Mind, Reactive and Creative
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'Experiences are preceded
by mind, led by mind,
and produced by mind.

If one speaks or acts
with a pure mind,
happiness follows like
a shadow.'

FOREWORD

With almost half a million American troops in Vietnam, peace rallies were multiplying. In Britain mini-skirts were getting shorter and *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was in the charts. The summer of love was about to begin. It was 1967 and Sangharakshita was in London, resolved to start a whole new kind of Buddhist movement. An Englishman who had spent twenty years in India, the last sixteen of these as a Buddhist monk, he neither wanted simply to transplant one of the Asian schools nor to water Buddhism down to suit modern tastes. Instead he would take the Buddha's core teachings and apply their principles to a contemporary world.

Whilst his friends were clearing out the junk-filled basement in London's Monmouth Street where he would ritually found that new movement on the sixth

of April that year, Sangharakshita was invited to give a lecture at Reading University Buddhist Society. He spoke on 'Mind – Reactive and Creative'. In the years to come it was to prove one of his most popular lectures. He gave it again on several occasions and it has been reprinted many times. Abhaya (ordained in 1974) heard it on his very first retreat. He says 'I remember the truth flooding in on me as I listened, that I was at last free to take control of my own life. Now, over fifty years later, the impression of it is still strong in my mind'.

And over fifty years later this brilliant and accessible approach into the heart of Buddhism is being reprinted for a new generation. Sangharakshita has said that it's possible to think of Enlightenment itself as continual creativity and there is enough wisdom in this lecture to start us on that path.

Subhadramati

London Buddhist Centre, June, 2019

MIND, REACTIVE AND CREATIVE

Taking a bird's-eye view of human culture, we see that there exist in the world numerous spiritual traditions. Some of these are of great antiquity, coming down from the remote past with all the authority and prestige of that which has been long established; others are of more recent origin. While some have crystallized, in the course of centuries, into religious cults with enormous followings, others have remained more of the nature of philosophies, making few concessions to popular tastes and needs. Each one of these traditions has its own system, that is to say, its own special concatenation – its own network – of ideas and ideals, of beliefs and practices, as well as its own particular starting-point in thought or experience out of which the whole system evolves. This starting-point is the 'golden string' which, when wound into the ball of the total system, will lead one in at 'heaven's gate, built in Jerusalem's wall' of the tradition concerned.

Among the spiritual traditions of the world one of the oldest and most important is that known to us as Buddhism, the tradition deriving from the life and teaching of Gautama the Buddha, an Indian master the vibrations of whose extraordinary spiritual dynamism not only electrified north-eastern India in the sixth century BCE but subsequently propagated themselves all over Asia and beyond. Like other traditions Buddhism possesses its own special system and its own distinctive starting point. The system of Buddhism is what is known as the 'Dharma', a Sanskrit word meaning, in this context, the 'Doctrine' or the 'Teaching', and connoting the sum total of the insights and experiences conducive to the attainment of Enlightenment or Buddhahood. Its starting-point is the mind.

A shared tradition

That this, and no other, is the starting-point, is illustrated by two quotations from what are sometimes regarded as the two most highly antithetical, not to say mutually exclusive, developments within the whole field of Buddhism: Theravada and Zen. According to the first two verses of the Dhammapada, an ancient collection of metrical aphorisms included in the Pali Canon of the Theravadins,

> Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows even as the cart-wheel follows the hoof of the ox.
> Experiences are preceded by mind, led by mind, and produced by mind. If one speaks or acts with a pure mind, happiness follows like a shadow that never departs.

The Zen quotation is if anything more emphatic. In a verse which made its appearance in China during the T'ang dynasty, Zen itself, which claims to convey from generation to generation of disciples the very heart of the Buddha's spiritual experience, is briefly characterized as:

> A special transmission outside the Scriptures.
> No dependence on words and letters.
> Direct pointing to the mind.
> Seeing into one's own nature and realizing Buddhahood.

From these quotations, representative of many others which could be made, it is clear that the starting-point of Buddhism is not anything outside us. In the language of Western thought, it is not objective but subjective. The starting-point is the mind.

Absolute mind

But what do we mean by mind? In the Dhammapada verses the original Pali word is *mano*; in the Chinese Zen stanza it is *hsin*, corresponding to the Sanskrit and Pali *citta*. As both these terms can be quite adequately rendered by the English 'mind' there is no

need to explore etymologies and we can plunge at once into the heart of our subject.

To begin with, mind is twofold. On the one hand there is Absolute Mind; on the other, relative mind. By Absolute Mind is meant that infinite cosmic or transcendental Awareness within whose pure timeless flow the subject–object polarity as we ordinarily experience it is for ever dissolved. For mind in this exalted sense Buddhism employs, according to context, a number of expressions, each with its own distinctive shade of meaning. Prominent among these expressions are the One Mind, the Unconditioned, Buddha-nature, the Void. In the more neutral language of philosophy, Absolute Mind is Reality. It is the realization of Absolute Mind through the dissolution of the subject–object polarity – the waking up to Reality out of the dream of mundane existence – which constitutes Enlightenment, the attainment of Enlightenment being, of course, the ultimate aim of Buddhism.

Mind reactive, mind creative

By relative mind is meant the individual mind or consciousness, functioning within the framework of the subject–object polarity, and it is with this mind that we are now concerned. Like mind in general, relative mind or consciousness is of two kinds: reactive and creative. While these are not traditional Buddhist expressions, neither of them rendering any one technical term in any of the canonical languages, they seem to express very well the import of the Buddha's teaching. In any case, the distinction which they represent is of fundamental importance not only in the 'system' of Buddhism but in the spiritual life generally and even in the entire scheme of human evolution. The transition from 'reactive' to 'creative' marks, indeed, the beginning of spiritual life. It is conversion in the true sense of the term. What, then, do we mean by speaking of 'reactive mind' and 'creative mind'?

In the first place, we should not imagine that there are literally two relative minds, one reactive, the other creative. Rather should we understand that there are two ways in which relative mind or the individual con-

sciousness is capable of functioning. It is capable of functioning reactively and it is capable of functioning creatively. When it functions in a reactive manner, it is known as the reactive mind; when it functions in a creative manner, it is known as the creative mind. But there is only one relative mind.

Reactive mind

By the reactive mind is meant our ordinary, everyday mind, the mind that most people use most of the time, or, rather, it is the mind that uses them. In extreme cases, indeed, the reactive mind functions all the time, the creative mind remaining in complete abeyance. People of this type are born, live, and die animals; though possessing the human form they are in fact not human beings at all. Rather than attempt an abstract definition of the reactive mind let us try to grasp its nature by examining some of its actual characteristics.

Reactive mind

In the first place, the reactive mind is a re-active

mind. It does not really act, but only re-acts. Instead of acting spontaneously, out of its own inner fullness and abundance, it requires an external stimulus to set it in motion. This stimulus usually comes through the five senses. We are walking along the street; an advertisement catches our eye, its bright colours and bold lettering making an instant appeal. Perhaps it is an advertisement for a certain brand of cigarette, or for a certain make of car, or for summer holidays on the sun-drenched beaches of some distant pleasure resort. Whatever the goods or services depicted, our attention is attracted, arrested. We go and do what the advertisement is designed to make us do, or make a mental note to do it, or are left with an unconscious disposition to do it as and when circumstances permit. We have not acted, but have been activated. We have re-acted.

The reactive mind is, therefore, the conditioned mind. It is conditioned by its object (e.g. the advertisement) in the sense of being not merely dependent upon it but actually determined by it. The reactive mind is not free.

Mechanical mind

Since it is conditioned the reactive mind is, moreover, purely mechanical. As such it can be appropriately described as the 'penny-in-the-slot' mind. Insert the coin, and out comes the packet. In much the same way, let the reactive mind be confronted with a certain situation or experience and it will react automatically, in an entirely mechanical, hence predictable, fashion. Not only our behaviour but even much of our 'thinking' conforms to this pattern. Whether in the field of politics, or literature, or religion, or whether in the affairs of everyday life, the opinions we so firmly hold and so confidently profess are very rarely the outcome of conscious reflection, of our individual effort to arrive at the truth. Our ideas are hardly ever our own. Only too often have they been fed into us from external sources, from books, newspapers, and conversations, and we have accepted them, or rather received them, in a passive and unreflecting manner. When the appropriate stimulus occurs we automatically reproduce whatever has been fed into our system, and it is this purely mechanical reaction that passes

for expression of opinion. Truly original thought on any subject is, indeed, extremely rare, though 'original' does not necessarily mean 'different', but rather whatever one creates out of one's own inner resources regardless of whether or not this coincides with something previously created by somebody else. Some, of course, try to be different. This can, however, be a subtle form of conditionedness, for in trying to be different such people are still being determined by an object, by whatever or whoever it is they are trying to be different from. They are still re-acting, instead of really acting.

Repetitive mind

Besides being conditioned and mechanical, the reactive mind is repetitive. Being 'programmed' as it were by needs of which it is largely unconscious, it reacts to the same stimuli in much the same way, and like a machine therefore goes on performing the same operation over and over again. It is owing to this characteristic of the reactive mind that 'human' life as a whole becomes so much a matter of fixed and settled

habit, in a world of routine. As we grow older, especially, we develop a passive resistance to change, preferring to deepen the old ruts rather than strike out in a new direction. Even our religious life, if we are not careful, can become incorporated into the routine, can become part of the pattern, part of the machinery of existence. The Sunday service or the mid-week meditation become fixed as reference points in our lives, buoys charting a way through the dangerous waters of freedom, along with the weekly visit to the cinema and the launderette, the annual holiday at the seaside, and the seasonal spree.

Unaware mind

Above all, however, the reactive mind is the unaware mind. Whatever it does, it does without any real knowledge of what it is doing. Metaphorically speaking, the reactive mind is asleep. Those in whom it predominates can, therefore, be described as asleep rather than awake. In a state of sleep they live out their lives; in a state of sleep they eat, drink, talk, work, play, vote, make love; in a state of sleep, even,

they read books on Buddhism and try to meditate. Like somnambulists who walk with eyes wide open, they only appear to be awake. Some people, indeed, are so fast asleep that for all their apparent activity they can more adequately be described as dead. Their movements are those of a zombie, or a robot with all its controls switched on, rather than those of a truly aware human being. It is with this realization – when we become aware of our own unawareness, when we wake up to the fact that we are asleep – that spiritual life begins. One might, indeed, go so far as to say that it marks the beginning of truly human existence, though this would imply, indeed, a far higher conception of human existence than the word usually conveys – a conception nearer what is usually termed spiritual. This brings us to the second kind of relative mind, to what we have termed the creative mind.

Creative mind

The characteristics of the creative mind are the opposite of those of the reactive mind. The creative mind does not re-act. It is not dependent on, or determined

by, the stimuli with which it comes into contact. On the contrary, it is active on its own account, functioning spontaneously, out of the depths of its own intrinsic nature. Even when initially prompted by something external to itself it quickly transcends its original point of departure and starts functioning independently. The creative mind can therefore be said to respond rather than to react. Indeed, it is capable of transcending conditions altogether. Hence it can also be said that whereas the reactive mind is essentially pessimistic, being confined to what is given in immediate experience, the creative mind is profoundly and radically optimistic. Its optimism is not, however, the superficial optimism of the streets, no mere unthinking reaction to, or rationalization of, pleasurable stimuli. By virtue of the very nature of the creative mind such a reaction would be impossible. On the contrary, the optimism of the creative mind persists despite unpleasant stimuli, despite conditions unfavourable for optimism, or even when there are no conditions for it at all. The creative mind loves where there is no reason to love, is happy where there is no reason for

happiness, creates where there is no possibility of creativity, and in this way 'builds a heaven in hell's despair'.

Independent mind

Not being dependent on any object, the creative mind is essentially non-conditioned. It is independent by nature, and functions, therefore, in a perfectly spontaneous manner. When functioning on the highest possible level, at its highest pitch of intensity, the creative mind is identical with the Unconditioned; that is to say, it coincides with Absolute Mind. Being non-conditioned the creative mind is free; indeed, it is Freedom itself. It is also original in the true sense of the term, being characterized by ceaseless productivity. This productivity is not necessarily artistic, literary, or musical, even though the painting, the poem, and the symphony are admittedly among its most typical, even as among its most strikingly adequate, manifestations. Moreover, just as the creative mind does not necessarily find expression in 'works of art', so what are conventionally regarded as 'works of art'

are not necessarily all expressions of the creative mind. Imitative and lacking true originality, some of them are more likely to be the mechanical products of the reactive mind.

Responsive mind

Outside the sphere of the fine arts the creative mind finds expression in productive personal relations, as when through our own emotional positivity others become more emotionally positive, or as when through the intensity of their mutual awareness two or more people reach out towards, and together experience, a dimension of being greater and more inclusive than their separate individualities. In these and similar cases the creative mind is productive in the sense of contributing to the increase, in the world, of the sum total of positive emotion, of higher states of being and consciousness.

Aware mind

Finally, as just indicated the creative mind is above all the aware mind. Being aware, or rather, being Awareness itself, the creative mind is also intensely and radiantly alive. The creative person, as one in whom the creative mind manifests may be termed, is not only more aware than the reactive person but possessed of far greater vitality. This vitality is not just animal high spirits or emotional exuberance, much less still mere intellectual energy or the compulsive urgency of egoistic volition. Were such expressions permissible, one might say it is the Spirit of Life itself rising like a fountain from the infinite depths of existence, and vivifying, through the creative person, all with whom it comes into contact.

Symbols of mind

One picture being worth a thousand words, the reactive mind and the creative mind are illustrated by two important Buddhist symbols. These are the symbols of the Wheel of Life and the Path (or Way), otherwise known – more abstractly and geometrically – as the Circle and the Spiral.

The Wheel of Life

The Wheel of Life, or Wheel of Becoming, occupies an important place in Tibetan popular religious art, being depicted in gigantic size on the walls of temples, usually in the vestibule, as well as on a reduced scale in painted scrolls. It consists of four concentric circles.

The three poisons

In the first circle, or hub of the Wheel, are depicted a cock, a snake, and a pig, each biting the tail of the one in front. These three animals represent the three 'unskilful roots' or 'poisons' of craving, aversion, and delusion, which are, of course, the three mainsprings of the reactive mind, the first and second being the two principal negative emotions and the third the darkness of spiritual unawareness out of which they arise. Their biting one another's tails signifies their interdependence, or the fact that the circle is a vicious circle.

Around and around

The second circle is divided vertically into two segments, a black one on the right-hand side and a white one on the left. In the black segment the figures of naked human beings, chained together, are seen plunging headlong downwards with expressions of anguish and terror. In the white segment modestly clad figures, carrying mani-cylinders (what in the West are erroneously termed 'prayer-wheels') and religious offerings move gently upwards with serene and happy countenances. These two segments represent two opposite movements or tendencies within the Wheel itself, one centripetal and the other centrifugal. In other words, while the black segment represents a movement in the direction of the hub of the Wheel the white segment represents a movement away from the hub and towards the circumference – towards freedom, ultimately, from the reactive mind. Though in a sense constituting a stage of the Path, or a section of the Spiral, it is still part of the Wheel inasmuch as regression from it, in the form of a transition from the white to the black segment, is liable to occur at any time. The white segment can therefore be regarded as representing states of consciousness intermediate between the reactive mind and the creative mind

from which one can either slide back into the former or rise up into the latter. As the presence of the mani-cylinders and the religious offerings suggests, the white segment also represents conventional piety, which being part of the process of the reactive mind is not in itself a sufficient means to Enlightenment and from which, therefore, a reaction to a life of vice and impiety – to the black segment – is always possible.

The six realms

The third circle of the Wheel of Life is divided as though by spokes into five or six segments. These are the five or six 'spheres', or planes, of conditioned existence into which sentient beings are reborn in accordance with their skilful and unskilful bodily, verbal, and mental actions, in other words, as the result of their past 'good' and 'bad' karma. These spheres, depicted in Tibetan religious art with great richness of detail, are (proceeding clockwise from the top) those of the gods, the titans, the hungry ghosts, beings in hell, animals, and men. The total number of segments is either five or six depending on whether the gods and the titans, who are engaged in perpetual warfare with each other, are enumerated separately or together. In all the segments the presence of a differently coloured Buddha figure represents the persistence of the possibility of Enlightenment even under the most adverse conditions.

Although the five or six spheres of conditioned existence are usually interpreted cosmologically – as objectively existing worlds which are just as real, for the beings inhabiting them, as our own world is for human beings – it is nevertheless also possible to interpret them psychologically, as representing different states of human life and consciousness – an interpretation which has some sanction in tradition. Looked at in this way the sphere of the gods represents a life of security and contentment, that of the titans one of jealousy, competition, and aggressiveness, that of the hungry ghosts one of neurotic dependence and craving, that of the beings in hell one of physical and mental suffering, that of the animals one of barbarism and ignorance, while the human sphere represents a

mixed state of existence with neither pleasure nor pain predominating. In the course of a single lifetime one may experience all six states, living now as it were in 'heaven', now as it were in 'hell', and so on.

'This being, that becomes'

The fourth and last circle, or rim of the Wheel, is divided into twelve segments, each containing a picture. The twelve pictures (again proceeding clockwise) depict a blind man with a stick, a potter with a wheel and pots, a monkey climbing a flowering tree, a ship with four passengers, one of whom is steering, an empty house, a man and woman embracing, a man with an arrow in his eye, a woman offering a drink to a seated man, a man gathering fruit from a tree, a pregnant woman, a woman in childbirth, and a man carrying a corpse to the cremation-ground. These pictures illustrate the twelve 'links' in the chain of cyclical conditionality, each of which arises in dependence on, or is conditioned by, the one immediately preceding.

In dependence upon *ignorance*, the 'first' link of the chain, arise

the *volitional factors* which determine the nature of the next rebirth.

These give rise to *consciousness*, in the sense of the karmically neutral 'resultant' consciousness, which begins functioning at the moment of conception.

In dependence on consciousness arises the *psychophysical organism*.

In dependence on the psychophysical organism arise *the six sense-organs* (mind being reckoned as a sixth sense).

In dependence on these there arises *contact* with the external world,

which gives rise to *sensation*,

which gives rise to *craving*,

which gives rise to *grasping*,

which gives rise to '*coming-to-be*'.

In dependence on 'coming-to-be', by which is meant the renewed process of conditioned existence, arises birth, in the sense of rebirth, from which sooner or later there inevitably follows *death*.

As even a bare enumeration of them is sufficient to make clear, the twelve links are primarily regarded as being distributed over three successive lives, the first two belonging to the previous life, the middle eight to the present life, and the last two to the future life. However, just as the five or six spheres of sentient existence can be interpreted psychologically as well as cosmologically, so the whole twelve-linked chain of cyclical conditionality is also to be regarded as operating within the limits of a single experience of the reactive mind.

Completing the symbolism, Tibetan religious art depicts the whole Wheel of Life, with its four circles and its innumerable sentient creatures, as being gripped from behind by a monstrous demon, the head, tail, and claws of whom are visible. This is the demon of Impermanence, or the great principle of Change, which though dreadful to the majority nevertheless contains the promise and potentiality of development, of evolution.

The wheel as symbol

From the description just given it is clear that the Tibetan Wheel of Life is able to symbolize the workings of the reactive mind because the reactive mind is itself a wheel. Like a wheel, it simply goes round and round. Prompted by negative emotions springing from the depths of unawareness, it again and again reacts to stimuli impinging on it from the outside world, and again and again precipitates itself into one or another sphere or mode of conditioned existence. Moreover, the wheel is a machine, perhaps the most primitive of all machines, and as such the Wheel of Life represents the mechanical and repetitive nature of the reactive mind.

Some paintings of the Wheel of Life depict in their top right-hand corner the Buddha, clad in the saffron robes of a wanderer, pointing with the fingers of his right hand. He is indicating the Path or Way. To this symbol, second of the two great symbols with which we are concerned, we must now turn.

The spiral path

As previously explained, just as the Wheel of Life symbolizes the reactive mind, so the Path or Way symbolizes the creative mind, or the whole process of cumulative, as distinct from reactive, conditionality. It works on the principle not of round and round, but of up and up. In the case of the Wheel of Life, as depicted in Tibetan religious art, practically all the different aspects of the reactive mind coalesce into a single composite symbol of marvellous richness and complexity. For the Path or Way there seems to be no corresponding picture. Instead, there are a number of relatively independent representations, some of them in the form of images, others in the form of conceptual formulations of the various successive stages of the Path. Among the former are the images of the Tree of Enlightenment, or Cosmic Tree, at the foot of which the Buddha seated himself on the eve of his great attainment, and the ladder of gold, silver, and crystal on which, after instructing his deceased mother in the higher truths of Buddhism, he descended to earth from the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods. Among the

conceptual formulations of the Path are the Three Trainings (i.e. ethics, meditation, and wisdom), the Noble Eightfold Path, the series of twelve positive 'links' beginning with suffering and ending with knowledge of the destruction of the biases, the Seven Stages of Purification, and the Seven Limbs of Enlightenment. All these concrete images and conceptual formulations of the Path represent one or another aspect of the total process of the creative mind, a process of such multi-faceted splendour that tradition has been unable, apparently, to combine them all into one composite representation of their common object. For the purpose of our present exposition we shall select one of the conceptual formulations of the Path, that of the Seven Limbs of Enlightenment, as this exhibits in a particularly clear and striking manner the cumulative and truly progressive nature of the creative mind.

The seven factors of enlightenment

The seven 'limbs' or 'factors' (*anga*) of Enlightenment (*bodhi*) are: Recollection or Awareness, Investigation

of Mental States, Energy or Vigour, Rapture, 'Tension Release', Concentration, and Tranquillity. Each of these limbs or factors arises in dependence on the one immediately preceding – out of its fullness, as it were – and as we shall now see in detail, each one, as it arises, constitutes a still higher development of the creative mind as it spirals towards the final – and everlasting – explosion of creativity that constitutes Enlightenment.

1. Recollection or Awareness (smrti)

As insisted once already, spiritual life begins with awareness, when one becomes aware that one is unaware, or when one wakes up to the fact that one is asleep. Within the context of the total evolutionary process this 'limb' or 'factor', the emergence of which constitutes one a human being, occupies a middle place, being intermediate between the total unawareness, or unconsciousness, of the stone, and the Perfect Awareness of Buddhahood. Within the comparatively narrow but still aeonic context of purely human development, awareness occupies a middle position

between the simple sense consciousness of the animal and the higher spiritual awareness of the person who has begun to confront the transcendental. Thus we arrive at a hierarchy which, excluding unconsciousness and the vegetative sensitivity of the plant, consists of the four principal degrees of (a) sense consciousness, (b) human consciousness or awareness proper, (c) transcendental awareness, and (d) Perfect Awareness. As one of the limbs of Enlightenment or Enlightenment factors, Recollection or Awareness corresponds to the second of these degrees, that of human consciousness or awareness proper. Awareness in this sense is synonymous with self-consciousness, a term which draws attention to one of the most important characteristics of awareness. Whereas sense consciousness is simply consciousness of external things and of one's own experience, awareness consists in being conscious that one is conscious, in knowing that one knows, or, in a word, of realizing. Though the traditional vocabulary of Buddhism does not contain any term strictly correspondent with self-consciousness, the explanation which is given makes

it clear that this is what, in fact, it is. Awareness consists, according to the texts, of awareness of one's bodily posture and movements, of one's sensations, whether pleasurable or painful, and of the presence within oneself of skilful and unskilful mental states. More will be said about each of these later on.

2. Investigation of Mental States (dharma-vicāya)

From awareness in general we pass to awareness, particularly, of the psychical as distinct from the physical side of our being. This psychical side is not static but dynamic. It is made up of an endless stream of mental states. These states are of two kinds, skilful and unskilful. Unskilful mental states are those rooted in craving, hatred, and delusion. Skilful mental states are those rooted in non-craving, non-hatred, and non-delusion, in other words in contentment, love, and wisdom. Investigation of Mental States is a kind of sorting-out operation whereby one distinguishes between the skilful and the unskilful states and separates them into two different categories. In terms of our present discussion one distinguishes between

what in the mind is reactive and what is creative. It is, however, awareness that releases creativity. By becoming more aware we not only resolve unawareness, thus eventually achieving self-consciousness or true individuality, but also effect a switch-over of energy from the cyclical to the spiral type of conditionality, that is to say, from the reactive and repetitive to the free and creative type of mental functioning.

3. Energy or Vigour (vīrya)

Although often defined as the effort to cultivate skilful and eradicate unskilful mental states, the third Enlightenment factor is much more in the nature of a spontaneous upsurge of energy coming about with the birth of awareness and the growing capacity to discriminate between the reactive and the creative mind. Most people live far below the level of their optimum vitality. Their energies are either expended in ways that are ultimately frustrating or simply blocked. With increased awareness, however, through meditation, and through improved communication with other people – perhaps with the help of a freer lifestyle and

more truly fulfilling means of livelihood – a change takes place. Blockages are removed, tensions relaxed. More and more energy is released. Eventually, like a great dynamo humming into activity as soon as the current is switched on, or a tree bursting into bloom as the spring rain flushes up through its branches, the whole being is recharged, revitalized, and one expends oneself in intense creative activity.

4. Rapture (prīti)

Release of blocked and frustrated energy is accompanied by an overwhelming feeling of delight and ecstasy which is not confined to the mind but in which the senses and the emotions both participate. This is Rapture, the fourth Enlightenment factor, of which there are five degrees. These five degrees produce physical innervations of corresponding degrees of intensity. The lesser thrill is only able to raise the hairs of the body, momentary rapture is like repeated flashes of lightning, flooding rapture descends on the body like waves breaking on the seashore, in all-pervading rapture the whole body is completely surcharged, blown like a full bladder or like a mountain cavern pouring forth a mighty flood of water, while transporting rapture is so strong that it lifts the body up to the extent of launching it in the air. Under ordinary circumstances only prolonged meditation enables one to experience Rapture in its fullness, from the lowest to the highest degree, but this is not to say that it cannot be experienced to a great extent in other ways as well. The creation and enjoyment of works of art, appreciation of the beauties of nature, solving problems in mathematics, authentic human communication – these and similar activities all involve release of energy and all are, therefore, experienced as intensely pleasurable.

5. Tension Release (praśrabdhi)

Blocked and frustrated energy having been fully released, the physical innervations by which the release was accompanied gradually subside and the mind experiences a state of non-hedonic spiritual happiness unmixed with any bodily sensation. Subsidence of the physical innervations of Rapture, as well as of the per-

ceptions and motivations derived therefrom, is known as Tension Release. This Enlightenment factor, the fifth in the series, thus represents the stage of transition from the psychosomatic to the mental-spiritual level of experience. Awareness of one's physical body and one's surroundings becomes minimal, or disappears entirely, and one becomes more and more deeply absorbed in a state of 'changeless, timeless bliss' quite impossible to describe.

6. Concentration (samādhi)

Impelled by the inherent momentum of one's experience, absorption in this state gradually becomes complete. Such total absorption is known as samādhi. Though untranslatable by any one English word, this term is usually rendered as concentration, a meaning which it admittedly does bear in many contexts. As the sixth of the Enlightenment factors, samādhi stands for very much more than simple fixation of the mind on a single object, especially if this fixation is understood as something that is achieved forcibly, by sheer exercise of will, or despite strong resistance

from other parts of the psyche. Rather is it the spontaneous merging of all the energies of the psyche in an experience so intensely pleasurable that thought and volition are suspended, space vanishes, and time stands still. It is in fact a state of total integration and absorption rather than of 'concentration' in the more limited and artificial sense of the term, and as such can be compared best, though still inadequately, to the experience of the musician rapt in the enjoyment of a piece of music or of the lover immersed in the joys of love.

7. Tranquillity (upeksā)

When perfectly concentrated the mind attains a state of poise and equilibrium free from the slightest trace of wavering or unsteadiness. This equilibrium is not only psychological as between contrary emotional states but spiritual as between such pairs of opposites as enjoyment and suffering, acquisition and deprivation, self and not-self, finite and infinite, existence and non-existence, life and death. As a spiritual state or experience it is known as Tranquillity, the seventh

and last of the Enlightenment factors and the culmination, so far as this formulation is concerned, of the whole process of the creative mind. Though sometimes connoting simply a psychological state of security and rest it is here synonymous with Nirvāna or Enlightenment itself. It is that state of absolute metaphysical axiality – of complete equilibrium of being – to which the Buddha refers in the Mangala Sutta, or 'Discourse on Auspicious Signs', saying:

> He whose firm mind, untroubled by the touch
> Of all terrestrial happenings whatsoe'er,
> Is void of sorrow, stainless and secure –
> This is the most auspicious sign of all.

The Crucial Point

In this manner, each member of the series arising out of the abundance – even the exuberance – of the one by which it was immediately preceded, the seven Enlightenment factors collectively illustrate the way in which the creative mind functions, how it progresses from perfection to ever greater perfection, until the

fullness of creativity is attained. But having arrived at this point, thus completing our brief study of the two principal symbols of Buddhism, we cannot help asking what the connection is between them. At what point, if any, do the Wheel and the Path, the Circle and the Spiral, intersect?

In order to answer this question we shall have to refer back to the twelve links in the chain of cyclical conditionality. Besides being distributed over three successive lifetimes, these are regarded as being either volitions or the results of volitions and as belonging, therefore, either to what is known as the cause-process or to what is known as the effect-process. Ignorance and the karma-formations, the first two links, constitute the cause-process of the past. They represent the sum total of karmic factors responsible for the present birth, or rather rebirth, of the individual concerned. Consciousness, the psychophysical organism, the six sense-organs, contact, and feeling make up the effect-process of the present life. Craving, grasping, and coming-to-be are the cause-process of the present life, while birth together with

old age, disease, and death constitute the effect-process of the future. From this account it is clear that feeling, the last link of the effect-process of the present life, is immediately followed by craving, the first link of the cause-process of the present life. This is the crucial point. This is the point at which the Wheel either stops, or begins to make a fresh revolution. It is also the point of intersection between the Wheel and the Path.

Mindfulness clear and radiant

As we have seen, the first of the seven Enlightenment factors is Recollection or Awareness. If we remain simply aware of the pleasurable and painful feelings that arise within us as a result of our contact with the external world, instead of reacting to them with craving and aversion, then craving, the first link of the cause-process of the present life, will be unable to come into existence. Awareness puts as it were a brake on the Wheel. For this reason the cultivation of Awareness occupies a central place in the Buddhist scheme of spiritual self-discipline. It is the principal

means of transition from the reactive mind to the creative mind, from the Wheel to the Path, from the Circle to the Spiral – ultimately, from Samsāra to Nirvāna.

Tradition distinguishes four different kinds of awareness, or four different levels on which it is to be cultivated:

In the first place, one is aware of one's bodily posture and movements. This consists in the awareness that one is, for example, standing, or sitting, or walking, or lying down, as well as in the mindful performance of all bodily actions, from the vigorous use of the morning toothbrush to the delicate wielding, the almost imperceptible manipulation, of the surgeon's scalpel or the artist's brush.

Secondly, one is aware of one's feelings, pleasant, painful, and neutral, as well as of the emotions arising in direct or indirect dependence upon them. One knows whether one feels elated or depressed, whether one's emotional state is one of love or hatred, hope or fear, frustration or fulfilment, and so on. One is also aware of more complex and ambivalent emotions. In

order to be aware of one's feelings and emotional reactions one must of course allow oneself to experience them, one must recognize and acknowledge them as one's own. This is not to recommend emotional self-indulgence, but only to emphasize the fact that repression and awareness are incompatible.

Thirdly, one is aware of one's thoughts. This consists not only of the vigilant observation of images and ideas, mental associations, trains of reflection, and conceptual systems, but also in seeing to what extent these are rooted in the unskilful states of neurotic craving, aversion, and spiritual ignorance, and to what extent they are rooted in the opposite states, that is to say in states of contentment, love, and wisdom. Practising these three kinds of awareness, or cultivating awareness on these three different levels, we begin to see how conditioned we are, how machine-like in our functioning, how dead.

Fourthly and lastly, one is aware of the difference between one's past dead state of mental conditionedness and mechanicalness and one's (potential) more alive future state of freedom and spontaneity. Awareness of the Wheel and of the fact that one is bound on the Wheel generates awareness of the Path, as well as of the fact that one has the capacity to follow it.

The dynamic of spiritual growth

Awareness is therefore of crucial importance in human existence. As the bud presages the flower, so the development of awareness heralds the dawn of the still higher development that we term the spiritual life. Such being the case it is not surprising that in Buddhism there are a number of practices designed to promote the growth of this all-important quality, but it must be emphasized that unless we exercise the utmost caution these practices will themselves tend to become mechanical and, therefore, bricks in the prison-house of our conditionedness rather than the implements of its destruction. The same warning applies to all 'religious' beliefs and practices without exception. If eternal vigilance is the price of mundane liberty how much more is it the price of spiritual freedom! Whether studying mystical theology or making votive offerings, engaging in spiritual discussion with

friends or reading about 'Mind – Reactive and Creative', unless we remember the Buddha's 'Parable of the Raft' and constantly remind ourselves what the true function of all these activities is, there is the danger that we shall find ourselves not midstream on the Raft, not bound for the Further Shore, but on the contrary taking refuge in a structure which, while apparently constructed out of the same materials as the Raft, nevertheless remains firmly stuck in the mudflats of this shore. Only by remaining constantly on our guard shall we succeed in making the difficult transition from the reactive mind to the creative mind, thus inheriting the spirit of the Buddha's teaching and realizing the true purpose of human life.

SEMINAR EXTRACTS

Being on Seminar with Sangharakshita

In the long, hot summer of 1976 I was living in a men's community, a ramshackle squat in a rough part of London. I was nineteen and filled with enthusiasm for the Dharma. I wore Tibetan shirts and a long, large-beaded mala. My hair in those days grew upwards, long and thick. One day, Lokamitra, the incredibly friendly and energetic chairman of *Pundarika* – our first proper Buddhist centre – suggested to half a dozen of us that we go to the forest for a weekend retreat. It was all arranged he said, and he would meet us there.

We gathered at an old farmhouse in Thetford Forest that we used for retreats in those days, surrounded by glowering pines. Every now and then a fighter jet roared overhead. Soon enough Lokamitra

arrived and with him a wonderful surprise: our teacher Sangharakshita – Bhante as we called him – who was going to lead us in some Dharma study. The following morning we gathered in a small lounge. Bhante came in, long-haired, in deep yellow robes, with a rather tatty-looking jumper underneath them and carpet slippers. He sat cross-legged in an armchair and began to take us through the *Mangala Sutta*, where the Buddha describes many auspicious signs – the signs that show real human and spiritual progress.

I was, of course, in awe of Bhante. I also possessed that blend of self-intoxication and awkward self-consciousness that goes with being a teenager. Inevitably, I would get my first taste of Bhante as the vajra guru – 'the no nonsense guru'. To one of my rather trite replies to his questions he said, somewhat witheringly: "That's a good Buddhist answer." He wanted more than clichés. Alongside this though was his eager sense of humour and playfulness. I tried several times to get him talking about the Buddhist Tantra, a subject I was obsessed with at the time.

"He's cunningly luring us onto Tantric territory, always edging us nearer and nearer to it," Bhante said, provoking much good-natured laughter.

In all the seminars I was lucky enough to attend over the years, it was as if reality took shape around Bhante while he spoke. Not long after the Mangala Sutta seminar I was back in the farmhouse in the forest for my ordination retreat. Once again, Bhante appeared in his robes, this time without the tatty jumper, but instead a rich saffron-coloured, dragon-patterned Tibetan ceremonial shirt. As well as ordaining Ratnaguna and I, Bhante led us through *The Shepherds Search for Mind*, from *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*. In this chapter Milarepa reveals to a sixteen-year old shepherd the true nature of mind. Bhante was clearly inspired by this and as he spoke I felt the exhilaration of being given an elusive glimpse of the liberated, luminous nature of mind. Much later, on another seminar, the discussion moved to the Green Tara mantra. As Bhante drew out its meaning I had the tangible feeling of a green breeze passing through the room.

Bhante was always methodical when he took us through a text, reading closely, explaining the cultural contexts and the Pali sources. He wove together the earliest teachings of the Buddha with other Buddhist traditions – the Mahayana, the Vajrayana, and Zen. Great literature and the Western canon flowed from him just as easily. There would also be references to other religions and philosophies. I first heard about Sufism on seminar with Bhante. What he said was so attractive that it gave me an abiding interest in that tradition.

On seminars, Bhante made the Dharma live for us. This could be uplifting and exhilarating, though sometimes his relentless exploration of the truth, hour after hour, was profoundly challenging, even humiliating. A seminar I attended not long after my ordination on *Mind in Buddhist Psychology* was like that. As Bhante sat calmly in his armchair, a Buddhist rosary in his hands, taking us deep into the Abhidharma, it was like being passed by a great ocean liner while struggling to stay afloat in armbands. At the end of ten days of intensive study I couldn't decide

whether I was feeling purified by the seminar, or just relieved it was over!

I could not attend many of Bhante's seminars in the 1980s, but of those that I did attend, as well as encountering his incisive intellect, his range of cultural reference and playful humour, I also noticed his deep reverence for the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and his overriding concern to communicate the living reality of those precious Three Jewels. Sometimes a fresh way of presenting the Dharma would emerge as we went along and these would become integral to Triratna: *The Bi-tendential Value of Being*; *The Greater Mandala of Aesthetic Appreciation*; *The Imaginal Faculty*; *The Gestalt*; *The Five Great Stages of the Spiritual Path*; *Reality Principle and Pleasure Principle as the Middle Way*. There are so many and there remains so much to be explored.

Above all, Bhante wanted us to put the Dharma into practice and do our best to live it fully and completely. The seminars, which began in 1973 with the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, spoke to our needs back then, but much that lies buried in the transcripts of the

seminars is deeply relevant to us now and waiting to be found. Bhante said in one seminar that he was starting a lot of hares running and it was up to us to chase after them.

One of the last study seminars I attended with Bhante was on his lecture *The Taste of Freedom*. By then Bhante was an old man and he could barely see. At a certain point he reminded us that the word freedom was a translation of *vimukti*, which was synonymous with Nirvana itself – complete liberation from conditioned existence. He then said: "Perhaps all we can do is contemplate the full significance of that." At that moment he became quiet and still and the whole room with him, as if there and then he was contemplating the real meaning of *vimukti*. Indian, including Indian Buddhist tradition, speaks of the importance of *darshan* – seeing (and being seen by) the teacher. This was a moment of *darshan* for me. I do not know what vimukti is, but in that moment I knew I was in the presence of someone who had, at the very least, a deep sense of what it is.

The great 11th century Indian master Atisha, who did so much to revive the Dharma in Tibet, said that the Precept of the Lama was more important than all the sutras and commentaries because the precept shows you how to apply the teachings to your actual experience. The seminar extracts you are about to read are the record of a man who spent his life showing how to apply the great treasury of the Dharma to our lives in order to bring about profound transformation. I hope you feel something of Sangharakshita's energy and presence talking directly to you. Oh yes...and where did I read about the Precept of the Lama? In a seminar transcript of course!

Padmavajra
Padmaloka, August, 2020

A possibility of choice

From a seminar on the Great Chapter of the Sutta-Nipāta *(pp. 538–40)*

> The person who is searching for his own happiness should pull out the dart that he has stuck in himself, the arrow-head of grieving, of desiring, of despair.

Sutta-Nipāta, The Great Chapter, *Salla Sutta* ('The Dart'), verse 592, trans. H. Saddhatissa

Sangharakshita: This phrase *attano sukham esano* literally means 'who seeks self-happiness'. What are the implications of this? It suggests that to seek your own happiness is the right thing to do. Happiness is not found by indulging in grief; it is found when you can produce the creative response which enables you to transcend grief and follow the higher spiritual path. But there is certainly nothing wrong in seeking your own happiness. I mention this because quite a few people have mentioned from time to time that they

feel guilty about seeking happiness, as though there is something wrong with being happy. There's nothing wrong with seeking happiness. It is perfectly right and – not even natural, more than natural, better than natural – but you need to go the right way about it, by drawing out the dart of grief, facing up to the existential situation, and responding positively and creatively by leading a spiritual life, by following a spiritual path, for want of a better term.

It is as though the sutta is saying, 'Here is the wheel of life revolving before you, this is the human situation, immersed in conditioned existence, subject to old age, disease, and death, and the repeated process of birth and rebirth. So there are two possibilities. Either you let the wheel of life go on turning and turning, or you get out, you go up the spiral. You either evoke a reaction of the reactive mind or a creative response of the creative mind. In the first case you continue to revolve and get more and more immersed in the samsara, and with the other you start extracting yourself, rise to higher and higher, more and more positive, more and more liberated levels.'

So we mustn't think that the existential situation confronts us just once in our lives and we just take this path or that path. It confronts us at every instant. At every instant, there is a possibility of choice. You react to that existential situation either positively or negatively, reactively or creatively. And especially the sutta speaks of bereavement, losing those who are near and dear. We all experience this. Even if we haven't experienced it yet, sooner or later we will. And we can respond in one of two ways. We can be overwhelmed with grief, get very depressed, very upset, ask 'Why should this happen to me? Why should fate pick upon me?', even become resentful, brood over it, hug our grief. Alternatively, we can allow ourselves to feel any natural grief that we do feel, but then reflect that our loss was inevitable. 'I surely never thought my father or mother or brother or sister or husband or wife or friend was immortal. I knew they would have to die one day, just as I will have to. It has happened. I'm very sorry to lose them but it was inevitable, so I need to accept this and become less attached to worldly life, to conditioned

existence, and become less attached to worldly life, to conditioned existence. Let me think in terms of other things, higher things. Let me meditate more, let me be less involved with the world, let me try to liberate myself. That is the more creative response.

Q: It can be quite exhilarating if you can accept it in a healthy way.

S: Right, yes. It's an opportunity. It's the same when you lose a large sum of money. Maybe it is stolen from you. You can either feel very angry, very resentful, or you can think, 'Well, yes, I really feel upset, I am really sorry to lose it. This has shown me how attached I am to it. I know that now. I shouldn't have been so attached, or I should have looked after it more carefully and not placed, maybe, so much blind confidence in such and such a person. I've learned that lesson. That's a good thing.' In that way you give the whole thing a positive turn.

It isn't even just a question of a highly traumatic, extreme, desperate, existential situation, but even the

ordinary occurrences of everyday life, which are a bit painful, or unpleasant, or difficult. You can either react negatively, with the reactive mind, or you can respond positively, with the creative mind. In the first instance you go round and round again, even though the circle may be a comparatively tiny one, or you go up another round of the spiral, even though it may be an apparently insignificant round of the spiral. If someone speaks a bit harshly to you, you can either let yourself get irritated and brood over it, or you can reflect, 'Well, I don't suppose they really meant it, and even if they did, what does it matter? Hard words break no bones. I am none the worse for it. Maybe they weren't in a very good frame of mind. That's a pity, I feel sorry for them.' In that way you can talk yourself out of your resentment and develop a much more positive frame of mind. In every minute almost, you can switch yourself from the reactive to the creative.

Q: There seems to be a watershed of awareness, when the reactive becomes less frequent and the creative

more frequent, where a person's tendencies swap around and they really seem to be launched.

S: Right, yes.

Q: Well, if you are really determined you can use anything. There's nothing that can happen in life that you can't switch round in your mental manoeuvrings.

S: Yes, right. Of course some situations are really extreme, as when you suddenly lose several people who are near and dear to you. Maybe you lose all your money and get involved in lawsuits and fall very seriously ill, all at the same time. That of course is a very difficult situation, but you can still transcend it, you can still respond positively and creatively, and there is all the more likelihood of that if you've trained yourself in that positive creative response through a whole series of apparently insignificant experiences. If you get irritated and annoyed when a window won't open properly, and feel like banging the window, if you are functioning reactively and negatively even with regard to those little things, what about the bigger things?

One could regard that whole talk that I gave on 'Mind – Reactive and Creative' as a sort of commentary on this sutta. This is all that the sutta is about: life as we have to experience it sooner or later and how either the reactive mind or the creative mind comes into play. If at every moment of the day, in every situation, we are careful to respond creatively rather than react negatively, progress is assured. We will be progressing all the time and gradually there will be a shift in our lives from what we can only describe as the negative to the positive, and we will become more and more predominantly creative rather than reactive. That is what following the path means. It is not anything more than that: responding to every situation that confronts you with positivity, which of course implies mindfulness and awareness, and not letting any situation get you down.

Why do you listen to the Dharma?

From a seminar on the Great Chapter of the Sutta-Nipāta *(pp. 658–9)*

> Thus have I heard: Once the Buddha was staying in the Eastern Park of Migāramātu's estate at Sāvatthi. One evening on a full-moon day he was sitting in the open air with all the monks gathered round him. He saw that they were silent and so he spoke to them.
>
> 'Monks', he said, 'It sometimes happens in this world that things are said concerning skilful states, distinguished and liberating statements are made that lead to full enlightenment. Now, monks, why should you bother to listen to those statements? People may ask you this same question, and, if they do, you should answer them like this:
>
> 'It is for the purpose of knowing two things as they have come to be.'
>
> They may ask you what these two ideas are. If they do, you should answer them like this:
>
> 'The first insight is this: this is suffering and this is what causes it. The second insight is this: that is where suffering stops, and that is how you get there.' ...

Sutta-Nipāta, The Great Chapter, the introduction to the *Dvayatānapassanā Sutta* (Origination and Cessation of suffering), trans. H. Saddhatissa (pp. 83–4)

Why do you listen to the Dharma? To learn to distinguish between the reactive order of things and the creative order, the cyclical order and the spiral or progressive order, and to be able to follow the progressive and creative. That's why you listen to the Dharma. Tell people that. If people ask you why you sit in meditation hour after hour, why you listen to the Buddha's teaching, why you chant the Dharma verses, say it's to lead a creative life rather than a reactive life. That's the answer you should give. It boils down to that, doesn't it? In terms of traditional Indian cosmology, it's to get off the wheel of life and to realize

nirvana, but if you want to put it in the most simple and general terms of all – not in those particular contexts or from those particular points of view – it's just to be as little reactive as possible and as creative as possible, not to swing between pairs of opposites but to go up and up. That's why you listen to the Dharma.

Perhaps it's significant that the Buddha is telling the monks this on this occasion towards the end of his life, when no doubt he is conscious he hasn't got much time left. He is reminding them of the fundamental principles, why they are all gathered together, why they are all listening to him, why they are leading that sort of life at all. But this is the reason, this is the general principle behind it all: to be less reactive and more creative, to be as creative as possible, to be infinitely creative, in our present terms. This is the thought that comes to the Buddha as he sits there with them, meditating. 'This is what I must tell the monks. Do they know why they are here? Do they know why they are listening to the Dharma? Let them know that fully and clearly. If people ask them why they listen, this is what they must be able to explain. They must be able to make the general principles clear.'

A habit of creativity

From a seminar on the Ratana Sutta *(pp. 79–80)*

Those who comprehend clearly the Noble Truths
Well taught by him who is endowed with profound wisdom,
However exceedingly heedless they may be,
Do not take birth for the eighth time.
This precious jewel is in the Sangha.
By this truth may there be peace.
- Ratana Sutta verse 9

Sangharakshita: It's quite a thought, isn't it, that you don't fall back? When you attain the point of Stream-entry it's not that you come to a certain static point. Stream-entry does not represent that. It rather represents the sparking off of a process which from then onwards generates spontaneously an increasing momentum, without anything further being done. If we go into this at all deeply, it makes us question our literalistic way of looking at things. The point of Stream-entry is the point at which you move from the circle to the spiral. In a sense you are making an effort. In a sense you are not making an effort. It's as though ... let's say that in your personality when you start off there's an enormous excess of reactivity over creativity. Maybe there's an absolute minimum of creativity, just barely enough to make you a human being at all. As a result of your spiritual practice the proportion of creativity in relation to reactivity is constantly increasing, but the reactivity remains very powerful. So long as the creativity is still very much less than the reactivity, whatever the actual proportions may be, there is always the possibility of the reactivity stifling the creativity. But let us say that once the creativity is proportionate to the reactivity, from that point onward the reactivity hasn't a chance. So if that is so, when they're half and half or even maybe (we can't be sure of this) when the creativity is three quarters and the reactivity only one quarter, then there is no possibility of the reactivity ever overpowering the creativity again. The reactivity in you is inevitably finished within a limited time which can be calculated from the rate at which the creativity

is increasing and that is the point of no return. It's something like that which the verse is saying.

Q: People set up routines and patterns in their day to day existence to make things easier. They get up at the same time and catch the same bus to work and things like that. Is that reactive or what?

S: Well, is it? If you do it, you should be able to tell whether it is reactive or not. How do you tell whether something that you are doing is reactive or creative? Or do you just have to take it on trust?

Q: To the extent that it's done with awareness.

S: Yes.

Q: Because such situations could equally be quite creative.

S: You are not necessarily being reactive because you do the same thing over and over again or appear to do

the same thing over and over again. For instance, if you meditate every morning you don't, or you shouldn't, sit down with a mental attitude of 'Well, here we go again, same old meditation, same old mindfulness of breathing.' You have to try to bring a fresh mind to it, because the situation has changed, you have changed, it's a new day. It's not that you're doing the same old thing over again. Nonetheless you could say there is objectively a pattern which is in a manner of speaking reactive, but there are two kinds of reactivity. There is the reactivity that leads to further reactivity, and the reactivity that leads to creativity. There is a more refined reactivity, a reactivity which is used with a degree of awareness which points in the direction of the creative. You are using your reactive patterns in such a way that they work against themselves.

This applies very much to habit. We are creatures of habit. If we've done something once we tend to do it again. If we do it twice we're more likely to do it a third time and so on. In that way we build up a habit. So it's as though we have to make use of that tendency

within ourselves to build up habits which even though those habits are in a sense positive. Sitting and meditating regularly is like that, because it means that you are constantly working on your mind. If you were just to do it whenever you felt like it you probably wouldn't do it at all. Also there's the question of where to fit it into the day's routine. You might decide to meditate in the morning and in the afternoon not because there is anything magical about meditating twice a day, but because that is the only way for most people to ensure that they meditate at all. That's the way to make sure that the constant effort to work on your mind is kept up. When you've got into a certain momentum and are sure of meditating whatever happens, you don't have to bother so much about particular times and places, because you'll do it anyway. You'll just sit down where you are and do it. You don't have to think in terms of meditating at six in the morning and eight in the evening, or whatever it is. But at the beginning you do, so you make use of your tendency to form habits in such a way that you

form good habits, habits which will lead to the cultivation of more and more skilful mental states.

In every situation we encounter there is the possibility of being reactive and the possibility of being creative. Even when you're getting on a bus you can be reactive or creative. At the moment of stepping on the bus you could be thinking, 'What a nuisance! I've got to sit on this bus with all these ridiculous stupid people for half an hour.' You can sometimes get on the bus with that sort of feeling, even if it's not consciously formulated. Or you can get on the bus with a positive attitude, 'I'll be able to sit quietly for half an hour and collect myself, so that when I arrive at my destination I'm rested and collected.' You can remind yourself not to get distracted by anything you might see or hear on the bus. You might even make a practice when you get on a bus or any other form of public transport to mentally wish well to all the people who are already there. That would be up to a point creative rather than reactive. At every juncture the possibility exists of being either reactive or creative. If you're unaware of the existence of those two

possibilities, if you're in a dull mental state, then that is reactive and not creative. But if you begin to be aware that those two possibilities exist all the time, it means that you are already to some extent creative.

Working with the mechanical mind

From a seminar on The Door of Liberation *(pp. 350–1)*

Q: Can the repetition of a mantra become mechanical?

Sangharakshita: What do you mean by mechanical?

Q: I've read in some books, don't let mantra chanting become mechanical.

S: Well, what do you think is meant by that?

Q: Unmindfully repeating it.

S: But do you think you can repeat it unmindfully?

Q: I don't think so, but I've seen it somewhere, and that causes quite a lot of confusion.

S: Surely one can't repeat it with total lack of mindfulness? Obviously there are degrees, from

doing it with just a little mindfulness and awareness and doing it with a very strong mindfulness and awareness, and obviously one should do it as mindfully as possible. But I don't think there can be any completely mechanical repetition, otherwise you wouldn't be repeating it at all, you'd stop. The only mechanical repetition would be if you recorded it and played the recording over and over again and didn't listen to it, or even left the room. Someone has said, 'You want to be very careful about repeating mantras, don't let it become mechanical', almost as if to scare you off it. But even if it is a bit mechanical at first, or very mechanical, never mind, go on repeating it and try to increase your awareness.

Q: I've had this hanging over me when I have been doing it, not really giving myself to it because I'm worried I might be doing it mechanically.

S: I wonder, in a very general way, why there is always this sort of self-defeating attitude. It is very widespread and you get it in all sorts of books. You are

warned off meditation because if you do too much you might become egoistic. You are warned off austerity because you might fall into the extreme of torturing yourself. You are warned off too much reading because it might make you too intellectual.

Q: The point I was trying to make earlier was that I think sometimes you do realize that a lot of things that you're doing are rather mechanical and you seem to be doing them rather compulsively in a blind mechanical way. One does sometimes wonder whether it might not be better just to stop it altogether.

S: What I said wasn't necessarily a specific reference to what you said; it was more of a generalization from many such statements that I have encountered. There seems to be this attitude with regards to spiritual practices in general of always warning you against the danger of taking them to extremes in such a way that you are put off even getting started on that particular practice. Do you see what I am getting at?

The breaking forth of blossoms

From The Ratana Sutta *seminar, Padmaloka, May 1980*

> As a clump of trees in blossom with their tops
> during the first heat of the summer months, so
> the sublime doctrine leading to Nirvana was taught
> for the highest goal. This precious jewel is in the
> Sangha. By this truth may there be peace.

Sangharakshita: I think this is one of the most aesthetically pleasing verses in the whole of the Pāli canon, though this translation isn't very poetic. The Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is likened to the breaking forth of blossoms when the first heat of summer comes. So this is very evocative. It suggests that the Buddha's teaching of the dharma is a spontaneous, natural thing, like the springing forth of flowers. This translation says, 'as a clump of trees in blossom with their tops', and the suggestion is that the Buddha comes into bloom with the blossom of the teaching at the peak of his being, as it were. The summer heat could be interpreted in two ways. You could say that the Buddha's own Enlightenment is the sun, the warmth and light which brings forth the blossom of the teaching on the tree of the Buddha's being, or that the suffering of living beings is the scorching heat which causes the blossoms of the Buddha's teaching to break forth.

There are a number of allied similes in other texts. For instance, in the Saddharma-pundarika the Dharma is likened to a great raincloud and also to the sun which causes things to grow. There it's living beings who grow when they receive the rain or the sunshine of the Dharma. But here the Dharma is the blossom that the Buddha himself produces. It's as though the Buddha's teaching is the flower of his being, spontaneously bursting forth when the sun shines, either the bright sun of his full Enlightenment or the scorching heat of the suffering of living beings. In either case, the teaching is not seen as something artificial or thought out, but something springing forth from the Buddha just as naturally as blossoms spring from the trees. That is not how we usually speak about the Buddha and his teaching of the

Dharma, but it's a very appropriate way. When you explain the Dharma, even on your own humble level, it's as if you are producing blossoms for the benefit of other people. You are not just laying down 'This is what the Buddha says.' You feel as if you are blossoming, as it were, for their benefit. You're giving of your best. So the Dharma is something that breaks forth naturally, spontaneously, from the Buddha, a great contrast with the way it's presented in some books on Buddhism, which give the impression of the Buddha as a grim, schoolmasterly figure standing at a blackboard and writing out the four noble truths and a long list of precepts.

Seeing the mind

From a seminar in New Zealand on The Sutra of Forty-Two Sections *(pp. 41–2)*

Knowing the source of his own mind

Sangharakshita: What do you think is meant by that? What is the source of one's own mind? Is it possible to see the source of one's own mind? Who sees?

Q: It's not looking at or perceiving the reactive mind, is it? It seems to be going beyond that. It's going to be some sort of an insight into the nature of the mind.

S: It's not reactive mind seeing reactive mind, which you can only do reactively. If you really see the conditionedness of the mind, the mind that sees is a non-conditioned mind. You can't know the source of the mind with the mind itself, in the ordinary sense, at all. So it suggests that a higher faculty, a more intuitive, more transcendental faculty, has to come into operation; otherwise you don't see the origin of

the mind. But what is the origin of the mind? Or is there an origin of the mind? Does it mean going back and back in time? Does it refer to the process of rebirth? Does it mean seeing your first birth, your first embodiment? It doesn't really mean that, does it? Seeing the origin of the mind means seeing where you go wrong. It's not the origin way back in the past. It's an origin which is constantly being repeated, over and over again, in the present. 'Seeing the origin of the mind' means seeing how this whole reactive process takes place, this whole silly circle.

And when you really see that, when you are 'outside' that circle, you see the conditionedness of it all, the reactivity of it all, and at that moment you are not conditioned and reactive, you are creative, intuitive, even transcendental. You are unconditioned, and in that way you penetrate to the profound principles of Buddhahood, because at that moment you're intuitive, transcendental, unconditioned, and what is that if not Buddhahood, at least the beginnings of it, the principles or qualities of Buddhahood? Seeing the conditionedness of your

own mind, knowing the source of your own mind, you awaken to, you penetrate to, the profound principles of Buddhahood. A Buddha is one who thoroughly, clearly sees the conditionedness of his own conditioned mind, and as soon as the conditionedness of the mind is really seen, the conditionedness ceases.

If you really see yourself reacting, you cease to react. There has to be a real seeing, not just a theoretical, mental knowing. You can stop your reactivity at any instant by seeing it. You see how ridiculous and absurd it is, and how unnecessary and how you just go round and round in the same old circle. You see the foolishness of it, and you just stop. Well, you don't just stop, there's more than that. In order to stop you have to be more than that reactive person, so the creative element, the intuitive element, the transcendental element comes in, as it were, automatically. It's not that one happens and then the other; it's instantaneous, simultaneous.

He awakens to the non-phenomenal [the unconditioned], clinging to nothing within and seeking for nothing from without.

In a sense, there is no within or without, no self and non-self, no subject and object. They are all part of the reactive mind's activity. So the mind that sees, the unconditioned mind, is not a subject as opposed to an object. This is very important to see. It's only the reactive mind that can be a subject. The 'seeing', unconditioned mind is not a 'seer' that 'sees' something 'seen' as distinct from, or opposed to, itself. So it really means a dissolution, a breaking down of the subject-object relationship or experience in a unitary awareness. This is the only way in which we can describe it: an awareness which is at the same time subject and object. There is awareness, but nothing of which you are aware. You can't make it into an object, though at first it seems like an object. It is what they call a pseudo-object. You can think of it as an object, but really it isn't an object.

'Clinging to nothing within' – let's assume for the time being that there is a distinction (and it's a relative one) between 'within' and 'without'. You don't cling to anything within, you don't cling to any personal experience, you let it pass, let it go, let it change. And you seek for nothing from without, because you know that nothing from without can give you any real lasting satisfaction.