wheel-turning king, righteous and ruling in righteousness, Lord of the four quarters, conqueror, protector of his people, possessor of the seven precious things. His will be these seven precious things, to wit, the Wheel, the Elephant, the Horse, the Gem, the Woman, one Housefather, the Councillor. More than a thousand also will be his offpsring, heroes, vigorous of frame, crushers of the host of enemy. He will live in supremacy over the earth to its ocean-bound, having conquered it not by the scourge, not by the sword, but by righteousness.
>
> At that period, brethren, there will arise in the world an Exalted One named Metteya Arahant, Fully Awakened, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the world, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an Exalted One, a Buddha even as I am now." (*Cakkavattisihananada Suttanta* 26.24 , Rhys-Davids 1965, 3.76, p. 73).

In what sense is charisma passed down to saints and kings, so that they are said to be connected to the 'ultimate'? Charisma takes the form of the Buddha's prediction, for his prophecies, or his words (*buddhavacana*), are the living substance of the Buddha's presence. The Buddha's words are the body of *dhamma*; they are the material representation and successor of the once living Teacher. The *buddhavacana* extenuates the sacred time *in illo tempore*, when the historical Buddha was alive, because the Buddha had appointed his words, i.e., his *dhamma*, as his successor over a human disciple. Thus, a prophecy of a future king is an immanent substance that becomes materialized as reality in charismatic saints and kings. A Buddhist kingship is cast in the chronicles as an inevitable unfolding of the natural course, as foretold by the Buddha himself. Thus, in the history of Buddhist kingdoms, rulers and saints look back to the Buddha as the source of their inexplicable powers. They gain powers by an absolute faith in the original Buddha. They imitiate his acts, and conceive of their extraordinary successes as a derivation of the 'ultimate', 'fundamental' and 'world-ordering' powers of the Sakyamuni Buddha himself.

Because the Buddha's words are to be fullfilled by righteous kings whose advents have been prophesied, Buddhist scripture is a rich source of historical clues to the thought processes that underlie textual, artistic, and archeological remains produced by faith. To understand such kinds of evidence, we should discern the system of symbolic images that have grown out of centuries of Brahmanic and Buddhist interactions. These interactions leave their evidence not only in textual meanings, but in the linguistic, orthographic, and stylistic peculiarities of succeeding periods. Each later use of symbols and images harks back to earlier periods. Each layer of a text represents a new historical development evolving from previous layers.

Competing paradigms

Thai rulers in the past have made use of both Brahmanic and Buddhist rites of kingship. In his study of the Haripuñjaya temple in Lamphun, Donald Swearer observes that historical and legendary texts contain layers of Buddhist and Brahmanic accounts of the city's establishment, superseding each other in turn. Myths that enclose lesser gods in the fold of superior ones are not unique to Buddhist texts. When found in Hindu or Brahmanic material, they signal a tolerant rivalry between mutually inclusive gods, and between sects which use such accounts to glorify their titular deities who have other gods as attendants. The deities take turns occupying the paramount position, depending on the political fortunes of their followers. In the Lamphun chronicle, the story of King Adittaraja's enthronement reveals a supremacy of Buddhist over Brahmanic symbols of kingship. Swearer writes:

> "In the *Yonok Chronicle, Founding the Religion,* and the *Lamphun Chronicle,* the Buddhist layer of the chronicles tied to the Buddha's visit and the Buddha's relic is broken by the *rsi* and the Camadevi traditions. It is resumed again with the advent of Adittaraja in the year 409 of the Culasakara Era (i.e., 1047 AD)...
>
> As expected, the major event in the reign of Adittaraja is his discovery of the holy relic, related by the chronicler in a most humorous way. After the coronation ceremony in which the sovereign, Adittaraja, retired to his privy to relieve himself. It so happened that these quarters were built directly over the spot where the Buddha relic was being protected by the indigenous guardian of the soil and the black crow. The crow, being warned by the *deva* of the desecration due to take place, quickly flew over the king and let its drippings fall on his head... When the king had ascertained the cause of the crow's behavior, he had his privy demolished and the ground reconsecrated. He then prayed, "Servants of the Buddha of the magnificent destiny, Lord, I beg that you deliver all of us, Servants of the Master of the Sages. Lord, make the relic appear to us soon; show to us now this excellent marvel. Render us pure in the merit of our Buddha."
>
> With the above invocation of the relic, encased in Asoka's golden urn, appeared and emitted golden rays and perfume. Upon hearing Adittaraja's intention of moving it to another location, however, the relic disappeared into the earth." (Swearer 1975, 8-9)

Showing the supremacy of the Buddha's relic and lineage over the Brahmanic ceremony of coronation, this story signals the ascendency of Buddhism in the kingdom. Although the effects of the Brahmanic *abhiseka* are not totally cancelled out, they have to be further legitimized by the Buddha's relic and by the lineage of King Asoka. The story on the whole expresses the idea that the physical space of the kingdom has from an ancient past been pervaded by the Buddha's presence: it has been consecrated a Buddhist realm from a very early time. Thus, even though Adittaraja may have received a Brahmanic rite, his rulership is sanctioned utlimately by the Buddha's charisma in the form of a relic. The legend further expresses the idea that the legitimacy of Buddhist royalty is passed down through King Asoka's lineage, for Asoka was the ideal Buddhist who observed the *dhamma* and supported the Buddhist religion over Brahmanism. King Asoka first made Buddhist moral ideals a reality. By claiming a sanction bestowed by King Asoka's lineage, Thai Buddhist kings also aspired to live up to the exemplary stature of a paradigmatic, righteous, Buddhist monarch.

Buddhist rulers of Thailand have in the past sought to imitate the Buddha's acts. King Lithai's composition of the *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* was done in emulation of the Buddha who, it is said, went to preach the *dhamma* to his mother in heaven (Reynolds & Reynolds 1982, 10; 45–6). He proclaims himself a *Bodhisatta* who strives to build up the same kinds of *barami* as *Bodhisattas* in the past have done in order to become a Buddha (พัฒน์ เพ็งผลา 2528, 133). Buddhist kings commonly displayed the auspiciousness of their reigns by building temples and promoting *dhamma* throughout the realm. For a king's perfection of virtues (*barami*) is thought to be conspicuously displayed

in the kingdom's prosperity and morality.

Pious acts of kings have produced some of Thailand's finest lierature, when kings commissioned poets to compose quasi-sacred literary pieces in support of Pali literature. The *Mahachat Khamluang, Trai Phum Phra Ruang,* and many others, are some results of kings' pious acts. The *Ongkan Chaeng Nam,* said by some to be a first literary production of the Ayudhaya period, reveals traces of Buddhist literature and Buddhist theory of kingship at work:

> แลมีค่ำมีวัน
> กินสาลีเปลือกปล้อน
> บ่มีผู้ต้นแต่งบรรณา
> เลือกผู้ยิ่งยศเป็นราชาอคร้าว
> เรียกนามว่าสมมติราชเจ้า
> จึงตั้งท้าวเจ้าแผ่นดิน
> (การสัมมนาวิชาการ 1983, 5)
>
> And there are days and nights.
> [They] eat entirely chafless wheat
> without anyone trimming the leafy plants.
> They gladly choose as king a man of high honors
> naming him the Lord King by All's Consent,
> and thus set him up as lord of the land.[1]

These first few lines recall the *Agañña sutta* of the *Dighanikaya,* in which it is recounted that in the beginning days and night come into being, humans live happily without toil. Wheat grows by itself without planting, and wheat kernels have no chaff or germ. The epithet of the king, สมมติราชเจ้า (*sammatiratcao*), is precisely the nomenclature of the *Agañña sutta*'s Great Elect, or the *mahasammata* (See *Dighanikaya* 27.21, Rhys Davids 1965, 3.93, p. 88). Thus, while the *Katha Ongkan Chaeng Nam* begins by evoking Brahmanic gods Narayana, Isvara, and Brahma, it also refers to the Buddhist theory of kingship by naming the king the "Great Elect" as in the Buddhist myth of origin. Even in the Sukhothai era, these references to the *Agañña sutta* have already been made in the *Trai Phum Phra Ruang* by King Lithai (in 1345 AD), describing the evolution of the world and explaining that the king is a *Bodhisatta,* elected and anointed (อภิเษก) by the people to rule over them because of his superior physical, spiritual, and moral beauty (เทพรัตนราชสุดา 2525, 128).

The ritual semantics

In the shared ritual semantics of Buddhism and Brahmanism, an *abhiseka* is a ritual bath symbolic of washing away the old and inaugurating the new. During the Brahmanic New Year ceremony, Brahmins initially invite Siva down from Mt. Kailasa to reign over the earth. After celebrating the god's presence on earth, the priests enthrone the god by performing the rite of installation. At the end of this lengthy ritual, they send him back to heaven. The Brahmins chant and rock his chariot gently, as the god floats back to heaven (see Kuanpoonpol 1990).

The ritual of Siva's installation is in essence not different from a king's coronation ritual. Anointing Siva, the worshipers bring bottles of perfume which the officiating Brahmins pour over the Siva image placed on his throne. The throne is a diagrammatic representation of Mt. Kailasa. Perfumes offered by worshipers are poured over the image, collected, and returned in their bottles to the donors at the end of the ceremony. Each portion of the returned perfume is now lustral water: it is sacred because because it has been in contact with the presence of the deity. It has been used and left over by the god; it is an *ucchista* contaminated by the god's body and therefore imbued with his charisma. An *ucchista,* a leftover, polluted by contact with an ordinary person, is blessed by a touch of the divine.

In Buddhism, the Buddha's body is a source of charisma passed

on to all things that touch him, or that are used and left over by him. The physical body of the Buddha, the *buddhakaya*, after his death becomes the *dhamma*, which comprises words thought to have been spoken by him.

> Then the Bhagavan addressed the venerable Ananda: "It may be, Ananda, that some of you will think, 'The word of the Teacher is a thing of the past; we have now no Teacher,' But that, Ananda, is not the correct view. The Doctrine and the Discipline, Ananda, which I have taught and enjoined upon you is to be your teacher when I am gone." (*Mahaparinibbanasutta* (v & vi) of the *Dighanikaya*, Warren 1984, 107)

Thus, the recitation, or even mere physical presence of scripture, ushers in what Mircea Eliade calls *"illud tempus."* Speaking and hearing the *dhamma* recreate the real and original time, the center that emits all other times and to which they return again and again.

The original time is the Buddha's historical lifetime. It is the time when his perfections culminate in enlightenment and all his different lives converge into one life. For it is then that the Buddha remembers all his past lives and foresees all future lives. This is the time of the beginning of history, when all secular cities and future kings are born from his predictions; it is only a matter of time before they become a reality. The containment of times *in illo tempore* is also the mode of *jataka* stories: in these moral tales, causes take their effects in the lives of ordinary people. But, in the end the Buddha tells us, "I was so-and-so...," and back we go to the original time when the Buddha sits on his throne and holds all the cosmos in his knowledge.

In scripture, the Buddha's body is described in literally glowing terms: his inner powers issue through the top of his crown as a rising flame (*usnisa*). Rays of light emanate from parts of his body which glows with a golden light illuminating entire assemblies. In city-founding myths, an object touched by the Buddha, such as a half-eaten fruit or a ground touched by his foot, is an *ucchista* which lends its powers and auspiciousness to the founding of that city. The Buddha's footprint is an *ucchista*, a contamination that brings the Buddha's bodily presence to bear on an uncultured space and renders it cultured (*ariya*) territory, tamed by the Buddha's religion and claimed by his followers.

Like a Siva image bathed in the New Year's ceremony, Buddha images are also bathed on the Buddhist New Year (*songkran* สงกรานต์). The ceremony is called *song nam phra phuttharup* (สรงน้ำพระพุทธรูป), which may take place inside the hall of a monastery or in open air. After bathing the images, people go on to visit relatives and sprinkle them with perfume. At the same time young people sprinkle or douse with each other with water in an atmosphere of merry-making in the street. Thus, it is evident that the act of sprinkling is a general ritual form which is performed as a particular rite in various ritual contexts. In a particular context, it is placed in a sequence of rites as required by the design of the entire ritual.

In a comment on the Thai New Year, Sathiankoset (see เสฐียรโกเศศ 2525), noticing the similarity between Buddhist and Brahmanic *abhiseka*, calls the ceremony of the *song nam phra phuttharup* by a Sanskrit name of *"visesarghya,"* meaning a particular, respectful offering of water to a guest. In this context, "particular" may mean that the water is offered in a special context. Originally such an offering is made as a gesture of hospitality to a guest: the water is given for washing the feet and for drinking after a journey. In the classical Indian tradition, it is a common ritual: a householder is duty-bound to attend to a guest who arrives at his home, greeting him with water, i.e., the *arghya*.

Contamination and exchange through water

In particularized contexts of sprinkling, or proffering of water, the *abhiseka* is a rite of anointing by water. On the New Year's day, a sacred image, of the Buddha or of Siva, is bathed for the sake of blessing and consecrating a new year about to be born. This ritual renders a formless time formal: it brings an unknown time into the Buddhist realm of cultured and measured conceptions of temporality. The consecration is a rite in the form of contaminating the New Year by a sacred body: A Buddha image or an icon comes on contact with the water which becomes the lustral water, possessing the charisma of the sacred and passing it on to people and things.

Just as the bathing of the Buddha image consecrates the New Year, the *abhiseka* of a king consecrates his reign over the kingdom. The sprinkling of water is a ritual exchange in which the ruler is consecrated together with the ruled. The contact made by the flow of water is also a contract between the two parties touched by it. The waters collected from various parts of the country and proffered to the king represent the land and its people. The waters combined into one sacred water are showered on the king's person, as an offering of the essence and allegiance by the kingdom and its people. The king, bathing and drinking from the sacred water, in turn imbues the land with the presence of his body. The powers and efficacy of his person contaminate the realm and dominate it. At the same time, the king promises in turn to protect and rule his kingdom justly. A mutual binding of the king with his kingdom, signified by this rite of *abhiseka*, is theoretically elaborated in the *Manudharmasastra*, as well as in the Buddhist "Tenfold duty of kings" (ทศพิธราชธรรม).

A king, according to the Brahmanic *Dharmasastra*, is the wielder of the chastising rod: he rules by meting out punishments to transgressors who disrupt the communal welfare. In the Thai coronation ritual, from the reign of King Rama V onward, the king utters a verbal acceptance to rule justly and to be a refuge for all his subjects.

Thus, from its inception Buddhism has given an account of spiritual and secular aspects of rulership: governing by a moral religion is inseparable from government by secular laws. In the above-cited canonical passage (*Dighanikaya* 26.24), the Buddha foretells an ideal time in which the future king will rule by righteousness rather than by the sword. It is to be remembered that the Buddha himself is not only a teacher but also a universal king. In Buddhism, religion and society have been enmeshed in the dialectic of the world-renouncing and world-conquering roles of the Buddha (see Tambiah 1976). In Brahmanism the spiritual leadership is assigned to Brahmins and rulership to kings. In Buddhism, the king governs a just society and turns the wheel of moral law leading to spiritual knowledge. The core of Buddhism implies a natural reciprocity between just rulership and pious morality. Many rulers in Thai history have aspired to fulfill the secular and religious goals of bringing about a good society through their exemplary conduct.

Note

1. My translation. See also the same in *Ongkan Chaeng Nam Chabab Chiang Phram*, transliterated by Niyada Laosunthorn and Michael Wright in *ศิลปวัฒนธรรม(?)*. In this Chiang Phram manuscript, despite variants the substance is essentially the same. See also พระราชพิธีถือน้ำพิพัฒน์สัตยา. หม่อมหลวงปีย์ มาลากุล. พิมพ์ในงานศพของ พ.ต.ต. กฤช สังขะทรัพย์ 4 ธันวาคม 2511, 58.

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