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Scripture and Fiction: An Aesthetic Approach to *The Little Pilgrim*



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Date: 5/20/13

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Preface

I first encountered Buddhism when I rode my bicycle to the Mun Su Sah Korean Zen Temple only minutes from my home in Wakefield, Massachusetts. The outside of the Temple appeared to be just another house, yet I soon discovered an intricate Dharma Hall on the inside. I watched monks bow to a golden life-sized Buddha-statue and asked them what motivated their actions when they had finished. I will never forget their response: “We prostrate to acknowledge the Buddha-nature within us.” I was captivated after my first visit and started attending the Sunday service regularly, one Caucasian amidst a sea of forty Koreans sitting on zafus. I began a two-year course that met once a week to learn Buddha’s teachings from International Dharma Instructor Ernest Do. On the day I took refuge in the Buddha and formally became a Buddhist, he gifted me *The Little Pilgrim*. The Dharma name that Mr. Do chose for me was Sudhana (Child of Wealth), the subject of *The Little Pilgrim*. I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Mr. Do.

Without his guidance and inspiration, this labor of love would not have been possible. I furthered my knowledge of Buddhism during college, majoring in Religious Studies. I concentrated my major in Buddhism, enrolling in classes such as “Religions of China, Japan and Tibet” as well as “A Passage to India: India and the Western Imagination.” I am indebted to my thesis advisor, Nikky Singh for teaching these classes and phenomenally shaping my own aesthetically-minded writing style. Last semester, I lived in a Burmese Monastery in Bodh Gaya, India, the birthplace of Buddhism where Siddhartha Gautama attained Enlightenment underneath the Bodhi tree. I had the opportunity to meditate two hours a day. Now, I return to Ko Un’s India to culminate my journey thus far, as I approach understanding my namesake through scripture and fiction.

Introduction

The Little Pilgrim is written by Korean author Ko Un and was translated into English by Brother Anthony of Taizé. This text, a fictional rendering of the Gandavyuha Sutra, is an instant classic of contemporary Buddhist literature. The Gandavyuha Sutra comprises one-third of the fifteen hundred page *Avatamsaka (Flower Garland) Sutra*. The *Avatamsaka* has been described as the epitome of Buddhist thought, Buddhist sentiment, and Buddhist experience and is popular with all schools of Mahayana Buddhism, in particular, The Pure Land and Zen. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* is the longest sutra of the Buddhist canon and one of the oldest, dating back nearly 2,000 years. The *Avatamsaka* contains forty chapters on disparate topics, although the overarching themes are the interdependency of all phenomena and the progression of the Buddhist path to full Enlightenment. The Gandavyuha, the *Avatamsaka*'s penultimate chapter, aesthetically merges the topics of interdependence and attaining Enlightenment in the form of a boy's quest for awakening.

The Little Pilgrim describes the pilgrimage of the Gandavyuha's protagonist, the youth Sudhana. At the behest of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, he visits fifty-three masters to attain a greater understanding of the nature of reality. My question is: How does Ko Un's aesthetic approach employ Sudhana to represent the Bodhisattva ideal? In Buddhism the Bodhisattva is a near perfect being. Un utilizes Sudhana as a pedagogical tool to espouse the primacy of experiential insight through which spiritual liberation is attained. My thesis focuses on how Un's aesthetic approach portrays Sudhana as a Bodhisattva to teach the reader the ideal way to live.

Un's writing style beckons us to embrace our own personal power to increase the aesthetics of our existence. He is not only concerned about appreciating beauty but on providing an example for how to lead a beautiful existence. Un's aesthetic approach is fundamentally structured on cultivating wisdom and compassion to understand *how* one can make the world more beautiful for everyone. His approach relies on an underlying set of Buddhist principles such as suffering, no-self and impermanence that are interwoven within the novel. These principles are espoused by colorful characters that imbue Sudhana with an understanding of the world's relative illusoriness and its liberating capacity from all unsatisfactoriness. Un's fictional recreation is along the lines of Michel Foucault's ethical-aesthetic approach. Foucault invites the individual to problematize the relationship with the self, reminiscent of how Un demonstrates the faults of creating an ego that causes unsatisfactoriness. Both illustrate techniques to transform oneself into a work of art. In Un's case, living up to the Bodhisattva ideal is the greatest possible art anyone can undertake to create.

Un's novel engenders an awakening sensibility. Readers are moved to appreciate and respond to complex emotional and aesthetic influences like Sudhana does to better the aesthetics of their existence. Un utilizes the medium of the novel to create his art and teach on the art of existence in return. Art is defined as the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination. In a more technical sense, art "may be defined as the practice of creating perceptible forms expressive of human feelings" (Langer 6). Un's art evokes a range of human feelings and teaches one how to incorporate them into one's aesthetic approach. He demonstrates how choices at an individual level can beautify the entire world. "Feeling" means much more than just sensation. It also has an

emotional denotation (as we speak of hurting some) as well as an emotional attitude (we say we feel strongly about something). Un depicts feelings in all of these respects in his aesthetic approach employing Sudhana to represent the Bodhisattva ideal. My emotional response to *The Little Pilgrim* was to travel to India to develop my own aesthetic approach to actualizing the Bodhisattva ideal. My drive to learn was only equaled by my enjoyment, both indispensable qualities on the path of the Bodhisattva.

Ko Un is a prolific writer. He has published over 135 volumes, including many volumes of poetry, several works of fiction (predominantly Buddhist fiction), drama, essays and translations from classical Chinese. In *Little Pilgrim's* epilogue, Allen Ginsberg called him "a magnificent poet, a combination of Buddhist cognoscente, passionate political libertarian, and naturalist historian." He was born Ko Un-Tae, in 1933, in what is now North Korea. Un grew up under Imperial Japan's iron grip on the Korean People, which lasted from 1910 until 1945, after which his country was bifurcated into an oppressive Communist government in the North facing an oppressive Capitalist government in the South. The ensuing Korean War emotionally and physically traumatized Un and caused the death of many of his relatives and friends. He suffered a great burden of guilt, lamenting that half of his generation perished while he survived. After the Korean War ended, Ko became a Buddhist monk and spent ten years in Zen meditation, traveling the country begging for alms. In the words of Gary Gach, "The seeds of the [*The Little Pilgrim*] were planted during Ko Un's ten-year monastic life ... As a mendicant he, like Sudhana, walked across his country. An elder monk suggested he write of Sudhana's journey. Ko Un went on to become a master and was in charge of the famed Haeinsa Temple. Yet, he grew disillusioned with the self-centeredness he

encountered within the order and disrobed” (Un 367). Then, in 1962, he entered into a period of nihilism and headed to the South Sea to commit suicide. In a stroke of serendipity he passed out after drinking heavily and lost the courage to go through with the act. He then traveled Jeju-do Island for three years and founded a charity school. In 1970, he returned to Seoul where he was again plagued by his demons and he attempted suicide for the second time by drinking poison. Then in 1972, the South Korean government attempted to curb democracy by putting forward the Yusin Constitution. Un became very active in the democracy movement and led efforts to improve the political situation in South Korea. Simultaneously, he continued writing prolifically despite being imprisoned four times (1974, 1979, 1980 and 1989). Un was accused of treason during the coup d’etat led by Chun Doo-hwan in 1980 and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. He was released in August 1982 as part of a general pardon. After his release, Un married Lee Sang-Wha and moved to Anseong, Gyeonggi-do where he presently resides. He is currently playing a prominent role in reunification efforts with North Korea. In 2000, he visited North Korea as one of the special delegates for the Inter-Korean Summit and read a poem while attending a state banquet there. He continues to be celebrated in South Korea and across the world, as an adept author, skilled in writing about children, farmers and village women and others who are usually deemed too insignificant to write about.

Chapter I: Scripture and Fiction

Un's hermeneutical transformation of the Gandavyuha engenders a Sudhana that is entirely accessible and expressive to approaching the Bodhisattva ideal. Rather than depicting the esoteric philosophical dialogues of the Gandavyuha Sutra, Un humanizes Sudhana by personalizing his journey. Yet, he still captures the sentiments of the Gandavyuha by maintaining its structural elements. Both fiction and scripture contain the fifty-three masters that Sudhana meets along his quest. Often, but not always, *The Little Pilgrim* incorporates characters with the same names as in the scriptural text and they sometimes live in places with the same name. The Scripture and Un's fiction also share Sudhana's question to every master, namely, "What is the way of the Bodhisattva?" In the Gandavyuha, Sudhana impersonally listens, says thank you, and is directed to the next teacher. Also, the Gandavyuha enumerates lists of the Bodhisattvas present during each teaching, which continue tediously for pages. But the Gandavyuha's antiquated style causes the reader to lose interest while *The Little Pilgrim* engages the reader with a fresh approach to Sudhana's question of how to be a bodhisattva. Such a stylistic difference creates a sharp distinction between the two versions. In *The Little Pilgrim*, Sudhana's conversations rarely lead to protracted esoteric philosophy and exactly what he learns is explicitly left to the reader's interpretation. As we read, our progress is seemingly impeded by puzzling gaps in the quest regarding the nature of Sudhana's insight into the Bodhisattva ideal. Un implicitly urges us to 'fill in the gaps' by using our imagination or speculation. His fiction is beautiful precisely because it leaves part of the picture for the reader to paint. By not providing the exact meaning behind his images, Un

challenges the reader to think critically and apply imagination thoughtfully to fully grasp the experiential ramifications of his work. This aesthetic is in stark contrast to the Gandavyuha, which is prone to tangential verbosity.

For Un, images matter more than extended arguments, as they can be more cognitively useful than any abstruse argumentation. In both scripture and fiction, Sudhana is first fooled by the illusions that he eventually learns to reject. This process exemplifies the Buddhist path: illusions are punctuated, one after another, about comfort, self, pleasure, beauty, goodness and eternity. This transcendent approach demands that Sudhana abandon the linear modality of thinking in a favor of a more circular way of thinking.

The Buddha promoted experience over theorizing, which is exactly the strength of Un's narrative. Depicting *how* Sudhana experiences reality is Un's foremost objective. It is only by the end of the novel that the Bodhisattva Manjushri reveals all of the technical stages that Sudhana had progressed through. Un's pedagogical style releases Sudhana from the canonical confinement of the Gandavyuha. Remarkably, Un is still able to include nearly all of the masters in the Gandavyuha and their respective spiritual ability that they instill in Sudhana. By not explaining the technical name of each stage as Sudhana passes through it, Un forges a novel that flows naturally and is more open to comprehension by lay readers. East Asian Studies Professor Francisca Cho describes Sudhana's encounters in the Gandavyuha as strikingly divergent, stating that they "consist of highly impersonal and enumerative conversations that are meant to exemplify stages of the Bodhisattva path: the ten faiths, the ten abodes, ten practices, ten dedications, and ten stages" (Un 369). Departing from the Gandavyuha, Un's aesthetic

does not remain restricted within these conceptual categories and encourages an exploration of the fantastical, transformative world of the Mahayana emptiness philosophy (sunyata). His style illuminates Sudhana's emotions while maintaining the exact spiritual stage he achieves through each master.

Both scripture and fiction embrace universality and gender equality, which contributes an ethical dimension to Un's aesthetic. The feminine presence in the scripture is remarkable considering contemporary scriptures that were far more patriarchal. In the words of Buddhism scholar Thomas Cleary, the Gandavyuha deserves praise, as it is "quite out of keeping with the modern myth that the inner circle of living Buddhism was traditionally a male monkish elite, since the story represents a small minority of the teachers as monks, and nearly half as women" (Cleary 1549). As for the degree of universality, Un expands on the Gandavyuha's already eclectic mix of characters by including even more people living on the margins of society. Both include enlightened laypersons to represent that when transcendence of the world is achieved, transcendent knowledge is not divorced from the mundane world. Fisherman, farmers and maidens can be just as awakened as the cave hermit sitting in the mountains. However, since the original Gandavyuha was written in Sanskrit and later Chinese, it would have only been accessible to the educated elite. In contrast, Un's interpretation, available in both Korean and English, is easy to read and more focused on the common man with whom Un empathizes greatly. Un's Sudhana meets farmers, artisans, monks, courtesans, ferrymen, drunkards and lowborn people. By incorporating these encounters with people who do not appear among the original fifty-three masters of the Gandavyuha, he is able to highlight the plight of the common man as well as demonstrate the valuable

wisdom that can be learned from them. Seventh Century layman Li Tongxuan stated that part of the purpose of the Gandavyuha was to depict Sudhana as a signpost for later generations of seekers as he is the first ordinary human being to realize the methods of progress expounded in the previous assemblies of the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (Tongxuan 30). In this vein, Un's aesthetic resurrects a more relatable guidepost for the twenty-first century. He makes available the wisdom of many masters to inculcate that awakening is still a possible ideal in the contemporary world.

The versatility of fiction enables both scripture and fiction to skillfully present Truth in a creative way that defies conventional assumptions. The secrecy and inaccessibility of the teachings is not due merely to esotericism but also to the extent to which the realms and activity of the teaching are outside the expected common conventions that we impose on them. The Buddhist Realism aspect of Sudhana's 'magical' encounters is more indicative of the nature of Absolute Reality than the relative reality the average person perceives. Indeed, one may misread Buddhist or other sacred texts if one believes that they are *only* literature. Buddhism scholar Ralph Flores notes that scripture "is not to be read as mere fiction or poetry like other fiction or poetry. On the other hand, many Buddhist texts are adapted to the audiences they address – that is, they are contrived as *skillful means*, thus complicating any uniformity of message they may be assumed to have" (Flores 14). The latter point is true for Ko Un as *The Little Pilgrim* is designed with a pedagogical intent for contemporary times. Nevertheless, not all readers are prepared for the magical or supernatural events in Buddhist literature. Therefore, suspension of disbelief is a prerequisite to cultivate the mindset required to read Buddhist literature. In the words of Poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, we must

“transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure from these shadows of imagination, that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith” (Alden 126). Cleary affirms the necessity of this faith one must have in reading Buddhist literature, stating, the Gandavyuha “begins with a symbolic description of manifestations of enlightened awareness, explaining that those who are within a fixed system have not the slightest inkling of the consciousness that lies beyond the bounds of their perceptions” (Cleary 45). Thus, those within a fixed system must temporarily suspend disbelief until they achieve a more mature understanding of Buddhism’s metaphysical truths. Only then can one follow Sudhana’s example and understand how to adhere to his aesthetic approach.

Un employs Sudhana as a pedagogical vehicle to demonstrate how reality works in accord with the Noble Eightfold path virtue of ‘Right view’ that Sudhana follows. Cleary defines this ‘view’ in an absolute sense, stating, “In the *Avatamsaka Sutra*’s doctrine of interdependent origination of the cosmos, it makes it clear that the ordinary person and the sage are one reality; if one still retains views, one is an ordinary person; if one forgets sentiments, one is Buddha” (Cleary 19). This statement does not negate maintaining virtuous views, rather it points to cultivating a profound view that shatters the dualities of view in one comprehensive way of being in the world. According to the Gandavyuha, “it is the perennial task of certain people, by virtue of their own development, to assist others in overcoming arbitrary restrictions of consciousness so as to awaken the full potential of mind” (Cleary 45). Sudhana has awakened this potential and is thus obligated to remove the restrictions of others to clarify their understanding of reality, which removes the suffering caused, by ignorance, anger and greed.

While one would view Sudhana's encounters as miraculous, they are simply the natural reality according to Buddhist thought with some room for embellishment. This caveat does not draw an arbitrary line, it simply acknowledges that our phenomenal world is more supernatural than it is perceived to be by most. The fictional element should not be perceived as minimizing the existence of the supernatural. Jeff Humphries asks, "Is there any place in genuine Buddhist practice for Literature' and 'Is there any valid place for Buddhism in literature?'" (Flores 9). Humphries gives a negative answer to both questions, invoking the figures of Nagarjuna and others who warn against treating the Middle Way as literature or philosophy. True enough, "the delights of poetry were considered dangerous distractions by the Buddha" (Flores 9). Un craftily subverts the power of this dichotomy by blending poetry with philosophy through fine-tuned didactic intent.

While Un would not view his poetry and prose as a dangerous distraction, he would agree with Humphries' transcendent view of Buddhist literature that does not confine itself to mere philosophical hearsay. After all, Sudhana does not just blindly accept the Truth he seeks. Rather, he has the keen discerning intellect to investigate phenomena with logic even when they are outside the confines of 'normal' perception. His *knowing* is not simply empirical by way of the senses, but a *knowing* that is unmediated, non-conceptual, immediate and intuitive. Buddhist Studies professor Robert Thurman states, "There is no reason for a sound faith to be irrational. A useful faith need not be blind, but should be well aware of its ground. A sound faith should be able to use scientific investigation to strengthen itself" (Thurman 27). Thurman has found this proof

in his experiential tutelage from Tibetan Buddhist masters when he became the first westerner to ordain in a Tibetan Monastery.

Chapter II: The Fundamentals of Buddhism

An aesthetic approach to *The Little Pilgrim* requires an underlying knowledge on Buddhist metaphysics. Therefore, to clarify how Un's utilizes Sudhana as a pedagogical tool to represent the Bodhisattva ideal, I present the relevant concepts of the Little Pilgrim's quest.

Karma

Reincarnation, a key concept of Buddha's teachings, is the notion that after biological death, one's spirit or soul begins a new life in a new body that may be human, animal or god-like depending on the moral quality of one's actions. Karma is the chain of cause and effect that determines one's reincarnation. Any action is understood as creating "seeds" in the mind that will sprout into the appropriate result when met with the right conditions. Wholesome behavior imprints positive karma and a 'better' reincarnation and even the possibility of *nirvana*, which extricates one from the cycle of birth, death and re-birth of the world of *samsara*. Non-virtuous activities imprint negative karma – seeds that result in negative outcomes in the future, binding one in the world of *samsara*.

Master Vasumitra tells Sudhana, "The so-called world is an impermanent thing designed to retain us here. Fundamentally, every living creature in the world was once a Buddha. Then the Buddha put on robes of karma and became the living creatures of a thousand million aeons" (Un 168). This quote designates the foreground for Sudhana's quest as the youth's karma keeps him reincarnating back into the world. Sudhana becomes acutely aware that his karma at any given moment of life, death or in between is

the overall pattern of causal impulses resulting from former actions connected with his life-continuum.

The Hermit Veshthila instructs Sudhana on karma, stating, “Sickness, exploitation, and oppression, do not disappear so readily. Yet, the karma responsible for them has its own limitations, if you believe that these ills will soon disappear. You create the power to eradicate them” (Un 178). Thus, living in the world is a karmic test wherein Sudhana purifies his karma by learning from masters to have greater control over the determination of his destiny. As evidenced, Karma is suitably explained in *The Little Pilgrim*. In the Gandavyuha, Karma is called ‘action’ and it clearly states that the basic principle: “*Higher action based on past roots of goodness*” leads to a more favorable reincarnation (Cleary 1180).

Bodhisattvahood

Sudhana aims for reincarnation in the realm of humans because it is the only realm where one can influence one’s karma. In the non-human realms, one generally does not move into another birth until the karma that has brought one there has run its course. In the human realm, he can ideally cultivate the compassion and wisdom necessary to fulfill his Bodhisattva vow. This vow necessitates being reborn in the human realm, which is exposed to the elements that cause suffering to arise. This vow is to culminate certain virtues, the perfection of which is called Pāramitā (perfection, completeness), for the benefit of all sentient beings. Un describes the Bodhisattva, stating, “A Bodhisattva is the title given to those who give and give of themselves for the good of all living creatures to awaken them so they suffer no more” (Un 235). Un’s entire presentation of Sudhana demonstrates how one can develop an ethical aesthetic

approach to life in concert with the fulfilling the Bodhisattva ideal.

The Dalai Lama, who is considered a living Bodhisattva defines the Bodhisattva ideal thusly: “*Bodhi* means enlightenment, the state devoid of all defects and endowed with all good qualities. *Sattva* refers to someone who has courage and confidence and who strives to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Those who have this spontaneous, sincere wish to attain enlightenment for the ultimate benefit of all beings are called bodhisattvas. Through wisdom, they direct their minds to enlightenment, and through their compassion, they have concern for beings. This wish for perfect enlightenment for the sake of others is what we call *bodhichitta*, and it is the starting point on the path. By becoming aware of what enlightenment is, one understands not only that there is a goal to accomplish but also that it is possible to do so” (*A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night*, 12).

The Dalai Lama’s definition mentions the crucial Bodhisattva ideal of *bodhichitta*, which is generated to attain Enlightenment for oneself and others. He also highlights the elements of generosity and compassion that define the aesthetics of Sudhana’s existence. The Dalai Lama and the Gandavyuha neglect to mention the paramount quality of the bodhisattva: The fact that the Bodhisattva is capable of reaching nirvana but delays doing so out of compassion in order to return to samsara and save suffering beings. This is a culminating feature of Un’s aesthetic because Sudhana humbly quests for the good of all sentient beings. Also, while *The Little Pilgrim* offers a clear definition of the Bodhisattva, the Gandavyuha only defines the Bodhisattva as “an enlightening being of the stage of faith” despite its references to the numerous bodhisattvas that Sudhana encounters (Cleary 1566).

Sudhana's evolution to bodhisattvahood by the end of the novel is in light of countless existences of positive merit that enable him to achieve this state of being. Similarly, Buddha had a vast number of lives before attaining awakening which are recounted in over 550 tales in the jatakas. Sudhana and Buddha's past paths imply that a life not strictly devoted to renunciation and meditation could still be on the path to Buddhahood. This aspect of the path reflects the greater Mahāyāna Buddhism school ideal that anyone, including laity, can attain enlightenment by practicing the bodhisattva values.

Aspiring to bodhisattvahood is the goal of the Mahāyāna schools. The earlier more traditional Theravada school stresses the monastic life as the sole path to salvation, the attainment of arhatship. Arhats do not remain in the world as they have attained nirvana, an ineffably transcendent state wherein one is removed from the life, death and rebirthing cycle of samsara as well as the effects of karma. Nirvana means "blown out" (as in a candle) and refers, in the Buddhist context, to the imperturbable stillness of mind after the fires of desire, aversion, and delusions have been finally extinguished. The Arhat is an enlightened being or perfect saint, yet according to Mahayana adherents such as myself, the Arhat possesses an inferior, selfishly attained enlightenment, one based on benefitting oneself. In contrast, the bodhisattva is motivated entirely by compassion, by the desire to benefit others. Ko Un's training as a monk shines through clearly in his Mahāyāna –influenced presentation of Sudhana as pedagogical vehicle. Although he is nearly a bodhisattva during the entire quest, he persistently seeks illuminated others to expand his skillful means, intensifying his enlightened activity to greater serve sentient beings.

Un emphasizes the Bodhisattva ideal of Sudhana's journey as having no beginning, no middle, and no end. Since freeing all sentient beings is nearly an impossible task, the length of Sudhana's journey takes on an incomprehensibly infinite duration. In the words of *The Little Pilgrim's* translator, Brother Anthony Taize, "One of the challenges to the novel as a literary form that Ko Un cannot avoid is the fact that the Buddhist vision of the nature of things virtually denies the reality of progress and the possibility of ending" (Un 375). While Sudhana does progress to higher levels of awakening, Un's episodic style depicts Sudhana's journey as a constant cycle of endings and beginnings. In the middle of the novel, Un demonstrates the endlessness of Sudhana's journey when he states, "A particular moment on a long journey can make us forget all that lead up to that moment. In this, beginnings arise in endings. Sudhana's journey was beginning now, at the very end of a very long road" (Un 145). East Asian Buddhist Scholar Francisca Cho furthers this non-linear understanding of journeying, stating, "Buddhist liberation, especially in the Mahayana tradition is doggedly non-developmental, for all its talk of stages and journeying. One's enlightenment is not something to accumulate, it is something to be reminded of" (Un 370). Thus, Sudhana is already enlightened in a sense from the beginning as his quest puts in back in touch with the purity of Bodhisattvahood he already possessed. Cho also states, "The West is deeply apocalyptic in its vision of time. There must be an end, which beyond death is expressed in Christianity as Heaven, union with the Eternal (usually called God) who is believed to be the origin and unending fulfillment of all that has ever been. In Buddhism, as in modern astrophysics, there is not the same form of end, this might even help explain why Buddhism did not develop the narrative forms so popular in the West" (Un 376). Her

quotes demonstrate how Sudhana's quest for Bodhisattvahood assumes the non-linearity of narrative common to Eastern culture. In Sudhana's cyclical world, even reaching the 'end' of *The Little Pilgrim* causes a new beginning as Sudhana endeavors to aid an orphaned boy.

Becoming a bodhisattva affords no privilege to Sudhana. Even if he dies, it is in his nature to return to the suffering of the world on a nearly infinite chronological continuum. But there is nothing sorrowful in this constancy for Un states; "Encountering is the mother of parting and sometimes parting's son. The experience of meeting followed by parting is the shape endlessly taken by this world's unfolding course" (Un 132). Hence, the impermanence of the flow of relationships is a natural progression for the bodhisattva. Scholar Joseph Campbell also details the endlessness and lack of progression of Sudhana's character with respect to the Bodhisattva ideal. He states that "the oriental hero is the monad: In essence without character but an image of eternity, untouched by, or else casting off successfully the delusory involvements of the mortal sphere. And in the West, the orientation to personality is reflected in the concept of a personal God as a personality, but in the Orient, in perfect contrast, the overpowering sense of an absolutely impersonal law suffusing and harmonizing all things reduces to a mere blot the accident of an individual life" (Campbell 243). Since Sudhana is a symbol of eternity, he is not devastatingly implicated in the agony and mystery of temporality that plagues the personality of the occidental hero. His lack of character still begets a persona to be emulated. He is humanized but his lack of personal characteristics allows the readers to put themselves in Sudhana's position as they navigate the novel. His youth is a reminder for the reader to see the world with the newness and wonder of a child's

eyes. Un evidences this point, stating, “He was blessed in that every time he met someone new, he became a child again” (Un 229). Therefore, Un’s casting of Sudhana as infinitely youthful perfectly fits his aesthetic journey to practice the Bodhisattva ideal as the ultimate pedagogical vehicle.

Sudhana affirms his commitment to the Bodhisattva ideal, stating, “Why do I continually force myself to meet night spirits and night goddesses like this? Because the world is dark. Because this world’s suffering, its sorrows and pain are night! No, because this world’s dazzling light is born in the darkest night. Because in order to live in this world I have to become better acquainted with darkness” (Un 217). This quote encapsulates the challenge of living up to the Bodhisattva ideal as well as edifying the enthusiasm of Sudhana’s commitment. His potential is best actualized in the most difficult of trials, aiding those with the greatest need for his assistance.

The Four Noble Truths

The Little Pilgrim begins with Sudhana being saved from drowning, having suffered the loss of all his worldly possessions and family. Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, sends Sudhana off to find Truth, which will enable the boy to apprehend the true nature of things as he develops compassion and wisdom. In this context, wisdom is partially the understanding of *Dukkha*, impermanence, non-self and emptiness/interbeing. Sudhana’s quest reflects the truth of impermanence as Manjushri tells him “All things vanish in splendor. All things in themselves are evanescent” (Un 15). His quest also reflects recognition of no-self or the illusion of a self. He understands that all things perceived by his physical and mental faculties are not really "I" or "mine", and for this reason he knows he should not cling to them. *Dukkha* refers to the unsatisfactory nature

of the physical pain and suffering associated with living, the psychological inner stress of trying to hold onto things that are constantly changing and the unsatisfactoriness pervading all forms of life because all forms of life are impermanent and constantly changing. The illusion of self is the foremost cause of Dukkha. Dukkha is the first of Buddha's 'Noble Truths.' Including the other three truths, they comprise the key doctrine of Buddha's teachings. Un writes that "since we are all still in the world of suffering, the Buddha is a suffering Buddha too" (Un 40). While a Buddha technically has transcended suffering, Un is more so referring to a Bodhisattva who remains in the living fabric of suffering humanity to cease the Dukkha of sentient beings through wisdom and compassion. The second Noble Truth states that craving causes Dukkha to arise. The three types of craving Sudhana experiences are 1) Craving for sensory objects and sensory pleasures which provide a satisfying feeling; 2) Craving to be something, dominate something or to unite with an experience (this includes craving to be solid and ongoing, to be a being that has a past and a future); and 3) Craving to not experience the world, and to be nothing; a wish to be separated from painful feeling. The third Noble Truth is the truth of the cessation of the arising of Dukkha and its causes. The final Noble Truth is the path to the cessation of Dukkha. This path is called the Noble Eightfold Path, and it is considered to be the essence of Buddhist practice. The Eightfold Path consists of: Right view, Right intention (constituting the division of wisdom), Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood (constituting the division of ethical conduct), Right effort, Right mindfulness, and Right concentration (constituting the division of concentration). After he rids himself of his personal Dukkha, Sudhana keeps selflessly journeying from place to place to appeal for love and aid others in ceasing their suffering.

His willingness to traverse reflects the truth of impermanence as Manjushri tells him “All things vanish in splendor. All things in themselves are evanescent” (Un 15). Sudhana actualizes this truth by not clinging to what will dissipate yet maintaining compassion for all sentient beings. Mastering the Eightfold Path to rid himself of Dukkha and perfecting understanding of no-self and impermanence engenders a knowledge of awakening in Sudhana. Neither the Gandavyuha nor *The Little Pilgrim* explicitly state the Four Noble Truths but their implication provides the basis by which Sudhana ceases Dukkha and attains Bodhisattvahood.

Dependent Origination

There are twelve links in the chain of Dependent Origination that give rise to all phenomenal existence in the world of samsara (death, birth and rebirth). They are ignorance, volitional fabrications, consciousness, name and form, the six sense spheres, contact, feeling/sensation, attachment/craving, grasping, becoming, rebirth, old age and death. While they all mutually ‘cause and effect’ each other, one way of perceiving the links is placing ignorance as what sets the wheel of samasara in motion, as the cycle of rebirth emerges from ignorance of central facets of reality, such as the Four Noble Truths. Ignorance causes volitional fabrications or conditioned phenomena generally but is specific to all mental dispositions. Volitional fabrications in turn cause the crystallization of consciousness, the mental force that animates the otherwise inert material body. “Once that stage of consciousness has arisen, ‘name and form,’ appear, when experience becomes bifurcated into subjectively experienced mental functions (*nama*) that are involved in naming things and objectively experienced appearances (*rupa*) that are classified and named. In this way, the unity of the flow of experience subjectively arises

as the identification of appearances and things (*nama*) and objectively arises as the appearances and entities that are identified” (Wallace 137). The feeling, perception and intention of name and the elements of form cause the six sense spheres of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind (the sixth sense) which in turn causes contact, the coming together of the object, the sense medium and the consciousness of that sense medium. The six forms of feeling (sensation) that arise from contact are vision, hearing, olfactory sensation, gustatory sensation, tactile sensation and intellectual sensation (thought). These feelings cause craving, a mental factor that increases desire but without any satisfaction. As craving increases, it develops into grasping, i.e. actively striving never to be separated from what is pleasurable and to avoid what is painful. Craving causes becoming which creates karma since craving causes acts of the body, speech and mind. The karma of becoming induces dependent origination, which returns one to the cycle of samsara as life, death then re-birth occurs. Birth and death comprise the last two links of the chain.

Buddhist Studies professor David McMahan states that the idea of an egocentric “separate ego find[ing] its way back to wholeness in expanding its boundaries to identify with the vast interrelated cosmos and all its inhabitants” appears to be a celebration of the interconnected web of being of all dependently originated life (McMahan 164). Yet, he contends that this truth must reconcile with the fact that Buddha originally depicted dependent origination as the mass of suffering fueled by ignorance, encouraging *disengagement* from all entanglement in this web. The goal is not “becoming one with the world, merging with the infinite web of existence, rather it is a reversal of this chain of interdependent causation—not identify with it. Buddha taught this disengagement

since phenomena are only sustained as their sustaining factors remain so to remove oneself from the chain is the attainment of Enlightenment itself. Sudhana does celebrate the world of samsara however because as a Bodhisattva, he remains within it until all beings are free of suffering. He states, “Nowhere is near or far for me. Wayfaring is my goal” (Un 55). In the Gandavyuha, Sagaramegha, the second master Sudhana meets, elucidates the twelve links of dependent origination (Cleary 1582). Ko Un omits this lesson from his novel in keeping with his style to blend the teachings into Sudhana’s experiential encounters rather than to state them outright. I prefer Un’s method because rather than just hearing the abstraction of the concept in the Gandavyuha, I get to put myself in Sudhana’s sandals in *The Little Pilgrim* and experience the essence of the concept through his perspective.

The Dharma

In Buddha’s teachings, Dharma refers to a system that constitutes the natural law and order of things. This Sanskrit word is derived from the verb *ldhr*, ‘to hold,’ and it has a range of important meanings associated with holding, Truth and teaching. The core of Buddha’s teaching was the essential reality of freedom – that underlying the lived reality of existence is the immediacy of total freedom, especially freedom from suffering, from bondage and from ignorance. This primordial awareness can be realized by the human mind as its deepest and most true condition. The realized individual is *held apart* from suffering and of binding patterns. “Thus the new range of meaning of Dharma is to be held away from suffering” rather than its original meaning ‘to hold’ (Thurman 15). The uppercase Dharma corresponds to the Buddha’s teaching while the lowercase dharma can be approximated as a "phenomenological constituent," referring to the

perception of distinct phenomena. In Greek, phenomenology translates as “to study that which appears,” which is appropriate to the definition of dharma as reality as-it-is (*yathabhuta*). Thus, the Buddha’s Dharma is aimed to cease the suffering caused by the disparity between one’s view of reality and the reality of the actual state of things by realizing the nature of the dharmas.

Sudhana affirms his aspiration to understanding reality, stating, “my free wandering is all on account of the dharma taught by the Buddha” (Un 274). Sudhana perceives that there is indeed something in existence as “it is wrong to deny these exist; yet they don’t have substantial existence either. What [one] experiences does not exist in an absolute sense, but only in a relative way, as a passing phenomenon. The nature of the dharmas *lies in between* absolute non-existence and substantial existence (Harvey 97). Therefore, dharmas as like a dream or magical illusion (*maya*), not the experience of the environment itself but rather a projection of it one creates. Sudhana ‘sees’ all of the elements of existence (dharmas) that make up dependent origination as empty, as lacking independent existence, rendering him liberated from this world (*loka*) if he wished. Un demonstrates this notion when Bhishmottaranir-ghosha states, “As I am here but not there, you to are not really here” (Un 73). Un further elaborates that, “The Buddhas are murals, the Bhodhisattvas are murals, perhaps you and I are murals, too. All things are painted murals and dreams” because they appear like dharmas between existence and non-existence (Un 60). Since the flow of phenomenal events are dependent on contact between the senses and sense objects, it does not exist in and of itself but arises with the intertwining of a falsely reified subject and object. As a result, perceiving separate conceptual reifications as empty of distinction engenders awakening.

Un also ensures that the reader also understands the Buddha's Dharma is only relative as well because language is subject to dichotomies. For example, Prashantaruta states, "Why the devil do they think they have to leave their homes to go looking for eternal laws? Don't they realize how useless any laws they find are going to be? Idiots! Believe laws exist and they grow infinitely big, decide they don't exist after all and they shrink and shrink until they sink into the ground. Isn't that what's called dharma" (Un 233). This definition of Dharma cautions overvaluing absolutes as it advocates a middle way approach to interpreting Buddha's teachings. The *Gandavyuha* and *The Little Pilgrim* do not define dharma outright as understanding its usage is situationally dependent.

Buddha-Nature

Buddha-nature is what Siddhartha Gautama realized after enlightenment, which is that all beings, without exception, have the same nature and potential for awakening. Sudhana does not discover it; he allows it to come forth in a feeling of interconnection and responsibility toward all sentient beings. As Veshthila says, "Real Buddha-nature is a matter of not having any such thought as 'a Buddha has entered Nirvana,' or 'a Buddha is now entering Nirvana,' or 'a Buddha will later enter Nirvana.' Every single thought of mine reveals the works of the Buddhas of all the worlds" (Un 176). Both *The Little Pilgrim* and the *Gandavyuha* define the major attributes of Buddha-nature while the latter does so in a more technical manner.

Though the Buddha-nature is eternally present, Sudhana endeavors to remove the veil of ignorance that obscures it for most sentient beings. Buddhists speak metaphorically of 'leaving the world' on the path of renunciation toward awakening and

then a ‘coming back to the world’ by applying wisdom and compassion. However, in an absolute sense, there is neither leaving the world nor returning to it as every being is endowed with Buddha-nature that can never be left or returned to. Sudhana achieves Bodhisattvahood by cultivating a way of being that sees both nirvana and samsara as the same. Rather than attempting to grasp at attaining or being averse to rejecting samsara, Sudhana masters the non-duality of non-discrimination, reconfiguring the relationship between nirvana and samsara. The “abandoning [of] the two notions of the samsaric life-cycle and the nirvanic liberation, [as] they become the same, that is called integration” (Thurman 79). The Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna’s *Fundamentals of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā)* declares there is “not the slightest difference between the two” since even the difference between samsara and nirvana, is merely a conventional non-absolute truth (MMK 25: 19–20). The Goddess Surendrabha reflects this truth of integration when she tells Sudhana, “At the very heart of all forms of beauty lies a beauty arising from liberating emancipation, as well as from illusion” (Un 293).

To the awakened mind, the fact that all forms of beauty arise from liberation and illusion transcends the duality between nirvana and samsara. Thurman interprets this point as “knowing of the addictive and purificative as both the absolute itself, which is to know their sameness in an integrated wholeness” (Thurman 79). This may seem paradoxical, but it only by neglecting the Bodhisattva ideal that one predominantly perceives the addictive quality of the absolute and suffers accordingly. Consequently, since the world (loka) is all a mutual construct, conditioned by the collective, Sudhana’s motive to increase the aesthetic value of his reality is the pure intention of the Bodhisattva ideal. Hence, Un uses Sudhana as pedagogical vehicle to progress the purity

of sentient beings. He simply and selflessly reincarnates back to the world to make it more beautiful. He contributes to the all that is “full of growing enlightenment” (Un 120). In this progression, sentient beings cease attachment to the grasping ego and the feeling of separateness it entails by experientially recognizing their true nature as a microcosm in the oneness of inter-being. Sudhana resonates with this point, stating, “Living creatures are not separate entities but are all returning into imminent oneness” (Un 154).

The German Idealists and English Romantics have developed various formulations of the organic wholeness of nature and our inseparability from it that inform the reader’s perspective on *The Little Pilgrim*. They conceive of the absolute as nature itself, which comes to individual consciousness in human beings. This notion parallels how individual Buddha-nature is a microcosm for the Buddha-nature pervading the universe. The Idealists and romantics describe the human ego as separated from nature but longing to return to the primordial unity with the Absolute ego that connects everyone and everything. The German philosopher Schelling asserted that one’s eternal ego could be reunited with the Absolute ego through a direct intuition devoid of sensory intuition. He believed that such intuition was cultivated through aesthetic appreciation and serene reflection.

Schelling posited that intuited experience provided a more profound knowing of one’s true nature than the dissecting blade of rational analysis. This notion was connected to an antimechanistic critique of the Newtonian cosmology and Cartesian dualism, as well as the exclusive epistemological reliance on instrumental reason. Such reliance, the Romantics argued, fragmented the wholeness of nature, cutting us off from

its vital force. Coleridge, for example, praised the “intuition of things which arises when we possess ourselves, as one with the whole,” while characterizing as “mere understanding” the perception that occurs when “we think of ourselves as separated beings, and place nature in antithesis to the mind, as object to subject, thing to thought, death to life” (McMahan 164). These Western thinkers were integral to my own understanding of Buddha-nature when reading *The Little Pilgrim*.

Sudhana yearns to make apparent the Buddha-nature present in all sentient beings known as the Dharmakaya. The Dharmakaya constitutes the unmanifested, inconceivable aspect of Buddha, out of which Buddhas arise and to which they return after their dissolution. It composes the entire universe. Sudhana’s last master Samantabhadra describes it thusly: “Pure essential Buddha nature cannot be measured against anything or likened to anything in any world whatever. Every comparison is just so much trash, for Buddha nature transcends all worlds, beyond emptiness and being alike” (Un 352). It is precisely this non-dual wholeness witnessed in the Gandavyuha that caused Buddhist author Gary Gach to summarize *The Little Pilgrim* thusly; “In a word, interbeing. All things, all beings, all moments, all realms, are all infinitely interconnected. A single drop contains the whole universe” (Un 366). Cleary also relates the notion of interconnectivity with Buddha-nature, stating, “*The Flower Garland Sutra* is like a hologram, the whole concentrated in all the parts, this very structure reflecting a fundamental doctrine of scripture, that is what the cosmos itself is like, everything interreflecting, the one and the many interpenetrating” (Cleary 43). Robert Thurman contemplates the implication of this interconnectedness, stating, “the happiness of real freedom causes the natural realization that the lack of isolated, fixed and independent self is just equivalent to the

presence of all totally interrelated things and beings, inconceivably intertwining endlessly throughout immeasurable eternity and unencompassable infinity. Within this web, “free from all craving for nothings and oblivions, there is a personal destiny of endless involvement with limitless others” (Thurman 79). The beauty of the universe’s Buddha-nature is boundless.

Sudhana’s transcendent victory of Bodhisattvahood produces the feeling that he lacks anything. He eschews powerful desires (cravings) as they obscure Buddha-nature by creating a strong separation between the subject and object of desire, which causes more grasping. “The ‘wanting’ itself is a constriction of consciousness arising from the feeling or lack that remains as long as we do not abide in our true nature” (Thurman 174). Thus, the purest desire is the longing for the wholeness and completion of full realization of Buddha-nature. Yet, since detachment from desire is Buddha’s prognosis for the cessation of suffering (achieving nirvana), it becomes of great import for Sudhana to avoid the pitfall of desire while simultaneously seeking nirvana. Sudhana realizes this seeming paradox of his own quest for Bodhisattvahood when he admires a bodhisattva boatman, “someone for whom even Sudhana’s journey in search of truth was merely one more form of desire” (Un 163). This recognition of his Buddha-nature allows him to act spontaneously in the moment. Buddha-nature causes bliss and peace beyond all understanding but Sudhana does not let the addictive quality of this state cause attachment.

While staying in the world subjects Sudhana to the danger of identifying with the links of samsara, he accommodates, as evidenced by his statement, “For me, things that stay in one place all part from me, as I flow on. If I decided to settle somewhere,

everything else would flow away from me” (Un 101). His intention to flow on allows him to avoid samsaric entanglement. Nevertheless, he is weary of generating negative karmic manifestations that cause other sentient beings to suffer. However, this danger is more than offset by the possibility that everything can be transformed toward limitlessly positive configurations, realms of joy and fulfillment for all living beings. While this way of being is challenging to most, it is the ideal position regarding the reconciliation of the intrinsic relationship between the illusory mundane world, and absolute reality. Sudhana understands that he does not need to abandon the world and become a hermit to cease mundane desires. Rather, he apprehends that the world of phenomena, illusory as it is, is not devoid of positive quality. This is what Buddha meant by the “Middle Way.” As a result, Sudhana’s awakening to this reality obliges him to open the eyes of the others. The aspect of his pedagogical intent to awaken is overshadowed by the colossal aspiration to awaken others by alleviating the suffering of all sentient beings. It is as if Sudhana has rid himself of the flu of samsara, yet everyone surrounding him still has the flu. His quest for Bodhisattvahood is only logical then as he attempts to immunize beings by unobscuring their Buddha nature.

Chapter III: Metaphors of Liberation

Un employs metaphors of spiritual liberation to define his aesthetic. He utilizes a plethora of metaphors to demonstrate the Bodhisattva ideal. The fact that Sudhana is an orphan throughout his quest demonstrates that accessing absolute reality is possible despite struggling with extreme disadvantages. In addition, *The Little Pilgrim* contains a remarkable multiverse of metaphors from Buddhist texts despite its relatively tiny size.

Un's array of literary devices, aesthetic poetics and prose reminds us that the ordinary and the extraordinary are one. In fact, these metaphors allow the reader to enter the inconceivable realm of absolute reality that is always available in one's daily experience. Un's metaphors generously help us visualize and fathom what most of us have not reached through experiential awareness. In the Gandavyuha, the abrupt masters usually define absolute reality on the basis of insufficient, often negative, adjectives; *not-brought-into being, unborn, not-made and not-formed*. Contrastingly, *The Little Pilgrim* provides rich imagery for one to speculate on what the higher states of meditation might be like to experience. Un does not explicitly define the transcendent Absolute, yet he brings the experience of the Absolute to life through the eyes and actions of the little pilgrim. The plurality of the images demonstrates an important Mahayana notion: Any image can represent absolute reality because all images occur within the substratum of all existence. Un's aesthetic approach embraces the ephemerality of appearances that arise and dissipate within the substratum, each as precious as the last.

Un's aesthetic language is not intended to replace the valuable technical

explanations of the Gandavyuha's teachings, yet it conveys a *knowing* that is something to be experienced, lived and understood. It cannot be communicated easily in any language. To utilize an anonymous simile: "The truth flees just at the very moment when we seem to hold its gleaming splendor in our hands, and all we are left with is one more dead butterfly to add to our smoldering collection." Such a simile demonstrates that trying to rigidly contain truth only serves to transform it into something perverse. Reaching a perspective on metaphysical truth is not only hard to grasp, but requires different terms and phrasing depending on the cultural context in which it is being imparted. The layers of multiculturalism are complex in *The Little Pilgrim*, as it is based on a Chinese text, written by a Korean and translated by an Englishman. Yet *The Little Pilgrim* manages to present the esoteric truths of the Gandavyuha because it is able to make them comprehensible for a broad readership. Additionally, Un's aesthetic is easily comprehensible since it retains "the three traditional mythological stages of the hero's journey, in Greek terms, "the *agon*, or conflict; the *pathos*, or death struggle; and *anagnorisis*, or discovery, the recognition of the hero" (Sandner 109). This narrative framework contextualizes metaphors of liberations by illustrating Sudhana's heroics. Sudhana becomes a hero as he is propelled by the purest desire: to realize the primordial consciousness. This desire is paradoxically realized as he struggles to detach himself from desire and sense of self.

To further understand the metaphorical language of the novel, the reader must know that Un's characters are embedded in a particular history and culture that shapes them. As the German philosopher Hans Gadamer states, "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-

evident way in the family, society and state in which we live.” Sudhana’s embeddedness in Indian culture is evidenced through his interaction with the Indians he meets; yet his way of being comes to surpass most Indians who are still bound to the dictates of the caste system. Gadamer’s ‘historically effected consciousness’ runs parallel to the Heideggerian concept of ‘thrownness’ which posits that being in a particular milieu shapes one’s interactions and views. Given this framework, Sudhana’s quest for Truth is not out of the ordinary as the appeal to live a spiritual existence is prevalent in Indian culture. While modern culture is vastly different than ancient Indian culture, the same elements of the human experience are present. Therefore, Un’s universal metaphors of liberation resonate timelessly by transcending cultural differences.

Light is one of the most prominent metaphors of liberation as its image is most often utilized to represent liberation. Liberation is literally, the ‘light’ of enlightenment. Un pervasively mentions ‘light’ seventy times within *The Little Pilgrim* to highlight its importance as the symbol of luminous awakening. Sudhana endeavors to emulate the Buddha, whose brilliant light is measureless. Un uses light as a distinctive feature of his moral aesthetic approach since light also symbolizes one’s innately pure Buddha-nature. The nun Sinhavijum tells Sudhana, “Child, you are light, just as I am light,” demonstrating that Sudhana already is the very light of liberation he seeks (Un 165). Additionally, Sinhavijum’s sentiment mirrors the beginning of the Gandavyuha where all the Buddhas unite in a pavilion to illuminate the cosmos with a network of light.

Furthermore, light and the absence of light demonstrate the complexity of metaphorical language. On one hand, the light of liberation metaphorically sparks the candle that dispels the darkness of ignorance that obscures Buddha-nature. While this

metaphor of lighting a candle has positive connotations, the image of nirvana, which means "blown out" (as in a candle), suggests a positive denotation of darkness, which symbolizes extinguishing desire. Since light and darkness both represent liberation, it is evident that metaphors themselves are tools to realize liberation. If one views both light and darkness as equally representative of liberation, then one's dualist way of thinking that causes suffering is exposed as illusion.

Un invites one to dwell in images like light, to try to find the experience hidden in the word and between the lines. Even hearing the word light engenders a visual and tactile sensation, as one knows it as more than a conceptual abstraction. Metaphors paint a hazy picture of liberation, but it takes a master writer like Un to elicit the experience of liberation to engender a grasping of the awesomeness of the experience to his readers. One must be cautious of letting one's compulsive mind instinctively seize on Un's metaphors by overanalyzing them. Doing so relegates them to logical abstractions conditioned by one's habitual thinking. For example, given the extinguished candle metaphor, one's thinking mind wants to further inquire where the candle came from and how it was lit. Instead, one should be content with using one's senses to know that there is darkness and then the candle is lit. "The darkness is replaced by luminosity that is clear, substanceless, directly known. A wind arises and the flame is blown out. We know what it feels like when light is overcome by darkness" (Wangyal 57). In this scenario, viewing metaphors in terms of direct experiential knowledge is shown to be superior to the view of the habitual mind that distorts metaphors by asking too much of them. Un employs Sudhana in metaphors of liberation because he is unimpeded by obstructive thoughts and has the experiential view to immerse himself in the metaphors'

meanings.

Water, in the forms of oceans, rivers and lakes is an integral metaphor and ubiquitous symbol that appears in nearly every chapter of both *The Little Pilgrim* and the Gandavyuha. The symbol of Water encapsulates the saga of *The Little Pilgrim*. His quest begins by the water and ends by the water, symbolizing how water affords the possibility for ceaseless journeying. The Bodhisattva Manjushri starts the novel by having just rescued the orphaned Sudhana from drowning in the river. Sudhana ends the novel by heading toward an ocean harbor, but this time to care for an orphaned child. Therefore, this narrative arc comes full circle, except now Sudhana is a master helping an orphan much like himself.

In the previous example, water represents the flow of continuation of all experience. But Un also invokes water as a pedagogical device that instructs the reader on basic Buddhist metaphysical notions. For example, Un writes that just as “each river [that] reaches the sea loses its name and is simply called the great ocean,” each human life is a wave that becomes the ocean again after it subsides (Un 198). This exquisite metaphor signifies the three Buddhist marks of existence: impermanence, no-self and samsara/nirvana. This metaphor of liberation challenges one to accept the ephemerality of existence and embrace how everything is of the same Buddha-nature. Un also states, “The sea [is] the great equalizer that abolishes all distinctions of class” (Un 198). This quote furthers the metaphorical import of water, which represents the underlying blissful Buddha-nature shared by everything.

One of the most philosophically relevant instances involving water is when Sudhana throws his worldly belongings out of a boat and considers throwing himself out

too. He intended to take this action because he perceived that he was negatively attached to his desire and saw death as means to be completely rid of desiring and craving. Yet, Utpalabhuti dissuades him, stating, “The things of this world possess a certain force, without which you will never get free of the world. If you throw your body away, who will be left to throw your heart away?” (Un 140). So, Sudhana continues, knowing that his positive actions will outweigh the possibility of negative karmic manifestations that could result from his bodily existence.

The ancient and modern texts draw upon water to highlight the fifth book of the Avatamsaka entitled “The Flower Bank Array Ocean of Worlds.” This scripture represents the ocean of worlds, which in turn symbolizes the interpenetrating nature of all causes and effects in existence. This book provides a visionary cosmology describing this world system or universe as purified by the vows and deeds of Vairochana Buddha, the glorified or cosmic aspect of the historic Buddha. It represents the world system as resting on an ocean of fragrant water, which symbolizes, what is called the ‘repository consciousness.’ It is the mental repository or ‘storehouse’ in which all experiential impressions are stored. “It is from these impressions that images of the world develop” (Cleary 33). The ocean storehouse is incomparably perfect and contains the seeds for all possible manifestations that arise and dissipate. This pure ocean is also a metaphor for the Dharmakaya, the inherently pure reality itself, without specific, delimited form, wherein the Buddha is identified with the spiritually charged nature of everything that is.

In the scripture, the ‘flowers’ that rest on the ocean represent deeds, which produce the positive or negative seeds of consequent states. Un parallels this scripture’s portrayal of flowers representing deeds in his chapter entitled, “Every song yields a

flower.” Sudhana sounds a bell by the sea and every song and every sound becomes a flower, indicating his good karma. This depiction is especially apropos as the Gandavyuha is contained within The *Flower Garland Sutra*.

While karmic waves are both pure and impure, they all arise from the Dharmakaya, which is eternally pure. To utilize a simile, karmic impulses are like waves in the ocean because they are neither identical with the water nor separate from it, yet they stir up the water and make it cloudy. These waves continuously disturb the ocean so that it is constantly in motion. Yet, the eternal state of the ocean/repository consciousness is inherently stationary, for it is always water, and not even cloudiness can turn it into non-water. But, the experiential impressions stored in the repository consciousness cause impure karmic waves to arise from lifetime to lifetime, binding one in samsara. Sudhana demonstrates how to purify negative karma by experiencing the pure ocean/Dharmakaya more directly through meditation.

The Master Shilpabhijna describes the Dharmakaya thusly, stating, “All dharma is unborn” (Un 298). He asserts this notion because just as waves are temporary, the “dharmas of experience possess ‘no own-nature,’ for they are caused by mind and made by mind and their non-arising does not mean that they do not happen outside of the mind” (Robinson 110). The dharmas are non-arising as the mind that is not conditioned is originally unborn. Since the Dharmakaya is birthless, the matter and mind that arise from it are fundamentally void and their absolute identity cannot be destroyed. Sudhana experientially understands that all contents of experience are originally birthless and fabricated by the mind so he ceases to provoke the impure waves of karmic impulses. These impulses are based on the assumption that objects in experience have their own

existence 'out there.' Yet, when the impure waters are pacified and transformed to purity, “this state is neither empty nor non-empty, for while it is empty of defiling waves, it is not empty of pure water and pure waves” (Robinson 110). Years go on, yet in the Dharmakaya, the uncreated, naturally radiant mind itself can never age. It is always just the same primordial space beyond elaboration and duality. Residing in the Dharmakaya, the ground of all experience, that is closer to one than even one’s thought, is not really an experience at all for Sudhana, but rather the space in which subjectivity, sleep, dream and waking experience occur. It is only from our limited perspective that we think of it as an experience that one can have.

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche relates that experiencing the Dharmakaya is like experiencing space. He contends that the direct recognition of space is the recognition of luminosity, which is akin to a primordially pure awareness. He states, “Space is a good analogy to use, because there is nothing to reference in space. It has value though it is nothing: in it can be built anything. Space is pure potentiality. It has no up or down, in or out, boundaries or limitations. Those are all qualities we conceptualize in space, not qualities of space itself. There is little that we can say about space, so we normally describe it in terms of what it is not. This is the same as the dharmakaya; though it is the essence of all that exists, nothing can be affirmed about it because it is beyond all qualities, attributes, or references” (Un 198).

Un’s aesthetic approach molds Sudhana to experience the Dharmakaya by way of realizing that everything, including himself, emerges from and is of the nature of this enlightened ground. This ground is known as the clear light. Wangyal Rinpoche states “We lose the real sense of the clear light as soon as we conceptualize it or try to imagine

it. There is neither subject nor object in the clear light. If there is any identification of a subject, then there is no entry into the clear light. Actually, nothing ‘enters’ the clear light: the clear light is the base recognizing itself. There is neither ‘you’ nor ‘it.’ Using dualistic language to describe the non-dual necessarily results in paradox. The only way to know the clear light is to know it directly” (Wangyal 144). This description provides the motivation for Un’s entire novel as he employs prose and poetry to depict Sudhana’s comprehension of the clear light and how this comprehension propels him to the Bhodhisattva ideal.

Un also interweaves the Buddha’s teaching of emptiness (*sunyata*) with Sudhana’s encounters with water. He writes, “It was necessary to flow down the river, tossing away everything he knew and returning to the original emptiness of knowing nothing” (Un 96). This state of knowing nothing is a reference to the primordial unstained awareness of the Dharmakaya. Yet, the original emptiness Sudhana yearns to return to is not a nihilistic idea of nothingness. Instead, it refers to the lack of both inherent existence of phenomena and the relative illusion of distinguishing between subject and object. Sudhana’s understanding of this emptiness conveys that all phenomena are impermanent, devoid of a solid, unchanging essence, and co-existent as aspects of the entire web of being. His experience conveys the complex textual doctrines of the Huayen (*Avatamsaka*) School of Buddhism in China and the Cha’an School of Buddhism (Son in Korean and Zen in Japanese). The arcane texts of these schools are made so accessible through Sudhana’s perspective of emptiness.

The Dalai Lama brilliantly dissects the paradox of the concept of emptiness, stating: “If we take ultimate reality – emptiness itself – what we will find is that

emptiness is a phenomenon that is found as a result of an ultimate analysis on a given object. Therefore, from that point of view, it is ultimate and rightly called ultimate truth. Yet, if we take the ultimate as an object in its own right and then examine it, search for its essence, and determine whether emptiness exists objectively, independently of other factors and so on, we will find that this is not the case. This indicates that emptiness is also not ultimately existent. Understanding this will enable us to reconcile the seeming contradiction that arises when we say that emptiness is ultimate truth, but at the same time, is ultimately nonexistent. All the phenomena that appear to our mind and exist in the universe, including the mind itself, depend for this very existence on causes and conditions. Since their nature is one of dependence, they are devoid of any independent existence. They cannot exist in their own right, and from their own side, and this absence or negation of independent existence is the ultimate reality or truth of all things” (Gyatso, Dzogchen 145). The Dalai Lama’s connection of interdependence with emptiness is a recurrent theme in *The Little Pilgrim*. Sudhana’s wisdom of this notion spurs his compassion for others because he understands his relation to them. Thus, *The Little Pilgrim* imparts the moral aesthetic that compassion directly results from knowledge of emptiness. While Un does not explore the complexity of the concept of emptiness, Sudhana’s actions are indicative of the fact that emptiness engenders positive possibilities rather than nihilistic ones.

Un’s use of emptiness beautifully references Buddhism’s most famous text, the *Heart Sutra*. This sutra asserts that since reality is empty, “it comes to have a chameleon-like elusiveness, like an actor playing multiple roles, appearing as emptiness one moment, form the next, until roles are no longer distinct, or even roles at all” (Flores

110). Sudhana's transformation demonstrates that he constantly evolves in capability to play the roles required of him. He learns that 'I' as an independently existing entity imputes a false conceptual designation. He sees how his 'self' cannot be found in some distinct location, changing from moment to moment based on situation, mood and other factors. He also perceives that objects also have no independent inherent identity over time. When one searches for the objects themselves as something inherent and immutable, they cannot be found.

For example, a piece of paper, originally from a tree, will eventually turn yellow from the sun and become dust. Moreover, the creation of the paper interdependently relies on the sunshine to grow the tree as well as the logger who brought it to the mill to be manufactured into paper. Since the logger cannot exist without his daily bread, we can also see that the wheat that became his bread is also in this piece of paper. Hence, there is no essence arisen from nothingness that is unique and personal to any being or object. Emptiness is the mere non-findability of a quality inherent of the paper. There is no inherent quality of 'paperiness' to be found. The paper, sunshine and logger inter-are since on a general level, all things dependently originate from multiple causes and conditions. For that reason, emptiness denotes the non-existence of inherent existence. The negation of this non-existent quality does not imply the existence of anything in its stead; it is a mere non-affirming negation, comparable to saying that there is no tiger in one's room. Yet, the conditional existence of objects does not interfere with their absolute emptiness. It is not the objects of the world around one that are being refuted by the concept of emptiness; it is one's perception that these objects possess a true inherent existence. Un employs Sudhana to ideally reverse this grasping-based perception that is

the cause of misery.

The metaphor of the Samsaric ocean of existence implies a vastness which challenges Sudhana's resolve to achieve Bodhisattvahood. Mid-way through his journey, he thinks he has the requisite knowledge and virtue and wonders if there is anything left to gain from further traveling to teachers. Un evokes the literary device of Sudhana answering his own question to demonstrate to his reader that they can exhibit resolve just like Sudhana. He states, "Together with a child bodhisattva there has to be an adult bodhisattva and an old one, too. Only then is it possible to embrace the ocean of wretched creatures that no one in this work has any thought of caring for" (Un 218). Yet Sudhana's decision to continue his quest had been foreshadowed by Vaira the boatman, who states to Sudhana, "The people and animals I carry are able to travel peacefully. They lose all fear of the ocean of torment arising from birth and death in this world; they receive power to transform that ocean into an ocean of wisdom. You and I both have the power to change the ocean of desire, the ocean of the entire Buddha cosmos, into a blue ocean of perfect purity" (Un 148). This quote perfectly captures why Sudhana continues his quest. He does so to refine his wisdom and compassion with the guidance of masters to manifest the perfect purity of the ocean of Dharmakaya in all of his interactions.

In relation to the ocean's vastness, Sudhana exemplifies Indriyeshvara, who sings, "I am a little boat, just floating down the omniscient river. Little boat! Tossing all it knows into the river" (Un 95). Sudhana humbly embraces his smallness juxtaposed to the immensity of the flowing river that contains everything in the past, present and future. Using all his knowledge and compassion to beautify the omniscient river.

An old ferryman further elaborates how one relates to the river, stating to

Sudhana, “You must know the river very well. I still don’t know it so very well. The course of the stream changes all the time; it is always turning into a new river. That means I keep turning into a new ferryman, too” (Un 143). Un’s aesthetic in this scene reveals how reincarnation continually makes life a new experience. In each life one must relearn how to navigate the seas of samsara. Having a guide on the sea reinforces the necessity of a master to help the student navigate through samsara. Also, the constant flux of the water reinforces the notion of no-self and impermanence.

Clouds and rain are also prominent Buddhist images that are traditionally represented in Buddhist cosmology. Megha instructs Sudhana, stating, “Bodhisattva awakening means releasing all beings from their suffering, becoming a fire to burn away avarice and self-love, becoming a cloud bringing rain, becoming a bridge so that all sentient beings and all living creatures can cross the river of life and death (Un 51). Un cleverly names this master Megha, the Sanskrit word for cloud. Clouds have four meanings related to Sudhana’s embodiment of the Bodhisattva ideal. Buddhist scholar Li Tongxuan states, clouds “are everywhere representing concentration. They bear moisture, representing virtue. They shade and cover, representing compassion. They shower rain, representing knowledge” (Tongxuan 33). Also, Megha’s ‘river of life and death’ that sentient beings must cross is an allusion to reaching the other shore of awakening. Sudhana’s masters give him the oars, but he must ultimately reach the other shore himself on his own quest of inner-discovery. To aid others in their quest, which is a component of his own, Sudhana’s journey requires him to retain eternal youth as his reincarnations are basically infinite. Un writes that “ultimately, newness is a kind of infinity,” encapsulating Sudhana’s moral-aesthetic existence to keep on with his quest

(Un 217). He had already “ been traveling a long while, huge aeons of time” from his past lives (Un 60). The journey requires his eternal youth, as Sudhana states, “The river is endless ... we travel without end. To travel endlessly, I have to travel an endless path in this life as if I were endlessly enduring the torments of a Bodhisattva. I shall never become an enlightened being; I shall just go on and on, experiencing life in the course of endless reincarnations” (Un 146).

The profound Truths related through these symbols do not controvert the importance of relishing the experience which is central to celebrating one’s humanity. After meeting Avalokiteshvara, Sudhana decides to spare some compassion for himself, stating, “Playing in this water here, I’m going to enjoy myself” (Un 188). After all, Cleary states that the Gandavyuha asserts, “Entertainment represents delight in truth (Cleary 1608). Un uses the image of water in this context to suggest the dimension of revelry that the infinite ocean affords. The absence of delight in Sudhana’s quest would destroy the entire model of Un’s aesthetic. While sorrow is a necessary counter-balance, the joy of the journey must never be taken for granted as it is this key ingredient that makes the quest so incredibly lovely!

The most awe-inspiring image in *The Little Pilgrim* is Maitreya’s Tower. In this allegory, the bodhisattva’s quest is resolved in a stunning aesthetic resolution concerning enlightened inter-being with all facets of existence. “Instead of trying to shy away from the impression that the teachings of emptiness turn the world into a magical illusion, the Gandavyuha embraces it head-on” (Robinson 111). In the Sutra's penultimate scene, Sudhana meets with Maitreya, the prophesied future Buddha, and gains a glimpse of his pavilion, which is essentially a vision of the universe as seen by realized bodhisattvas.

The pavilion fills the entire universe as each of the vast pavilions inside of it contains more pavilions within pavilions evenly arrayed in all directions. Each tower is not mixed up with one another, being each mutually distinct, while appearing reflected in each and every object of all the other towers. Maitreya manifests Sudhana's consciousness in every tower, so "Sudhana can see Maitreya assuming millions of emanation bodies to spend eons of time bringing millions to Buddhahood in millions of buddha-fields. Then as quickly as the vision appears, it vanishes" (Robinson 111). While he is overjoyed at this blissful vision of the cosmos, he comprehends the downside of interdependence, which is that the causal chain can be polluted by ignorance, desire and hatred. He evidences this realization before he meets Maitreya, stating, "The world is a sad and lovely place" (Un 339). This central textual insight depicts Un's morally bound aesthetic as sorrowful yet sublime.

Un aptly depicts the tower through Maitreya, who tells Sudhana, "This tower is a place drawing one aeon into all, all aeons into one. This tower is a place drawing one world into all, all worlds into one. This tower is a place drawing one dharma into all, all dharmas into one. This tower is a place drawing one creature into all, all creatures into one. This tower is a place drawing one Buddha into all, all Buddhas into one" (Un 338). This vision of an interpenetrating ultimate wholeness in which the ordinary categories of space and time are collapsed happens in only a moment. But in such a seemingly infinitesimal time, Un best demonstrates Sudhana's achievement of the Bhodhisattva ideal.

Upon seeing the tower, Sudhana "could not help breaking into tears, as he wept, he made repeated prostrations, innumerable prostrations. He had never made so many in

his life before. Each prostration was full of other multiple prostrations so that in the end he must have made tens of thousands” to all the Buddhas projected through space and time (Un 349). His ordinary gestures help the reader identify with him. We learn that we can acquire knowledge of the extraordinary through mundane gestures.

Maitreya’s tower is the metaphorical zenith of his quest. It is where Sudhana is thrust into oneness with the unfathomable vastness of the totality of existence. His experience of the overwhelming plenitude of the illusion counteracts any sense that it is nihilistic. The importance of this point cannot be understated. Sudhana’s experience of Maitreya’s Tower encapsulates the entire message of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*: the emptiness of experience does not matter as long as that emptiness is so full. With this knowledge, Un’s moral aesthetic shapes Sudhana to beautify the emptiness with as much compassion and wisdom as possible. Un’s vision is a call for life for others, a message of altruistic import reasoned by the interpenetration of all phenomena.

The Little Pilgrim’s translator Brother Anthony of Taizé, states, “It is striking to find such an ancient work intensely aware of the immensely vast dimensions of the universe, and of the molecular tininess of its component parts. In the West, there is a somewhat similar pattern in the Platonic notion of microcosm and macrocosm, where each distinct concrete temporary reality is seen as the reflection of an eternal idea; but in the traditional images of Indra’s Net or of the tower of Maitreya, everything is a reflection of everything and contains everything while remaining itself, and there is no absolute reality giving origin and form to contingent realities” (Un 375). This one reality is unborn and perfect yet the samsaric entanglement, a complex conglomeration of mutual substrates, necessarily manifests in its primordial substrate.

Brother Anthony of Taizé mentions Indra's Net, which is very similar to Maitreya's Tower. In chapter forty-seven, Sudhana visits Indra Heaven atop Mt. Meru, the location of Indra's Net. A master tells Sudhana, "When bodhisattvas perfect the practice of the ten laws, they attain a wisdom that resembles Lord Indra's Net, where every pearl reflects and contains every other" (Un 281). *The Little Pilgrim's* glossary provides a clear definition of Indra's Net as "A limitless net stretching infinitely in all directions, with a jewel in each node of the net. These jewels are infinite in number, each reflecting in itself all the other jewels" (Un 379). Sudhana is aware of his power despite his size. He rejoices in being a single node in the void's network of beauty and bliss because he knows he is capable of ameliorating the suffering of other nodes. He identifies as both an individual and the universe itself, the underlying reality of all things. His "self" is established in the voidness wherein everything is present relatively and without an ultimate independent existence.

The Little Pilgrim is replete with metaphorical references to wholeness and interreflectivity of all things. As Manjushri says, "To know one grain of sand on this shore is to know the whole universe" (Un 16). This statement is extremely similar to William Blake's poetic line, "To see a world in a grain of sand," which is cited regularly in contemporary Buddhist articulations of this microcosm/macrocosm relationship. Walt Whitman's statement, "I am large, I contain multitudes," fulfills the same function. In his last encounter of a master in the novel, Sudhana meets Samantabhadra, who conveys a metaphorical model similar to Blake and Whitman. "Sudhana saw that every one of the pores on Samantabhadra's body, and all the minute pores hidden within his body, were

each filled with innumerable Buddhas. Around each of those innumerable Buddhas, crowds were assembled like clouds. Sudhana had now become capable of seeing such microscopic realities with his ordinary, weak eyesight” (Un 352). This image parallels the beginning of the Gandavyuha when Buddha’s pores open to reveal innumerable beings.

Un’s aesthetic approach conceives of this universe as “So full of Buddhas, there’s not one empty spot. And there’s not a single place where there isn’t a Bhodhisattva offering itself for living creatures” (Un 178). This conception of space demonstrates the relative lack of profanity in the universe. For example, Veshthila states: “There is nowhere left to spit, nowhere left to piss that isn’t Buddha ...When I’m out in the field pissing and shitting, I see Buddhas there, too ” (Un 178). The scope of interpenetration is conceivable because dharmas are not limited by space or time. Emptiness does not mean that Dharmas, are not present, simply that they have no boundaries to mark their arising and passing away in time. Hence, they can interpenetrate without interfering with one another. Since “space and time are also empty, they can interpenetrate on many scales at once. A single spot can contain many worlds and exist in many different interpenetrating worlds. A moment of time on one scale can encompass eons on others. The ramifications of a single meritorious thought, focused on a single spot, cannot be counted. Because of this, emptiness means the exact opposite of Dukkha” (Thurman 49). Thus, Sudhana cultivates wisdom and compassion as every act may cause immense positive karma.

Chapter IV: Pedagogy & Paradox

Sudhana seeks many masters in order to learn the nature of the Bodhisattva ideal. The fact that *The Little Pilgrim* retains nearly none of the content of Sudhana's meetings with masters from the Gandavyuha is purposive on the part of Un. His re-imagining of each encounter breathes life into the story. The Gandavyuha models each meeting robotically as Sudhana inquires about the bodhisattva way and the master provides a monotonous philosophical response. Contrastingly, Un avoids explicit discussion on what exactly is being imparted to Sudhana. Rather, he provides dialogues that hint at the ineffable wisdom the master espouses rather than spelling it out conceptually with extremely technical Buddhist vocabulary.

The major similarity between scripture and fiction is that Un preserves the number of teachers Sudhana visits. He portrays nearly all of the fifty-three masters from the Gandavyuha, changing the names of some masters but often maintaining his or her positions in society. For example, Utpalabhuti remains a perfumer, Muktasara a goldsmith and Sinhavijurm is still a nun. Un's depiction of each master's profession cleverly relates to how each master uniquely imparts knowledge to him. Un is compelled to deviate from the original lessons of the Gandavyuha because they are written monotonously and repetitively. If Un had conserved the original dialogue of the Gandavyuha, he would have compromised *The Little Pilgrim's* sleek aesthetic that made each chapter so focused and tangible. In the Gandavyuha, Sudhana's rigid dialogue with the masters demonstrates that he seems emotionless. Un contrarily humanizes Sudhana to show how he feels just like anyone else. Sudhana's relatability allows us to perceive the world through his eyes. Un's aesthetic approach in the regard is what makes his

interpretation of the Gandavyuha worth reading.

One must have an understanding of Un's cultural background to comprehend the pedagogy he employs. His Korean heritage imbues *The Little Pilgrim* with Eastern values and cultural norms. Joseph Campbell states, "Man's earthly condition is not interpreted in the orient as a punishment for something; nor is its end in any sense atonement ... its function is pedagogical, not penal. The aim is not true satisfaction of a supernatural father, but an awakening of the natural man to truth" (Campbell 311). This perspective speaks to the cultural influence present in *The Little Pilgrim*. It demonstrates the nature of the pedagogical relationship between Sudhana and his masters. Sudhana's quest is not retribution for an infraction nor is he making amends with a paternalistic creator God. He is driven by his thirst for truth that can only be quenched by a quest to the greatest masters.

Un's pedagogical approach conforms to the notion of the Eastern cultures having a collectivist orientation and Western cultures possessing an individualistic orientation. The scripture does praise individual achievements, but only to inspire the seeker and activate the seeker's potential for Bodhisattvahood. The scripture's admiration does not degenerate into personality worship or cultism. Therefore, Sudhana's humble teachers do not try to bind Sudhana to a given system of dogma, keep him as a follower, or claim to hold the whole truth. Their Eastern style teaches Sudhana how to experience reality without illusion. If they ever showered too much praise on him, they would risk reifying his ego, causing him to suffer from an illusory grasping of a false sense of self.

The master's teaching style regarding Sudhana resembles the style of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. His methods, proposed in his book *Pedagogy Of The Oppressed*,

directed students' attention to a critical comprehension of reality. He pioneered a pedagogical technique known as the Dialogue Education approach. This approach contrasts with the monologue approach of traditional education systems whereby teachers present information to learners who receive information without engaging with it. Like Freire and his students, Sudhana's masters do not lecture him but engage him in a dialogue to better encourage creativity and comprehension skills. Freire labeled the monologue style as the "banking" approach since traditional education views learners as empty receptacles ready for teachers to deposit information into. Such an approach disconnects students with independent thought, causing them to be passive receivers instead of active learners. Freire and Sudhana's masters know that the dialogue is the most successful pedagogical approach because it causes the enthusiastic involvement of the student. Teachers cease being viewed as superior authority figures handing down knowledge and are transformed into partners in the journey to critically comprehend reality.

A

major trope of Sudhana's quest is that the masters tell him the truth that he is seeking is already accessible to him. At every turn, he is told that the truth is within and no one can teach him anything he could not have know by himself. But since the masters really do teach him, the tension of this paradox remains apparent throughout *The Little Pilgrim*. In fact, the Masters Meghashri, Mutaka, Saradhvaja, Ananyagamin, Anrak, Prashantaruta, Bhadrottama and Shivaragra all tell Sudhana that they have nothing to teach him as awakening is already available in the present moment. Ananyagamin tells him, "You have already learned all there is to learn, you are fully fed. My words will make no difference" (Un 187). This seeming paradox between being told there is nothing to

accomplish while simultaneously being sent on an arduous spiritual quest creates the confusing question: “If the ultimate reality is absent of distinctions, and if liberation is to be found in the realization of this empty nature, then why should one do practices that are aimed at relative results?” (Wangyal 77). In short, the answer is that since we live in a dualistic relative world, practices with dichotomies are effective in conveying the worldly conventional truth. There is a relative right and wrong, and better and worse ways to act and to think in any given situation. However, Sudhana is already aware of basic morality and seeks higher knowledge related to how he should be in time and space. Such knowledge requires having experience within the realm of absolute truth.

In the Buddha’s teaching, the two truths ("satyadvada") is the division between this conventional truth (samvriti-satya) and absolute truth (paramârtha-satya), which corresponds to the Dharmakaya. In relation to Plato’s two-tiered metaphysics, absolute truth corresponds to the platonic notion of form, which is empty of inherent characteristics but structures the lower conventional realm: a multiplicity of constantly changing temporal things. Absolute truth nearly abolishes the two truths entirely, replacing the division by the One Truth of the ultimate, which negates conventional truth as a whole. Indeed, the notion that they are distinct can only be made in the realm of relative truth. For Chandrakîrti, Śântideva & Tsongkhapa, the two truths have the two natures of each and every phenomenon as their ontological reference, and so their distinction is not purely epistemological, but rooted in their identical ontological status, and so ultimate truth is not higher than conventional truth (as the idealists claim). Although verified along different epistemological pathways, these truths have an equal ontological status.

Given knowledge of the two truths, Sudhana can appreciate the present nature of the absolute but also the conventional steps he must take on his quest to further his awakening. Sudhana's mastery of these truths is evident when he states, "If I've not learned all the truth in this world from the masters I've met so far, I'll not learn it all from the masters I meet in the future, I'd like to have some fun" (Un 188). Sudhana then splashes around in the water, taking a recess from helping others. By taking a respite to enjoy himself instead of continuously pursuing Truth, he demonstrates that there is no need to keep seeking for meaning when he knows how to act on the meaning he has understood. The mirth Sudhana displays splashing around in the water is not present in the Gandavyuha. Also, one could legitimate Sudhana's pause from the path of refining his knowledge of the Bodhisattva ideal with the rhetorical question: "Who would be doing the seeking on your quest?" Such a comical question is appropriately Buddhist, because without an ego, there is nothing to attach to the idea of seeking. Un encapsulates this crucial aspect of the journey with poetic clarity, writing, "He knew the freedom of a child who has no direction. Going anywhere meant the eternal standstill of going nowhere. Such a standstill was the eternal motion of all journeying" (Un 189). Such freedom from the self defines the aesthetic of the journey paradoxically: Sudhana is constantly attaining higher degrees of perfection yet the journey has been perfect for its entire duration. When Sudhana achieves Bodhisattvahood, it only establishes that he has no more to learn and that he must now begin intensifying the application of bodhisattva virtues for the benefit of others. At the conclusion he is perfected and now endeavors to perfect others.

By the end of the novel, Manjushri recounts the various spiritual achievements

that Sudhana has accomplished. While the Gandavyuha goes to great pains to detail every technical aspect of each achievement, the genius of *The Little Pilgrim* lies in the fact that it leaves elucidation to the reader. It is only at the very end that the reader discovers Un's precise intentions to articulate the character of every achievement in his own style. Manjushri relates these achievements, stating that Sudhana has "mastered the ten abodes, the ten practices, the ten dedications, the ten stages and the ten goals" (Un 345). This statement demonstrates that even though Sudhana is nearly a bodhisattva during the entire quest (due to his past life merit), he requires further transformation. He had to achieve the spiritual achievement of each stage with the help of every master. Such achievement was necessary to expand his skillful means in order to intensify his enlightened activity toward sentient beings. In the beginning of his quest, Prabhava-ta sings him a lullaby "to keep Sudhana's fear from overpowering him," demonstrating that Sudhana is still very much a young child (Un 245). Manjushri relates that in the middle of Sudhana's quest, "Until he had reached the fifth of the ten lands, *sudurjaya-bhumi*, the Land Hard to Conquer, Sudhana's confidence in his own grasp of the truth had often wavered. Once there, he attained a state in which there was no more wavering or turning aside. From that point it was possible to reach a position of self-perfection in a state where there was no more dwelling in cycles of life and death, no dwelling in nirvana, either" (Un 346). But of course, Sudhana returns to the cycle, as his journey is endless.

The crux of the master's pedagogical style is to let Sudhana discover the nature of his own mind with as little interference by them as possible. Manjushri does not sit down with him to explain the Bodhisattva ideal, rather he sets the boy out on a path of self-discovery that leads back to him. Bhadrattama tells Sudhana that he is "Always

asking the same question, always trying to get a deeper understanding of [his] initial question. Young Pilgrim, you've got nothing to ask me about. You've got nothing left to ask anybody. Those who ask have already found the answer for themselves as they ask the question, you know very well that your question returns to you as its own answer" (Un 303). The question, "What is the way of a bodhisattva?," is always answered by what the Master brings Sudhana to experience while they are together. Indeed, Sudhana's question is also Un's question as it lies at the heart of the pedagogical purpose of Sudhana's quest. It puts the quest in *question*. Un spent his whole life challenging himself to follow the Bodhisattva ideal and learning how best to apply its dictates. Despite being traumatized by the Korean War, battling with alcoholism and being repeatedly tortured and imprisoned for his opposition to the South Korean military regime, he sustained himself through Buddhist meditation. He considers *The Little Pilgrim* to be the greatest mark of his own understanding of Buddha's teachings as it reflects his own degree of awakening.

When Sudhana journeys to his second master, Meghashri, he begs to be taught and even immaturely hits him with a twig to get his attention, but the monk stays plunged in deep meditation. "Apart from the mere fact of spending the days together Meghashri never taught Sudhana anything" (Un 33). Yet, by emulating the monk's silence he begins the path of meditation practice, which was Meghashri's exact pedagogical intention. For Un, capturing this meditative equipoise that is cultivated in silence is the most illusive goal of the novel, as it is through the mystery of deep silence that Sudhana quells the passions of his mind and finds peace in the bliss of emptiness. *The Little Pilgrim* is nearly four-hundred pages, yet Un contends in an interview that, "the finest poetry is

silence. Silence is not the sort of trash of words and silence is not the tomb of words. I dream of a reconciliation between silence and words; they are not distinct and they are not in conflict” (Prater). Un’s quote beautifully illustrates the tension between silence and words that he wishes to reconcile. He acknowledges the negative aspect of words as they have a tendency to pollute truth by engendering dualistic conceptualizations. Yet, by his own admission, Un knows that breathing life into words by presenting them creatively and poetically can transmit Truth. He perceives the empty space between the words as saying just as much as the words themselves. The beauty of his fiction is that it leaves the reader to fill in the blanks with their own interpretation.

Sudhana further learns that the same meditational equipoise can be sought in the most mundane of chores. When he goes to Sudarshana, the master calls him ‘bloody useless,’ but Sudhana is unabashed. When Sudhana enquires to be taught, the farmer tells him, “I’ve got nothing I can teach you in a day or two ... if you farm, nothing happens in a day or two. You have to spend a year, ten years, even” (Un 86). So, Sudhana stays with him. He tills the land and performs chores. Through mindfully performing these activities daily, he is really practicing mediation. He learns from Sudarshana that “everyone possesses the laws of the universe within them. Between any such person and the universe there will always be the simple words, ‘Come and play with me,’ and the pure meeting of the child with the child” (Un 89). This moving statement also conveys a key aspect of the quest’s pedagogical import, namely that one must grow but never shirk away from the fun of being alive.

Muktasara the goldsmith similarly makes Sudhana meditate, albeit in a radical manner. He leads Sudhana to a windowless building and bolts the door. When

Muktasara releases him, Sudhana tells him “I am deeply grateful to you beyond thanks” since the situation allowed him to plunge deeply into a meditation of non-thinking (Un 310). Accordingly, the practicality of meditation on the path cannot be understated. Sudhana learns this from Myohyang who tells him, “Ten kinds of wisdom are not worth one seed of practice” (Un 120). However, one must not fall into the trap of desiring meditation, which would exacerbate its beneficial effects. This pitfall is described in the classic Zen proverb of the polished tile. One day Nangaku asks Baso what he has been doing recently and Baso tells him that he has been meditating exclusively. Nangaku asks him why and Baso replies that he aims to achieve Buddhahood. Then, Nangaku took a roof tile and began rubbing it on a rock near Baso’s hut. Baso is alarmed and asks him what he is doing and Nangaku says he is polishing a roof tile. This answer begs the question from Baso of why Nangaku is polishing a roof tile. Nangaku states he is polishing it to make a mirror. Baso then says that it is impossible to make a mirror by rubbing a tile. Nangaku concludes by telling Baso he should not expect to make himself into a Buddha through meditation, implying it is as impossible as turning tile to mirror. This proverb instructs us that desiring meditation for the sake of enlightenment removes us from the very goal one is attempting to achieve. Even though the mirror was being polished, it was already without blemish in its unpolished state. Our nature is already that of the Buddha.

However, meditation remains an important practice to ensure the balancing of work in the world and world-transcending practices, characteristic of the ideal of comprehensive Buddhist activity that promotes the benefit of self and others. Sudhana establishes this balance toward the end of the novel when he starts applying what he has

learned for the benefit of others. If he had stayed immersed in meditation and unconcerned about worldly affairs, he would have disobeyed the promise made in his Bodhisattva vow to free all sentient beings from suffering.

Sudhana evolves his meditation abilities, until he “sat meditating, filled with truth’s joy, beyond the bonds of time. He could feel no hunger, did not realize he had stopped breathing when he held his breath, felt no call of nature, so intense was the bliss provoked by the Himalayas” (Un 278). This advanced meditation state is even beyond *Samadhi*, a state of single minded-concentration that Un depicts as “the holiest form of journey possible in this world” (Un 174). This is a state where Sudhana’s “awareness is not directed anywhere, neither inward or outward, but rests naturally in its own nature” (Un 59). Through these mediation experiences, some guided by the masters, Sudhana “realized that everywhere in the world, no matter where, is a place of meditation” (Un 310). Thus, Un’s aesthetic approach fluently shows the accessibility of meditation which allows one to become more deeply awakened.

Un’s own pedagogical journey bespeaks the same epiphany of endeavoring to appreciate the presentness of the truth he seeks. The healer Megha who states, “The truth stays in no place. Whoever journeys in quest of truth already has the truth” (Un 51). Sudhana reiterates this notion, stating, “Truth is not only found with the man who speaks truth, it can be found in every place. I have been following this path since I was a small child. South or north mean nothing to me” (Un 67). When Sudhana says that it makes no difference whatever direction he goes, he reveals his contentedness to go with the flow of his awakening. Yet each time he changes direction it is the opposite direction of the Buddha’s path. Un’s intention is to show that Sudhana does not need to meet the Buddha

and that he will selflessly go to help those where the Buddha is not. Master Sudarshana, who never meets Siddhartha, relates how Sudhana can never meet Buddha but still deeply reside in his wisdom. He states, “In my heart I am always meeting him. It’s like the love that keeps a parent watching over a child when the other parent is gone” (Un 89). This knowledge lightens Sudhana’s quest, leading him to amusingly state, “Now, I’ll head north and look for more truth, then I’ll abandon that, too” as there is nothing he needs to grasp onto in order to master the way of being he already manifests (Un 162).

The notion of omnipresent truth is so critical to Un that he highlights it using negatively terminology. It is voiced by Saradvaja who states, “People looking for truth are all mindless dolts like you” since one cannot find the Buddha-nature that is already present (Un 62). Seeing that his own quest was more introspective than externally driven, Un writes, “Sudhana had received instruction from many teachers, and had constantly been astonished to discover that everything in the world was the eternal truth he had been seeking” (Un 149).

Nevertheless, it would be improper to underrate the connection between the master and the student. Their relationship is extremely important for deepening the student’s understanding of the proper way of being as the master uses methods beyond the student’s means. The student must receive transmission and instruction from the teacher to develop his or her own stability in the primordial awareness. Consequently, Sudhana provides a pedagogical tool for the reader to learn how one should ideally interact with a master. Un encourages the reader to hear, to be like Sudhana as he lives without preconception or judgment, allowing for openness that sees even the smallest mote of dust as a teacher. Un writes, “This world is a strict school, where every single

thing without exception is a master, faithfully observing the Way” (Un 158). Since “there is not one empty spot in all the wide universe (and) everywhere is full of encounters between bodhisattvas and beings”, the reader is encouraged to show great respect to everything just as Sudhana does (Un 138). For Un, this is where “the truth arises,” in the experiential aspect of these opportune encounters where wisdom and compassion can be applied (Un 138). Hence, he urges the reader to be just as enthusiastic as Sudhana, who, “like a chicken, pecking eagerly at scattered grain” attends to the teachings of his master (Un 37). But, while learning the teachings is important, maintaining a humble-nature and not becoming undone by pride is just as crucial to his aesthetic approach. Sudhana reflects this attitude as “he enjoyed his conversation with the elephant, the huge animal knew everything, yet deliberately kept the knowledge concealed and did not boast. Through small fissures like a little stream, the elephant revealed how much he knew” (Un 57). Sudhana emulates the elephant just as Un intends for the reader to imitate Sudhana.

The master’s aesthetic approach in espousing the interrelation of compassion and wisdom in heeding the Bodhisattva ideal is another pedagogical trope. Master Anrak states, “The bodhisattva is first of all someone able to feel compassion. In compassion, wisdom and mercy unite, abandoning everything they possess, both self and possessions” (Un 250). Sudhana applies this to his behavior as well as his thoughts. “From Myohyang, Sudhana learned how to pray for all living beings. Soon he was praying for sky and clouds, moon and stars, as well as for the rocks around him, for fir trees and old trees, and for animal’s bones” (Un 121). Just by sitting next to each other, Myohyang and Sudhana loved each other and so experienced an incomparable bliss since “Wisdom is nothing

other than the fruit of love” (Un 121). The simple act of sitting side by side becomes a revolutionary opportunity to experience an awesome degree of compassion and wisdom. Hence, the non-dual understanding of compassion and wisdom is one that pervades Un’s pedagogical approach.

Multiple teachers charge Sudhana to awaken others as a final instruction after he possesses the skill to do so. Indeed, students preserve their masters’ legacies. Sudhana is told, “the holiest deed of all is the work of bestowing on others. Let your bestowing be unconscious, practice the selflessness that communicates selflessness to selflessness. All this world’s joy in having is not worth one hundred thousand million trillionth part of the joy of giving” (Un 193). Communicating the Buddha’s teaching of no-self to those who inherently do not have a self is both semantically and philosophically trying, especially given the myriad people with different backgrounds that Sudhana is expected to teach. Yet, the obligation and meaning of the teaching, especially in the Mahayana context, is to relish in the wonder of giving instruction! Through his virtuous action, Sudhana grows sentient beings’ awareness of the wholeness that inexorably binds sentient beings. Un’s pedagogical approach instructs us, “All change, all life and death, loving and hating, all is training and growth” (Un 137). This knowledge engenders the wisdom and compassion in Sudhana that enables him to aid others in their tests to overcome suffering. Sudhana embraces the opportunity to illuminate the proper way of being, as he perceives teaching to be a gift rather than a burden.

Chapter V: The Dance of Fiction and Reality

This chapter explores some of the most philosophically important issues concerning the Bodhisattva ideal. I first approach how Sudhana perceives reality as like a dream. This way of perception teaches the reader that conventional reality is like a relative illusion. Sudhana's penetration of conventional reality as relative illusion aids the readers in modifying their own aesthetic approach with the goal of ceasing their suffering. I further discuss how Un's emphasis on the relativity of the self contributes to this goal. The most important fact of Sudhana's aesthetic approach to existence is that he learns the way of the Bodhisattva ideal in the relative fiction of dreams as well as conventional reality. Thus, most distinctions between reality and fiction become irrelevant for Sudhana as actualizing the Bodhisattva Ideal takes prime importance.

In discussing how the world is like a dream and the benefits of this approach, I invoke the reflections of eminent scholars such as Tenzin Wangyal, Namkhai Norbu, Robert Thurman and Alan Wallace and Stephen LeBerge. I include some writings by LeBerge because he is a psychophysicist specializing in the dream state. His research provides a scientific understanding of consciousness, which aids in the perception of the Bodhisattava ideal. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche and Namkhai Norbu provide an experiential perspective that utilizes simple metaphors to explain esoteric truths. Thurman and Wallace, former Buddhist monks provide a Western perspective on these issues that blend science with Buddhist metaphysics. Wallace's study of the relativity of the self through the science of consciousness provides a foundation in how to perceive the Bodhisattva ideal. Thurman's approach helpfully analyzes complex metaphysical questions and skillfully crafts them to be comprehensive

for a Western audience.

While these scholar-practitioners have varying perspectives, they would all agree that what one experiences in fiction or conventional reality does not exist in an absolute sense. They would posit that it only exists in a relative way, as a passing phenomenon as the dharmas that constitute existence *lies in between* absolute “non-existence” and substantial “existence.” Sudhana experientially recognizes this knowledge as he perceives conventional reality as a form of 'projection' resulting from the fruition (*vipaka*) of karmic seeds played out in a world of temporary constituent forms (*sankharas*) lacking concrete identity (*atta*). These scholar-practitioners as well as Un perceive that sentient beings live in the relative illusion as a test to improve their karma to achieve nirvana. However, because everyone is co-emergently causing the relative illusion by the karma they produce, the world remains entangled in samsara. Therefore, Un created Sudhana as a version of himself since both are motivated to grow in wisdom and compassion to ameliorate the karma of others to actualize the ideal world. Even after Un dies and experiences the intermediate state of Bardo, he believes he will be able to return to the world as a human and renew his Bodhisattva vow to cease the suffering of all sentient beings.

Un’s aesthetic approach melds the qualities of real life with fiction as he perceives them as two sides of the same coin. To reiterate, fiction in the realm of Buddhism is just as relevant as real life since both are valued in their capacity to teach the reception and application of the Bodhisattva ideal. Francisca Cho states, “If life is a brief manifestation and the universe itself a divine expression of the divine play of the gods (as per traditional Indian cosmology), then fiction and life alike are chimeras (symbolic

association between two different subjects) whose primary values are to teach and liberate” (Un 370). Thus, it is irrelevant whether the event has actually occurred if it imparts wisdom. Cleary also alludes how fiction can be just as instructive as reality. He states, “Given that the specific characters of the scripture are ‘fictional,’ the teaching indicates that in order to seek historic reflections of what the characters represent, it would be necessary to avoid being constrained by labels and definitions imposed by external observers” (Cleary 46). Cleary reinforces that one cannot impose one’s own views in a way that confines the pedagogical relevance of fiction. For example, Buddhist scholar Ralph Flores states that recent skeptics “allow that the Buddha did not have the exact experience that is ascribed to him, but at some point formulated it in such a way so as to make it symbolically accessible to others, and a gateway to his teachings” (Flores 49). Consequently, it is valid that relaying Buddha’s message with such specific pedagogical intent would necessitate not telling his narrative exactly as it happened. This point rings true for Sudhana as his entire quest is stylized by Un to impart specific symbolic messages in a precise order.

The notion that Sudhana’s perception of reality is a relative illusion or dream is represented in the major schools of Buddhism. For example, the Dzogchen school considers *perceived reality* as relatively unreal. The very word, Dzogchen, refers to the natural, primordial state in which the relative illusion arises. As esteemed teacher Namkhai Norbu states, "In a real sense, all the visions that we see in our lifetime are like a big dream. In this context, the term 'visions' denotes not only visual perceptions, but appearances perceived through all senses, including sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations, and operations on received mental objects.” Thus, in the words of Dzogchen

scholar Robert Thurman, inference and experience dictates, “the certainty that any sense of absolute anything is only relative, and that anything you can sense at all is only relative. This is to realize the equivalence of voidness and relativity, no longer looking for an absolute void beyond the world, no longer depreciating the relative world as lacking ultimate value” (Thurman 62). Sudhana integrates this certainty into his experience in two ways. He lets his experience affirm absolute voidness and impermanence, knowing that anything he can experience is relative and void of intrinsic identity. In the other respect, he lets absolute voidness affirm his relative experience, since knowing a thing’s voidness makes its relative presence undeniably important. This attitude allows Sudhana to retain his wisdom and lack of suffering and still be compassionate since ameliorating the relative illusion is the hallmark of the Bodhisattva ideal.

The Mind-Only Philosophers of the Yogacara school also validate the notion that Sudhana’s perception of reality is a relative illusion or dream. This school asserts that phenomena are of one entity with the mind that perceives them. When we see a table, the table that we perceive is said to be of the same nature as the mind perceiving it. This view accords with Buddha’s saying in the Dhammapada, ‘mind precedes all phenomena.’ Former Buddhist monk and scholar Alan Wallace affirms this notion in a modern context, stating, “This mind, or substrate consciousness precedes phenomena in the sense that phenomena are conditioned by this substrate as it filters almost all that we perceive. When we awaken, the nightscape dissolves back into the substrate. Photons, sound waves and the like are theoretical entities that we cannot perceive directly. So they exist relative to the systems of measurement by which they are detected and relative to the

minds that conceive them” (Wallace 89). For that reason, one’s dreams, which create continuous environments populated by subjects and objects, arise from this one substrate just like conventional reality. This is the first noted similarity between the ‘fictitious’ dream reality and conventional waking reality.

Furthermore, a physiological similarity between conventional reality and the dream state is that perception when dreaming and when awake – are very similar, with overlapping networks of correlated brain mechanisms. Psychophysicist Stephen LeBerge states, “Dreaming can be viewed as the special case of perception without the constraints of external sensory input. Conversely, perception can be viewed as the special case of dreaming constrained by sensory input” (Wallace 130). The pedagogical relevance of this fact is that both states can potentially be just as clear, just as ‘awake’ to receiving teachings.

Dreams are similar to reality because just as one cannot take objects with them from the dream world, one cannot take anything with one after biological death. The dream of life and regular nightly dreams are not very different in their essential nature. The non-essential difference between the dreaming state and ordinary waking experience is that the latter is more concrete and linked to attachment, while the dreaming in sleep experience is more detached.

The most fundamental similarity between them is “The essence of both waking and dream consciousness which are both forms of awareness, the same awareness through which we *know* – in the broadest and most basic sense – everything we experience. And this awareness can be influenced. It is malleable and subject to conditioning” (Wallace 26). This conditioning makes one prone to be ‘born’ into a

sequence of absentminded thought, which is similar to a dream, which has no identifiable beginning. Each time one enters into this microcosm of samsara, a chain of compulsive, obsessive thinking arises from unawareness and one is prone to mistake one's thoughts for a reality that is independent of one's mind. Thus, fiction and conventional reality are relative as illusion can obscure the Bodhisattva ideal in either setting. Yet one benefits from Sudhana's perceptive example by decreasing the instances that they are bound by afflictive illusion in any conscious interaction.

Un does not trivialize the ramifications of living in conventional reality, but he intends to teach the reader not to overvalue conventional reality either. An old boatman impels Sudhana to remember the lighter side of this dream-like reality, stating, "Even when you wake out of a dream, you're still in a dream. No matter how deep the life of devotion you led, was it anything more than games in a dream?" (Un 359). This statement is meant to offset taking the quest too solemnly and does not negate the power of devotion, just the mindset by which it is accomplished.

Un emphasizes metaphors to further depict the similarity between conventional reality and the dream state. By evidencing, visual, aural, and tactile metaphors, Un pervasively illustrates the similarity between the fiction of dreams and conventional reality. Un prominently utilizes the visual metaphor of 'Reflection' with respect to this similarity. Besides the reflecting diamonds and towers of Indra's Net and Maitreya's tower, Un engages Master Muktaka as having a body that reflected everything unceasingly like a mirror. His 'mirror body' remains pure as he reflects the samsaric formations that temporarily cross his path. Muktaka's mirror body also represents the ephemeral nature of the consciousness experiences. "'Life' and 'death' take place

within the nature of the mind, but it is neither born, nor does it die, just as reflections come and go without creating or destroying the mirror” (Wangyal 190). Sudhana reflects his own being in Mukataka’s mirror-like body. He can hide neither his shames nor victories from the mirror. Both shone equally as manifestations of the mirror’s innate capacity to reflect everything. Furthermore, Mukataka’s clear mirror represents his pure mind, which vividly perceives actual reality, whether in the dream or waking state. Sudhana learns to embody the quality of Mukataka’s mirror as nothing distracts him from maintaining a pure, unstained mind amidst a sea of samsara.

Another visual metaphor Un utilizes is the rainbow. Rainbows are similar to the relative illusion of conventional reality and dreams because they are only a display of light dependent on the perspective of the observer. Yet, these alluring appearances have no substance. They are only a combination of conditions from which a relative illusion arises. The elephant master sings, “I am a rainbow after rain” (Un 57), demonstrating his own ephemeral nature.

Furthermore, Un frequently utilizes the moon as a visual metaphor. The moon is a simile for a dream as it reflects onto numerous surfaces but there is still only one moon. The moon is similar to a mirror as well, as both are one essence yet reflect many objects. Un also includes an oft-used Buddhist saying about the moon: “When you point at the moon you forget the finger that points” (Un 97). This saying is meant to remind one that the moon, the truth in the experience, should not be mistaken for the relative illusion of the words which one uses to point to the meaning of truth.

Un dedicates an entire chapter to the metaphor of the mirage being like a dream. Mirages, like the images of a dream, are empty of substance. Sudhana visits the horrid

city of Taladhvaja where the King orders many executions yet it is only a mirage caused by a hawk (Un 130). Thus, illusive dreams are like mirages, they seem to exist but they are not really of the essence they appear. The philosophical implication of this notion for Sudhana is that he must discern illusion but act virtuously in any circumstance to follow the Bodhisattva ideal.

Un employs the aural metaphor of an echo to demonstrate how the contents of one's dream or reality appear to be independent of one but it is only the projected content of one's mind returning back to one. Like an echo, the sound one hears returned is the sound one made. This point is elicited through Master Prabhava's song which "became a fundamental reverberation; echoes gave birth to echoes that in turn gave birth to further echoes, until the entire cavern became one vast echo, the cavern's own Garland Sutra" (Un 245). This quote also references the interreflection of all phenomena as a single echo subsuming all echoes.

The host of metaphors Un employs illustrates how both dreams and waking states are relative illusion that point to understanding the nature of reality. Sudhana's encounter with the elephant master encapsulates this point better than any philosophizing. Sudhana meets the elephant and falls asleep on his back. He perceives that he wakes up and then has a series of adventures, only to later find himself still on the elephant's back. The elephant had given him the dream, which to Sudhana, seemed to have "really taken twelve years. It wasn't possible. And yet he was sure it had taken him that long" (Un 59). Yet, in only the span of a week, he has one of his most significant experiences when he perceives that he loses his virginity to Hehua and is heartbroken when she dies within the dream. The enlightening elephant gives Sudhana his "first taste of passion" to teach

him there is beauty in the impermanence of life (Un 71). Francisca Cho states, “in Asian fiction, depictions of the ultimate brevity and sorrows of romantic love are rendered in dreams, literalizing the Buddhist observation that the pleasures of this life are as brief as a spring dream. Far from imparting a life-negating message, Un weaves the dream tale into Sudhana’s journey, as part and parcel of it, to suggest that if life is ultimately short-lived like a dream, its passions are nevertheless a part of the path to salvation” (Un 369). Thus, even though Sudhana’s experience was in a dream, his response to his environment demonstrates that learning could be just as important as learning when awake in conventional reality.

Sudhana accomplished further spiritual progress through the dream as he learns how easily his mind mistakes illusion for reality and how the two are not very different. Asha, who is also in the dream, tells Sudhana, “If Hehua was only a dream, the truth you seek is also a dream” (Un 70). This statement delves deeply into the nature of reality as Sudhana thought his perception and feelings for Hehua were real but they were only as transitory as her existence. Myohyang reiterates the ephemeral-nature of reality, stating, “The world comes into being through loss. You have lost the girl ... All things must be lost and you have lost them. You have lost what you had to lose” (Un 121). Therefore, the magical transformations that populate the book, such as Sumera’s gender transformation and the horrific but unreal spectacle of King Anala who is himself an illusory transformation of the enlightened hawk, have the same pedagogical intent. They teach Sudhana to act virtuously in any state of reality, keeping in mind the temporary quality of all experience.

Un’s emphasis on the relativity of the self contributes to achieving the

Bodhisattva ideal. Un portrays Sudhana as having knowledge of the relativity of the self, which helps him discern the relative illusion of reality. Sudhana's way of being does not separate the wholeness of experience but seamlessly merges with it. Since phenomena are traditionally analyzed in two domains: the personal self (the 'inner') and everything else – the outer world, one assumes that one's 'self' and the outside world really exist as independent entities. But the self and the object of experience are not two things. But, if the subjective cannot be found, how can objects remain substantial? The answer to this question is that a subjectivity that cannot find itself cannot indulge in finding objects out of a sense of certainty in itself. Sudhana wisely assesses reality more accurately by dissolving the duality between subjectivity and objectivity.

Sudhana's non-dualistic perspective breaks down the distinction that he intuitively feels, namely, that mind and matter are not two separate, independent entities that interact with each other. Sudhana's meditative equipoise evidences that mind and matter are merely categories, conceived from a flow of experience that is more fundamental than either of these derivative classes of phenomena. The mind-body problem itself is a duality reified by the conceptual mind. Thus, it cannot solve a problem 'it' created. By incorporating bliss into his experience, Sudhana "maintains full awareness without separating the experience into an observing subject and the experience being observed. His "moving mind drops away for a moment and reveals the empty base; integrating that moment with awareness, [he] has the integration of emptiness and bliss" (Wangyal 175).

Sudhana's experience in this respect contradicts the universally accepted notion that the qualities of objects are inherent in the objects themselves. For example, the red

of fire hydrant or the yellow of a raincoat are assumed to be innate qualities of these objects, yet, qualities of external objects are not contained in the objects themselves. Thus, the general assumption of color as an innate feature, both in waking consciousness and in nonlucid dreaming, is a relative illusion. Alan Wallace clarifies this relative illusion, stating, “The molecules that make up material objects do not have color. The photons that strike our retinas are colorless. And the neurons in the visual cortex do not take on the colors that we perceive. The colors we perceive therefore do not exist in physical space – not in the objects, not in the space between our sense organs and those objects, and not in the brain. Colors and all other appearances to our physical senses and to mental perception all arise from the substrate” (Wallace 88). Which is the ‘real’ red fire hydrant then? There is none. Other species’ could perceive the color of the fire hydrant differently. The ‘red’ fire hydrant is a relative illusion based on our perception. Indeed, “From the modern neuroscientific perspective, the same is true for the objects of the other senses” (Wallace 89). Thus, much of what one perceives ‘out there’ in the perceived reality is only an appearance apprehended through the medium of one’s senses. As Wangyal Rinpoche states, “The conceptual mind is incapable of direct perception; it recognizes things only through projected mental images and language through which is itself inferential” (Wangyal 195). This does not imply that direct sensory experience is itself the nature of the mind. Even with very raw perception we tend to be subtly identified with a perceiving subject, and the experience remains dualistic. By ceasing even this subtle identification with a perceived subject, Sudhana purifies his being to perceive reality without the false impressions and dualisms created by the ego.

Identification with the ego is a key factor in determining suffering. One can deceive oneself by transforming their life into a more palatable fiction that ignores reality, but sooner or later such a way of life produces suffering. Not identifying with the ego causes Sudhana to have an expansive feeling of equanimity towards others. However, since Sudhana still has a relative self, he is forced to contend with the question “What essence is there to be reincarnated if there is no self?” Un does not pose this question explicitly yet Sudhana displays knowledge of transcending his ego. The question itself is very important to one’s aesthetic approach because it defines the perspective of the approach. Since Buddha taught that the psychological habit of assuming a fixed subjectivity and an unchanging identity is an impediment to awakening, the perspective of the relative self is problematic. But as Robert Thurman contends, “Buddha never rejected the relative presence of a living self, he insists on the self’s reality, vulnerability, responsibility, and evolutionary potential” (Thurman 16). Yet, there is still the fact that when one looks for an absolutely real, independent, freestanding personal self, there is none to be found. “If you point to your body, well that is designated ‘body,’ not ‘self.’ We usually think of ourselves as more than our body, so we may say that either the self is *in the body* or the self is the *owner* of the body. But if the self is in the body, just where in the body is it?” (Wallace 82). Wallace continues this line of thought with a counter to his argument, stating, “One might retort by saying that this is a simplistic view of the self and that we really exist as something more complex and sophisticated – some kind of pattern or collection of body parts and neuronally produced thoughts, memories, and emotions. But by asserting this idea, one returns to the Buddhist notion of interdependence. Prior causes and conditions contributed to the

creation of one's body; the components and attributes of mind and body (thoughts, emotions, and physical activities) provide the collection that is the basic designation of the self who possesses these components and attributes – *my* thoughts and opinions, *my* body, and so forth. The 'me' of 'my body' is mere designation – a label” (Wallace 82).

Buddhist psychology provides a more in-depth look on the subject of self. The Psyche is the most superficial level of consciousness. The psyche “comprises the five physical senses along with conscious and unconscious mental phenomena – thoughts, feelings, sensations and so forth. This is the ordinary, conditioned mind. The psyche emanates from a deeper, intermediate level, the substrate consciousness. This is described as a subtle mind stream containing latent habits, tendencies and attitudes tracing back to previous lifetimes. It is different from the subconscious of Freud and the collective consciousness of Jung. The substrate consciousness is like a sub-subconscious as it is prior and more basic to the subconscious. Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche aptly describes the substrate consciousness as “similar to a computer chip, where previous inputs constantly modify the present and condition the future operation of the computer. Just as the software and the hardware of a computer constantly interact with and influence each other, so do the substrate consciousness and its emergent psyche causally interact with each other throughout the course of a lifetime” (Wangyal 71). One is hindered by ignorance of the substrate consciousness since understanding it reveals the inner terrain that must be transformed during the process of spiritual maturation.

Although the substrate consciousness is unique to the individual, it is the basis for future reincarnations. The mental stream of the substrate begins to become configured at conception and is then modified by the thinking, emotions, behavior, and the experiences.

The accumulated behaviors are imprinted into the substrate consciousness positively or negatively depending on the wholesomeness of karmic actions. The nature and quality of our lives in the future are determined through an evolutionary momentum as the karma of one's actions and thoughts form new causal impulses. Hence, it is not the individual that reincarnates but successive expressions of an individual continuum of a substrate consciousness. Thurman expresses this sentiment thusly, stating, "A subtle, mental level of life carries patterns developed in one life into the succeeding ones. This is the basis of reincarnation ... Buddhism always taught a soul as what reincarnates, as a selfless continuum of relative, changing causally engaged awareness" (Thurman 27,41). Therefore, we are embedded in a samsaric entanglement, a complex conglomeration of mutual substrates. Wallace delineates this reality by tracing the logical consequences of there not being a Universe without consciousness. He states:

"There is no such thing as information without the presence of a conscious agent who is informed and without the presence of something about which that agent is informed. Likewise, there is no informed subject without the presence of information, and there is nothing about which one is informed if there is not the act of being informed and someone who is informed. The three – the informed subject, the imparting of information, and the object about which one is informed – are all mutually interdependent. So from one perspective, it is the observer who gives rise to observers; and from another perspective it is the observer who gives rise to the information, from which matter is conceived. That, in short, is Wheeler's 'strange loop,' in which we humans are observer-participants who co-create the world of our experience, while uncritically assuming that it already

exists out there, independent of our participation. Our waking reality is therefore like a nonlucid dream, from which we awake only when we recognize the extent of our participation in the creation of the world we experience (Wallace 143).

The deepest and most fundamental layer of consciousness is the *primordial consciousness*, which encompasses both the psyche, and the substrate consciousness. It is “an ultimate level of pure wisdom where the ‘inner’ (mind) and ‘outer’ (phenomenal world) are nondual” (Wallace xii). Sudhana seeks to experientially realize this primordial consciousness, which is synonymous with Dharmakaya and the ultimate goal of Buddhism itself – nirvana. Wallace states, “Primordial consciousness transcends all concepts, including those of subject and object, existence and nonexistence. It is timeless and ‘unborn’ into the relative universe we conceive of as ‘existence.’ It is the source of virtue such as compassion, creativity, and wisdom, which emanate from it spontaneously” (Wallace 72). Un’s prose depict Sudhana as having authentic experiential insight into primordial awareness so the reader knows Sudhana is not mistaking a relationship with the conceptualization of primordial awareness for the real ineffable thing.

The koan is a paradoxical anecdote or riddle used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning and to provoke experience of the primordial consciousness. It is a very proficient tool to startle one’s mind, opening all of one’s senses when one has not yet identified oneself as the experiencer of the experience. This non-dual experience is the unborn mind that when hearing a dog bark from far away, recognizes the sound immediately, without having to think about it. Hearing a koan is intended to shock one’s mind into a kind of unconscious stillness for a moment, to

divorce the mind from the normal pattern of chaotic thought it identifies itself as being. Sudhana does not explicitly receive a koan from a master but they are interwoven subtly through the novel. For example, an ancient boatman tells Sudhana, “Once I’m reborn in the next world, I’ll be younger than you, won’t I?” (Un 145). Sudhana immediately responds that in that case, the river is as old as both of them. This non-logical response provides the philosophical backing for Sudhana’s aesthetic approach by signifying how reality should be perceived despite the linear chronology perspective embedded in the Western thought. Sudhana is able to answer this koan as he has disidentified his thoughts, which are inherently not him, from his fluid identity which is detached from the grasping that causes Dukkha. This is not to say Sudhana does not have thoughts, but it is a sign of awakening to have less thoughts as it signifies that one is no longer fixated in patterns of compulsive thought.

These three levels of the consciousness: psyche, subconscious and primordial are pertinent to Sudhana’s perception of reality as like a dream in many respects. With regard to his psyche, Un depicts Sudhana as learning a healthy mistrust of his senses and arising mental phenomena. Because his psyche is liable to be deceived by illusion, the youth views all experience as an opportunity for mindfulness, not just the times when he is learning from his masters. Furthermore, Sudhana is well acquainted with his substrate consciousness because he has transformed it to reflect the primordial consciousness.

These three levels of the consciousness also relate to Sudhana’s fulfillment of the Bodhisattva ideal since Sudhana recognizes how others are constructing their consciousnesses in a way conducive to suffering. For example, he perceives how people attached to the thoughts produced by the psyche reify a self that causes suffering. He

also observes how most people do not go questing to understand the Bodhisattva ideal. Their substrate consciousnesses usually remain unexplored and they are hindered by their own negligence of spiritual exploration. They have little chance of experientially knowing the primordial consciousness in this state of being.

Therefore, Sudhana sympathizes with the anguish of those who perceive phenomena as inherently existing. This perspective causes the dualistic world they perceive, leading to reactions to the illusory projections of their minds colored by grasping and aversion. The delusive reactive grasping of this view, based on the ignorance of the impermanent nature of things, is the fuel of the samsaric world. This view's dualism falsely designates the subject "I" to be affected by physical and mental objects like anger. But, in absolute reality, there is no separate entity that can identify with anger as the anger is only a reflection of the mind. When the illusory empty nature is penetrated, anger abates. "The three poisons (of which anger is one) have no objective basis but are only a reflection of the mind, like a dream, these knots loosen and are no longer binding" when their true nature is penetrated (Wangyal 55). Sudhana transcends the dream-like illusions by penetrating their true nature, stating, "My world of experience is the scaffold where illusions are put to death" (Un 130). By heeding his master's teaching that everything is relatively unreal, Sudhana helps others to diminish their attachments and suffering. He rescues them from the fictitious dream they mistook for reality and helped them achieve a way of being that comprehends reality without the blinders of illusion.

In order to most efficiently apply his bodhisattva practice, Sudhana locks in the ambition to artfully re-envision himself as a perfect master of the cosmic situation. Like

the Goddess Maya who is enabled “to fashion things as if by magic, bringing into being in the world things that did not exist,” Sudhana acts like a virtuous child in a karmic playground to ensure the joy of others by the source and wisdom of his bodhisattva being (Un 289). He realizes that how one “views the phenomena of experience determines the kind of experience one has and how one reacts to experience” (Wangyal 55). Since he has detached from samsara and pacified his inner-world, he has the freedom to better direct his trajectory through the external world in his mission to help others. These others create their own story, its projections and the emotions that swirl around them due to their attachment to the illusion of samsara. Sudhana proves that he is not imagining his view of the world, simply that he is viewing it more purely than others because he perceives its true unobscured nature. For instance, Un emphasizes this point when Sudhana encounters a subterranean paradisiacal realm and perceives everyone as extremely beautiful. The people tell him that they would have appeared as “blood-soaked phantoms” had he not been pure of heart (Un 131). Like a jeweled node on Indra’s net that reflects and contains every other node, this anecdote is the ideal representation of how Un utilizes Sudhana as pedagogical vehicle in his aesthetic approach.

Un challenges us to see as Sudhana does, not naively, but with the piercing penetration of profound insight. Sudhana teaches us that the dream-like nature of reality is in large part what one’s mind creates it, so one must have wisdom and compassion to view reality as it is, without defilements (despite the transitory defilements of samsara). This revelation is based on knowing that when one believes that something is actually there, then it is, since it then has the power to affect one. For example, most people create distressful situations and as a result are not able to determine if they are true

hardships or fabricated anxieties. The question of whether this thing is really ‘there’ or not becomes secondary to whether one’s illusory sense of self is causing the suffering to occur unnecessarily. Sudhana realizes the dream-like nature of reality when he thinks, “even reality had turned into a new dream ... This world had become a dream world while the world he had dreamed about had changed into reality” (Un 189).

Consequently, he wills the pure world of his mind into whatever he experiences, whether it is a slept dream or reality. He does not try to overpower and force his perception of reality onto others. He merely exposes the reality that others construct to be mostly fictitious if they are afflicted by suffering. For example, he convinces the wealthy Ajitasena to renounce all his riches and grasping behavior.

If Sudhana was not fictitious, he would certainly take to heart the message of Alan Wallace’s book, “Dreaming yourself awake” since he endeavors to transform the world into the perfect dream where no one suffers. While this reality seems like an extremely fictitious possibility, Un is teaching us to envision and create such a world despite the odds. Un calls us to exemplify Sudhana by applying the Bodhisattva ideal continuously, yearning for “each living creature to advance towards bodhisattva truth. That yearning is no illusion or fantasy, no mere night’s dream. Or if it is a dream, it is the dream of every living creature” (Un 325). This quote encapsulates Un’s aesthetic approach as it dissolves the dualism between the fiction of dreaming and conventional reality.

The vast extent of Un’s exotic landscapes cause Sudhana to not be able to “distinguish whether the places he was passing through were real or imaginary” as his experience was so fantastical (Un 287). Yet, because he is purely oriented to help others,

it does not matter whether it was fiction or conventional reality. He purifies himself through action in either one. Thus, Un shows the reader how viewing dreams as a metaphor for reality can alleviate the stresses one is inculcated to carry in the mundane world. While the world of suffering is daunting, Sudhana's realization is powerful enough that when thinking of the world, he utters, 'How can anything be this wonderful? ... Can there really be days dark with the outgrowths of hell, full of the suffering of all living beings?' (Un 217). It is this buoyant spirit that perceives the conventional reality as like a dream that propels him to live the challenging life of a bodhisattva. In conclusion, the dance of fiction and reality are two-sides of the same coin that instructs the reader on perfecting the Bhodhisattva ideal.

Chapter VI: Politics & Ethics of the Bodhisattva Ideal

The hallmark of Un's aesthetic approach is that Sudhana's behavior is spontaneously virtuous. Since he has radically reoriented his behavior to be devoid of desire, he is able to overcome the three poisons of ignorance, attachment and aversion. He accepts any experience no matter how unfortunate or severe. His mind utilizes skillful means to allow the body to defy his own limits and become absent of aversions. He demonstrates his mind-over-body power when he throws himself into the flames of the valley of fire to meet Jayoshmayatana. One notable example of how Sudhana subdues attachment is when Gopa expounds the ten laws of the dharma to him. Yet, he tells her that he does not want to hear them because that will only make him attached to the power of the laws. As for his ethical response to ignorance, his entire quest is based on the removal of ignorance that leads him to dedicate his life to saving sentient beings. The ethicality of his actions can be characterized by the Taoist notion of Wu Wei, or 'effortless action.' He has harmonized his way with nature, becoming one with the Tao in a completely natural uncontrived way. He is able to act suitably in any situation without any question due to the purity of his motives. Like a crystal, he simply radiates light, he does not need to produce it. The ethics of Sudhana are condensed in the ten laws he gives to Muktasara which is a version combining the other two sets of ten laws told to him by Gopa and Shilpabhijna. The latter tells him that "Bodhisattva living is not an end to studies; Bodhisattva living is the reason for studying, affirming the ethical foundation of the Bodhisattva ideal (Un 301).

Sudhana's ten laws are:

“never refrain from good knowledge

never to forget the thought of seeing the Buddha

never to neglect to go in search of the good knowledge of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas

never to neglect to serve and venerate them

never to turn away from those who preach knowledge of the good without much learning and wisdom

never to refrain from listening to the ways of perfection

never to refrain from listening to teaching concerning the practice of enlightenment

never abandon the three gateways of liberation

never to refrain from the four laws where Brahma-deva dwells

never to refrain from the essence of all wisdom” (Un 316).

Beyond that, ethical conduct prevents the accumulation of negative karma, which would impede the individual's quest for enlightenment. Ethical conduct is also one of the guarantors of the kind of tranquil mind required for advanced Buddhist practice.

Buddhism has numerous guidelines for ethical conduct. One is the Ten Non-virtues, a list of behaviors to be avoided. They are the non-virtues of the body: 1) killing, 2) stealing, 3) sexual misconduct (generally meaning sexual misconduct that brings suffering to others); the non-virtues of speech: (4) lying, (5) harsh speech, (6) slander, (7) idle chatter; and the non-virtues of mind: (8) wishing harm, (9) coveting, and (10) wrong views (i.e. views not in harmony with reality). Sudhana also heeds the four immeasurable virtues that comprise a list of positive aspirations for the well being of all sentient beings. Sudhana cultivates these aspirations with the greatest sincerity. They are: (1) ‘May all

sentient beings have happiness and its causes,' (2) 'May all sentient beings be free from suffering and its causes,' (3) 'May all sentient beings attain the wholesome attitude of rejoicing in the happiness and virtues of all sentient beings' and (4) 'May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of attachment and aversion.' Additionally, the Six Perfections comprise a list of virtuous activities directly related to advancement on the spiritual path. One is encouraged to practice: (1) generosity, (2) ethical discipline, (3) patience, (4) enthusiasm, (5) meditation, and (6) wisdom. These ethics capture the central concerns of Sudhana as a soteriological paradigm. Since the universal potential presently exists everywhere for enlightening or awakening, Sudhana must strive to strengthen the bonds of wholeness interpenetrating the immense reality of his world.

As a pedagogical vehicle, Un invokes supernatural aspects as part and parcel of his Buddhist epic. However, this focus does not negate his awareness of political situations that negatively affect people in the mundane world. Ethics cannot help but meld into political concerns when Un develops social themes, such as the disparity of wealth between the rich and poor, charity, the need for a just government and the need to overthrow dictatorships midway through the novel. Sudhana even equates the political path to the Bodhisattava path, stating, "Buddha living must involve not just spiritual preaching about helping people, but advancing along a political path, the bodhisattva path, where you were supplied with the strength it took to redress reality" (Un 259). Un places the brunt of his social criticism on the caste system at the time of the historical Buddha who challenged the caste system while India's divided states were at war. East Asian Studies Scholar Francisca Cho states, "The work refers to the Buddhist reaction to the caste-system and at times suggests a Buddhist utopian society" (Un 373). Sudhana

states, “The truth about equality that Shakyamuni taught was intended to do away with the system” (Un 305). A boatman tells him, “If the four castes of the *Kshatriya*, *Brahman*, *vaysya* and *sudra* come together, according to the sacred teachings and commandments; all four main castes and the innumerable subsidiary castes will vanish; the Buddha’s world alone will remain and flourish” (Un 198). Sudhana was so touched by these words that he began to sob and kept weeping for a long time. The novel demonstrates that living with the system is an ever-present reality for Sudhana on his journey. “The low-caste people couldn’t keep their heads held high as processions of strongly-built Brahman priests passed by, but once the Brahmans had passed, members of the lower castes took the same road with heads raised boldly” (Un 209). Furthermore, Samantagambhirashrivimala-prabha tells Sudhana, “By my darkness, I abolish from every last corner of this world the difference between high or low, noble and base. There is no more rich and poor ... If a Bodhisattva chooses its enlightening position and sees it as something high and noble that all ordinary creatures should look up to, that is not bodhisattva living at all” (Un 211). This point presents that even a bodhisattva is bound to the same equality of all sentient beings. The night spirit Jahshri particularly extols the virtues of political and social equality to Sudhana, stating that emancipation is love. Jashri states that during his ten years as a slave, he “came to see clearly how wrong is this world’s system of wealth and honor. I met many poor people who endured countless torments so that the rich and powerful could flourish” (Un 227).

On this same theme of social justice, Sudhana meets a boatman who is also a political activist that works for a Robin Hood-like chieftain that cares for the people. The boatman states, “This is still part of the chief’s territory. Only nowadays the boss doesn’t

purloin things, unless they belong to the rich, or government officials; he only confiscates regular tributes or stolen goods being transported out of weak countries by more powerful ones” (Un 270). The reference to confiscating ‘tributes’ or stolen goods being transported out of weak countries by more powerful ones is a critique of neo-colonialism as the more developed countries profited over the less developed. Un implies that it is the unethical nature of Dependence Theory in which a periphery of poor and underdeveloped states enrich wealthy nations, causing the former to remain underdeveloped. The contention is that raw goods from poorer states are sold cheaply to the richer states that then process them into products and services unavailable to the poorer states, reinforcing a division of labor that keeps poor states weaker members of the global market economy. Near the end of the novel, Sudhana rights some economic inequality when he convinces the goldsmith Muktasara to renounce his ways and join a monastery and persuades the wealthy Ajitasena to donate his riches and redistribute them to the poor. Un’s Buddhist utopia is presented in a lavish town where there is no king, as every citizen had been a ruler in a past life. One of the people on the street tell him, “When no one is higher or lower, when we are all close, when all are equal in solidarity, then all are closely united side by side” (Un 136). But Un unfortunately notes that, “the ambitions of living things always struggle upwards, while those who have taken the upper places try to keep control over the others in order to preserve their superior position” (Un 136). The latter scenario is a central problem in every nation and it leads Sudhana to exclaim, “Governing upper and the governed lower class has to be abolished” (Un 136). While Un’s utopia is a far cry from reality, it provides an idealistic blueprint for a society that heeds Buddha’s principles for salvation.

Conclusion:

Sudhana began his pilgrimage by journeying south, the direction which represents truth, clarity and openness (Cleary 1567). He ends his quest by traveling north, symbolizing that he has accomplished everything he has intended to realize in the south. In both cases, he heads in the opposite direction of Siddhartha, the historical Buddha. Sudhana is so compassionate that he sacrifices meeting Siddhartha in order to aid those that the Buddha cannot be near. By analyzing Un's own aesthetic quest to represent Sudhana as the Bodhisattva ideal, I have shown how his novel distills profound truths in a creative fashion. It is Un's imaginatory capacity that naturally carves the chapters of my thesis, from aesthetics and pedagogical intent, to the coalescing of fiction and reality and ethics and politics.

Un's novel may seem tedious to a non-Buddhist, but to a budding one like myself, it was a logical choice to delve into as it contained all the major facets of one of Buddhism's most crucial sutras, the *Avatamsaka*. Re-reading the novel multiple times was necessary precisely because it did not spell out the Buddhist philosophy explicitly. Rather, Un challenged me to put myself in Sudhana's place and viscerally feel his experiential insight that does not lend itself to abstract explanation as detailed in the *Gandavyuha*. Un embraces the emptiness that is the existential world to demonstrate that it engenders an interconnecting that is the basis for compassion and the Bodhisattva ideal. In the stillness of meditation, love for sentient being arises. Un teaches us all a profound lesson that enables us to accept the relative illusoriness of the world and reside in the absolute reality and its liberating capacity from all unsatisfactoriness.

Readers are likely to harbor ambivalence and be suspicious of the shining promises of relief from suffering and nirvana, but a careful reading of the novel has assuaged my own doubts. The instruction found in *The Little Pilgrim* lightens this burden of suspicion and allows these promises to bloom, as one trusts the teachings despite not fully fathoming or grasping them in any intellectual way.

Sudhana's positively nonchalant attitude at the novel's end reflects his satisfaction with endless circling of his quest. Samsara and nirvana are merely abstractions he need not bother with. His freedom from desire causes him to state, "In this world, my only wealth is my body so I can travel in quest for truth. All I desire is the day when, by these treasures, all the world's poverty, evil, and discord will be changed into wealth, perfume and song" (Un 201). He is not attached to his body, but recognizes it as his greatest source of wealth as it enables him to be compassionate and cultivate wisdom. His happy lifestyle demonstrates that true wealth is the absence of wealth. His aesthetic approach demands nothing yet embraces everything for the best.

The fact that Un is able to construct the ideal world of *The Little Pilgrim* after so much personal suffering encapsulates the triumph of his own path to Bodhisattvahood. After years of survivor's guilt, suicidal thoughts and torture at the hand of his own government, Un was able to release his anger and frustration through forgiveness and wisdom. His courage to create such an innocent and loving character as Sudhana is a testament to the purity of his imagination. He forged a universe within a novel that helps countless people shape their aesthetic approach to reflect a freedom from suffering.

Sudhana is in the world but not of it, easily holding the tension between forgetting himself in worldly affairs and his transcendent essence. He lives with the knowledge that

freedom and bondage are intimately linked. Since he has freed his being, he has no desire to escape anything, having abandoned himself to the ceaseless motion of samsara. He does not fight the wheel but turns it with the skill of a bodhisattva. He contributes to the positive motion of the whole universal process of profound spiritual growth. May we all hold Ko Un's little pilgrim in our hearts and embody his aesthetic approach to existence!

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Appendix 2: Plot Summary

To better contextualize how Un's narrative invokes Sudhana as the Bodhisattva ideal, the following brief plot summary of "*The Little Pilgrim*" is offered.

Chapters 1-15

The Little Pilgrim begins with the mythical Manjushri, the most significant Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna literature, rescuing the nine-year-old Sudhana from drowning in a river. Sudhana's nurse had bound him to a raft and sent him down the Son River, a tributary of the Ganges. Manjushri has a vision of Sudhana's family's mansion in ruins as a result of pillaging by King Virudhaka in his effort to conquer the Shakya clan. It is implicit that Sudhana was abandoned in an effort to save his life. The inclusion of this historic warfare places the chronology of Sudhana's story at 2,500 years ago, as the Shakya clan lost their kingdom in Kapilavastu after the Buddha passed away at approximately this time. Manjushri tells Sudhana, "I'll tell you the way you must go," stating that a Sal tree branch points the way Sudhana must travel. Then, he leaves him with the promise that they will meet again. On the road, a palm tree tells Sudhana to visit a camel trainer's house at Ajay Ferry. At the camel trainer's house, he meets the trainer's daughter Iryon, weeping for her recently deceased father. After helping Iryon to cremate her father, she tells him that her father's last message for Sudhana was, "If you want to find the Truth, first you must meet the monk Meghashri in Sugriva Mountain." This instruction definitively eventuates Sudhana's quest for Truth through visitation of multiple masters. Iryon attempts to lure Sudhana to stay with her instead of seeking the monk, but Sudhana does not give into the temptation and departs from her. After finding Meghashri, Sudhana is frustrated that the master will not teach him and only sits plunged

all day in deep meditation. Yet without being taught, Sudhana learned many things from emulating the silent monk. Meghashri sends Sudhana onward to the desert city of Sagaramukha to meet with the old drunkard, Sagaramegha. Sudhana hitches a ride on a boat with some kindly sailors that take him to the city's harbor. He walks to Sagaramegha's house but the sage is not to be found. Finally, Sudhana walks a few more miles and stumbles upon a bump in the sand. He digs down and unearths the drunken Sagaramegha. They trek onwards and the sage gives Sudhana wine from his bottle, paradoxically espousing that drinking is folly yet equating it to the Buddha's Enlightenment. He goes on to say that everyone has the perfect nature of a Buddha. As Sagaramegha lay dying, he instructs Sudhana to seek a humble man named Supratishthita. Sudhana walks nine days until joining with a camel caravan that takes him to the seaside town of Kina. Sudhana happens upon Supratishthita with his retinue returning to Earth after a walk through the heavens. Sudhana stays with the young novice monks at Supratishthita's monastery. The wisest novice, Amidahwa leads Sudhana to a secret underground lake, whereupon Supratishthita appears and teaches them a lesson about not being attached to the beauty of the lake before instructing Sudhana to seek the healer Megha in Vajrapura. On the path by the lakeshore, Sudhana stumbles across a diseased girl named Seiya. The two journey to Megha's hospital where it is revealed that Seiya is Megha's daughter who had died five years ago. Megha delivers a sermon, rejoicing that Sudhana brings Seiya back to him and sends him southward to Vanavasin to meet the great man Mutaka. On the way to his next destination, Sudhana secures a ride from a wise elephant but cannot remember when he departs from his companion. The next thing he knows, he arrives where Master Mutaka lives, but the wily old man

insists that he has nothing to teach Sudhana. Mutaka poetically espouses how life is like a dream, then assigns Sudhana to meet Saradhvaja in Milaspharana. This master also says he knows no truth and calls Sudhana a dolt for searching for it. He then tells Sudhana to seek his wife Hehua. Sudhana eschews the rules he has been living by and falls in love. They then lose their virginity to each other. The next day, Hehua slips over the edge of a cliff and perishes. Sudhana beats himself until he goes unconscious out of despair. He awakes to find himself in a bed, saved by a servant of Asha, Heshua's friend. They platonically sleep together, yet when Sudhana wakes, he is astounded to discover he is still on the back of the elephant. Everything since his meeting with Mutaka, a period that seemed to last twelve years, had been a dream the elephant had given him! The elephant leaves him for good after Sudhana wakes up. Then he joins some peddlers on their way to see the clairvoyant Bishmottaranir-gosha. The sage tells Sudhana to empty his heart of evil and fill it with an eternal resonant voice. He instructs Sudhana to meet the Brahman Jayoshmayatana in the land of Ishana. Sudhana sees Jayoshmayatana throwing himself on the rocks and swords in the valley of fire for penance. Sudhana doubts him but then realizes him to be holy. So, he hurls himself into the flames to meet him and is miraculously unscathed. Before jumping into the flames for the final time, the sage bids Sudhana to visit the Maiden Maitrayani. Sudhana finds her attendants through the fog, and they lead him to Maitrayani who performs a dance for the repose of the souls of the dead. She then ushers him on to the monk Sudarshana in the land of Trinayana.

Chapters 16-30

Sudhana crosses a desert to reach Trinayana and collapses by the edge of the town. A forager carries him to an inn where he learns of the location of Sudarshana who

is a farmer up in the mountain. Sudarashana tells Sudhana that like farming, his teaching cannot be taught within a day or two and requires time to be cultivated. Sudhana helps Sudarashana farm which yields an appreciation of mindfulness through mundane chores. Sudarashana sends Sudhana to a child, Indriyeshvara, who welcomes him by telling him they were friends in a past life. They go witness an all night dance that leaves the participants dead yet their spirits go to a Pure Land heaven. Indriyeshvara tells Sudhana to travel to the city known as Samudrapratishhana on the Aso River. Sudhana walks to the largest house in town, intuitively feeling that Lady Prabhuta is his next master. She welcomes him to her mansion, giving him an empty bowl. She tells him that anything he wishes will manifest inside the bowl, yet it remains empty as Sudhana has conquered desire. She then instructs him to seek a beggar named Vidvan. Sudhana finds him beneath a tree on his path. Vidvan tells him that he has met the Buddha Siddhartha who had told him that to enjoy a Bhodhisattva's bliss, one must experience one kind of suffering in his or her own body. So, the Buddha gave Vidvan leprosy after he built a wing of a monastery for the Buddha. Vidvan sends him south, but gives him his leprosy to teach Sudhana to affirm the world of suffering before he casts it off. Sudhana eventually rids himself of the disease when he passes by an oleander branch that offers to bear the burden of his leprosy. Next, he reencounters Iryon who is an attendant for the dying master Ratnachuda. His dying request is for the two of them to recover songs buried near a pine grove by the sea. They unearth a bell that plays songs for them and all the sounds manifest flowers. After giving the bell to the people of Ratnachuda's kingdom, the two set off and are forced to take shelter from a storm in a small cave. Sudhana then actually loses his virginity to Iryon in a burst of passion. They journey to

the town of Samantamukha and a kindly storekeeper's wife lets Iryon stay with her for ten months to ease her pregnancy. Sudhana now regards himself as Iryon's husband, but is compelled to continue his quest. He stops at a nearby tavern and meets an elderly man who leads him up Mt. Samantanetra to meet his brother, Myohyang. When Sudhana finds the hermit, he asks him how he can attain enlightenment. Myohyang responds that in every place a Bhodhisattva is sacrificing its life for the sake of all living beings. After a few months, Sudhana departs down the mountain to find the storekeeper's wife. She tells him that his baby died yesterday and the mother left town after scattering the ashes. Sudhana proceeds onward with a hawk to Taladhvaja where he happens upon some nomads who tell him of a murderous king in the city. Sudhana seeks King Anala at the execution grounds and tries to convince him to stop his evil ways. Yet, the king reveals himself as having been the hawk Sudhana had been traveling with. The Hawk tells him the entire city and its inhabitants had been an illusion to demonstrate the ephemeral nature of existence. Sudhana walks all night long until he reaches the subterranean kingdom of Suprabha, a paradisiacal realm where all the people live without strife. The people's king, Mahaprabha, greets Sudhana and tells him that all things existing turn into dance. Sudhana stays and dances for a long time until a woman tells him to head for Sthira city to visit her sister, a devotee. Sudhana then has a dream where the devotee appears and tells him that the desire that gives rise to evil passions is at the same time the source of paradise. He awakens and hastens onward through the city of Tosala, a city renowned for its unorthodox ascetics who could appear as a single person, four people or an entire crowd. When the ascetics meet Sudhana, they tell him that the very motion of the whole universe is a process of profound spiritual growth. They urge him to visit

Utpalabhuti in the land of Parthurashtra. Utpalabhuti sings to him on the path and bestows upon him a perfume, thanking him for teaching her through his pure action. She advises Sudhana to find Jayottama on the Vasita River. Sudhana then encounters a ferryman named Vaira who instructs him as he takes him closer to his next destination. On the bank where Vaira leaves him, Sudhana meets Sumera, who is the niece of King Jayottama. She secures Sudhana an audience with the king but Sudhana sleeps and dreams before his meeting that he is still traveling to see the King. He imagines a wanderer calling himself the old sleeper of Nandihara who discourses on the non-dual nature of reality. Sudhana awakens and hears Jayottama sermon before leaving with Sumera who suggests visiting the nun Sinhavijurm in the Kalingavana forest. Sumera uses a magic spell to transform herself into a boy and then refers to himself as Sansuita. However, even though he transforms himself in order to travel with Sudhana without desire, his use of magic causes him to perish. Sudhana then walks with a tramp to a ferry and the ferryman chastises the tramp that wants to go his own way for wasting the opportunity of traveling with Sudhana. At Sunlight Park, Sudhana meets the nun Sinhavijurm who is able to multiply her body a multitude of times to be with each individual who has come to visit her. Sudhana subsequently encounters a boy there named Vasumitra who accompanies him to the city of Ratnavyuha.

Chapters 30-45

Sudhana parts from Vasumitra then achieves the state of Samadhi, the state of complete concentration and mental absorption. Next, he heeds Vasumitra's call to seek the hermit Veshthila in the region of Shubha-paramgama. Veshthila tells Sudhana that he sees the Buddha everywhere even where he goes to the bathroom, undoing the duality of

separating sacred and profane space. Veshthila proceeds to send Sudhana to Avalokiteshvara at Mount Potalaka. Avalokiteshvara tells him that a bodhisattva's joy is also his sorrow, which is the nature of compassion. Then, the Bodhisattva Ananyagamin descends from sky and proclaims that Sudhana has learned all there is to learn yet he sends him on to Mahadeva, the Lord of Heaven. Mahadeva advises Sudhana to be vigilant and behooves him to travel to Magadha to meet Sthavara, the leader of the earth spirits who was even larger than the giant Mahadeva. The goddess offers Sudhana the jewels of truth produced by him from past incarnations yet he refuses them, as he believes they belong to all living creatures. Sthavara dispatches him to Vasanti, goddess of the night in the region of Kapilavastu. Vasanti tells him that she is the cause of all the phenomena in the cosmos and the cosmos is the cause of her. She sends Sudhana to her master, Samantagambhirashrivimala-prabha, the god of darkness and night. He expounds to Sudhana the humble nature of the Bodhisattva. He spurs Sudhana to visit the Bodhisattva Pramudita-nayanaagad-virocana, who shows Sudhana a representation of all the heavenly realms, which manifest out of her pores. Thereafter, Sudhana happens upon the night spirit Jahshri who extols the virtues of political and social equality, stating that emancipation is love. This goddess forwards Sudhana on to meet the goddess of darkness and night, Prashantaruta-sagaravati. Sudhana first stumbles upon Sanantha who is the son of Devadhata who attempted to murder the Buddha. Sanantha takes him to Prashantaruta who tells him that he need not have left his home to find truth. Afterward, the master tells him to go see Prabhava-ta. This spirit has nothing new to teach him yet his delivery of the teachings invigorates Sudhana with a new passion for the Dharma. Prabhava-ta directs Sudhana to the spirit Anrak who states that Sudhana is his teacher and

whisks him off to his friend Prabha. This spirit exhales an image of the whole natural world and shows Sudhana a vision of the ten-directioned universe. Upon seeing these images, Sudhana has ten different kinds of mind arise at once, the first of which thinks that Prabha was Sudhana himself and the second thinks that Prabha was thinking of himself as Sudhana. In the ensuing day, Sudhana follows a flock of birds to the Godavari River and begs a lift down the river on a raft. At the port of Masulli in the region of Amarabathi, he meets the beautiful woman Mani for the second time and she takes him out for a fine meal. Later, Sudhana boards a merchant ship bound for Bijaga. On the way, he dreams of the Goddess Sutejo-mandala-ratishri of the Lumbini grove. She divulges the story of Siddhartha's birth in Lumbini and how all creatures rejoiced. Sudhana furthers his quest by joining with Jihol the merchant and they go down the Ganjes on a boat rowed by a wise old bandit. The two part on the shores of Bodh Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. At this most sacred site for followers of Buddha, Sudhana meets the youth Suthei who tends to him when he gets sick. Sudhana remembers that Sutejo-mandala-ratishri told him to meet Gopa, the daughter of Mani, so he continues on to the northern frontiers of Mala.

Chapter 46-57

Sudhana meets Gopa who expounds ten laws of the dharma to him. But he tells her that he cannot abide by them because that will only make him get lost in the details and become attached to the power of the laws. Further on, Maya, mother of all Buddhas guides Sudhana and he is unable to determine whether the places he passes through are real or imaginary. Maya recalls all the Buddhas she has birthed to Sudhana and bids him to see Indra's daughter Surendrabha in Indra heaven. Sudhana briefly transforms into a

bird to reach Surendrabha in Indra heaven at the top of Mt. Sumeru. Surendrabha tells him to make the precepts a part of himself then charges him to meet the child Vishwamitra. This boy is an insulting rascal yet Sudhana perceives him as just as valuable a teacher as the others. Vishwamitra tells him to go get stoned with Shilpabhijna, a six year old prodigy. Sudhana visits Shilpabhijna, who proceeds to make sounds, telling Sudhana that one can attain liberation by repeating certain syllables. Shilpabhijna dispatches Sudhana to stay with Bhadrottama who tells Sudhana that he already knows the Bhodhisattva way and need not ask her. Bhadrottama directs Sudhana to spend time with Muktasara the goldsmith in Bharukaccha. Muktasara leads Sudhana to a windowless building and bolts the door. Hours later when Sudhana is let out, he thanks Muktasara for providing him the conditions to plunge deeply into meditation. Next, Muktasara sends him to the richest man in town, Suchandra. At Suchandra's house, Sudhana persuades him to leave his land and seek Siddhartha and initiate as a monk. Suchandra instructs Sudhana to spend time with the rich Ajitasena who Sudhana then convinces to renounce all his riches and redistribute them to the poor. Sudhana presses on and meets the 100-year-old Brahman Shivaragra who Ajitasena has recommended seeing. Shivaragra states that Manjushri has been enquiring about his well-being and the two share a dream where Shivaragra reiterates that Sudhana has nothing more to learn. Afterward, Sudhana encounters the apparitions of Shrimati and Shrisambhava in an underground kingdom. Shrisambhava tells him that even liberation is a phantasm, as conceptualizing it forms an external object not present to the senses. Sudhana nears the end of his quest at Samanta-vyuha Park where he meets Maitreya by his tower. Inside the great tower, he sees infinite towers arrayed in all directions, each

reflecting every object of all the other towers. By the power of Maitreya, Sudhana perceives himself in every tower, becoming one with the totality of the universe for a single moment. Then, Sudhana finds himself going full circle on his quest when he reunites with the Bodhisattva Manjushri. The Lord praises Sudhana and recounts the stages of enlightenment that he has passed through. The final master Sudhana meets is Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva of Practice, signifying that Sudhana's Bodhisattva way of practice had fully begun. Samantabhadra shows Sudhana that his body is composed of innumerable Buddhas and states that the pure Buddha-nature is too profound to be measured or contained by words. In the last chapter of his journey, Sudhana takes a ride from an ancient boatman who throws himself over the side. He rows the boat himself along the Indian coast and disembarks on a beach by a forest. His newest companion is a ten-year old boy whose mother had died. He comforts the child and the two emerge from the forest. They head to the harbor intent on continuing the nearly infinite quest.

The Masters & The Spiritual Achievement Each Exemplifies

Each Master Sudhana meets in the Gandavyuha and *The Little Pilgrim* symbolizes a Buddhist virtue or accomplishment. Un does not state Sudhana's accomplishments as they happen. Rather he waits until Sudhana's reunion with Manjushri to explicitly state that Sudhana has mastered the ten abodes, the ten practices, the ten dedications, the ten stages and the ten goals (Un 345). The last three masters, to complete the fifty-three of Sudhana's quest are Maitreya, Manjushri and Samantabhadra. In the realm of principle, Manjushri stands for knowledge of the fundamental and Samantabhadra stands for knowledge of differentiation (of wisdom). Maitreya stands for the uncreated realization within Manjushri and Samantabhadra. "These three principles are all the fifty spiritual friends" (Cleary 1567). Sudhana symbolizes this uncreated realization that is never born and never dies, as he was "unable to make any distinction between the two bodhisattvas, uniting the wisdom of Manjushri with the practice and love of Samantabhadra (Un 349).

The ten abodes

- 1) **Meghashri** – The first abode is initial determination
- 2) **Sagaramegha** – The second abode is preparing the ground or cultivation
- 3) **Supratishthita** – The third abode is practice
- 4) **Megha** – The fourth abode is noble birth
- 5) **Mutaka** – The fifth abode is skillful means. In the novel, Mutaka appears in a dream given to Sudhana by the elephant master.
- 6) **Saradvaja** – The sixth abode is correct state of mind. In the novel, Saradvaja is within Sudhana's dream given to him by the elephant master.

- 7) **Asha** – The seventh abode is nonregression (from the teachings). In the novel, Asha and her companion Hehua are also in dreams given to Sudhana by the elephant master.
- 8) **Bhishmottaranir-ghosha** – The eighth abode is youthful nature. It involves the development of psychic freedom.
- 9) **Jayoshmayatana** – The ninth abode is prince of the teachings which is a stage of development focused on the sciences of teacherhood
- 10) **Maitrayani** – The tenth abode is anointment. It refers to the accomplishment of all sciences and means of liberation.

The ten practices

- 11) **Sudarshana** – The practice of joy
- 12) **Indriyeshvara** – The practice of beneficial practice
- 13) **Lady Prabhuta** – The practice of nonopposition
- 14) **Vidvan** – The practice of indomitability
- 15) **Ratnachuda** – The practice of nonconfusion
- 16) **Myohyang** – The practice of good manifestation. In the Gandavyuha, he is known as Samantanetra.
- 17) **King Anala** – The practice of nonattachment. In the novel, King Anala is an illusion conjured by a hawk. In the Gandavyuha is a real king that punishes evildoers.
- 18) **King Mahaprabha** – The practice of the difficult-to-attain
- 19) **Devotee** – The practice of good teaching. In the Gandavyuha this master is known as Achala.
- 20) **Ascetics** – These characters take the place of Master Sarvagamin in the Gandavyuha, who teaches the practices of the bodhisattva

The ten dedications

- 21) **Utpalabhuti** – Dedication to saving all beings without clinging to any images of beings
- 22) **Vaira** – Indestructible Dedication
- 23) **Jayottama** – Dedication equal to all buddhas
Sumera/Sanuita – This character who changes gender from female to male is only present in *The Little Pilgrim*
- 24) **Sinhavijurm** – Dedication of reaching all places
- 25) **Vasumitra** – Dedication of infinite stores of virtue
- 26) **Veshthila** – Dedication of adaptively stabilizing all roots of goodness
- 27) **Avalokiteshvara** – Dedication according to all sentient beings
- 28) **Ananyagamin** – Dedication characteristic of true Thusness
- 29) **Mahadeva, the Lord of Heaven** – Dedication without bondage or attachment
- 30) **Sthavara** – Dedication equal to the cosmos.

The ten stages (all females)

- 31) **Vasanti** – The Stage of joy
- 32) **Samantagambhirashrivimala-prabha** – The Stage of purity. In the Gandavyuha, Prabha is encountered after Vasanti but in *The Little Pilgrim*, Sudhana encounters him right before Vasanti.
- 33) **Pramuditayanajagadvirocana** – The Stage of refulgence
- 34) **Jahshri** – The stage of blazing radiance. In the Gandavyuha, he is known as Samantasattvatranojashri and Sudhana encounters him directly after Vasanti.
- 35) **Prashantaruta-sagaravati** – The Stage difficult to conquer
- 36) **Prabhava-ta** – The Stage of presence. This night spirit replaces the night spirit from the Gandavyuha named Sarvanagararakshasambhavatejahshri.
- 37) **Anrak** – The Stage of far-going. This night spirit replaces the night spirit from the Gandavyuha named Sarvavrikshaphullanasukhasamvasa.

- 38) **Prabha** – The Stage of immovability (total absorption in helping others). In the Gandavyuha he is called Sarvajagadrakshapranidhanaviryaprabha.
- 39) **Sutejo-mandala-ratishri** – The Stage of Good Mind
- 40) **Gopa** – The Stage of clouds of teaching. This Stage symbolizes the essence and function of knowledge and compassion reaching everywhere.

The Eleventh Stage, the practice of good (The ten goals)

This stage is the name of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, who represents the active manifestation of the totality of all enlightening practice.

- 41) **The Lady Maya** – Sudhana realizes the method of magical attainment of enlightenment by producing knowledge from compassion
- 42) **Surendrabha** – Sudhana realizes unfailing mindfulness of all truths through mastery of knowledge and compassion
- 43) **Vishwamitra** – Sudhana realizes how to be a teacher of worldly principles everywhere
- 44) **Shilpabhijna** – Sudhana realizes the universal knowledge of writing
- 45) **Bhadrottama** – Sudhana realizes how to help people by conventional and mystical arts and sciences from Bhadrottama
- 46) **Muktasara** – Sudhana realizes the way to pure liberation by being in the world without clinging thoughts
- 47) **Suchandra** – Sudhana realizes the way to illumination by pure knowledge working in the world
- 48) **Ajitasena** – Sudhana realizes the method of finding infinite forms in formlessness
- 49) **Shivaragra** – Sudhana realizes the way of speaking in such a manner that truth is revealed
- 50) **Shrimati, Shrisambhava** – Sudhana realizes the nature of illusoriness from Shrimati and Shrisambhava
- 51) **Maitreya** – Sudhana realizes the way to Buddhahood in one lifetime from Maitreya

- 52) **Manjushri** – Sudhana realizes knowledge of the fundamental from Manjushri. This knowledge, in the words of Thomas Cleary, is that “the ultimate result is the same as the cause, because the way into eternity of the silent function of universally illumined knowledge is not of the past, present, or future and has no beginning or end, no exit or entry” (Cleary 1625).
- 53) **Samantabhadra** – Sudhana realizes the knowledge of differentiation from Samantabhadra. In Un’s words, “After meeting with Samantabhadra, Sudhana learns that the *Avatamsaka Sutra* even included the tale of his own lengthy pilgrimage! Now Sudhana had attained all that had been prophesied about him in the final portion of the *Garland Sutra*. He had nothing more to expect from Samantabhadra, the originator of the Sutra, for he had reached the state of utter liberation and detachment” (Un 354).