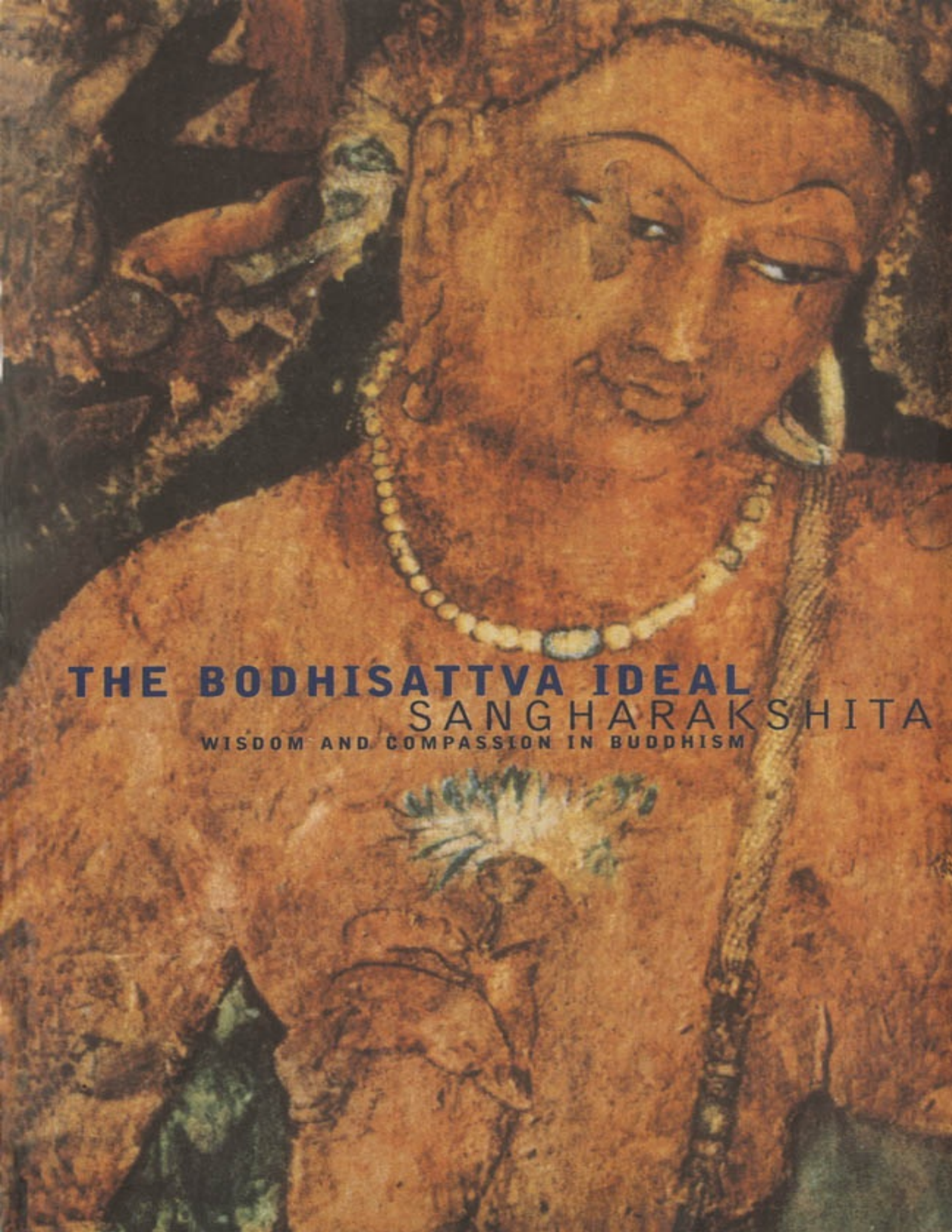

THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

SANGHARAKSHITA

WISDOM AND COMPASSION IN BUDDHISM

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About the Author

Sangharakshita was born Dennis Lingwood in South London, in 1925. Largely self-educated, he developed an interest in the cultures and philosophies of the East early on, and realized that he was a Buddhist at the age of sixteen.

The Second World War took him, as a conscript, to India, where he stayed on to become the Buddhist monk Sangharakshita. After studying for some years under leading teachers from the major Buddhist traditions, he went on to teach and write extensively. He also played a key part in the revival of Buddhism in India, particularly through his work among the most socially deprived people in India, often treated as untouchables.

After twenty years in India, he returned to England to establish the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order in 1967, and the Western Buddhist Order in 1968. A translator between East and West, between the traditional and the modern, between principles and practices, Sangharakshita's depth of experience and clear thinking have been appreciated throughout the world. He has always particularly emphasized the decisive significance of commitment in the spiritual life, the paramount value of spiritual friendship and community, the link between religion and art, and the need for a 'new society' supportive of spiritual aspirations and ideals.

The FWBO is now an international Buddhist movement with over sixty centres on five continents. In recent years Sangharakshita has been handing on most of his responsibilities to his senior disciples in the Order. From his base in Birmingham, he is now focusing on personal contact with people, and on his writing.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

> God once looked into nothingness and made something come to be.... [The] Buddha ... saw that the world had always been, and he, in his wisdom, found a way to allow some of it to stop. His gift to us – his act of greatest compassion – was to teach us that way. Who is to say that this is finally any less loving than the Christian drive to mimic God's sublime generosity in a never-ending round of action and creativity?[1]

The fear, or the conviction, that Buddhism is selfish seems to be one of the greatest obstacles to the reception of the Buddha's teaching in the West. It may be based on a vague, and mistaken, sense that the most evident aspects of Buddhist activity – meditation, ritual, the study of ancient texts – serve no purpose in the 'real world', do nothing to help this troubled planet. Buddhists rightly advocate the need for reflection before action; like most witticisms, that phrase 'Don't just do something, sit there' has some point to it, although the virtues of fearlessness and prompt action are in fact no less part of the Buddhist tradition. But while the charge of selfishness seems ironic, given the more obvious selfishness of so many of the other options our society offers, the fear is a reasonable one.

That wisdom and compassion are inseparable aspects of Enlightenment is easy to say, but the working out of that truth has shaped Buddhist history and practice. If the desire for wisdom takes us, in a sense, out of the world, the force of compassion that arises with the development of true wisdom brings us straight back into it. And in practice we need to work on developing both at the same time. Without at least the first stirrings of compassion, a life lived in the name of Buddhism can indeed become as selfish as the worst excesses of the life, the world, that it purports to have the aim of transforming.

What has become known as 'engaged Buddhism' is seen by many Western Buddhists as the only way forward. To focus this aspiration, it seems time for an unequivocal reassertion of the heroic, other-regarding, compassionate nature of

the ideal Buddhist: not otherworldly, but this-worldly. We do see people who exemplify these qualities – the Dalai Lama is the most famous, but there are many others. And in terms of Buddhist tradition, the inspiration we need already exists: in the form of the Bodhisattva – the wise, compassionate, tirelessly energetic, endlessly patient, perfectly generous, and completely skilful ideal Buddhist beloved of the Mahāyāna tradition. What we also need is a clear and pragmatic understanding of how to begin to approach such a lofty ideal.

Throughout Buddhist history there have been times when the need for a restatement of the Buddhist ideal has been recognized. It was such a period of revalorization that led to the emergence of what Sangharakshita has called ‘one of the sublimest spiritual ideals that mankind has ever seen’: the Bodhisattva ideal. The somewhat obscure origins of this ideal, and of the school of Buddhism that came to call itself the Mahāyāna, the ‘great way’, have been the focus of much recent scholarship. In particular, it has been important to sort out whether and in what sense the Arhant ideal of early Buddhist tradition was equivalent to the Bodhisattva ideal which emerged in response to it. The Mahāyānists came to refer to those who rejected the new Mahāyāna scriptures as following the ‘Hīnayāna’, the lesser way, a pejorative designation that has needed to be reassessed.

While touching on the relationship of the Bodhisattva ideal to earlier Buddhist ideals, this book especially considers the origin of the Bodhisattva ideal in broad, almost mythical terms: in terms not just of the tension between the human tendency towards self-interest and our innate feeling for our kinship with other living beings, but also of our need to honour our own spiritual development, balanced against our need to respond to the needs of others.

Sangharakshita’s acquaintance with the Bodhisattva ideal began, like so much in his life, with a book. Having, at the age of sixteen, read two Buddhist texts renowned for their sublime wisdom – the *Diamond Sūtra* and the *Sūtra of Hui Neng* – and realized that he was a Buddhist, one of the next Buddhist works he happened upon (and there weren’t so many around in England in the 1940s) was an extract from a work equally renowned for the sublimity of its compassion, the *Avataṁsaka Sūtra*. Of this discovery he has said, ‘This work I read repeatedly, and its picture of the infinitely wise and boundlessly compassionate Bodhisattva ... made a deep impression on me.’

A few years later, during his stay in the Himalayan border town of Kalimpong, it was through another book (Śāntideva’s *Śikṣā-Samuccaya)* that he was ‘more strongly attracted to the Bodhisattva ideal than ever – so strongly, in fact, that attraction is far too weak a word for what I then felt. The truth was that I was thrilled, exhilarated, uplifted, and inspired by the Bodhisattva Ideal....’

The attraction was twofold. He was moved by the ‘sheer unrivalled sublimity’ of the ideal of dedicating oneself, for innumerable lifetimes, to the attainment of Supreme Enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings. And the ideal gave him strong spiritual support in his Buddhist work at a time when he was receiving little help from those around him. The Bodhisattva ideal provided him ‘with an example, on the grandest possible scale, of what I was myself trying to do within my own infinitely smaller sphere and on an infinitely lower level’. His contact with this ideal was not just on paper. In Kalimpong he found a teacher and friend, Dhardo Rimpoche, whom he had ‘come to revere as being himself a living Bodhisattva’.[2]

Sangharakshita’s fervent appreciation for the Bodhisattva ideal has never wavered, and it has been the subject of many of his talks, seminars, and poems. When I visited him last year and we were swapping notes about our current reading, he said he was reading – among a wide variety of other works – the *Avataṁsaka Sūtra*, the very same work he happened upon in London more than fifty years ago, now available in a full translation: ‘I always like to keep up my sūtra reading,’ he observed.

What *has* changed is his view of how the Bodhisattva ideal fits into the Buddhist tradition as a whole. He devoted the final chapter of *A Survey of Buddhism* to that ideal, describing it as ‘the perfectly ripened fruit of the whole vast tree of Buddhism’. At that time, in 1957, dissatisfied with aspects of the Theravāda tradition within which he had been ordained, he was inclined to see Mahāyāna Buddhism, and its presiding idea, the Bodhisattva ideal, as a more advanced teaching – a view which various Mahāyāna sūtras assiduously promulgate.

But further reflection convinced Sangharakshita that the Mahāyāna and, later, the Vajrayāna, were not more advanced developments but restatements of the original spirit of the Buddha’s teaching, restatements necessitated by the gradual loss of that spirit in the prevailing Buddhist schools. The heart of commitment to the Buddhist life was still ‘Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels’ – faith in the ideal of Enlightenment as represented by the Buddha, in his teachings, the Dharma, and in the generations of his Enlightened followers, the Sangha. The Bodhisattva ideal was simply the altruistic dimension of that commitment. This insight was expressed in a talk on Going for Refuge given in India in 1980. Recently, in a talk given in August 1999, Sangharakshita has elaborated on this to show that ultimately the Bodhisattva ideal goes even beyond altruism, encompassing the insight that in reality no distinction between self and other can be drawn.

This book is based on lectures given in London in the spring of 1969,

supplemented by points from seminars on the Bodhisattva ideal given by Sangharakshita in 1984 and 1986. The combination of these teachings provides an assessment of the Bodhisattva ideal which is both thoughtful and pragmatic. The ideal is said to complement the teachings of the Pāli Canon of early Buddhism, the Mahāyāna sūtras providing the inspiration for practice, while the Pāli texts give us day-to-day guidance on the details of that practice. And, as is characteristic of Sangharakshita, his thoughts on the practice of the Bodhisattva ideal itself are very much about how to live one's life in an everyday sense.

Dhardo Rimpoche once said, 'If you are in doubt about what to do next in your spiritual life, do something for other people.' The path of altruistic activity does sometimes seem easier – because more obvious – than the subtler task of finding one's way along what has been called the path of the inner life. But it isn't always easy to know how to help others. To discern this, a degree of insight is needed.

So is one to develop that insight before engaging in altruistic activity, or plunge in and try to help where one can, trusting to one's ability to learn wisdom in the process? The consideration of this dilemma is one of the key themes of this book. According to the Bodhisattva ideal, there can be no spiritual development without consideration for others, and no true altruism without a basis in one's own spiritual development. Sangharakshita's assertion that the Bodhisattva ideal represents the resolution of all conflict, the synthesis of all opposites, is both compelling and challenging.

So here is another book on Buddhism. Buddhist publishing has an ancient and venerable history. Not that the Buddha himself ever made so much as a memo, but once people began to commit the Dharma to paper – or palm-leaf, anyway – the written word became crucial to the journey of the Buddha's teaching through many countries and many centuries. It was in Sri Lanka that the Pāli Canon was first written down, in the first century BCE. In the seventh century CE the Chinese pilgrim-scholar Hsüan-tsang travelled from China to India and, after a sixteen-year journey, came back with many mule-loads of Buddhist texts, which he spent the rest of his life translating. Kukai, the celebrated founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, undertook the perilous sea journey from Japan to China and back, to return with a cargo of precious teachings.

Perhaps one has to make such a journey – or at least an inner equivalent – for the acquisition of Buddhist books to be worth much. 'Buddhism's in the life and in the heart', says Sangharakshita, in his poem 'The Scholars'. Books may ensure the life of the Dharma, but they can also be the death of it, unless we can take our interest in Buddhism further than the acquisition of information about it. Sangharakshita introduced the first lecture of the series on which this book is

based with the statement that the purpose of the teaching was to enable those present to experience a higher degree of being and awareness than usual. ‘We ourselves are living Buddhism at the moment of our participation.’

It is in the hope that this book will facilitate that kind of participation, that kind of life, that we offer it for publication now. For its existence gratitude is due to Silabhadra for the provision of lecture and seminar transcripts, to Jinananda for editorial assistance, to Shantavira and Dhivati for proof-reading, copy-editing, and help with end-notes, to Dhammarati for the cover design, to Varaprabha for the illustrations, Graham Patterson for the index, and to the production and distribution team at Windhorse Publications – Padmavajri, Sara Hagel, Chandramani, Dave Thompson, and Dharmashura – for putting it together and sending it out into the world. And, of course, thanks is due above all to Sangharakshita, both for reading the manuscript, and for giving us this teaching, sharing this ideal which has meant so much to him these many years.

Vidyadevi, Spoken Word Project, Birmingham, September 1999

1

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL

ONE DAY, as was his custom, the Buddha was wandering with a few of his disciples in the depths of the Indian jungle, away from the heat of the noonday sun. And as they were walking along, the Buddha bent down and scooped up a handful of siṅsapā leaves. He didn't always give elaborate discourses – he often taught in a simple, direct way – and on this occasion he simply asked his disciples, 'Tell me, what do you think? These leaves in my hand, as compared with the leaves of the forest, are they few or are they many?' The disciples of course replied, 'Well, in comparison with all the leaves in the forest, those in your hand are as nothing. They are just a handful.' Then the Buddha said, 'So it is with the truths I have realized, as compared with those I have revealed to you.'[3]

The point is not that there were truths that the Buddha felt unable to communicate, but that there were certain things he didn't consider it appropriate to teach. And the text goes on to explain why: because those truths would not help his disciples to transcend suffering and attain Enlightenment.

Since the Buddha's time, of course, whole forests of Buddhist scriptures have appeared. But the same applies: even though the scriptures are voluminous, they represent just a fraction of the Buddha's infinite knowledge and understanding. This is also true of the subject of this book. The Bodhisattva ideal is a vast subject. It is the major distinctive emphasis of the phase of the development of Buddhism known as the Mahāyāna, which had its flowering for a period of around 500 years (0–500CE), but is still practised today in many different forms,

from Tibetan Buddhism to Zen. To consider this topic is to place one's hand on the very heart of Buddhism, and feel the beating of that heart.

In a work of this size one can do no more than touch on a few major themes. The intention here is therefore to present certain aspects of the Bodhisattva ideal, selected with the intention of focusing directly on spiritual life and experience, and including only a minimum of historical and doctrinal detail.

Even in the handful of the Buddha's teachings which make up the Bodhisattva ideal, there are so many leaves that one hardly knows which to take up first. Perhaps it is best to begin right at the beginning, with the word Bodhisattva. In Sanskrit, *bodhi* means 'knowledge' in the sense of supreme knowledge, spiritual knowledge, knowledge of reality; and it also means 'awakening' in the sense of awakening to the ultimate truth of things, penetrating to the heart of existence. *Bodhi* is usually translated as 'Enlightenment', which is good enough as a provisional translation, provided that we understand the word not in the eighteenth-century rationalistic sense[4] but in its full spiritual, even transcendental sense. Bodhi is supreme spiritual knowledge, the great awakening that is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist life. *Sattva* means simply a being – not necessarily a human being, but any living being, even an animal or an insect. Thus a Bodhisattva is an Enlightenment-being, a 'being of awakening': a being whose whole life is dedicated – whose entire energies are devoted – to the attainment of Enlightenment.

Some authorities[5] hold that the Pāli term *bodhisatta* should have been Sanskritized as *bodhisakta*, that is to say, one who is making an effort towards Buddhahood, *sakta* meaning 'striving'. But the term settled upon was *bodhisattva*, 'sattva' meaning, as I have suggested, 'being' in quite an ordinary sense. For instance, when one speaks of *sarvasattva*,'all beings', one is not suggesting that all beings have the heroic qualities associated with *sakta*. Nonetheless, it may be that originally the term Bodhisattva did have that connotation. In any case, there is no doubt that the ideal is a heroic ideal. The Bodhisattva is a being *par excellence*, a Being with a capital B.

To say that a Bodhisattva is a being whose life is totally dedicated to the attainment of Enlightenment is no more than to say that the Bodhisattva is the ideal Buddhist. Ideally a Buddhist is dedicated to following the teaching of the Buddha and realizing the experience of Enlightenment just as the Buddha did. The Bodhisattva ideal is likewise the ideal of self-transformation from unenlightened to Enlightened humanity. But the definition of 'Bodhisattva' goes even further. A Bodhisattva is described as one who is dedicated to the attainment of Enlightenment not for his or her sake alone, but so that he or she may lead all living beings whatsoever to the same state.

It seems strange that in the Buddhist texts which pre-date the teaching of the Bodhisattva ideal there seem to be so few unequivocal statements to the effect that the aim of the spiritual life is to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. However, a few such statements are to be found in the Pāli Canon. In the *Aṅguttara-Nikāya*, for example, the Buddha speaks of four kinds of people: people who help neither themselves nor others; people who help others but not themselves; people who help themselves but not others; and people who help both themselves and others.[6] That is quite clearly in the territory of the Bodhisattva ideal. And in the *Mahāvagga* of the Vinaya Pitaka, the Buddha addresses the first sixty Arhants (an Arhant – literally 'worthy one' – being one who has gained Enlightenment through the Buddha's teaching), saying 'Go forth, O monks, for the good of many people, the welfare of many people, out of compassion.'[7] Here again the other-regarding emphasis is very clear.

So although altruism doesn't at first seem to be a predominant emphasis in the Pāli Canon, it is definitely there; and if one disregards all those suttas that are spun out from scanty material or seem to be later compilations, these altruistic elements form a considerable part of the canon as a whole. It is also possible that certain things got left out of the Pāli Tipiṭaka and were subsequently incorporated into later texts (some of the Mahāyāna sūtras, for example) in which compassion, the other-regarding emphasis, is very strong. But even looking at the Pāli Canon as it stands, there are enough indications to suggest that the original Buddhist ideal was not one of liberation for oneself alone.

One might well imagine that at the time of the Buddha people felt no need to spell this out so explicitly. If you had the example of the Buddha before you, you could hardly doubt that there was an other-regarding aspect of the spiritual life. But later on, as we shall see, the self-regarding aspect became over-stressed, so that there needed to be a compensatory counter-emphasis. To understand how this happened, and why it became necessary to promote the ideal of Enlightenment 'for the benefit of all living beings', we have to go back to the origins of Buddhism, and also to consider certain fundamentals of human nature.

One can often draw a sharp distinction between what a person is and does and what he or she says or writes. For example, a psychoanalyst may write a whole book about love: what it is, how it develops, how to maintain it, what to do when things go wrong, and so on. But although he may express himself so fluently on the subject, his own life may fail to be in any way an embodiment of love. On the other hand, some people may be seen clearly to embody love in their lives, radiating kindness, affection, and goodwill; but they may not be able to analyse it, or put it into words at all, even to their nearest and dearest. Between being and

doing on the one hand and verbal expression on the other there is often this sort of chasm.

Words always express to some extent what we are, but they do not necessarily express what we think they express or what we would like others to think they express. Sometimes our being is just not adequate to the words we say. For instance, if somebody asks you ‘What is the goal of Buddhism?’ and you say, ‘Well, Enlightenment, of course, Supreme Enlightenment – you know, the unification of wisdom and compassion on the highest level,’ the words are formally correct, but your being is by no means adequate to what you have said.

One could think of there being two circles, a great big circle which is our words, and a tiny circle which is our being. The aim is to make the two circles equally big. If one’s words are too much out of harmony with one’s being, people will notice the fact. Emerson said, ‘Don’t *say* things. What you *are* stands over you the while, and thunders so that I cannot hear what you say to the contrary.’[8] To talk about love while in a thoroughly irritable frame of mind is to communicate not love but irritability.

The difference between words and being applies on the very highest level. We may make the statement that the Buddha was, or even is, a fully Enlightened being, but it is hard for us to imagine what that means. We read that a Buddha knows reality, that he is compassionate, wise, and so on, but these are just words. A great effort of imagination is required to realize what the words really mean, what a fully Enlightened being really is. Indeed, if we encountered an Enlightened being, we would be very unlikely to be able to recognize that he or she was Enlightened.

A Buddha’s inner experience is expressed primarily in terms of what he is and does, and only secondarily in terms of what he says. Even though we have abundant records of what the Buddha said, even on the subject of Enlightenment itself, a report – however accurate – of his words could never fully express what he was. This is evident from some of the incidents the Pāli scriptures describe. The Buddha meets someone on the road, perhaps during his almsround, and, either in reply to a question or just spontaneously, gives a few words of instruction. The words are usually very simple. But to our astonishment we read that upon hearing them, the person listening becomes Enlightened, just like that.[9]

How can that possibly be? We can’t help asking this question. After all, we ourselves can read those same words a hundred times over, but nothing much happens. There may be a glimmer of understanding – we may think, ‘Well, of course. Obviously. No problem there,’ – but we don’t go spiralling up into Enlightenment. How was it that when they were originally spoken those words produced such a dramatic effect? Sometimes the listener would have been

prepared to be receptive to them by many years of previous spiritual training. But the main factor to be taken into consideration is the Buddha himself. Those words didn't just appear in the air – it was the Buddha who spoke them, and that made all the difference. In a sense it didn't matter what he said. It was who he was that produced the impression.

The being of other people always does impinge on us in that direct, 'being to being' way. We often get a definite impression of someone before we have spoken to or even looked at them. In the same way the being of the Buddha can impinge on the being of the ordinary person – if they are receptive. The Buddha can't impose his being on us; there needs to be an element of cooperation. People may impinge on us in such a way as to change our mental state, but a permanent change comes about only with transcendental insight into the true nature of things. Even a Buddha cannot produce insight in a person; he can only give one an opportunity to develop it oneself.

Could he make it easier for one to be receptive? There is a parallel discussion in Christian theology: you need the grace of God to be saved, but you are not completely passive – you have to be able to receive that grace. Does that mean that there is another grace which has enabled you to receive grace? The Buddhist conundrum is more or less the same: do you need the Buddha's help to enable you to be open to the possibility of his helping you? At some level this must be so; but it is a regressive train of thought, and perhaps it is best not to take even the first step backwards. The point is that one needs to be open to whatever the Buddha can give.

One might think that to be directly influenced by the Buddha would involve being in his presence. We shall see that the Mahāyāna took quite seriously the idea that one could choose to be reborn at a time and in a place in which one might encounter a Buddha. However, this hypothesis is not strictly necessary, because in any case the limitations of space and time don't apply, presumably, to mental states. One could, with sufficient effort and receptivity, simply feel oneself to be in the presence of the Buddha. The meditation practices of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition that involve visualizing a Buddha or Bodhisattva work in this way. One constructs a mental image of a Buddha or Bodhisattva; this is called the *samayasattva*, the conventional being. It doesn't just appear – you have to bring it into being, which is not an easy thing to do – but eventually, on the basis of the visualization of the samayasattva, the *jñānasattva* or 'knowledge-being', an actual experience of the Buddha or Bodhisattva, can manifest.[10]

Practices such as this are a testament to the true nature of the Buddha's teaching. Whether he gave a long discourse or whether he said nothing at all, he

influenced people more by what he was and what he did than by what he said. The man himself, the Enlightened man, was the message. One could even say that Buddhism *is* the Buddha, and the Buddha is Buddhism. During his lifetime, many people became Enlightened, not just because of the words he said – words which are still available in the scriptures – but because of his tremendous presence. Nothing he said could adequately express what he was. This is what the story of the siṅsapā leaves is really saying: that what the Buddha said and what he was were incommensurable.

After the Buddha's death, called his *parinirvāṇa* (as it is not death as we understand it, but rather an extension of his experience of Enlightenment), things were different. The accounts of what happened are contradictory, but they agree that not long after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa a large number of his disciples held a meeting to discuss a crucial question: what is Buddhism?[11] This question is, if anything, still more crucial to us today. So far as we are concerned, the Buddha is dead – not just in the historical sense but in the sense that we are dead to, not aware of, not awake to, our own Buddha nature. For a Buddhist, 'What is Buddhism?' is – of course – not a theoretical question, but an essentially practical one. What one really wants to know is, 'What is the path to the realization of Enlightenment? How can I contact my own lost Buddhahood?' (It is important that these two questions are taken together. In a sense we can consider that Buddha-nature is innate within us; but we will have to engage in a process of change, growth, and development – that is, we will have to find and follow a path – to realize our potential for Enlightenment.)

It seems that after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa there were among his disciples two parties, representing two different points of view. One party said, in effect, that Buddhism is the teaching of the Buddha: the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the three marks of conditioned existence, the twelve links of the chain of conditioned co-production, and so on.[12] These teachings, given by the Buddha during his lifetime, constitute Buddhism, they said.

Reasonable enough, one might think. But the other party disagreed. Not that they rejected the Buddha's teaching; on the contrary, they valued it very highly. But they did not agree that Buddhism was fully embodied in the Buddha's verbal teaching. According to these people – and they seem to have been in the majority – one had also to take into account a second factor: the life and example of the Buddha himself. This, in their view, was even more important than the doctrinal teachings.

What made them think this? We can get a feeling for the answer to this question – we are never going to know for sure – by trying to place ourselves imaginatively in their position. And doing so will also bring us very close to the

origin of the Bodhisattva ideal.

When the Buddha died, by all accounts his disciples were grief-stricken. Well, not quite all of them. Although even the gods, as well as unenlightened human beings, are represented as being utterly distraught, we are told that the Arhants, those who were themselves Enlightened, remained absolutely calm and unmoved. Their realization that even a Buddha must die, in the sense that his physical body must break up, was so profound that they didn't feel any sense of loss.

After all, what had they to lose? Inasmuch as they were Enlightened, they had the Buddha with them – in a sense they *were* the Buddha. Enlightenment was neither theirs as a personal possession nor the Buddha's as a personal possession. There had been no essential change. They certainly hadn't lost the Buddha, because they hadn't lost Buddhahood, and it is Buddhahood that makes a Buddha a Buddha. (Whether there was a difference between the Enlightenment of the Buddha and that of his Enlightened disciples is a question we will consider later in this chapter.)

The Arhants may have been able to face the Buddha's death with equanimity, but to those who were not themselves Enlightened, Enlightenment was inevitably associated with the physical body of the Buddha. When he died, it was as though Enlightenment itself had disappeared from the universe. Some people exclaimed, 'The Eye of the World has disappeared!'[13] And although this wasn't really true – a cloud had moved across the face of the sun, but the sun was still shining – *it felt* true, and they were devastated. According to tradition, even the animals were affected.

There are beautiful representations in Buddhist art, especially that produced in China, of this solemn final scene, set in a grove of sāl trees. (The major events of the Buddha's life – his birth, Enlightenment, and parinirvāṇa – all took place, according to the scriptures, beneath trees.) Sāl trees are still a common sight in India. They are perfectly straight, with a slender trunk, broad green leaves, and beautiful white flowers. We are told that the Buddha passed away lying on a stone couch at the foot of a group of these sāl trees. Also vividly depicted are the disciples – monks, kings, queens, princes, merchants, wandering mendicants, brahmins, traders, flower-sellers – grouped around the Buddha in attitudes of grief. A little further away are the wild beasts of the forest, as well as a number of domesticated animals. And all of them, human beings and animals too, are weeping, as if the whole world shared a common grief in the loss of the Buddha.

But even though the disciples felt that the light of the world had gone out, still, slowly, they recovered from their grief, as we all have to recover on these occasions, and started to take stock of the situation. Unbelievable as it seemed at

first, the Buddha was gone and they had to settle down to life in a Buddhaless world – which, especially for those who had lived in his presence for many years, was a terrible change. But eventually they started trying to understand what they were left with. And some – perhaps the intellectuals among them – said, 'Well, we've got the teachings the Buddha gave us: the doctrines, the rules of behaviour, and so on. That's enough, surely.' (One can imagine that these were the kind of people who went on to spend their lives happily analysing and classifying the teachings, and later began the tradition that became what is known as the Abhidharma.)[14]

But there were many among the disciples of the Buddha who, while they had nothing against the teachings or the rules, felt there was something missing from their lives now that the Buddha had gone. We can imagine that even when they were supposed to be thinking of the teachings and committing those long lists of terms to memory, they couldn't help thinking of the Buddha, and recalling incidents in his life that exemplified his personal qualities.

For instance, some of them no doubt remembered the occasion when the Buddha was going round from one hermitage to the next and found in one hut an elderly monk lying on the floor in a terrible condition; he had dysentery. It was obvious that he had been lying there for days without receiving any help at all. The Buddha asked the old man why the other monks weren't looking after him, and he said, 'Well, I'm useless to them now. Why should they bother to look after me?' So the Buddha sent his companion, Ānanda, to fetch warm water, and together they lifted the old monk on to a bed, washed him, and made him comfortable. Then the Buddha called all the monks together and said, 'Monks, you have neither father nor mother, brother nor sister. You've given up the world. You must be brother and sister, mother and father, to one another. He who wishes to serve me, let him serve the sick.'[15]

Incidents like this, incidents which show the Buddha's practical compassion, must surely have remained in the minds and hearts of many of his disciples. Some of them, especially the lay disciples, might also have remembered the story of Kisāgotamī. In India in those days, as now, infant mortality was very high, and the story goes that a young woman called Kisāgotamī lost her only child when he was only a few years old. Unable to believe he was dead, crazed with grief, she took his body in her arms from house to house, asking for medicine to make him well again. Eventually someone had the good sense and kindness to suggest that she should go to the Buddha for help, so she went to him and asked him to bring her baby back to life.

He didn't refuse. He didn't give her a sermon – he knew that would be useless, grief-stricken as she was. In fact, he didn't answer her question directly

at all. He just said, ‘Bring me just a few grains of mustard seed – but bring them from a house where no one has died.’ So off she went, going from one house to another. Everywhere she went, the people were more than willing to give her some mustard seed. But when she asked, ‘Has anyone died in this house?’ they said, ‘Do not remind us of our grief. The dead are many, but the living are few.’ At every house she learned the same lesson: death comes to all. Eventually she laid her child’s body to rest in the jungle, came back to the Buddha, and sat quietly at his feet. She didn’t say anything for a long time. Then at last she said, ‘Give me a refuge,’ and she became a nun.[16]

The obvious contrast is with the story of Jesus’ raising of Lazarus from the dead. If both stories are true, there appears to be a tremendous difference between them as spiritual teachings – the Buddha pointing out, however gently, that death is natural and inevitable, while Jesus conveys a very different message. As represented in the Gospels, Jesus wasn’t so much concerned to give teachings – although he did give some, of course – as to demonstrate that he was the Son of God. The Gospel according to John (11:4) reports that on hearing of the illness of his friend Lazarus, Jesus said: ‘This sickness will not end in death; it has come for the glory of God, to bring glory to the Son of God.’ If you regard God as the creator of the world and of mankind, the master of life and death, to be able to bring a dead man back to life is to prove that you have some transcendent power, even that you *are* God. Down the ages Christians have regarded Christ’s miracles as proof of his claim that he was the Son of God.

The Buddha was not concerned to establish any such claim. He wasn’t even concerned to establish the fact that he was Enlightened. His only concern was to point out the way to Enlightenment to those who were looking for it. When Kisāgotamī came to him, there was no question of his bringing her son back to life, to prove anything about himself. He focused on the important thing: the compassionate demonstration of the truth about life, and death.

In Christianity a great deal of importance has been attached to the miracles of Christ, and when they are questioned, some Christians tend to feel that the foundations of their faith are being shaken. But Buddhists don’t feel that about the miracles of the Buddha. The Pāli scriptures describe plenty of supernormal happenings, but you can question those and leave the Buddha’s central teaching intact. The scriptures also describe miracles being performed on a regular basis by people like Devadatta, who has traditionally been regarded as the villain of the Pāli Canon, and very far from being Enlightened.

Kisāgotamī was exceptional in making a lifelong commitment to spiritual practice as a result of this incident. A question for us is how to sustain a realization brought by painful experience, so that we don’t lose the new direction

in life that it might initiate. We possess the ability to forget – mercifully, in some cases – but unfortunately very often the positive realizations arising from painful experiences are the very aspects of those experiences that are lost. To safeguard one's insights, one has to be careful not to plunge straight back into the distractions of one's old way of life, but to take the opportunity to make changes that will help to preserve and strengthen one's insight. It seems strange that one can have an intense experience and that it then can disappear almost entirely overnight, but it can happen. With effort, though, insights can be preserved, through sustained mindfulness – and the help of one's friends. The rest of Kisāgotamī's story makes it clear that she was able to do that; and remembering her would have reminded people of the Buddha's skilful compassion.

As for the Buddha's more vigorous qualities, his fearlessness and equanimity, these would have been recalled particularly in connection with his cousin Devadatta. Devadatta was a very ambitious man. Having been a monk for a number of years, he was very good at meditation and had all sorts of supernormal powers. But he was ambitious and proud.

One day, when the Buddha was a very old man, Devadatta said to him, 'Lord, why don't you just go into retreat? Spend your old age quietly and happily. Don't give yourself any trouble. I will lead the sangha for you.' But the Buddha, knowing perfectly well what Devadatta was up to, said, 'I wouldn't hand over the sangha even to Sāriputta and Moggallāna [the Buddha's chief disciples] – much less to you.'

Devadatta was so incensed, so offended, by these words that he resolved to take the Buddha's life. He conspired with Ajātasattu, a wicked king with whom he was on friendly terms, and together they bribed the king's elephant trainer to release a mad elephant in the Buddha's path. When it saw the Buddha, however, the 'mad' elephant calmed down and became perfectly tame. Devadatta became more and more desperate. Knowing that the Buddha used to walk in the valley below the great rock called the Vulture's Peak, he climbed up and sent a boulder bouncing down the hillside towards the Buddha. It missed, but a splinter pierced the Buddha's foot and drew blood.[17]

After these incidents, the Buddha's disciples became alarmed for his safety. To protect him, they formed a sort of bodyguard and, armed with sticks, ringed the vihara where he was sleeping. During the night the Buddha came out of the vihara – he never slept through until morning, but sat up half the night meditating – and saw all these monks on guard. He said, 'Monks, what is this? What are you doing?' They said, 'Lord, we're protecting you.' But the Buddha said, 'The Buddha needs no protection. Go to your dwellings.' So they all melted away into the night, leaving the Buddha by himself.[18] This was the Buddha's

spirit; this was his fearlessness.

According to early Buddhist tradition, it is simply against the nature of things that a Buddha should be killed. We can't tell when exactly this doctrinal concept arose,'[19] but it is very much in accord with what could be called the aristocratic attitude of early Buddhism. The first Buddhists had a strong sense of the dignity of the Enlightened person, and seem to have been unable to imagine that dignity being affronted. It followed that the nature of the universe was such as to guarantee that the Buddha would come to no harm. Early Buddhists would have been unable to countenance the idea of the Buddha's being humiliated and killed in the way that Christians believe Jesus was. Something like it does crop up later in the Buddhist tradition, in the Mahāyāna, which regards the Bodhisattva as undergoing all sorts of pain and suffering, but there is no suggestion that the Bodhisattva is martyred or humiliated.

If one looks at the matter aside from all doctrinal assumptions, however, there is no reason why even a Buddha might not die an unnatural death. There are instances of Arhants being killed – Moggallāna, for example, was murdered.[20] And the Tibetan Enlightened ascetic Milarepa was apparently poisoned, as other Buddhist teachers have also been.[21] It would seem likely that the doctrine that a Buddha could not be killed arose not out of the nature of Buddhism itself so much as out of the general cultural-cum-spiritual assumptions of India, especially upper-caste Indian society, at that time.

On the other hand, perhaps it *is* against the nature of things for a Buddha to be killed. Perhaps the universe itself would prevent that from happening. It does no harm at all to think of the universe as being alive. The view we have inherited from late nineteenth-century science is that the universe is dead, more like a motor-car than a human body. But, at least metaphorically, one can usefully think of the universe as being much more like a living being, and this is certainly the way it has been viewed by some – the Platonists, for instance. Indeed, the universe may be seen not only as being alive but as having a living – even an ethical and spiritual – equilibrium that would correct any such imbalance as would be represented by the killing of a Buddha. Certain organs in the body carry out all sorts of complicated functions as though they had an intelligence – not an individual consciousness, but something more than a series of mechanical reactions. Perhaps there is something in the world, or in the universe, that is analogous to that subconscious intelligence – a sort of intelligence which is capable of intervening to protect the safety and well-being of the organism (in this case the world or even the cosmos) as a whole.

But even if it is true that it is impossible for a Buddha to be killed, that takes nothing away from the Buddha's personal courage. Perhaps one could say that

the fearlessness which was one of his outstanding qualities helped to keep him safe from harm.

The Buddha's calm, radiant presence also expressed itself in his love of silence. This quality is famously exhibited in the story of how Jīvaka, who was the Buddha's physician and also the physician of King Ajātasattu, took the king on a midnight visit to see the Buddha. Apparently the king and his courtiers were all sitting on the roof of the palace admiring the moon – it was the full moon of October, when the lotus is supposed to bloom – and they agreed that it was a wonderful night for a visit to a holy man. Typically Indian, this: not a wonderful night for a beach barbecue, but a wonderful night to visit a holy man. So they set off – and being a king, Ajātasattu had to go in style. We are told that 500 elephants were saddled, and 500 ladies of the harem took their seats on the elephants, and they all went off, with the king and Jīvaka at their head, to visit the Buddha in the depths of the forest.

But as they went further and further into the forest, and as it got darker and darker, the party spirit began to wear off, at least as far as the king was concerned. Apart from experiencing the general stress of being weighed down by the cares and anxieties of kingship, he had ascended his throne by foul means, so he had a guilty conscience as well. Becoming fearful and suspicious, he stopped and said, 'Jīvaka, are you leading me into a trap?' But Jīvaka said, 'Don't be afraid, your majesty. It's just a little way ahead. The Buddha is staying in the depths of the forest.' They went on further, and it became still darker and still more silent, until they couldn't hear anything at all (except, presumably, for the sound of 500 elephants walking – but elephants can walk very quietly). Ajātasattu again said, 'Are you sure you're not leading me into a trap?' And Jīvaka repeated, 'Don't worry, your majesty. There's no trap.'

Ajātasattu didn't believe him, though. He said, 'You've told me that the Buddha is living here with 2,500 monks. We should be able to hear them a mile away, but there isn't a sound. And you're trying to tell me this isn't a trap?' But Jīvaka insisted, 'Don't worry. Look; just over there you can see the lights burning in the Buddha's pavilion.' Sure enough, in a great clearing in the trees, there was the Buddha, in the midst of 2,500 disciples, all perfectly silent, sitting in the light of the full moon. When the king, with all his fears and suspicions, came upon this sight, he said to Jīvaka, 'Oh that my son might experience peace of mind such as this!' (In India people are much attached to their sons, and make all their wishes and aspirations on their behalf.) So here again we find the Buddha communicating a particular quality of his presence: his love of peace, solitude, and silence. This too his disciples must have remembered after his death; of course, we know this because the story has come down to us.[22]

They also remembered some very different stories, concerning what we would call miracles. They would have seen or heard about all sorts of odd things that used to happen when the Buddha was around – supernormal happenings for which there was no rational explanation. They would have told how when the Buddha was staying anywhere, during the night marvellous figures – *devas* or gods – would be seen hovering around. And they would relate how the most marvellous aspect of these apparitions was the fact that they were there to learn from the Buddha. He would teach them the Dharma during the night just as he taught human beings during the day.[23]

The appearance of devas would not itself have been regarded as a miraculous event, a *prātihārya*. A *prātihārya* would be something like the incident described in the *Mahdvastu* in which the Buddha walks up and down in the air, emitting fire and water simultaneously. But the existence of devas would have been taken for granted in the Buddha's time. They are certainly supernormal beings, and one could regard their appearance before the Buddha as a supernormal happening; it clearly wasn't taking place on the ordinary material plane. But it wasn't due to the Buddha himself, although he may have had the supernormal power of creating what people might take to be a deva.

Nevertheless, such incidents added to the general stock of stories and anecdotes which must have been fresh in the hearts and minds of his disciples. Many of them must have felt that these stories communicated something of tremendous importance, something the formal teachings did not convey: the effect the Buddha had on those with whom he came in contact, the direct impact of an Enlightened being, which is above and beyond all words.

No one could have been a better judge of this than the Buddha's cousin Ānanda, who for more than twenty years was the Buddha's personal attendant, and went with him everywhere. If the Buddha was invited to lunch, Ānanda went too. If the Buddha went to give a sermon, Ānanda went along. If the Buddha received visitors, or answered questions, Ānanda was present. He was always there, like the Buddha's shadow. And the Buddha, we gather, was all in all to him. When the Buddha was about to die, Ānanda, understandably, felt it more deeply than anybody. According to the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, as the Buddha lay in the sāl grove, Ānanda left him and went to a nearby lodging-house. There he stood at the door of the hut and leaned against the doorpost. As he stood there, he tried to realize that the Buddha was going to die in a matter of days or even hours. Weeping bitterly, he said to himself, 'The Master is about to pass away from me: he who is so kind.'[24]

These words are of the greatest significance. In the course of the twenty years Ānanda had spent with the Buddha he must have heard the Buddha deliver

hundreds of discourses, including many abstruse, philosophical, deeply mystical teachings. He had heard him answer thousands of questions. He must have admired his brilliance, his affability, the easy way he handled difficult questions. No doubt he had witnessed all sorts of supernormal happenings. But it was not the Buddha's wisdom or his understanding of philosophy, his skill in debate or his ability to work miracles, his courage or his tireless energy, that stood out. For Ānanda the Buddha's outstanding quality was his kindness. After all those years, in which he had heard so much, the overall impression the Buddha had made upon Ānanda is summed up in those few words: 'He who is so kind.'

Half of Buddhism is in that remark. And – here we return to our theme – it also gives us the origin of the Bodhisattva ideal. The Buddha's wisdom is revealed in his doctrinal teachings, but his love, his compassion, which so deeply impressed Ānanda, is revealed in his personal example. This is what those disciples who could not identify Buddhism exclusively with the verbal teaching of the Buddha were getting at. They were saying that Buddhism was not just wisdom, as represented by the teaching, but also love and compassion, as exemplified by the Buddha's life; and in any formulation of Buddhism, both should be taken into consideration. Yes, we should try to attain Enlightenment, to awaken, to see the Truth; this is the wisdom aspect. But we should try to attain wisdom for the sake of all sentient beings; this is the compassion aspect. These two together form the Bodhisattva ideal.

It could be said that Ānanda was the first exemplar of the Bodhisattva ideal, in that he looked after the Buddha rather than thinking about his own needs all the time, although he was a serious spiritual practitioner in his own right. It is perhaps significant that Ānanda functioned after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, as far as we can tell from the records, in much the same way the Buddha had functioned. He went around from place to place preaching the Dharma, with a large following of bhikkhus; in fact, he was criticized for doing that. If anybody came close to the spirit of the Buddha, it does seem to have been Ānanda. The records are imperfect; it is difficult to be sure. But Ānanda certainly comes across as an attractive character, in a way that Arhants like Mahākassapa and even Moggallāna do not.

It is sometimes suggested that Ānanda delayed his own development for the sake of taking care of the Buddha, and that he therefore didn't gain Enlightenment until after the Buddha's death. That's rather a superficial way of looking at it: it would suggest that service is not a part of spiritual development, which it very definitely is. One might even say that it is a surer path of spiritual development, in that one has to give up one's own ego, one's own interests, one's own desires, in the way that Ānanda must have done.

Ānanda didn't opt for an easier or more mundane path in agreeing to look after the Buddha. Neither is there any suggestion in the scriptures that he nobly sacrificed his own spiritual development to that worthy task. It is true that the Pāli scriptures represent him as attaining Arhantship after the parinirvāṇa, but there is no suggestion that the delay arose because he was caught up with serving the Buddha. Though it is perhaps interesting that there was a delay. Perhaps it suggests that Ānanda didn't conceive of the spiritual life as having a definite goal, out there, in the way that perhaps the other Arhants did. Ānanda seems to have been less goal-oriented in a positive way. But there is more research to be done into this matter, as with so many aspects of the tradition. We can reflect on their spiritual significance, but their historical origins are very difficult to disentangle.

It is not easy to trace, either, exactly how the Bodhisattva ideal emerged in the form of a movement which finally felt it had to distinguish itself from those who did not share its vision. At some point its adherents started to call their approach the Mahāyāna or 'Great Way' and to refer to those who rejected that approach as followers of the Hīnayāna, the 'Lesser Way'. (Of the various early Buddhist schools, the only one still in existence today – and the only representative of 'Hīnayāna' Buddhism – is the Theravāda.)

The issue is far from clear-cut, however. The teachings preserved by the Theravāda over the centuries clearly register a good deal of the spirit of the Buddha's teaching as well as its letter. If the 'Hīnayānists' weren't interested in the life of the Buddha, how is it that all these stories were so diligently preserved in the Pāli Canon? Can it really be that they were more interested in the Buddha's teachings than in his life, given that they preserved all these incidents in their own scriptures?

One could argue that they might well have preserved teachings to which they did not attach much importance, their primary concern being to preserve whatever they could. We can be very glad that they did; without the different versions of the scriptures they preserved, we could have no idea of what Buddhism was like in the early days. We certainly couldn't discover this from the Mahāyāna scriptures, which on the whole represent an effort to achieve a complete reconstruction of the teachings, and are generally concerned not with the historical Buddha, but more with what one might call the Buddha's archetypal life.

However selective the later portions of the Pāli Canon are, they contain at least some elements of the original teaching from which it can be reconstructed. Some Mahāyāna texts – the *Ratnakūṭa* sūtras, for example – do seem to contain traces of the Buddha's original teaching.[25] Others, however, like the *White Lotus Sūtra*,

almost certainly have no direct connection with the teaching of the historical Buddha at all. From the Mahāyāna sūtras we may get a good understanding of the spirit of Buddhism, but if we want to reconstruct the original letter through which that spirit found expression, we have to go principally to the Pāli Canon. In any case, as we have seen, from the Pāli texts we get a strong sense of that spirit, through the vivid picture of the Buddha's life and character they present.

So how did the self-styled Mahāyānists come to take such a dim view of their fellow Buddhists? This brings us back to a question we encountered earlier. Was there a difference between the Enlightenment of the Buddha and that of his Enlightened followers? Could the ideal of Enlightenment possibly degenerate?

In the beginning there was Buddhahood. The ideal the Buddha set out for all men and women was that of attaining Enlightenment, just as he himself had done. When his disciples attained that goal, as many of them did, the Buddha did not distinguish, it would seem, between the content of their Enlightenment and his own. He is reported as saying, 'O monks, I am freed from all bonds, human and divine. You also are freed from all bonds, human and divine,'[26] which suggests that he saw their attainment as equal to his. The only difference was that the Buddha realized the truth first and the disciples realized it afterwards by following the Buddha's teaching (so that their Enlightenment was termed *anubodhi*, 'subsequent Enlightenment').

The Buddha's discovery of the path to Enlightenment made him unique; a special significance always attaches to a pioneer because he is the first – he sets the pattern. But if the Arhants had attained exactly what the Buddha had attained, why was the Buddha so greatly missed after his death? The scriptures give the impression that the Buddha definitely had something that his Enlightened disciples did not. He seems to have had a commanding personality, and more character than the others, even if they were all equal as regards Enlightenment. Later Mahāyāna doctrine says that due to his *puṇya*, his merit, the Buddha was of extraordinarily impressive appearance: tall, well-built, handsome, dignified, with a beautiful speaking voice. All this wouldn't have made him any wiser, but it did provide his wisdom with a very effective instrument, which might have meant that he had a greater influence.

In the Pāli scriptures Arhants like Sāriputta are sometimes to be found teaching quite successfully,[27] but the Buddha seems to have had by far the greater ability to communicate. As far as one can tell, some of the Enlightened disciples hardly communicated at all. Perhaps they just didn't have that gift. But that statement would be seen as a contradiction in terms by the later Mahāyāna tradition, which came to regard the gift of communication almost as an integral part of Enlightenment, an aspect of the Buddha's *upāya*, his 'skilful means'.[28] If you are

Enlightened, the suggestion is, you will be able to communicate your experience effectively, and will want to do so. If you have wisdom, you will also have compassion.

Perhaps one could conclude that the Buddha was simply *more* Enlightened. Enlightenment is not a full-stop. We tend to think of it as being a fixed state that you attain and stay in, but perhaps one should think more in terms of indefinite development. Beyond a certain point we can't track the Buddha any more – the *Dhammapada* calls him 'the trackless one'[29] – but the point at which he disappears from view is not necessarily the goal; further vistas may lie beyond.

But as the generations went by, Buddhists came to feel that there was a difference between the Enlightenment of the Buddha and the experience of his Enlightened followers (Arhants, 'worthy ones'). The Buddha had been the pioneer – he had rediscovered the Dharma at a time when it was lost – and the idea developed that he had qualified himself to do this by practising the pāramitās (or 'perfections') for countless lives. Not having had that particular task to do, the Arhants didn't need to go through that period of intensive training, so their achievement was less than that of a Buddha. Thus it was argued.

At the same time, within a hundred years of the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, there seems to have been a sort of ossification of the ideal of Enlightenment, or rather of the understanding of that ideal. It seems that over time the Arhant ideal degenerated until it came to signify a narrow, individualistic conception of Enlightenment. The original Buddhist way of looking at things was probably more open and fluid. The early Buddhist schools came rather to caricature their own conception of Arhants, portraying them as dry emotionless figures, and the Mahāyānists tended to inherit that attitude. However, the Mahāyānists were not satisfied that this conception accurately portrayed the highest ideal of the original spirit of the Buddha's teaching. It was this that led to a whole new phase in the history of Buddhism, and the origin of what became known as the Bodhisattva ideal.

Ultimately one cannot conceive of Enlightenment as being either for oneself or not for oneself, for others or not for others. It is impossible to separate the self-regarding aspect of spiritual development from the other-regarding aspect. But the Mahāyānists saw a need to distinguish the two, and to criticize the other schools for promulgating a 'Hīnayāna', a lesser way which limited the ideal of Enlightenment to its self-regarding aspect. Some of the Mahāyāna sūtras didn't just promote the Bodhisattva ideal, but went so far as to present the Arhant ideal as inferior *per se*. For example, in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* Śāriputra is portrayed as a sort of fall guy, forever having his literalism exposed by the Mahāyānist

Vimalakīrti,[30] even though the Buddha's original sangha is by no means synonymous or identifiable with what became known as the Hīnayāna.

Why did the Mahāyāna writers resort to such tactics? The reason can be traced back to something quite simple but at the same time perhaps hard for us to understand. In ancient India people had no conception of historical development. It is natural to us to think in terms of historical progression – so natural that it's hard to imagine not doing so – but it wasn't natural to ancient Indian Buddhists. Faced with the Arhant ideal as then presented, which they found unacceptable, they nonetheless had to accept it as having been taught by the Buddha. It wasn't available to them to think that the Buddha had in fact taught something different, and that in the course of time the teaching had degenerated, producing this rather negative ideal. They had to see whatever process had happened as having taken place within the lifetime of the Buddha himself, and all the different teachings and ideals as having been taught by the Buddha.

The way they made sense of this discrepancy was to think that the Buddha, confronted by people of different spiritual capacities, taught them different ideals. As they saw it, the Buddha *did* teach the Arhant ideal as they understood it, but only as a provisional teaching for those who were comparatively undeveloped. To those who were ready for a more advanced teaching, he taught the Bodhisattva ideal. This rationale is one of the major themes of many well-known Mahāyāna texts.[31]

With the coming of the T'ien-t'ai School in sixth-century China, a more historical perspective dawned. All the teachings of the Buddha were classified into five great periods, and the different sātras were allocated between them.[32] But it is only in comparatively recent times that, due to the influence of Western evolutionary modes of thinking, it has been possible to think in terms of a development of Buddhism, or for that matter a development of Christianity or any other religion.

The historical perspective available to us entirely alters the situation. It means, for example, that we don't have to think in terms of a limited Arhant ideal. We can think of the Buddha as having originally presented the ideal of Enlightenment as fully as he possibly could, and we can imagine that people in his own time and for generations afterwards had a full sense of what he meant. As the years went by, however, that understanding degenerated. A distinction came to be drawn between the attainment of the Buddha and that of the Arhants, and the latter came to be regarded as a lesser attainment. Hence the need for the Mahāyāna's restatement of the whole teaching, to bring the emphasis back to where the Buddha himself originally placed it. The Mahāyānists tried to unify the goal again, saying that Buddhahood was open to all and that one should aim not

for Arhantship, the lesser goal, but for supreme Enlightenment.

There are no detailed records, so we don't know much about the practical consequences of the development of these ideas, but we can extrapolate back from the accounts given by some of the Chinese pilgrims. Hsüan-tsang makes it clear that at the time he visited India in the seventh century, followers of the 'Hīnayāna' and followers of the 'Mahāyāna' lived side by side in the same monasteries, observing approximately the same monastic discipline.[33] They differed only in that the Mahāyāna monks studied the Mahāyāna sūtras in addition to the Āgamas (the Sanskrit equivalent of the Pāli Nikāyas), and worshipped the archetypal Bodhisattvas.

To hazard a parallel, one might say that it was a bit like the differences between 'high church' and 'low church' in the Church of England. In the same parish you may find one priest who is rather 'low church' and another who is rather 'high church', but both belong to the same 'broad church'. The difference between 'Hīnayāna' and 'Mahāyāna' seems to have been as unremarkable as that – until the Vajrayāna emerged and there was something of a collapse of monastic discipline.

Those who were following the Vajrayāna could hardly remain within the monastery if they no longer observed the monastic discipline, and we know that many – those who conformed more to the *siddha* ideal – consciously chose not to.[34] But so long as 'Hīnayānists' and Mahāyānists continued to observe the same monastic discipline, they apparently didn't feel any need to live in different establishments on account of their different views.

Similarly, in a present-day Buddhist community the residents might agree to follow the same way of life – to meditate morning and evening, to be vegetarian and abstain from alcohol, to follow right livelihood, and so on. Some might be studying Mahāyāna scriptures, some might be studying the Pāli Canon, and others might be reading translations of Tibetan Tantric works, but so long as a common way of life and common ethical principles were observed, it would be possible for community members to live together quite happily. Something like that seems to have happened in medieval India, with the Vinaya (the text detailing monastic codes of conduct) providing the ethical basis for the practice of both 'Hīnayāna' and 'Mahāyāna'.

But there was no corresponding communality of views, it seems. After the split there was very little in the way of discussion or controversy between the two parties for the simple reason that the various 'Hīnayāna' schools ignored the Mahāyāna, as the Theravāda has continued to do for the most part until the present time. One of the works of the Theravāda Abhidhamma, the *Kathā-vatthu* or 'Points of Controversy', records a number of discussions between Theravāda

schools and proto-Mahāyāna schools, but that is the only such account we have.[35]

Over the years the two became geographically isolated. It was in Sri Lanka that the Theravāda was preserved, and there – according to Theravāda tradition – that the Pāli Canon was first written down, at the Fourth Council held at Aluvihāra in the first century BCE. The Sinhalese Theravādins were much opposed to certain quasi-Mahāyānistic schools which gained a foothold in Sri Lanka. Of the two great Sinhalese monasteries, the Mahāvihāra and the Abhayagirivihāra, the Abhayagiri was Mahāyānistically inclined; but with the help of King Parakkama it was eventually suppressed in the twelfth century. We know very little about what was taught there. Theravāda sources give the impression that, whatever it was, it was so dreadful that no decent Theravādin could possibly go into details.[36]

Meanwhile, as Mahāyāna Buddhism spread to Tibet, China, and Japan, the Mahāyāna became dissociated from its 'Hīnayāna' monastic basis, and there was a complicating factor in that a sort of 'Mahāyāna' Vinaya sprang up. In India, and later on in Tibet, this was observed in addition to the 'Hīnayāna' Vinaya, as a Mahāyānistic supplement for Bodhisattvas. In the end the whole thing became rather ponderous.[37]

For all these reasons, the two trends in Buddhism came to develop completely different ways of expressing the path to Enlightenment, to the extent that comparison between the two is very difficult. One could be forgiven, indeed, for wondering whether it is the same 'Enlightenment' that is being referred to. We should remember, though, that in intention both refer back to the Enlightened experience and inspiration of the Buddha: that is their starting point. Throughout this study of the Bodhisattva ideal we shall return again and again to consider the correspondences between the two approaches – for the simple reason that it is spiritually fruitful to do so. With the historical perspective available to us, we can appreciate and learn from both. When one first approaches Buddhism, there is no need to unravel all the historical complications. It is enough just to consider the Buddha's life, and the spiritual life in general. The basic point is that Buddhism teaches a balanced spiritual ideal, emphasizing both wisdom and compassion. The task for Western Buddhists is to sort out what is really useful in the Buddhist tradition, what the Buddha really did teach, and what we ourselves find helpful in our own spiritual lives.

After the split, it was not the case that all Mahāyānists imaginatively embraced the spirit of the teaching while all 'Hīnayānists' rigidly adhered to the letter. The fact that technically you belong to the school of the spirit doesn't automatically mean that you yourself are more observant of the spirit than the letter; 'Mahāyānists' have no room for complacency here. In any case, nobody is always Mahāyānist or always Hīnayānist. On any occasion, whatever one's

spiritual context, one may adopt either a so-called ‘Hīnayāna’ – *i.e.* self-regarding – attitude or a so-called ‘Mahāyāna’ – *i.e.* other-regarding – attitude. There have been plenty of Mahāyānists who have stuck to the letter of the Mahāyāna in a very un-Mahāyānistic way, and there are certainly many Theravādins who live in accordance with the spirit rather than the letter of the Theravāda. And – because of course one’s own behaviour should be the primary object of one’s scrutiny – at any time it is useful to ask oneself which attitude one is adopting in, say, one’s meditation practice or one’s work.

Basically, all Buddhists need to remember that the Buddha, and his compassionate spirit, cannot be left out of Buddhism. It is essentially as a reminder of this that Buddhists engage in devotional practice or puja (worship). (This is a fundamental aspect of a Bodhisattva’s practice, as we shall see.) The puja brings us face to face with the Buddha – literally, if we sit directly facing the image of the Buddha on the shrine. As we look at that image, the teaching can be for a moment forgotten. For a moment we are face to face with Buddhahood and, contemplating it, we recognize our own true nature.

The Bodhisattva ideal recognizes that to gain Enlightenment we must develop both wisdom and compassion, both the self-regarding and the other-regarding aspects of the spiritual life. This is the basic polarity: Enlightenment within, through wisdom, manifesting without, through compassion. And this is the nature of the Bodhisattva, the one who is intent upon Enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

2

THE AWAKENING OF THE BODHI HEART

NOW WE HAVE A SENSE of who or what a Bodhisattva is, the next question is this: how does one *become* a Bodhisattva? How does one embark on the realization of this sublime spiritual ideal? The traditional answer is short and straightforward, though it requires considerable explanation: one becomes a Bodhisattva, and thus fully oriented in the direction of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, upon the awakening of the 'bodhi heart'.

The Sanskrit term translated here is *bodhicitta-utpada,* and it is one of the most important terms in the whole field of Mahāyāna Buddhism. As we have seen, *bodhi* means Enlightenment or awakening. *Citta,* one of the multifaceted terms encountered so often in Buddhist Sanskrit, means mind, thought, consciousness, heart – all these things. *Utpada* is more straightforward; it means simply arising or, more poetically, awakening.

Bodhicitta-utpada is sometimes translated as 'the arising of the thought of Enlightenment',[38] but this is exactly what it is not. We can think about Enlightenment as much as we like. We can read about it, think about it, talk about it. 'Enlightenment is both wisdom and compassion', we say, as though just saying the words means that we know all about it. But whatever we say, whatever we think, the bodhicitta has not arisen. Thinking about Enlightenment has certainly not transformed us into Bodhisattvas. So the bodhicitta is not just a thought about Enlightenment; it is very much more than that. Guenther translates it as 'Enlightened attitude';[39] my own preferred translation is 'the will to Enlightenment' or, as here, 'the bodhi heart'.

All these translations are considerably better than ‘the thought of Enlightenment’, but none of them is completely satisfactory. This isn’t the fault of the English language so much as the fault of language itself. In fact, *bodhicitta* is a very unsatisfactory term for the bodhicitta. The bodhicitta is not a mental state, activity, or function at all. It is certainly not a thought that you or I could entertain. It has nothing to do with thought. It is not even an act of will in the sense in which we understand the term – it is not one’s *personal* will. Neither is it ‘being conscious’, if by that one merely means being conscious of the fact that there is such a thing as Enlightenment.

The bodhicitta represents the manifestation, even the irruption, within us of something transcendental: the emergence within our ordinary experience of something of a totally different nature. The author of a short but profound work called the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* (said to be Nāgārjuna – though not the Nāgārjuna who is the famous philosopher of the Madhyamaka), describes the bodhicitta as being ‘free from all determinations, that is, it is not included in the categories of the five skandhas’.[40]

The skandhas are the traditional categories according to which all phenomenal existence and experience can be classified and described. This categorization is crucial to Buddhist thought; to gain any understanding of Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics, one needs a clear idea of what the five skandhas are. *Skandha*, another more or less untranslatable term, literally means the trunk of a tree, and the standard translation (though hardly more helpful) is ‘aggregate’ or ‘heap’. The first skandha is *rūpa*, which means ‘bodily form’, anything perceived through the senses. The second skandha is *vedanā*, ‘feeling’ or ‘emotion’ – positive, negative, pleasant, painful, and so on. Thirdly there is *saṃjñā*, which can be roughly translated as ‘perception’: the recognition of something as being a particular thing, as when we perceive and label, say, a tree. The fourth skandha consists in the *saṃskāras*, translated by some scholars as ‘steering forces’, but better rendered ‘volitional activities’ or ‘propensities’ – acts of will and so on. And the fifth skandha is *vijñāna* or consciousness: consciousness through the five physical senses and through the mind at various levels.

In the entire range of our psychophysical existence, on all levels, there is nothing which is not included in one or more of these categories. The Mahāyāna text called the *Heart Sūtra* begins with the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara coursing in the profound Perfection of Wisdom, looking out at the world and seeing the five skandhas – just that.[41] He sees that the whole of psychophysical, conditioned existence consists in just these five things. Nothing exists or occurs on the conditioned level of existence that cannot be categorized in terms of one or more of these five skandhas.

But the bodhicitta is not included in the five skandhas – which means that it is something altogether out of this world, something transcendental. Not a thought, not a propensity, not an idea, not a concept, but – if we must use words at all – a profound transcendental experience which reorients our entire being. As the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* goes on to say, the bodhicitta is characterized by perpetual emptiness.

An analogy can be drawn here – and it is *only* an analogy, with no suggestion of equivalence – with an aspect of the Christian tradition. If a Christian were to say that they were 'thinking of God', even if they were a pious churchgoer, that couldn't be described as a spiritual experience. Whether they were thinking of God as an old gentleman seated in the clouds, or as Pure Being, or whatever, 'thinking of God' would just be thinking of God. But if they were to speak of having experienced the descent of the Holy Spirit, that would be something else entirely. If merely thinking about Enlightenment is analogous to thinking about God, the arising of the bodhicitta is analogous to the descent upon one, in full force, of the Holy Spirit.

This analogy is not meant to blur the distinction between the bodhicitta and the Holy Spirit as concepts. Comparing them, we find that the concept of the bodhicitta is psychological rather than cosmological in its origins. The differences between the concept of God in the orthodox sense and what is really meant by the bodhicitta are obvious. But there is no need to be pedantic about terminology. If one is using the term God in a general way to signify some sort of spiritual, transcendental element in the universe, then perhaps one's idea of God does have something in common with the notion of the bodhicitta – though the two sets of concepts generally express quite contrary spiritual positions.

The arising of the bodhicitta is a profound spiritual experience. It is not, however, a personal experience. Another fundamental characteristic of the bodhicitta – also identified in the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* – is that it is not individual. It is possible to speak of the bodhicitta as arising in this person or that person, and one might therefore think that there were in existence a number of bodhicittas – your bodhicitta and her bodhicitta and my bodhicitta – like so many bright ideas that we might each independently have. It might sound as though there is a glorious plurality of bodhicittas arising in different people, making them all Bodhisattvas. But it isn't so. There is only one bodhicitta, in which individuals participate, or which individuals manifest, to varying degrees.

This means that the bodhicitta is more likely to arise in a spiritual community, a situation of intense mutual spiritual friendship and encouragement. The spiritual community' need not be a specific closed circle of people. And, of course, it is possible to make spiritual progress on one's own – many people do.

Most of us, though, need the support of others who are following the same path of practice. Even when one is alone, on solitary retreat for example, one can remain in contact with other members of the spiritual community in the sense of being aware of them. It is this kind of contact that is most important, although the possibility of mental connectedness is no excuse for neglecting straightforward contact and communication.

The bodhicitta is supra-individual but not collective – a rather tricky concept to get hold of. Before one can realize a supra-individual experience one has to achieve some real individuality, and this is not necessarily easy. The development of true individuality has several clear stages. To begin with, there is no individuality, but only membership of the species or group. Then individuality begins to emerge, but only in relation to the group. Three kinds of individual can be distinguished here: the individual who is dominated by the group, the individual who dominates the group, and the individual – really an individual*ist* – who rebels against the group, but still defines himself or herself in relation to that group. At the next stage, the individual stands free from the group altogether; and, at a further stage still, the individual enters into free association with other individuals – which could stand as a definition of the spiritual community.[42]

But one can envisage something even beyond that. The arising of the bodhicitta is an experience above and beyond the level at which a number of individuals are freely associating and cooperating. At the same time, it arises out of the intensive interaction of true individuals. It isn't individual in the way that the individual is an individual; but at the same time it isn't something collective which all those individuals have in common. At this level, in other words, it is very difficult to find words to express what happens; but basically one could say that, a higher level of consciousness having arisen in a number of individuals, the bodhicitta then arises.

The fact that the bodhicitta is not somebody's individual achievement or possession is illustrated by an incident in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, a Mahāyāna text in which 500 Licchavi youths who desire to develop the bodhicitta present their 500 parasols to the Buddha, and he turns the parasols into one spectacularly huge canopy.[43] What actually happens is not, needless to say, quite so simple as this image suggests. You no longer have 500 units, but they have not been resolved into one unit. The one canopy represents a quite different order of experience, transcending the concepts of sameness and difference altogether. Buddhism sees reality as being essentially diversified, as having unity in difference and difference in unity. The *Avataṁsaka Sūtra* illustrates this with the simile of beams of coloured light going in all directions, intersecting and passing through

one another. It is not that everything is reduced to one, but at the same time there is unity. Difference reveals unity and unity makes difference possible.

Another aspect of the nature of the bodhicitta is illustrated in the Mahāyāna by the image of the full moon: the same bodhicitta appears in different people just as the same moon is reflected in different pools and lakes and oceans. This, at least, gives an idea of a certain characteristic of the bodhicitta – like any image, it has its limitations. The bodhicitta is not literally a static object out there whose mere reflection appears in different people; in reality it is much more dynamic than that.

The Mahāyāna tradition takes account of the dynamic nature of the bodhicitta by making a distinction between the 'absolute' bodhicitta and the 'relative' bodhicitta. It should be admitted straightaway that there is very little that can be said about the absolute bodhicitta. In its ultimate essence it is beyond thought and beyond speech. But some great teachers do, very provisionally, have something to say about it. They say, for instance, that it is of the nature of sūnyatā, emptiness – that is to say, it is identical with ultimate reality. It is imbued with the essence of compassion. It is not a blank, featureless, inert absolute; it pulses with the spiritual life and activity which we call compassion. And it is like pure light, radiant and immaculate. It cannot be touched, cannot be soiled, cannot be shaken. Furthermore, it transcends both space and time. Very mysterious! Suffice it to say that even the absolute bodhicitta, although identical with reality itself, and thus beyond change – or rather beyond the opposition between change and non-change – is not a static, fixed thing (in fact, not a 'thing' at all).

The relative bodhicitta is more comprehensible, more accessible. It is, one could say, the reflection of the absolute bodhicitta in the web of conditioned existence, the stream of time, the cosmic process. We still have to be careful to realize the limits of imagery here: whereas a reflection isn't real – the moon isn't actually in the pool – the relative bodhicitta actually is in the individuals in which it appears to arise by virtue of the reflection in them of the absolute bodhicitta. And it is an active force at work in the world. This is why the translation 'will to Enlightenment' seems appropriate (especially when one is referring to the relative, as distinct from the absolute, bodhicitta).

The fact that the absolute bodhicitta and the relative bodhicitta share the same name is confusing, given that they are so different in nature. Here again we are faced with the difficulty of finding appropriate terminology. There are two alternatives: either to use different terms and hence imply that the two are entirely different, or to use the same term and thereby suggest that they are the same. To speak of the relative and the absolute bodhicitta is to opt for sameness,

while to give them two quite different names would be to go to the other extreme and opt for difference. The difficulty arises in part, perhaps, through the use of the word ‘absolute’. The translation of *paramārtha bodhicitta* as absolute bodhicitta is not meant to suggest a philosophical, unitary absolute into which everything has to be incorporated in a Hegelian sense. *Paramārtha bodhicitta* is literally translated ‘bodhicitta in the highest sense’, which makes things a little clearer.

These considerations are of great importance. One could say that the relative bodhicitta represents the path and the absolute bodhicitta represents the goal. To say that the two are the same – or to say that they are different – is a serious mistake; in fact, it is in effect to destroy the foundation of the spiritual life. They are neither the same nor different. To speak of a *saṃvṛtti* and a *paramārtha bodhicitta* is perhaps the best solution available to us, providing for both unity and difference – the unity reflected in the common noun and the difference in the different adjectives.

One effect of distinguishing between the absolute bodhicitta and the relative bodhicitta is to suggest that the reality towards which we are progressing is not, in the ultimate sense, foreign to us; nor are we, in the ultimate sense, foreign to it, even though for the time being we are progressing towards it, and appear to be different from it. You couldn’t progress towards it if you didn’t have some kinship with it. Angelus Silesius, the late medieval German mystic, following Neoplatonic thought, said something to the effect that the eye could not behold the sun if there was not something sun-like in the eye. Similarly, the bodhicitta could not arise in us if there was not already something like it in our being.

The *Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna* (a fifth-century Chinese work) talks about what it calls the mutual perfuming of the real and the unreal.[44] Something of the absolute clings to you despite everything – it is not something that brushes off – just as when one is perfumed with something, some infinitesimally tiny particles of the perfume adhere to one’s skin. So the goal towards which, as Buddhists, we are striving is not completely foreign to us; we have an inner kinship with it, however deeply hidden. Without that kinship, we couldn’t arrive at the goal. In a sense the absolute bodhicitta is the absolute dimension of something that is already present within us and experienced by us in a relative or limited form. The gaining of insight into the transcendental is not an irruption of something which is totally alien to us, but a manifestation at the level of our conscious mental activity of something which, in a much deeper sense, we *are*.

This is to use the language of immanence, which should always come with a spiritual health warning. Buddhahood may perhaps be said to be immanent within us in potential, but to realize that potential, we will need to do more than

become aware of it: for most of us, it will be a process requiring a great deal of time and effort. The goal of Buddhahood can be understood in temporal as well as spatial terms. This is why Enlightenment is generally thought of as the culmination of a process, with the implication that Enlightenment itself is a process at some level.

The problem is that it is not easy to reconcile the language of time with the language of space. Absolute bodhicitta is bodhicitta not outside time in the literal sense, but conceived of in terms of space – that is, as fixed, permanent, unchanging. Relative bodhicitta is bodhicitta thought of in terms of time, which implies change. When one thinks of ultimate reality in terms of space, one thinks of it as the absolute bodhicitta. When one thinks of it in terms of time, that is the relative bodhicitta. But they are really the same – or rather, they are 'not two', as the traditional phrase has it, just as saṁsāra and nirvāṇa are said to be 'not-two'. In one sense Enlightenment is eternally attained, in another sense it is eternally in the process of attainment, and these senses ultimately coincide.

So the bodhicitta is more than a simple 'thought of' Enlightenment. It has a transcendental, supra-individual nature. Its dynamic nature is reflected in the translation 'will to Enlightenment'. But this will to Enlightenment is no more an act of anybody's individual will than it is of anybody's individual thought. We might – though here we have rather to grope for words – think of the bodhicitta as a sort of cosmic will. (It is very important not to take this literally; it is meant poetically, not scientifically.) The bodhicitta is a will at work in the universe, in the direction of universal redemption: the liberation, the Enlightenment, ultimately, of all sentient beings. We may even think of the bodhicitta as a sort of 'spirit of Enlightenment', immanent in the world and leading individuals to ever higher degrees of spiritual perfection.

This makes it clear that individuals do not possess the bodhicitta; if you possess it, it isn't the bodhicitta – you've got hold of something else. It is the bodhicitta that possesses individuals. And those of whom the bodhicitta takes possession, as it were, those in whom this bodhicitta arises, or within whom it manifests, become Bodhisattvas. They live, that is to say, for the sake of Enlightenment; they strive to actualize, for the benefit of all, the highest potentialities that the universe contains.

To speak of the will to Enlightenment is perhaps rather like Christians speaking of the will of God. It's a very mysterious thing. You can say that your own will is blended with the will to Enlightenment. But it isn't that you have become a passive machine being operated from outside. The bodhicitta is *you*, but you have ceased to be something phenomenal. You have been transformed into something transcendental; or something transcendental has germinated in

you, or come into you.

If you love someone very much, when they ask you to do something and you do it, is the carrying out of that task their volition or yours? It's hard to say. What happens is that you make their will your will. There is no question of their taking you over or using you as a kind of puppet. Their will becomes blended with yours. And if you believe that person to be more spiritually developed than you are yourself, when they ask you to do something which will bring about some new direction in your spiritual life, you genuinely take their will upon yourself. You are not just submitting. You genuinely embrace their will so that it becomes your own. It is not that you are doing what they want you to do; no, you are doing what *you* want to. It's just that the initiative came from the other person. In a way they showed you what you really wanted to do.

Taking this to its highest degree, suppose that the person asking you to do something is a Buddha. If you do the Buddha's will, make the Buddha's will your own, this comes very close to the manifestation of the bodhicitta in an empirical personality. It isn't a mechanical taking over; your will is transformed into the bodhicitta. Not only your will, but your thought and emotion too; *you* are transformed into the bodhicitta. To the extent that a transcendental dimension has entered into your existence, to that extent is your phenomenal being transformed into the being of the Bodhisattva, to that extent you become a being of Enlightenment. This change isn't a mere refinement; it's a complete shift. In a sense the bodhicitta isn't anything to do with you, even then. You provide the basis on which it manifests, but once it has manifested, it becomes curiously blended with you – or you with it. We really don't have the language to describe what happens.

The Mahāyāna sūtras are never tired of singing the praises of the bodhicitta. In the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, for example, there are hundreds of illustrations, comparing the bodhicitta to a gold mine, to the sun, to the moon....[45] You get the impression that for the author of the sūtra, the bodhicitta was absolutely everything; it is hymned and praised almost as though it were a deity. You certainly don't get the impression of someone's thought or idea. You get the sense of something vast, cosmic, sublime, which descends into and penetrates and possesses those who are receptive to it.

As Western Buddhists we need to learn to engage with the rich imagery of Buddhist tradition. At present, of course, for most of us the imagery of Christianity will be much more readily available. In our everyday language, even as Buddhists, we often use phrases of Biblical origin. For instance, we might say 'The prodigal has returned,' which comes straight out of the Gospels, although one doesn't consciously think of it in that way because the phrase has become

such an integral part of our language and literature. But that has not yet happened with the images and figures of speech of the Buddhist scriptures; references to them have not yet infiltrated the language even of those of us who have been Buddhists for many years. At present we are not likely to refer, say, to the parable of the burning house, or the parable of the son who wandered astray and his skilful and compassionate father.[46] The images and symbols of the Buddhist scriptures haven't yet become part of our mentality. But there is a vast untapped store of material there. So it isn't enough just to read the scriptures; they have to become part and parcel of our whole way of thinking, feeling, and experiencing. That probably won't happen for generations, but perhaps we can make a start by looking out for images which bring our understanding of Buddhism – for example, our understanding of the arising of the bodhicitta – to life.

We should not take the bodhicitta to be a sort of doctrine or theory. It is a myth, in the sense that it refers to a transcendental experience that cannot be adequately described in conceptual terms. It is something that moves us, that stirs us on a much deeper level than that of the intellect or the ordinary waking consciousness.

The word myth, in the sense I intend it, does not mean something false or imaginary. A myth, one might think, is a story about gods and goddesses, and in a way this is so – but we have to ask what those gods and goddesses are, or what they represent. They are beings or powers or forces that exist on some other level, some other plane of being. When our life is inspired by a mythic dimension, we are working out on the historical plane something that is of archetypal significance. The bodhicitta, one could say, is the myth that inspires the Buddhist spiritual community.

Whatever the rational, conceptual, historically-oriented consciousness may comprehend, there is an imaginative or archetypal dimension to life that will always elude that rational consciousness. An analogy can be drawn here with our dream life. We may have a rich and vivid dream life – more vivid, sometimes, than our waking life. If we are to give a complete account of ourselves, we must describe not only our waking life but also our dream life; but this, significantly, is for most of us very difficult to do. We often don't remember our dreams; and when we are dreaming we rarely remember our waking life. They go along more or less separately, occupying their different planes. Likewise, if one does a lot of meditation, not much may be happening on the material plane – one may be on retreat and therefore not 'doing' very much at all – but a lot will be happening on that other plane of existence which is meditative consciousness.

If one's inner experience finds a collective expression in some kind of

spiritual movement, one could think of that movement as having a dream life, or a mythic life, of its own. Perhaps it does have an existence on another level. Indeed, if it did not, if it was merely an organization on the material plane, it would wither away very quickly. It needs to have very deep roots – roots in the sky.

A myth comes into being when people have very strong feelings about something, feelings which are not adequately supported by the existing state of affairs. The Mahāyāna Buddhists, it seems, felt a need to create a myth able to reflect not only their positive emotions but also the higher truths of Buddhism. Unable to nourish themselves on the dry bread – as they saw it – of the Abhidharma, they *had* to believe in the sort of Buddhism those myths represented. So one isn't to think that the Mahāyānists decided on rational grounds that it was about time there was a bit of myth in Buddhism. Their myths emerged out of spiritual necessity. The creation of these myths was, as with all myths, a collective rather than an individual process. And the myths were not created out of thin air; there were elements in the teachings going right back to the time of the Buddha that the myth-makers could build on. The Pāli Canon is very rich in mythical and legendary material, although the modern Theravāda tends to ignore that aspect of its literature.

Indeed, in the Pāli Canon one may even see myths in the process of emerging. There is an episode in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha-Nikāya* in which Ānanda asks the Buddha if he is really going to gain parinirvāṇa in the little wattle-and-daub township of Kusinārā. Couldn't he choose a more distinguished place? But the Buddha says, 'Don't say that, Ānanda. Formerly this was the capital of a very great kingdom.'[47] Then another sutta of the *Dīgha-Nikāya*, the *Mahāsudassana Sutta*, gives what is clearly an amplified version of this same episode, including a lot of imagery along almost Mahāyānistic lines.[48] The *Sukhāvaī-vyūha sūtras* of the Mahāyāna may be said to carry on from where this Pāli sutta leaves off; certain references, for example to rows of jewel trees, are very similar indeed.[49]

The question for us now is how we may renew this mythical dimension. How as Western Buddhists will we engage in the creation of myth? One the one hand we have the whole Buddhist tradition, together with the mythology of Western culture, to inspire us. On the other, we have so much theoretical knowledge getting in the way of that inspiration. The creation of myths will depend on our own very deep feelings and profound aspirations, feelings that go beyond our present personal situation, and even the existing world situation. If we have these feelings and aspirations, eventually there will be a need for them to be projected in an objective form, as myth. In the meantime it is important to recognize myths

like the bodhicitta for what they are, and to appreciate what their mythical status means.

There are no images for the bodhicitta in the Pāli scriptures. In fact, the term bodhicitta doesn't occur in the Pāli Canon at all. The early Buddhists seem to have considered the experience of insight or awakening to have been fully described by another concept – and image: Stream Entry. This is the point at which the practitioner attains transcendental insight, and 'enters the stream' that leads to Enlightenment.[50] From this point, although one has to continue to make a spiritual effort, one has sufficient momentum behind one's practice to make one's progress towards Enlightenment assured.

The two traditions, it seems, are talking about the same thing. Or are they? How does the concept of Stream Entry compare with the Mahāyāna's conception of the arising of the bodhicitta?

One way of thinking about the history of Buddhism is as a process of the solidification and dissolution of concepts. A concept originally used to express a spiritual experience comes to be 'solidified', and then identified with its solidified form, to the extent that it no longer really refers to the spiritual experience it was originally meant to express. When that happens, there is inevitably a protest, which results in a new conceptualization. But the protest is radical in the true sense of going back to the roots; it is really affirming just the same thing that the solidified concept was originally intended to affirm.

If one thinks in historical terms, Stream Entry can be identified as a concept which solidified and was negated by the protest of the Mahāyāna, which then came up with the concept of the arising of the bodhicitta. Looking at it this way, and in the Mahāyāna's terms, the arising of the bodhicitta as a spiritual experience comes at a later and higher stage of one's spiritual career than Stream Entry. But this arises from the devaluation of the goal of Arhantship, and thus of Stream Entry as an important point on the path towards that goal.

Not all Mahāyānists view Arhantship in the same light. Some see it as a stage on the way to supreme Enlightenment: the idea is that, having become an Arhant, one awakens to the possibility of a further stage of development and progresses, as a Bodhisattva, to Buddhahood. But other Mahāyāna schools see Arhantship as a sort of spiritual cul-de-sac. They warn that from the very beginning one should be careful not to follow that path because, while one may become Enlightened through following it, one has permanently precluded the possibility of gaining the higher transcendental realization of a Buddha. In effect they are saying that to become an Arhant is a mistake. More simply, we can say that at every stage of the path it is important to beware of spiritual individualism.

The path of the Arhant can also be seen as an attenuated version of what was

presented more fully in the Mahāyāna's path of the Bodhisattva. We can think of the 'Hīnayāna' and the 'Mahāyāna' not end to end, so to speak, but side by side, the one being a terser and the other a fuller description of the same spiritual path. Spiritual individualism is certainly not the message of the Pāli Canon. Indeed, one could regard the *Mahāgovinda Sutta* of the *Dīgha-Nikāya* as suggesting something like the bodhicitta. It places particular emphasis on the practice of the four *brahma-vihāras*, which in Mahāyāna practice often precedes the development of the bodhicitta.[51] In particular one can regard the *mettā bhāvanā* meditation practice, the development of loving-kindness, as a seed out of which the bodhicitta can develop. Mettā is essentially the wish that all living beings should be happy; and the greatest happiness is Enlightenment. To feel mettā is therefore ultimately to wish that others will gain Enlightenment, and do all one can to make it happen. The *mettā bhāvanā* thus implies the bodhicitta, and can be seen as indicating the shape of things to come in the Mahāyāna.

In short, the evidence we have suggests that from a purely spiritual perspective, as far as we can tell, what was originally meant by Stream Entry is more or less the same as what is meant by the arising of the bodhicitta. It is impossible to resolve the numberless differences, real and apparent, between the 'Hīnayāna' and the 'Mahāyāna' without an understanding of this difference between the historical perspective and the spiritual perspective. The expression 'the arising of the bodhicitta' cannot be separated from the historical circumstances in which it arose. It has around it all the associations of the Mahāyāna, which brought out the universalist, even cosmic, implications of Buddhism much more fully than the original form of Buddhism.

This is why in certain circumstances it seems appropriate to use the expression 'bodhicitta' rather than the term 'Stream Entry'. Even though in a sense the two ideas are interchangeable, they have come to express different aspects of the same experience, partly because of their historical associations. Their denotations are the same, but their connotations are different. In the course of Buddhist history many terms have acquired an additional richness of connotation, so that one term ends up being more appropriate than another in a certain context or with regard to a certain aspect of the spiritual life. One cannot ignore the historical doctrinal development; at the same time, one should not take it literally or on its own terms.

The connotations of the term Stream Entry are in a sense more individual, even individualistic, because it seems to refer to an achievement of the self – even though this 'achievement' is a liberation from the sense of ego. The bodhicitta is more explicitly unegoistic; as the will to Enlightenment for the sake of all, it has reference to other living beings. But it is only for historical reasons

that one term seems to refer to a certain aspect of the overall experience better than another. All these different terms – for these are only two of many – pertain to and revolve around one spiritual experience. Just as Stream Entry represents your entering the Stream, but there is no 'you' to enter it, the bodhicitta represents working for the benefit of all sentient beings, while realizing that in reality there are no sentient beings to be benefited.[52] Both, in other words, involve a transcendence of the concepts of self and others.

There is little point in trying to correlate all the details of the two paths as worked out in Buddhist tradition; they developed separately, without reference to one another, over many centuries. We have to be satisfied with a general correlation, an understanding of the underlying principle or spirit that is being expressed. For instance, the Mahāyāna stresses that wisdom and compassion are inseparable. That seems to be in direct contrast to the traditional teachings of the 'Hīnayāna', which sometimes appears to describe a path of wisdom with little or no reference to compassion, but it is quite consistent with the records of the Buddha's own life and teaching.

We may not be able to correlate the teachings of Stream Entry and the arising of the bodhicitta point by point, but we need to be able to correlate them to some extent in the interests of our own spiritual life and development. Otherwise we find ourselves in the impossible situation of having to choose between the 'Mahāyāna' and the 'Hīnayāna', the Bodhisattva ideal and the Arhant ideal, as though they represented distinct paths. In fact there is only one spiritual path for all, as the *White Lotus Sūtra* stresses.[53] The path of the so-called Arhant and the path of the so-called Bodhisattva are simply different ways of looking at that one path.

One can think of the experience as being multifaceted, Stream Entry being one of the facets and the arising of the bodhicitta being another. For one person, Stream Entry might be the first aspect of the total experience they contact, while somebody else might start with the arising of the bodhicitta and work their way round to Stream Entry.

And Stream Entry itself is a multifaceted experience. According to tradition there are ten fetters which keep us from Enlightenment, and when one breaks the first three of these, one attains Stream Entry.[54] But Stream Entry is also described in terms of developing insight into the transcendental. So do you break the fetters and thus develop insight, or develop insight and thus break the fetters? It's impossible to say: the two are different aspects of the same thing. You may go from insight to breaking the fetters, or from breaking the fetters to developing insight, depending on which aspect you give attention to.

This is the nature of following the spiritual path at any stage. If you start by

developing faith, sooner or later you will have to develop the balancing quality, wisdom, and vice versa.[55] And if you have developed a lot of faith but not much wisdom, you will seem very different from someone who has developed a lot of wisdom but not much faith. Eventually, as you both develop the balancing faculty, it will become more obvious that you are on the same path, but until then you may seem to be on completely different paths (traditionally called the path of the doctrine-follower and the path of the faith-follower).[56]

The danger of comparing people in terms of their spiritual progress is that one may compare one person's strength with another's weakness. One must be especially careful not to attach too much importance to whatever happens to be one's own particular strength. It is impossible to understand people quickly or easily. We all work on different aspects of ourselves at different times, and it may take years to work out what is going on. The main thing is that each of us should be developing some aspect of ourselves.

So – to return to our main theme – how does one go about this kind of development? How does one become a Bodhisattva? It happens through the arising of this glorious bodhicitta – but how does the bodhicitta come to manifest within us? This is a very mysterious thing. In his *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva says that it is like a blind man finding a priceless jewel on a dunghill at night.[57] It is so wonderful, so unexpected. Who would think that a blind man poking his way round a dunghill in the middle of the night would find a priceless jewel? In the same way, who would have thought that – living in the midst of the world, earning our living, raising our families, perhaps going along to meditation classes once a week – the bodhicitta could ever arise in us?

Wonderful and unexpected though it is when it happens, the arising of the bodhicitta is no accident. It is the most fundamental principle of Buddhist thought that whatever arises in the universe at any level does so not by chance, fate, or the will of God, but in dependence upon natural – and in Buddhist terms even the 'supernatural' is natural – causes and conditions.[58] This applies also to the emergence, the breaking forth, of the bodhicitta within us. It depends upon the creation of certain mental and spiritual conditions.

This draws attention to a crucial area of the spiritual life: the need for preparation. We are usually in far too much of a hurry. In our anxiety to get results quickly we often neglect the very conditions upon which the results depend, and so, very often, we don't succeed. But if we make sufficiently careful preparations, we can leave the results to look after themselves; indeed, we find that we succeed almost without noticing.

This very much applies to meditation. If you want to meditate, it's no good thinking you can just sit down and do it. In the East the tradition is that first of

all you go into the room in which you are going to meditate and, very slowly and carefully, sweep the floor, tidy up, and if necessary dust the image of the Buddha on the shrine. You do it all slowly, gently, and mindfully. Then, in a meditative mood, you throw away the old flowers (in some Eastern countries you are meant to throw them into running water if possible, not on the dust heap) and cut fresh ones. You put them in a vase and arrange them thoughtfully, taking your time over it. Then you light a candle and a stick of incense. You look around to see that everything is in order – perhaps you need to open the window for a bit of fresh air, or shut the door to keep out disturbances. Then you arrange your seat – making sure it is placed square – and then you sit down. You adjust your clothing, and put your feet and hands into the proper posture. Even then, very often, you won't begin the meditation. First you'll recite the Refuges and Precepts, and chant a few invocations to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Then – and only then – you start meditating.

Paying attention to the preparations in this way, one is much more likely to succeed, not just in meditation but in all activities. If one wants to write a book, or paint a picture, or cook a meal, the secret lies in the preparation. And it's just the same with the arising of the bodhicitta. One shouldn't even think of becoming a Bodhisattva. It isn't some thing one can become; one can't go into it as a kind of career move, follow a course, or get a certificate – though I'm sorry to say that in the East there are establishments that give certificates of this sort for people to frame and put up on their wall. One shouldn't even think of developing the bodhicitta. It's out of the question, a waste of time. But one can certainly think of creating within oneself the conditions which will enable the bodhicitta to arise.

Traditionally the assumption is that all the factors required for the arising of the bodhicitta are within one's own control. One might object that there are factors – like whether or not one is born in a country where the Buddha's teaching is known – about which one has no choice. But the Buddhist might reply that under the operation of the law of karma one has set up that particular condition for oneself – in that one has been born in that country – so that it reflects a choice that one made at some time.

But aren't some of the conditions upon which we base our spiritual practice outside our control? For example, a strong theme in Buddhism is the value of friendship to one's spiritual life. Isn't that an instance of an outside influence having an effect? Yes, in a way – but no one can live our spiritual life for us. Our spiritual friends may help to set up the conditions for it, but it is our receptivity to those conditions that makes the difference, not the conditions themselves.

Receptivity works a little like a lightning conductor. If one is able to harness

the power of the lightning flash when it comes, that doesn't happen by mere chance: one has set up the conditions to make it possible. But one won't get any electricity flowing through the lightning conductor unless a storm passes overhead and lightning strikes it. Of course, when it comes to the bodhicitta there is always a lightning storm going on, so to speak. But the point is that we, as we at present are, cannot force anything to happen. All we can do is set up the conditions and wait, or act as though we are just waiting. We can choose the right place for the lightning conductor, make it the right shape, right material and so on. But we can't pull the lightning down from the sky.

To say 'When you make the appropriate preparations the bodhicitta will arise' is simply to use the word 'will' in the future tense. It isn't that the bodhicitta *must* arise. At present you just don't know in detail all the conditions that are necessary or how long you will have to keep maintaining them. It isn't like making a cake: you can't assemble the ingredients and be sure what the result will be. This is where the element of freedom comes in. As we are now, we cannot provide for or dictate to our future selves, or even anticipate who we will be in the future.

This is why Śāntideva says – admittedly he is exaggerating – that the arising of the bodhicitta is like a blind man on a dark night finding a jewel in a dunghill. In a way you don't know what you're looking for. You may have a rough idea, just as the blind man may know that when he catches hold of the jewel it will feel hard and a bit sharp; but he could just as easily pick up a pebble or a walnut. Similarly, there is always an element of blindness in following the path. If you knew exactly what the goal was like and what you had to do to reach it, you would be there already. We tend to anticipate conceptually and think we know what we are talking about when we can only have a very vague, approximate idea. Not really knowing what the bodhicitta is like, we can't know with scientific precision what conditions we will need to set up for it to arise. We are going to have to juggle the conditions a bit until we get the right combination.

Different texts recommend different methods designed to cultivate the arising of the bodhicitta, but all aspects of one's practice, pursued intensively enough, can be thought of as leading to that goal. In a way it doesn't matter which one you start with; the crucial thing is to give yourself to it wholeheartedly. It's all too easy to end up just jogging along with one's spiritual life in a comfortable, easy, undemanding way. To avoid this, one needs all the time to be making a definite effort in some particular area of practice, whether it's ethics, meditation, study, work, generosity, or whatever.

Apart from the specific bodhicitta meditation practice taught in Tibetan Buddhism, according to Buddhist tradition there are two particular ways of

establishing the conditions in dependence upon which the bodhicitta can arise, one associated with the name of Śāntideva, and the other with the name of Vasubandhu. Both were great Indian masters of the Mahāyāna – Śāntideva in the seventh century, and Vasubandhu probably in the fourth century – and both are traditionally recognized as having been themselves Bodhisattvas. Though different, their two methods are complementary.

Śāntideva's method is more frankly devotional. It is known as *anuttarapūjā* – 'supreme worship' or even 'supreme adoration' – and it consists in a series of what could be described as seven spiritual exercises, seven acts which are each expressive of a certain phase of religious consciousness, even a certain mood. The recitation of verses corresponding to these different phases is known as the Sevenfold Worship or Sevenfold Puja.

The first of these seven phases is what is simply called worship. This is addressed principally to the Buddha: not just the human, historical figure, but the Buddha as the symbol of the ideal of Enlightenment. Adopting an attitude of worship within our hearts, we recognize with deep devotion and reverence, even awe, the sublimity of the ideal of attaining Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Feeling powerfully and profoundly filled with this devotion, we just *have* to make offerings, to give something. The most common offerings are flowers, candles or lamps, and incense, but there are many other things that can be offered. These are placed before the Buddha image, representing one's feeling of devotion for the ideal, as yet so distant, of supreme Enlightenment.

Secondly there is what is known as the obeisance or salutation. Obeisance literally means 'bowing down', and this stage consists in paying outward physical respect. It is not enough to experience something mentally. We are not just minds – we don't just have thoughts and feelings – we have speech and bodies too, and for any spiritual exercise to be effective, all three must participate, at least implicitly. So one folds one's hands and bows in reverence and salutation – and also humility. We not only see the ideal; we recognize that as yet we ourselves are far from attaining to it. The ideal is like the Himalayan peaks gleaming in the distance. All we have done so far is step out on to the path: there's a very long way to go.

Thirdly, there is the Going for Refuge. We began by recognizing the ideal, just seeing it, venerating it, responding to it emotionally. Then we recognize how far we are from it. Now, in this third stage, we commit ourselves to realizing that ideal. Having recognized that the ideal is way out there and that we are here, we resolve to go forward from here to there. We commit ourselves to the Three Jewels so central to and so beloved of the whole Buddhist tradition: the Buddha, the realization of the ideal; the Dharma, the path leading to that realization; and

the Sangha, the company – the spiritual fellowship – of all those who have walked the path to Enlightenment before us.

Then fourthly, confession of faults. Some people find it hard to relate to this, perhaps because the word ‘confession’ carries negative associations for them. In this context it represents a recognition of the side of ourselves that we would rather other people didn’t see – that we ourselves would rather not see – but that is always pursuing us, as Mephistopheles pursues Faust in Goethe’s great poem. Through confessing our faults we recognize our little weaknesses, our backslidings – and even sometimes our plain wickedness. This is not a matter of breast-beating, but merely a realistic appraisal, together with the resolve that in future we shall do our best to act differently. Our faults are just so much extra weight, making the journey to Enlightenment much more heavy going, and they must be unloaded.

Confession figures quite prominently in the Theravāda, especially as a part of monastic life. It is normal practice for a Theravāda bhikkhu or sāmanera to make a regular confession morning and evening to the teacher with whom he is residing, asking for forgiveness for any faults of body, speech, or mind that he may have committed, especially against the teacher, during the preceding day or night. Even if he has thought ill of his teacher in a dream, he confesses that. On top of this, there is the confession that, in theory at least, precedes the recitation of the *prāṭimokṣa*, the code of monastic law.

So confession is not specific to the Mahāyāna, or especially associated with the Bodhisattva ideal. Nonetheless, inasmuch as the Bodhisattva ideal represents, if anything, a more difficult ideal (if one is choosing to distinguish it from the Arhant ideal), any lapse from that ideal represents a more serious failure, and thus needs confession to a greater extent. Perhaps for this reason, there is an emphasis on confession in the Mahāyāna that we don’t quite find in the Theravāda. In the Theravāda it is an acknowledgement of offences committed, but in the Mahāyāna it becomes a heartfelt pouring forth of one’s regret, and a fierce determination not to commit that unskilful action again. This determination is strongly expressed in Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, in which confession is made in vivid and emotional tones;[59] in the *Sūtra of Golden Light* also, the confession has a poetic quality that one rarely finds in the Theravāda.[60]

The fifth stage of the puja is ‘rejoicing in merits’. This involves thinking of the lives of others, bringing to mind good, noble, virtuous, and holy people. One can think of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, saints and sages, great poets, artists, musicians, scientists, even people one knows (or has known), who exhibit, or used to exhibit, outstanding human and spiritual qualities. We can derive tremendous encouragement and inspiration from thinking that in this world,

where one encounters so much meanness and misery, people like this do appear, at least from time to time.

So one rejoices that good and holy and enlightened people have lived in every age of human history, in every part of the world, helping the rest of humanity in so many different ways – whether as saint or sage, teacher or mystic, scientist or administrator, hospital worker or prison visitor. Anybody who has helped others is to be rejoiced in. Instead of denigrating or debunking, as now seems to be the fashion, one appreciates and enjoys and feels happy in the contemplation of other people's good qualities and deeds.

The sixth stage of the Sevenfold Puja is called entreaty and supplication. We request those who are more Enlightened than ourselves to teach us. This isn't to suggest that they have to be cajoled into teaching. What we are doing here is expressing our own attitude of receptivity and openness, without which we can gain nothing at all – certainly not the bodhicitta.

The seventh and last stage is the transference of merit and self-surrender. According to Buddhist tradition, when one performs any skilful action, one acquires a certain amount of puṇya or merit, so one of the benefits of performing the Sevenfold Puja comes in this form – as merit. Puṇya has a double meaning: it means 'merit', and it also means 'virtue'. It is the karmic credit, so to speak, that one has in one's 'account' as the result of ethical actions. Thus the idea of puṇya is very closely connected with the idea of karma. If one performs skilful actions – puṇya in the sense of virtue – at some time in the future one will experience good and pleasant things, because one has accumulated puṇya in the sense of merit.

At the end of the puja, having accumulated all this merit, one gives it away. One says, in effect, 'Whatever merit I have gained in doing this, let it be shared by all.' Rather than keeping the merit gained by one's actions for the sake of one's own individual emancipation, one chooses to share it with all other beings. At the highest level, this aspiration becomes the Bodhisattva ideal itself.

So this is Śāntideva's method for preparing the conditions in which the bodhicitta can arise. The ritual, the recitations, the ceremony, are all there to support the inner core of the exercise, which is essentially a sequence of devotional and spiritual moods and experiences. If our hearts are filled with sublime feelings of reverence and devotion and worship; if we really feel the distance that separates us from the ideal; if we are truly determined to commit ourselves to the realization of that ideal; if we clearly see the darker side of our own nature; if we honestly rejoice in the good deeds of others; if we are really receptive to higher spiritual influences; and if we wish to keep nothing back for ourselves alone – then, in dependence upon these states of mind, the bodhicitta

will one day arise. This is the soil in which the seed of the bodhicitta, once planted, can grow and flower.

In his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* Śāntideva says that the effect of giving, of puja – in short, of committing yourself to the spiritual life – is that you become 'without fear of being or becoming'.[61] The would-be Bodhisattva has no more worries. You just give yourself to the spiritual life. You aren't bothered whether you are going to live or die, be rich or poor, be praised or blamed, or anything like that. You are just on the spiritual path and that's that. So long as you are still wondering what to do with your life – perhaps weighing up how much time to give to spiritual things and how much to worldly things – you remain unsure, unclear, and therefore unconfident. But once you have made up your mind and committed yourself, in a sense everything is looked after and there's nothing to worry about.

Our tendency is perhaps to think of spiritual life as difficult and worldly life as easy, but there is no objective reason for this view. Sometimes it is less trouble just to lead a spiritual life than to try to put things right in the world or even to try to have a successful and happy worldly career. In a way, it takes less effort to gain Enlightenment. It's very difficult to be successful in the world – there are all sorts of factors that might upset one's plans – but if one follows the spiritual path one knows that, if one makes the effort, sooner or later success will come.

However, while making offerings and dedicating oneself – surrendering oneself, even – is important, it is only the very beginning of the spiritual life. One is anticipating rather than experiencing the arising of the bodhicitta. One is wishing to be – rather than actually being – possessed by that higher spiritual force. So in the puja one says to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, at least in one's own mind, 'Take me over. Instead of doing what I want to do, from now onwards I'll do what you want me to do.' At this stage, there has to be this kind of dialogue. But when the bodhicitta arises, one is taken at one's word, as it were. Then there is no question of deciding what one will do. To put it rather mechanically, one starts to function as an instrument of the arisen bodhicitta.

Until that happens, one makes oneself receptive to its happening, first of all by making offerings and then by offering oneself, saying 'Take me over. Let me be directed not just by my own egoistic will, but by the will to Enlightenment. Let that motivate me, let that carry me along.' Puja becomes an important and demanding practice if one approaches it with this understanding of what one is doing.

According to Vasubandhu's method, which is more philosophical, the arising of the bodhicitta depends upon four factors.[62] The first of these is the recollection of the Buddhas. One thinks of the Buddhas of the past – Śākyamuni, the Buddha

of our own historical era, and his great predecessors in remote aeons of legend, Dipaṅkara, Koṇḍañña, and so on.[63] Then, in the words of the sūtras, one reflects:

> All Buddhas in the ten quarters, of the past, of the future, and of the present, when they first started on their way to enlightenment, were not quite free from passions and sins any more than we are at present; but they finally succeeded in attaining the highest enlightenment and became the noblest beings.
>
> All the Buddhas, by strength of their inflexible spiritual energy, were capable of attaining perfect enlightenment. If enlightenment is attainable at all, why should we not attain it?
>
> All the Buddhas, erecting high the torch of wisdom through the darkness of ignorance and keeping awake an excellent heart, submitted themselves to penance and mortification, and finally emancipated themselves from the bondage of the triple world. Following their steps, we, too, could emancipate ourselves.
>
> All the Buddhas, the noblest type of mankind, successfully crossed the great ocean of birth and death and of passions and sins; why, then, we, being creatures of intelligence, could also cross the sea of transmigration.
>
> All the Buddhas manifesting great spiritual power sacrificed the possessions, body, and life, for the attainment of omniscience (*sarvajñā*); and we, too, could follow their noble examples.[64]

In other words, the Buddhas all started off with the same ignorance and weaknesses as we do. If they could overcome them, so can we, if we make the effort. Apart from the obvious benefits of this practice for the development of faith and confidence, it has a very positive effect simply in that if one is thinking of the Buddha, one is mentally occupied with something positive and thus turning the current of one's thoughts away from unskilful actions. Occupying one's mind with thoughts of the Buddha, one is very unlikely to have an unskilful thought or commit an unskilful action. Instead, one will experience positive, skilful emotions: faith, joy, serenity, peace.

The second of Vasubandhu's factors is 'seeing the faults of conditioned existence'. 'Conditioned existence' refers to phenomenal existence of every kind: physical, mental, even spiritual – whatever arises in dependence upon causes and conditions. And the first 'fault' to be seen is that all conditioned

existence is impermanent. It may be an idea or an empire, it may arise and disappear in an infinitesimal fraction of a second or over billions of years, but whatever arises must, sooner or later, cease. And – because everything conditioned is transitory – conditioned existence can never be truly satisfactory; this is the second fault to be reflected upon. Sooner or later the wrench of separation comes, and in its wake comes suffering. And thirdly, everything is, in a sense, unreal, insubstantial. This is a subtler 'fault' to find with conditioned existence. It is not that things do not exist – clearly they do. But nothing exists independent of its constituents, all of which are impermanent and liable to change. This book, for example – take away the typeface and the pages, the cover and the spine, and where is the book? It has no inherent existence; there is nothing 'underneath', nothing substantial about it. And all things are like this, including ourselves. There is no 'I' apart from my constituent parts, my *skandhas*. This is the famous *anātman* doctrine.[65]

So one sees that conditioned existence as a whole has these faults: it is impermanent, it is riddled with unsatisfactoriness, and it isn't ultimately real. One further reflects – one knows in one's heart of hearts – that nothing conditioned can fully satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. We long for something permanent, something beyond the flux of time, something blissful, something permanently satisfying, something of which we never become weary, something which is fully and entirely real and true. But such a thing is nowhere to be found in mundane experience. Reflecting in this way, seeing the faults of conditioned existence, one pierces through the conditioned to the Unconditioned beyond.

The third factor is 'observing the sufferings of sentient beings'. And what a lot of sufferings there are. One has only to open a newspaper to encounter a whole host of them: people hanged, shot, burned to death – people dying in all sorts of painful ways, from disease, famine, flood, or fire. At this very moment, people are suffering in all sorts of agonizing ways, and one doesn't need much imagination to realize this. There are volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and plane crashes, to say nothing of war – sudden death in so many fearful and horrifying forms. And, of course, there are many deaths on the roads: we have become almost inured to this phenomenon, but it is still truly horrible if we consider the reality behind the statistics.

Even apart from such horrors, simply getting on in the world, making ends meet, leading a happy human existence, is sometimes a tremendous struggle. We strive to do the decent thing, to be upright and honest, to lift our heads above the waves; but then a great wave comes along and overwhelms us again. Down we go, then up we come again; and so it goes on. This is human life.

Then there's the suffering of animals: all those animals that are trapped for their fur, or slaughtered for human consumption, or pursued for 'sport'. If one looks at it objectively one sees that in many ways life is a painful and miserable thing: 'nasty, brutish, and short'. This is only one side of the picture, but it is a side which we very often ignore, and which we need to bear in mind.

Worse still, in a way, are the sufferings we bring upon ourselves through our own mental states. It is not just that we are afraid of growing old or dying; we do absolutely nothing about our predicament. Full of anxiety, most people have no spiritual orientation to their lives, no real clarity. The bodhicitta starts arising when one sees what a mess we are all in. One can't begin to see that until one is a little way out of the mess oneself, but then one does begin to appreciate what a miserable time people have of it.

The great danger is that, having freed oneself to some extent, one may start looking down on others and pitying them. This sort of elitism – 'Oh you poor people! Have you never heard of Buddhism?' – does no good at all. At the same time, though, one can see that most people *do* need a spiritual path, and one wants to help – not just to alleviate or palliate, but help in a far more radical fashion, helping people to see that there is some spiritual dimension, some higher purpose, to life.

Tennyson speaks of having a 'painless sympathy with pain',[66] and it is this sort of sympathy that Bodhisattvas feel. They are keenly conscious of the suffering of others, but they don't suffer themselves as others do. If one were literally to experience the sufferings of others, it would be completely incapacitating: it would be too much. If one gets too personally caught up in someone else's predicament, one can end up simply joining them in their suffering. One needs a basis within one's own experience which is so positive that even though one is fully aware of other people's suffering and one is doing what one can to alleviate it, one is not overwhelmed by that suffering.

The last of Vasubandhu's four factors is the 'contemplation of the virtues of the Tathāgatas' – the Tathāgatas being the Buddhas, the Enlightened Ones, and virtues here meaning not just ethical virtues but spiritual qualities of all kinds. As we have seen, in the Pāli scriptures there are many instances of people being tremendously inspired by encountering the Buddha. They haven't heard a word about Buddhism; they are simply inspired by the presence, the aura even, of the Buddha himself.

We ourselves can have this kind of encounter in a sense when we do puja. Puja is essentially just thinking about the Buddha: not thinking in a cold, intellectual way, but keeping the ideal of Buddhahood in the forefront of one's consciousness. When one does a puja, the Buddha is there in front of one, either

in the form of the image on the shrine, or vividly present in one's own mind through visualization and imagination. Through puja and the whole devotional approach – making offerings, arranging flowers, and so on – one becomes more open and sensitive to the ideal of the Buddha, and this in turn paves the way for the breaking through of that highest spiritual dimension which is the bodhicitta. One doesn't stop doing devotional practices when the bodhicitta has arisen. According to the Mahāyāna sūtras, no one makes more offerings than the Bodhisattvas; they are always doing pujas, praising the Buddhas and so on. Some Bodhisattvas, we are told, have a vow that they will worship all the Buddhas in the universe. They spend all their time – millions and millions of years – going from one part of the universe to another, worshipping all the Buddhas that exist. This is typical Mahāyāna hyperbole, but it does bring home the importance of acts of devotion.

Another way of contemplating the virtues of Enlightened beings is to read accounts of their lives, whether the life of the Buddha himself or, say, that of Milarepa, the Enlightened yogi from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. One can also contemplate the spiritual qualities of the Buddhas by means of visualization exercises, as developed particularly in Tibetan Buddhism, by conjuring up a vivid mental picture, a sort of archetypal vision, of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva. What one does in these practices – to summarize very briefly – is to see this visualized form more and more brightly, more and more vividly, more and more gloriously, and then gradually feel oneself merging with it, one's heart merging with the heart of the Buddha or Bodhisattva, the heart of Enlightenment. In this way one contemplates, one assimilates, one becomes one with, the virtues of the Tathāgatas.

Even without going into the traditional details too closely, it isn't difficult to understand how the bodhicitta might arise in dependence on these four factors. Through recollecting the Buddhas we become convinced that Enlightenment is possible. They have gained Enlightenment; why shouldn't we gain it too? Through this kind of reflection, energy and vigour is stirred up. Then, through seeing the faults of conditioned existence – seeing that it is impermanent, basically unsatisfactory, and not ultimately real – we become detached from the world. The trend, the stream, of our existence begins to flow in the direction of the Unconditioned. Next, through observing the sufferings of sentient beings – whether in imagination or in actual fact – compassion arises. We don't think only of our own liberation; we want to help others too. Then, by contemplating the virtues of the Tathāgatas – their purity, their peacefulness, their wisdom, their love – we gradually become assimilated to them and approach the goal of Enlightenment. As these four – energy, detachment, compassion, and 'becoming

one’, as it were, with the Buddhas – start to coalesce within our hearts, the bodhicitta arises; the awakening of the heart is achieved; a Bodhisattva is born.

3

THE BODHISATTVA VOW

so THE BODHICITTA has arisen. One has set out on the Bodhisattva path, one's heart burning with the desire that all sentient beings may be free from suffering and attain Enlightenment. But the arising of the bodhicitta is only the first of the ten stages (*bhūmis*) of the Bodhisattva's path to Enlightenment;[67] there is still a long way to go. What is the next step? This is relevant to all of us, whether the bodhicitta has arisen or not, because the Bodhisattva's course of action once the bodhicitta has arisen is echoed in the spiritual practice of those in whom it has yet to arise.

It is important to remember that it is the relative bodhicitta we are concerned with here. The absolute bodhicitta, as we have seen, is identical with Enlightenment, above and beyond time and space. It is, in a sense, beyond our reach, in the realm of eternity. But the relative bodhicitta, the bodhicitta which manifests within the stream of time, is more accessible to us. It is traditionally said to have two aspects: a vow aspect and an establishment aspect. The establishment aspect involves what are known as the six *pāramitās*, the six transcendental virtues or perfections, the practice of which moves the Bodhisattva towards Enlightenment: giving, uprightness, patience, vigour, meditation, and wisdom. These three pairs of virtues will be the subject matter of the next three chapters.

First, though, we will consider the vow aspect of the relative bodhicitta. This is one of the most important practical aspects of the Mahāyāna tradition. The Sanskrit word being translated as vow is *praṇiāhdna*, which can also be

translated as resolution, determination, or pledge. Har Dayal suggests ‘earnest wish’,[68] but that is perhaps too weak. Simply to wish that something may be so suggests that while one might like it to be so, one is not necessarily doing anything to make it happen. The Bodhisattva does not simply wish that all sentient beings may attain Enlightenment; he or she does everything within his or her power to bring that about. Hence the praṇidhāna is not just a pious wish; it is a solemn and special vow. This vow is made publicly, and when it has been made, it can never under any circumstances be withdrawn. It may even be described as a sort of promise made by the Bodhisattva upon the arising of the bodhicitta – a promise made to the universe at large, to all sentient beings.

The fact that it is solemnly irrevocable is of course the essential characteristic of any vow. If one takes a vow and then breaks it, one can’t really have been ready to take that step. A vow is a very serious kind of promise – and some people find even promises hard to keep. If one can’t keep a promise to meet someone somewhere at a particular time, say, one is unlikely to be able to keep a vow; while to be scrupulous in keeping one’s word in small things is good practice for the taking of a full-blown vow. If one is thinking of taking a vow of some kind, it is probably best to consult one’s spiritual friends about it. With their knowledge of one’s nature – perhaps better than one’s own – they may have a better sense than one does oneself of whether one will be able to keep the vow one has it in mind to take.

Whatever the vow – whether it is to give up smoking, to observe lifelong celibacy, or to meditate for two hours every day – it needs to be tested out. It’s a good idea to take it a bit at a time – perhaps for a month to begin with, then two months, six months, a year, and so on. Taking a vow publicly, in front of the assembled spiritual community or a number of friends, gives it a weight and seriousness it might not otherwise possess. Having witnesses to one’s vow helps one to keep it, because to break it would be to let them down, as well as oneself.

One extreme is to take vows rashly and lightly; the other is to avoid committing oneself at all. A middle way is to undertake personal precepts, again in consultation with one’s spiritual friends. A precept falls short of a vow, but it can help one prepare to take a vow. Of course, as a Buddhist one undertakes to observe five (or ten) basic precepts anyway, and these are to be taken with full seriousness.[69] One shouldn’t be in a hurry to take vows before one is satisfied that one is observing the precepts as well as one can.

And certainly one shouldn’t be in a hurry to take the Bodhisattva vow. The nature of this vow is closely linked to the nature of the bodhicitta. We have seen that the bodhicitta is universal, but that it manifests in individuals and expresses itself through them. This expression of the bodhicitta through the individual is

what is known as the Bodhisattva's vow. The vow may therefore be defined as the concrete practical expression of the bodhicitta in the life and work of the individual Bodhisattva.

Although it is traditional to speak of the Bodhisattva's 'vow', the vow is generally a set of vows, which varies from one Bodhisattva to another, reflecting his or her special interests and aptitudes within the wider context of the Bodhisattva ideal. If we take the image of light refracted through a glass prism, the bodhicitta is like pure white light shining through the prism (which represents the Bodhisattva), and the Bodhisattva's vows are like the colours of the rainbow emerging on the other side. To take the simile further, we could say that the pure white light of the relative bodhicitta streams from the sun of the absolute bodhicitta and shines through hundreds and thousands of individual prisms, so that each produces its own combination of colours. Within the spectrum usually visible to us, the rainbow has only seven colours, but some kinds of meditation involve trying to imagine, trying to see, to visualize, other colours, colours one has never seen before. We can think of all these prisms as emitting not just the seven colours we know, but hundreds of thousands of wonderful new colours, and similarly we can imagine the bodhicitta shining through the minds and hearts of different Bodhisattvas, producing innumerable combinations of vows.

Together, the bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva vow make provision for both unity and variety. The Bodhisattvas all participate in one bodhicitta. This is the source of their unity. At the same time each Bodhisattva expresses that one bodhicitta in his or her own way. This individual expression in terms of life and work is what the Bodhisattva's vows consist in. We usually think of a vow as being verbal, like an oath taken in court, but it isn't just that the Bodhisattva makes a statement that he or she is going to do this or that. It's not even just a question of the Bodhisattva's conscious intention. To change the metaphor, we may say that the vows of the Bodhisattva are so many sparks struck not just from his or her mind or will, but from his or her total being, under the tremendous impact of the bodhicitta.

The Mahāyāna scriptures mention many sets of vows, some of them associated with the names of great Bodhisattvas. For instance, there are the celebrated forty-eight vows of the Bodhisattva Dharmākara, who became the Buddha Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. These forty-eight vows are enumerated at length in the *Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra*, the Sūtra of the Adornment of the Happy Land.[70] The *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, the Sūtra on the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva's path, mentions ten great vows:

> (1) To provide for the worship of all the Buddhas without exception; (2) to maintain the religious Discipline that has been taught by all the Buddhas and to preserve the teaching of the Buddhas; (3) to see all the incidents in the earthly career of a Buddha; (4) to realize the Thought of Enlightenment, to practise all the duties of a bodhisattva, to acquire all the pāramitās (perfections) and purify all the stages of his career; (5) to mature all beings (that is, all the four classes of beings in the six states of existence) and establish them in the knowledge of the Buddha; (6) to perceive the whole Universe; (7) to purify and cleanse all the Buddhafields; (8) to enter on the Great Way (the Mahāyāna) and to produce a common thought and purpose in all Bodhisattvas; (9) to make all actions of the body, speech, and mind fruitful and successful; (10) to attain the supreme and perfect Enlightenment and to preach the Doctrine.[71]

These ten vows are clearly different aspects of the Bodhisattva's determination to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. There is not the space here to examine all of them, but perhaps the third is worth dwelling on a little in order to explore specifically how we can approach them. One might wonder how anybody could vow 'to see all the incidents in the earthly career of a Buddha'. But the traditional Mahāyāna presentation of the Bodhisattva career envisages that career as extending over three *asamkhyeya-kalpas*,[72] and therefore as covering innumerable lifetimes, during which one would be born during the lifetime of quite a number of different Buddhas, and could well be in contact with them in some way or other, even perhaps as a disciple. In the course of all those lifetimes, one would have the opportunity of seeing all the events in the life of a Buddha from the very beginning.

According to general Buddhist teaching the life of every Buddha follows a standard pattern. His mother always dies seven days after his birth, he always has two chief disciples, he always gains Enlightenment seated under a certain tree, and so on.[73] At the time of his birth, you might be a god watching from heaven. Or, to witness later events, you might be the charioteer of the Buddha-to-be, or one of his concubines, or one of his first five disciples. In one way or another, having taken this vow, you would be a witness to all the twelve great acts, as they are called, in a Buddha's life.[74]

This vow may seem neither relevant nor comprehensible, but one can at least try to grasp imaginatively what it means. There is no need to be in too much of a hurry to explain it away as being symbolic; it is good to allow oneself to linger over it and at least contemplate the possibility of taking it literally. In fact, the Mahāyāna tradition does take it quite literally. If one thinks in terms of hundreds

and thousands and millions of lifetimes in which one practises the perfections, the pāramitās, it is quite conceivable that one could be reborn during the lifetime of a Buddha. But if it is difficult to see this vow in this way – and for most of us it will be – another way we can approach it is to acquaint ourselves through literature with the life story of the Buddha.

In considering the Buddha's life, though, one should be discerning about what one is going to try to emulate. It isn't necessary to think in terms of duplicating *all* the incidents of the Buddha's life. It is important to draw a distinction between those incidents that reflect stages of spiritual development and those that just happened because the Buddha was living in India during a certain period of history.

It is perhaps best to regard this sort of vow as representing the archetype of a particular spiritual possibility, in which one participates to one's own very limited extent. If one undertakes to observe this vow, it is not necessary to take it literally. For most of us it will be more effective simply to reflect it in our own life as much as we can. It may be too much of a leap of the imagination to take a vow to witness the great events in the life of a Buddha, but one can certainly mentally review or imaginatively re-enact those events, and feel inspired by them. Likewise, the vow to perceive the whole universe is a vow that one cannot take literally, but one can take on board the underlying suggestion: that one should see as much of reality as possible, see everything as clearly as one can.

We do need to be quite careful here. It is hard enough to observe even the basic precepts of Buddhism. Thinking in terms of taking vows on this vast scale can amount to encouraging oneself to indulge in spiritual day-dreaming, just fantasizing about observing all these wonderful vows when one is not even practising the precepts very seriously. Taking the Bodhisattva vows shouldn't represent some sort of Buddhistic Walter Mitty exercise. Otherwise, like Walter Mitty, one is going to come back to reality with a bump.[75]

So how are we to take the cosmic perspective the Mahāyāna offers – the idea, for example, that it takes three kalpas to traverse the Bodhisattva path? It may have the salutary effect of stretching one's imagination; but the principle we have to come back to is that the cosmic Bodhisattva ideal cannot be seen as pertaining to any given individual at all. To think that one could personally form that kind of aspiration is simply to fail to understand its real significance.

As ordinary individuals we can perhaps allow ourselves to think in terms of rebirth – even in terms of a series of rebirths extending over quite a long period of time. We can perhaps imagine ourselves as continuing our spiritual life through a succession of lives. But can we think in terms of a Bodhisattva career literally extending over three kalpas? A kalpa is a very long time. The traditional

description of a kalpa asks us to imagine a rock a mile high, a mile wide, and a mile long. Then we imagine that once every hundred years someone comes and strokes a piece of Benares silk, just once, along the top of the rock. A kalpa is the amount of time it would take to wear down the whole rock, at that rate.[76] It is a truly immense period of time.

Gampopa was a great Kagyu teacher, a Tibetan, at about the time of the Norman Conquest in Britain. In his *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, he quotes the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*:

> I shall rejoice at staying in hell for thousands of aeons if only to save one single being from misery, to say nothing of still longer periods and of still greater miseries. Such is a Bodhisattva's armour of strenuousness.[77]

So apparently the Bodhisattva volunteers for sojourns of millions of years in various hells for the sake of helping just one living being. But can we really imagine ourselves doing that? Surely it would be impossible for any human being to say that and sincerely believe it. If we try to imagine what the pains of hell would be like, we realize we wouldn't be able to stand even a hundredth part of that sort of pain. How can we take this as a workable aspiration for a real live human being? We find it difficult enough to help with washing the dishes sometimes. When the texts speak of the Bodhisattva in this way, it makes most sense to think that they are referring to a sort of cosmic trend, or recognizing the existence of a potentiality for Enlightenment even under the most unfavourable circumstances.

We find a similarly formidable prospect in *The Precious Garland*, in which Nāgārjuna says:

> *(A Bodhisattva) stays for a limitless time [in the world],*
> *For limitless embodied beings he seeks*
> *The limitless (qualities of) enlightenment*
> *And performs virtuous actions without limit*.[78]

So here again we find a Mahāyāna text describing the Bodhisattva, the embodiment of the ideal we are exhorted to fulfil, but it doesn't seem at all practicable for us. Indeed, to judge from this description, the Bodhisattva hardly seems like a person at all. The impression one gets is that the Bodhisattva is beyond individuality as we usually understand it, a disembodied impersonal spiritual energy.

This being the case, we can gather that the Mahāyāna isn't expecting us to

behave in literally the manner described. We don't have to imagine ourselves performing infinite good deeds, establishing Buddhafields, liberating infinite numbers of beings.... It is more practical to take the Bodhisattva as representing a universal, even omnipresent spiritual energy, at work in the universe – an energy we get a sense of every now and then. We can't literally think of being a Bodhisattva, but we can be open to the ideal, aspiring to be a channel for that energy within our own particular sphere. That is the most realistic, even the most honest way to see it. We have to stick very close to our actual situation; otherwise we can get lost in unrealistic aspirations. It can all become a bit theatrical; and this does sometimes happen in the Mahāyāna countries of the Buddhist East. The Theravāda is much more sober, much closer to the facts of the situation.

But the Mahāyāna conveys very well the spirit of the whole process: the fact that this process takes place within a much wider, even a cosmic context. In *The Precious Garland* Nāgārjuna says:

> *Through faith in the Mahāyāna*
> *And through the practices explained therein*
> *The highest enlightenment is attained*
> *And along the way all pleasures*.[79]

Why should there be 'all pleasures' along the way on the Mahāyāna – as distinct from the 'Hīnayāna' – path? The difference, one can say simply, is the Bodhisattva ideal. The 'Hīnayāna' speaks more in terms of giving things up, disciplining oneself, getting rid of craving, and so on. If the goal is mentioned at all, it is usually referred to in terms of the cessation of suffering or the cessation of craving – not, for most people, a very inspiring prospect, not in the early stages of their spiritual life anyway. The Mahāyāna's ideal of the Bodhisattva is quite simply more inspiring.

During the Buddha's lifetime, when the ideal was visibly present in the form of the Buddha himself, there was presumably no need to talk about it very much. But when the Buddha was no longer around, the ideal he represented had to be formulated somehow. Something had to be created to take the place of the actual presence of the Buddha. With the emergence of the Bodhisattva ideal, the Bodhisattva came to represent the sort of person you had to become if you wanted to be like the Buddha.

It's all about vision. If one is to be inspired to build a Buddhist centre, to take that example, one will need to be given a vision of what one is creating. If one has a picture in one's mind of beautiful Buddha images, spacious, peaceful

rooms, and a wonderful community of people, even if what one is doing is plastering a ceiling or knocking down a wall, one will be inspired to do it. If someone just came along and said, ‘Knock down that wall,’ that would feel entirely different. If one is doing what one is doing for the sake of a positive goal, one can work much more happily. Indeed, it becomes pleasure all the way.

So we need to find a balance between vision and pragmatism. Perhaps the best solution is to take the two together: take the Theravāda for here and now, for daily practice, and the Mahāyāna as a guide to the ideal as it exists outside space and time, independent of one’s own small efforts.

All one really needs is a faith in the conservation of spiritual values beyond death. If one has that, one can be sure that if one practises the Dharma here and now, the future – how and where one will be reborn, whether or not one will become a Buddha in some distant world system, and so on – will look after itself. Perhaps one can’t realistically make one’s future Buddhahood the object of an aspiration. We need not take the Mahāyāna sūtras literally; they can be regarded as giving an inspiring glimpse of an archetypal world, but not as providing a pattern for Buddhist living in a detailed sense. One gets a much stronger sense of such a pattern from the Pāli Canon.

One can’t appropriate to oneself as an individual – which really means as an ego – the attributes and qualities and activities and vows of a Bodhisattva. It is not that you or I, as individuals, are going to be Bodhisattvas in a cosmic sense. There is a Bodhisattva, even *the* Bodhisattva, at work, and one does whatever one can to assist and co-operate with that work. Just as the *sambhogakāya* Buddha,[80] the archetypal Buddha, represents the ideal of Enlightenment outside any historical context, in the same way the Bodhisattva represents not any historical individual but what could be called the spirit of Enlightenment at work in the world, personified in that Bodhisattva form.

All this is to be borne in mind when it comes to approaching the Bodhisattva vows. Perhaps the most famous set of vows is the one known as the four great vows. These are recited daily throughout the Far East, and they are usually given as follows:

> *May I deliver all beings from difficulties;*
> *May I eradicate all passions;*
> *May I master all dharmas;*
> *May I lead all beings to Buddhahood.*

These vows are found in several Mahāyāna sūtras,[81] and it seems to be assumed that every practising Mahāyāna Buddhist would wish to take them. In a way they

reflect the essence of the Bodhisattva ideal, in that if one takes the ideal seriously, one does try to function in these four ways. One could say that these vows are implicit not just in the Bodhisattva ideal but in Buddhism itself; they outline how all Buddhists should aim to behave all the time.

But such extreme statements cannot be taken lightly. If one says, 'I vow to deliver all beings,' all beings means *all* beings. It would seem better not to include utterances of this sort in a puja which is recited regularly or habitually. The Mahāyāna's cosmic perspective is very valuable, but it does not lend itself to casual recitation. If one says the vows as part of one's individual, private practice, presumably one is taking their recitation seriously, but just to have everybody who happens to be present in a shrine-room reciting a vow to help all beings (to go no further than that) necessarily devalues that vow.

The four great vows encompass the spiritual aspirations of many people, but one is not obliged to adopt this particular set. The scriptures make it clear that any individual Bodhisattva is free to formulate a set of vows in accordance with his or her own aspirations, within the general framework of the Bodhisattva ideal. The main consideration is that the vows should refer not to petty or immediate objectives, but to an ultimate, all-comprehensive aim. The great characteristic of all Bodhisattva vows is their universality. The altruistic dimension of the spiritual life has no limit. When one becomes aware of the altruistic implications of one's spiritual commitment, one sees that one can't impose any limit on those implications. One can't say, 'I'll do so much for other people but no more.' It may be that at present one is not able to do very much, but in principle one recognizes no limitations to what one's commitment might require one to do for other people, when one is in a position to do it.

So when, in the traditional formulation of this first Bodhisattva vow, one says 'I vow to save all living beings,' what one is really saying is, 'I place no limit on what I am prepared to do for other living beings, when the time is ripe and I am ready.' One doesn't know what form one's aspiration is ultimately going to take or what one may need to do. One just remains open to helping people in any way one can. Inasmuch as there is no limit to egolessness, there is no limit to altruism. Just as one can't think in terms of getting rid of one's ego up to a certain point but no further, there can be no limit, in principle, to what one is prepared to do for other people. Once one has committed oneself to the spiritual life, one doesn't recognize any limitations at all, either subjectively or objectively. This is what the Bodhisattva vow is all about: a transcendence of limitations.

In the Mahāyāna text called the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines* there are many questions about how one can recognize a Bodhisattva. One of the

ways is apparently that whenever he is asked a question about nirvāṇa, he always brings compassion into his reply.[82] Translating that into more general terms, if, when one is asked a question about the spiritual life, one speaks only in terms of personal development, not mentioning the altruistic aspect, that suggests that one is not yet really on the spiritual path. We have to realize that our leading of the spiritual life can't be just for our own sake; it has implications for others, and even imposes responsibilities on us with regard to others. In other words, we have to realize that compassion is co-ordinate with wisdom. It is significant that the Mahāyāna took it upon itself to bring out in a remarkable and dramatic way the altruistic implications of the spiritual life; and unfortunate that, due to historical developments, that came to be seen as constituting an alternative path rather than as a reformulation of the original path.

In Mahāyāna circles people sometimes make very specific vows. For instance, someone might make a vow to publish the whole Tripiṭaka at their own expense and distribute it free; that might be a lifetime's work. Someone else might say 'I will construct a hundred stupas'[83] or 'I will arrange for such and such a great teacher to deliver a series of lectures.' Many vows take this kind of practical form. The idea is to strengthen oneself, give oneself a bit of spiritual backbone. A vow is something to stick to, to protect one from getting lost in a mishmash of vague quasi-spiritual aspirations.

But if one is a Bodhisattva or would-be Bodhisattva, does one need these vows to enable one to stick to one's practice of the pāramitās? Well, if as yet one has no more than an intellectual conviction about the bodhicitta, albeit a conviction that one holds sincerely and in accordance with which one tries to live, then one will need the vows. If the bodhicitta has not yet arisen as an actual experience parallel to transcendental insight, the vows will be needed as supports. But once the bodhicitta has arisen, one's vows are the expression of it rather than a support to it. It is important not to distinguish too rigidly between the bodhicitta and the vows through which it expresses itself. It is not that the bodhicitta arises and then one bethinks oneself that perhaps one ought to take a few vows. The vows are natural expressions of the arisen bodhicitta, the various perspectives that one sees opening up before one now that the bodhicitta has arisen.

According to tradition, when the Bodhisattva makes his vow consequent on the arising of the bodhicitta, the Buddha in whose presence he makes it predicts him to eventual Enlightenment, and mentions, perhaps, the name by which he will be known as a Buddha and also the name of his Buddhaland or Buddhafield. If one doesn't take this literally – and perhaps it can be taken literally on a certain level – one has somehow to interpret its meaning as a myth. One could

perhaps say that the Buddha's prediction of that Bodhisattva to supreme Enlightenment represents a sort of echo coming back from the whole universe in response to the vow. The universe is involved in that vow, it is affected by it and, presumably, if it is a moral-cum-spiritual universe, it has some 'awareness' of that. The Bodhisattva's vow is a public affair; as it is part of, and affects, the public reality, there is a response.

In a way, the prediction represents the fact that the universe as a whole underpins or even underwrites one's vow. This is the kind of universe within which the realization of the vow is possible, and in a sense even inevitable, once it has been made. The Buddha simply gives expression to that. From his perspective beyond time, the Buddha looks into time and predicts the future. But that prediction does not mean that the Bodhisattva is sure to gain Enlightenment. This is parallel to the difficulty in Christian theology of reconciling man's free will with God's foreknowledge. The fact that the Buddha predicts the Bodhisattva to Enlightenment doesn't mean that from then onwards the Bodhisattva has no freedom. The Buddha, from outside time, may see that the Bodhisattva will become Enlightened; but the Bodhisattva can't just ride on the crest of that prediction. From his or her own temporal point of view, he or she will still have to make a definite effort towards the goal.

This idea can be translated into simpler terms: Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels, for example. When one goes for Refuge in the presence of the assembled sangha, that doesn't predict one's spiritual progress, but it does support it. One realizes that one is not alone; there is a response. By rejoicing in one's merits, the sangha is effectively giving one an assurance of further progress.

In fact, lofty as it sounds, the first of the four great vows, 'May I deliver all beings from difficulties,' – difficulties here meaning worldly difficulties – is a pragmatic starting point. It's as though whoever framed these vows is saying to the would-be Bodhisattva: for the moment, forget about helping people spiritually. Few are qualified to offer help at this level, and even for them it is by no means plain sailing to help people in the right way. Many people ask for spiritual guidance, but hardly any are able to receive and act upon it. *The Sūtra of Forty-two Sections* says: 'It is hard to help others towards Enlightenment according to their various needs.'[84] Even for a Buddha, it is difficult to see people's true needs, apparently. The Pāli Canon recounts an incident in which the Buddha taught some monks the recollection on death, only for them to go off and commit suicide.[85] A useful general rule is to help in ways that are as simple and basic as possible. One can't go far wrong in giving someone a meal or their bus fare (unless they are going off to commit a crime or something), but anything more complicated can be problematic.

On the other hand, although practical human needs should be attended to first, in a way they can be more difficult to sort out than basic spiritual needs. One can be fairly sure that meditation will be good for people, if one can get them to practise it and one is qualified to teach it. But it may be quite difficult to tell whether it would be good for Mrs Brown to move to Bournemouth or for Mr Bloggs to marry a second time. It is perhaps significant that in most Buddhist countries, especially Theravāda countries, usually only the most senior and experienced bhikkhus within the monastic order are permitted to advise the laity with regard to their worldly affairs.

After all, what is help? It certainly isn't just telling people what to do, although some people think so. In fact, it may not involve interacting directly with them at all. Very often if one is just being oneself, if one is positive and inspired and getting on with one's own spiritual life, that can help others without one's even realizing it.

Listening can be very helpful, of course. It helps people to clarify their thoughts, to become conscious of their desires and wishes, and to consider all the factors involved in whatever they are talking about. Sometimes after one has been listening to someone for a while, at the end of the conversation they say, in all sincerity, 'This talk has really helped me.' Perhaps one hasn't said a word, but it is as though they have been given very good advice, because being listened to has allowed them to clarify their thoughts.

It is best to start by helping in a down-to-earth way. Everybody can give at least some material, tangible help to other people. It is therefore said, under the heading of this particular vow, that the would-be Bodhisattva should be sympathetic and helpful in the affairs of everyday life on all occasions – a friendliness which can extend not just to human beings but to animals as well.

If one shows a lack of consideration for others, that must be because one doesn't appreciate how they feel, or the position, even the predicament, they are in. Very often we are so bound up with our own affairs, interests, and preferences that we are oblivious to the needs and feelings of others. To cultivate fellow-feeling, therefore, one needs awareness of other people, together with imagination, a willingness to put oneself into others' shoes.

To take an everyday example, if someone pays you a visit, it is important to make sure they are properly introduced to others present, and that they feel at ease. In new surroundings they may be feeling a little uncertain and in need of reassurance. Then again, if you receive a letter and don't reply, the writer will be wondering what has happened, even whether you got the letter at all. You may have a perfectly good reason for not replying, but they don't know that.

As well as feeling *with* people, it is important to feel *for* them, appreciating

their good qualities as well as their limitations, not always thinking of them in terms of what needs to be changed. Often we are simply not kind enough to one another. Perhaps in our culture we have become so preoccupied with ourselves – what we want, what is due to us, our rights – that we have forgotten basic human kindness.

So to begin with one can leave aside concerns about other people's spiritual development. There's no need, either, to think in terms of performing great heroic deeds, although circumstances may sometimes demand that. One can start by paying attention to the small details of life. If you burn the rice, or produce lunch late, or borrow someone's favourite book and forget to tell them, or let the door slam, all those things are going to make life unpleasant for someone else. On the other hand, if you take care with preparing food for someone, or give them a book, or make a special effort to move around quietly, that will have a positive effect. We need to practise kindness and mindfulness in all these little ways, making sure that we are not so preoccupied with dealing with our own mental states that we lose all awareness of what is going on around us.

Of course, it isn't just our own mental states that preoccupy us; very often what we are intent on is what we can get from another person. When the Buddha asked the other monks why they didn't look after the monk who had dysentery,[86] they said that he was of no use to them. What a terrible admission! So often this is the reason for our lack of kindness towards people: they are of no use to us, we don't get anything from them. It's all very well to talk about the Dharma, practising meditation, Enlightening all beings, and all the rest of it, but we can start with just being kind to one another. Auden speaks of our kindness 'to ten persons',[87] and even that is quite an achievement, but it need not stop there. There should be an element of kindness in our attitude to everybody we meet. At least we should have good will towards them, and do what we can for them in small ways.

Having said that, one should be careful not to be too prematurely Bodhisattvalike, flitting around 'helping people'. It is possible to end up being like the boy scout who helped the old lady across the road as his good deed for the day. When he told his scoutmaster what he had done, the scoutmaster said, 'Well, that's not much of a good deed – that's a very easy thing to do.' To which the boy riposted, 'No it wasn't. She didn't want to cross.' Let us beware forcible philanthropies of that nature.

Even when it comes to 'encouraging' people, some caution is needed. Perhaps the best thing is just to be oneself, acting as skilfully and positively as one can; that will encourage others to behave skilfully without one's having to take it upon oneself to advise them about the right thing to do. We can help people a

great deal by thinking about them positively and developing mettā towards them. And sometimes we can help people just by keeping out of their way – or rather by not getting in their way. Sometimes people need space, and we help them most by giving it to them, or at least not taking it from them.

But those who take the Bodhisattva vow seriously will not be satisfied with being helpful in the affairs of everyday life, useful and necessary though that is. We should be prepared to go a little further, even to go a little out of our way, to help those in difficulties. We may even need to be prepared to undergo some discomfort. This is the kind of thing the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* is getting at when it describes the Bodhisattva as 'putting on the armour of strenuousness'. One's enthusiasm for the vision one has been given allows one to ignore, even be unaware of, not only minor discomforts but even pain. If one is a Bodhisattva or would-be Bodhisattva, one's wish to help others is so intense that one doesn't mind difficulties for oneself.

Something of this attitude has to inform anything one does for others that involves taking a bit of trouble. One can't do anything with or for other people without at least a touch of the Bodhisattva ideal to keep one going. Otherwise, there will be a reaction sooner or later. Resentment will set in the moment one feels taken for granted. One can even start hating the people one is trying to help; at the very least it will feel a strain. But the Bodhisattva feels no tension or strain, because he or she is acting on the basis of the arisen bodhicitta.

The *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* says, 'One who understands the nature of the bodhicitta sees everything with a loving heart, for love is the essence of the Bodhicitta.... All Bodhisattvas find their *raison d'être* ... in this great loving heart.'[88] It's the bodhicitta that makes the Bodhisattva. However altruistic one is, or tries to be, one is not a Bodhisattva if that transcendental dimension hasn't entered one's being. It could even be said that only when the bodhicitta has arisen is one really on the spiritual path; until then one is just preparing the ground.

But whether or not the bodhicitta has arisen, there are certainly a great many people in need of help, and we should not delay in helping where we can. There are certain groups of people who are perhaps especially in need of whatever help we can give them. First of all, old people are often in need of help. Many of them have to live alone, and they often, not unnaturally, feel lonely and neglected. If one can offer a few old people in one's neighbourhood a bit of warm human contact on a regular basis, it may make a great deal of difference to their lives.

Then there are the sick: not just those who are down with flu for a couple of days – though they need help too – but especially those who are confined to

hospital, sometimes with serious, painful diseases, for long periods of time. It sometimes happens that after a while even their closest relations begin to neglect them, thinking, ‘Ah well, I can go next week or the week after. After all, old so-and-so’s there all the time; they don’t go away.’ In the end they may stop visiting altogether. Many hospital patients, especially those who have been there a long time and those who are old, have no relations or friends to visit them. So this is something very practical we can do.

Then what about those confined to prison for one reason or another? We may not be able to visit them, but we could write. A lot of prisoners get a great deal of support from people writing to them and helping them to keep in touch with what is happening outside, helping them to feel that they still belong to the world to which one day they will have to return.

Also, those who are suffering mentally in one way or another need help and support. Many people whose psychological balance is disturbed need expert help – we certainly shouldn’t try to do more than we are qualified to do – but it may be that simple friendliness will help someone a great deal. Much mental distress is due to a lack of communication with other people, a lack of any opportunity to disclose oneself. In such cases befriending someone and making it possible for them to talk about what’s on their mind can be very helpful.

I once read about a catatonic patient in a mental hospital who didn’t respond at all, ever, to anybody or anything. But there was a young nurse in the ward who became convinced that he could be brought to respond. So every day she simply took his hand and held it for half an hour. She did this for six months without any response at all, but then one day the patient squeezed her hand in return, and that was the turning point. Over a period of a few months she was able to open up some sort of communication with him, and in the end he came out of his catatonic state. Such things are possible. In psychotherapy, one of the main factors that contributes to helping the patient is that the analyst is listening to them. Ordinary doctors are sometimes put in this position – the person who comes ostensibly as a patient is just desperate for somebody to talk to. We shouldn’t underestimate the value of simple communication.

And sometimes expert help doesn’t help. Psychotherapy can help people in many ways, but in cases where there are symptoms of some deeper existential disturbance, psychotherapy in the ordinary medical sense may not help much. The effectiveness of a system of psychotherapy depends very much on the ideas it is based on, especially its idea of what it is to be a human being. If you have a limited view of human beings, you cannot help having a limited view of mental illness, and therefore a limited view of psychotherapy. There is a great difference between somebody who sees a human being as a potential Buddha and

somebody who sees a human being merely as a rational animal, or even an irrational one.

Today schools of psychotherapy are increasingly aware of the need to help people confront existential problems. We are ultimately spiritual beings, and if our need for spiritual life is frustrated, that may result in mental distress. There will always be people whose psychological problems call for therapy rather than meditation. But ultimately there is no such thing as a psychological solution. In the long run the key to mental health is not psychological but spiritual. In any case, communication is always the key factor, and whenever our friendship may help someone in psychological difficulties, we should not hesitate to offer it.

There are, of course, many other kinds of people to whom we can offer help: refugees, the homeless, the starving, the under-privileged all over the world. It is difficult to help directly – not everybody can just go off to Africa or India – but we may be able to help indirectly through a charity. There is so much that can be done if we have the will and the heart to do it. And this is the first thing that the Bodhisattva sets out to do: to help living beings – human beings and animals – out of their immediate, practical, material difficulties. At this stage one doesn't presume to think of leading anybody to Enlightenment. To begin with it's enough to give them a helping hand in the affairs of everyday life according to one's capacities.

However, whether or not we are qualified to give spiritual help and guidance, this is what many people in the modern West do need more than anything else. If we ourselves are not in a position to give that sort of help directly, we can give it indirectly, by helping those who *can* give it, perhaps by freeing them from other responsibilities or providing facilities of some kind. For example, a good writer, or a good meditation or Dharma teacher, will very often need financial support if they are to put their valuable gifts to best use.

If one does find a way of expressing this vow, one should be careful to avoid the feeling that the way one has found is the only way. Years ago, when I was working among the most socially deprived Buddhists in India, often treated as untouchables, I met a man on a train who, in no uncertain terms, expressed the opinion that I was wasting my time. According to him the people who needed help were the lepers, and I ought to be devoting my time to them. Well, I could see his point, but he couldn't see mine. I certainly didn't feel that it was wrong for him to be working among the lepers, or that he should be working among the neo-Buddhists instead. But he could not see that working for the neo-Buddhists might be just as valid as working for the lepers. Indeed, the only way we can extend the relief of suffering in the world is by taking an interest where others have not yet done so.

The second great vow is: ‘May I eradicate all passions.’ So what are the passions, and how are they to be eradicated? The term covers all mental defilements – that is, all negative emotions, psychological conditionings, prejudices, and preconceptions. There are several traditional lists of these passions. First, there are the three unwholesome roots: craving, hatred, and ignorance, symbolized by the cock, the snake, and the pig depicted in the centre of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. In any depiction of the Wheel, with all its circles and subdivisions, right at the centre, right at the hub of our own lives, are these three creatures, each one biting the tail of the one in front. These are the driving forces of our existence.[89] Another list of passions is the five *nivaraṇas*, the five hindrances to meditation: desire for sense experience, ill will, restlessness and anxiety, sloth and torpor, and doubt and indecision.[90]

Then there are the five poisons: distraction, anger, craving, conceit, and ignorance.[91] The word poison is apposite. Negative emotions are literally poisonous, and when we indulge in them we literally poison our system. Sometimes when one is overpowered by a strong negative emotion, especially anger or hatred, one gets a stabbing pain in the stomach or the heart; this is the poison eating into one’s vitals.

The best way to eradicate the passions is to attack them at source, like stopping the activities of a band of robbers by destroying their hideout, to use a traditional illustration. One has to find the centre of operations of the passions, which of course is the mind. That’s where they are to be rooted out; and this is one of the effects of meditation. There are five basic meditation exercises in the Buddhist tradition which act as antidotes to the five poisons.

The first poison to be dealt with is distraction, the tendency of the mind to jump from one thing to another – having a butterfly mind, so that one can’t settle on one thing steadily for any length of time. In T.S. Eliot’s famous line, we are ‘distracted from distraction by distraction’.[92] The antidote to this mental state is the meditation practice called the mindfulness of breathing, which involves watching the breath to achieve a one-pointed concentration on the breathing process.[93]

The second of the five poisons is anger, said to be the most un-Bodhisattvalike of all passions. You can give way to craving and desires, you can steal and lie, and in your heart of hearts you may still be a Bodhisattva. But if you lose your temper, bang goes all your Bodhisattvahood, and you have to start all over again. The reason is that anger is directly opposed to the spirit of compassion. In his *śikṣā-Samuccaya* Śāntideva says – to paraphrase: ‘Well, here you are, promising to deliver all beings from difficulties and be kind and compassionate to them, and then what do you do? You go and get angry with one of them! There can’t

be much substance to your Bodhisattva vow.'[94] The Bodhisattva is advised to avoid anger at all costs.

The antidote to anger is again quite simple: it's the mettā bhāvanā, the development of universal loving-kindness. This meditation is one of four practices called the *brahma-vihāras*, the sublime abodes, the other three being for the cultivation of compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. The mettā practice was first taught by the Buddha, as recorded in the very beautiful *Mettā Sutta*. A fuller description of the practice is given by Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga* (*The Path of Purity*).[95]

One starts the practice by developing a feeling of loving-kindness towards oneself, wishing that one may be well, happy, and free from suffering; then one extends that feeling to a close friend, then to a person one can visualize but doesn't know well – perhaps someone at work, or someone one sees every day at the bus-stop – and then to someone with whom one has difficulties. The fifth and last stage of the practice involves extending one's mettā equally to all four people (oneself, one's friend, the 'neutral person', and the 'enemy') and then allowing the feeling to radiate out to those in the surrounding area, then wider and wider, until one's mettā is flowing out to all beings, animals as well as human beings, wherever they may be in the world, or the universe.

The mettā bhāvanā is a beautiful practice, though one which many people find extremely difficult. But if one perseveres, one can be confident that anger and hatred will gradually be dispelled through the deliberate, mindful development of love and good will towards all living beings.

Thirdly we come to craving. This is not just desire, but neurotic desire. Take food, for instance. We all have a desire for it – it is natural to have a healthy appetite – but that desire has become neurotic if we find ourselves trying to use food to satisfy some other need. As is all too obvious, craving is a big problem: it creates drug addiction, alcoholism, and a host of other problems. The vast advertising industry is geared to stimulating craving, trying to convince us, with or without our knowledge, that we must have this, that, or the other thing.

There are several practices designed to reduce craving; perhaps the number reflects the scale of the problem. Some of these antidotes, it must be said, are quite drastic. For instance, there's the contemplation of the ten stages of the decomposition of a corpse. This is still a popular practice in some Buddhist countries; it is said to be especially good as an antidote for neurotic sexual desire.[96] I won't describe the practice itself – that would make rather gruesome reading – but there is a milder version, which is simply to meditate alone, at night, in a cremation ground.

Indian cremation grounds are not pretty places. You get fragments of charred

bone and cloth lying around, and usually there's a stench of burning human flesh lingering in the air. But to meditate there can be a beneficial and even exhilarating practice. The effect can be to make one very peaceful, almost as though one's own cremation had already taken place. Indeed, within the Hindu tradition the custom is symbolically to perform one's own funeral service at the point when one finally leaves the household life. In this way one becomes a sannyasin, one who renounces the world and lives totally without possessions, solely for the realization of liberation. The idea is that when the sannyasin gives up the world, he no longer exists so far as the world is concerned; so the last thing he does before going off in his yellow robe is conduct his own funeral ceremony. It is the same association of death with renunciation and the eradication of all worldly cravings that is made in the meditation on the decomposition of a corpse.

If even the occasional visit to the cremation ground is too much (of course our Western versions of these places – graveyards – are not usually so elemental), for a still milder form of the same practice one can simply meditate on the reality of death. One can reflect that death is inevitable; it comes to everybody in due course; no one can escape it. So, since it must come, why not make the best possible use of one's life? And – here we get to the main point of the reflection – why indulge in miserable cravings which don't bring any satisfaction or happiness in the long run?

One can also meditate upon impermanence. Everything is impermanent. From the solar system to one's own breath, from instant to instant everything is changing, flowing, transient. When one remembers this, one can view things as being like clouds passing through the sky. One can't hang on to anything very determinedly when one knows that sooner or later one will have to give it up.

Every day the newspapers are full of reports of fatal accidents, and this gives, as well as the occasion for compassion, an opportunity for reflection. Human life is liable to unexpected termination; one may not live to a ripe old age. As Pascal said, just a grain of dust is sufficient to destroy us if it gets into the wrong place.[97] Life is very precarious. Such reflections can be sobering and fruitful; but they will be counterproductive if what they produce is a kind of neurotic timidity. One has to be sensitive to one's own nature in this regard.

A skull or a few bones, preferably human ones, can also be useful objects of reflection. It might sound strange or even amusing – we are sometimes inclined to laugh at death to cover up our fear of it – but this is standard practice among Tibetan Buddhists. (Of course, we have a precedent for it in the Western tradition, in Hamlet's contemplation of Yorick's skull in Shakespeare's play.) In fact, Tibetans tend to surround themselves with all kinds of things made of

human bone: bone rosaries, thigh-bone trumpets, skull-cups. They take a common-sense view of death; they don't think there's anything morbid or macabre about it.

In the West, though, the very word death is supposed to send a shiver down one's spine. Not that the Christian tradition avoids the straightforward facts of death. Many ancient tombstones bear representations of skeletons and skulls, in some burial places bones are kept for visitors to see, and monks practise the constant recollection of death. Corpses are laid out for friends and relations of the dead person to come and have a look – and of course there is the tradition of the wake. Indeed, if we sweep death under the carpet in our modern culture, perhaps it is partly because the Christian tradition is less important to us than it used to be. The problem in our culture is not really denial but the tendency to identify the total self with the body, even when the soul has departed. According to some kinds of popular Christianity, the teaching of the resurrection of the body means the literal resuscitation of the corpse. It follows that when a man is buried the worms are eating *him* – not just his body, but him. This identification of the decomposing corpse with the deceased person gives death a peculiar sort of horror mixed with fascination.

But this is not the Buddhist way of looking at death – nor, come to that, the Hindu or Muslim way of looking at it. After all, death is just as natural as life. Tagore, the great modern Bengali poet, says, 'I know I shall love death, because I have loved life.'[98] Life and death are opposite sides of the same thing. If you love life, you will love death; and if you can't love death, you haven't really loved life. It sounds paradoxical, but it is deeply true.

When it comes to counteracting craving, one should select whichever exercise is appropriate to one's needs. For many people the sight of a decomposing corpse would just give rise to feelings of disgust and revulsion. One might be physically sick but not affected spiritually at all. One has to be sufficiently mature spiritually to be able to absorb the lesson, to be impressed by the fact of impermanence, not merely shocked or disgusted. If one is sensitive enough, even the falling of a leaf will bring home the truth of impermanence. Perhaps each of us needs to experiment a little. Is a falling leaf enough, or keeping a skull in one's room (this is something Tibetan Buddhists often do), or does one need something stronger? Perhaps one might need to try another traditional antidote to craving, the 'contemplation of the loathsomeness of food'. I won't go into the details of this practice either; they are rather unpleasant, deliberately so.[99] Suffice it to say that it is a powerful antidote to food addiction.

The fourth poison is conceit – sometimes translated as pride, but conceit is a more effective translation. Conceit is said to be particularly associated with the

human realm, as opposed to the other five realms of existence depicted on the Tibetan Wheel of Life.[100] The human realm is characterized by selfconsciousness: and when one experiences oneself as separate from other people, one may feel not only separate but isolated; not only isolated but superior.

It is plain that there is less likelihood of conceit in the other realms depicted by the Wheel of Life. It is hardly possible to have a conceited animal – although some dogs, no doubt through human influence, seem to have a conceited air. *A preta*, a hungry ghost, is just so hungry that it doesn't have a chance to think about how it compares with others. It is hard to imagine a preta thinking, 'I'm hungrier than you are,' or, come to that, a being in hell thinking, 'I'm suffering more than you are.' Suffering is a serious business. Asuras and gods could possibly be imagined to be conceited because they, like human beings, have selfconsciousness. But perhaps the gods are too self-satisfied – they are not so anxious that they need to compare themselves with others – while the asuras are too busy fighting. So conceit is a very human weakness.

According to the Buddha, thinking in terms of one's status in relation to others *in any way* – whether one concludes that one is superior, inferior, or equal – is a form of conceit.[101] It is perhaps surprising at first that the Buddha should have said this, but a little reflection makes it clear that egalitarianism – insisting that everyone is equal – and selfconscious humility – insisting that others are superior to oneself – are both inverted forms of conceit. Someone may present themselves as a lover of equality when what they really want to do is bring everybody else down to their own level. This is a great weakness, and a great loss. If there is nobody above one, spiritually speaking, one has nobody to look up to or learn from, so it is going to be very difficult to make spiritual progress. Conversely, if one adopts a fixed position of inferiority, one denies one's own potential – and the negation of the possibility of spiritual development is a very serious thing.

The traditional antidote to conceit is to meditate on the six elements: earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness (listed in increasing order of subtlety).[102] For the purposes of meditation, the six elements can be represented symbolically by geometrical forms visualized one on top of the other so as to create a mental image of the Buddhist symbol and architectural form known as the *stupa*. Earth is represented by a cube, which is the base of the stupa; water by a sphere, which comes on top of the cube; fire by a cone on top of the sphere; air by a bowl-shape, representing the firmament; space by a flame in that bowl; and consciousness by the space in which the whole thing stands. This is one way of meditating upon the six elements. As well as having a geometrical form, each element in the practice is visualized in a particular colour: the cube is yellow, the

sphere is white or blue, and so on.

Alternatively, one can engage in a series of reflections. First of all you meditate upon the element earth. You reflect: ‘In my own body there is earth, the solid element – flesh, bone, and so on. But where does it come from? It comes from the earth element, the solid matter, in the universe. And when I die, my physical body is going to crumble, dissolve, return to the earth. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.’

Next, you reflect on the water element. You think: ‘In me there is blood, there are tears, there is sweat, and so on. This is the water element. Where does it come from? It doesn’t belong to me. It’s just part of the water element in the universe, like the rain, the rivers, the lakes, and the seas. One day I’ll have to give it back. One day the liquid element in me will flow back into the liquid element in the universe.’

Thirdly, you meditate on the element fire. ‘In me there is heat, there is warmth, but where does it come from? What is the great source of heat for the whole world? It’s the sun. Without the heat of the sun the whole solar system would be cold and dark. The warmth in me too comes from that source, and when I die it will return to the universe. I’ve borrowed it for a while, but in due course I’ll have to give it back.’

Then you consider the element air. ‘What is the air element in me? It’s the air in my lungs. I’m taking it in and giving it out, giving it back, every instant. But it doesn’t really belong to me. Just like the rest of me – the solid part, the watery part, the fiery part – the air element isn’t mine. I borrow it just for a few instants, then I have to give it back. One day, when I breathe out, I won’t breathe in again. I will finally have given back my breath. And just as the air element won’t belong to me then, in fact it doesn’t belong to me now.’

Fifthly, you meditate upon space. You reflect that your physical body occupies a certain space. ‘This is the space I occupy. I identify myself with it. But when the physical body disintegrates, what will become of the space I have occupied? It will merge into the vast space around, and disappear.’

And then, what about consciousness? You think: ‘At present part of my consciousness depends upon the eye, part upon the ear, and so on. But when there’s no eye, no ear, no physical body, where will that consciousness be? When my present individuality as I experience it ceases to exist, where will the consciousness associated with that individuality be?’ Reflecting in this way you attempt to withdraw from the different levels of consciousness associated with the physical body, and thus to realize higher and higher levels of consciousness.

This shift arises quite naturally out of the previous stages of the six element practice. You have already envisaged the four elements that make up your

physical body as occupying a certain space, and when those elements are no longer present, that space is no longer delineated. Associated with one's physical body is a certain consciousness. When the physical body and the space it was occupying are no longer there, the consciousness can no longer be associated with that physical body, or with that space. If there is no demarcated space for consciousness to be associated with, it cannot associate itself with an undemarcated space, *i.e.* an infinite space, either. It can only proceed infinitely outwards, not finding any line of demarcation or any material body with which to identify. In this way meditation practices like this one culminate, ultimately, in a kind of spiritual death, in which individual consciousness dies into universal consciousness, and in a sense realizes its everlasting identity with it. As the Tibetans say, the son-light returns to and merges into the mother-light.[103]

The classic opportunity for the transition to an experience of universal consciousness is the time of death. But unless one has already had some experience of this kind in meditation, one is unlikely to be able to sustain it for more than an instant after death – if indeed it happens at all; for it isn't an automatic part of the death process.

In fact, dead or alive, it is almost impossible for us to imagine what this experience might be like. One way to approach it when doing the six element meditation practice is to take universal consciousness as a poetic image. Many people find the traditional image of the dewdrop slipping into the shining sea very helpful.[104] More prosaically, one can think of all limitations to consciousness being removed, so that it becomes infinite in all directions. The essential thing is to have the experience of an infinite expansion of consciousness. One shouldn't take this image of the smaller consciousness merging into the greater too literally; the metaphor of a dewdrop slipping into the sea, shining or otherwise, is just a metaphor.

The infinite expansion of consciousness is so difficult to describe because if one were to experience it fully, one would become Enlightened; infinite consciousness is the Enlightened state. Furthermore, as the Mādhyamikas would be careful to add, this infinite consciousness is an *empty* consciousness; that is, it is not an entity or a thing.

The physical universe isn't excluded from this infinite consciousness, but it doesn't constitute a barrier to it. It's as though one's consciousness goes through it. It is not that something literally isn't there that was there before, but it is no longer seen as an obstacle; it becomes transparent, as it were. The six element practice, leading as it does to this perception of reality, is a direct negation of one's usual grasping, ego-based tendency. It helps one to dissolve the idea of one's own individuality, in the narrow sense of the word, and thus destroys the

poison of conceit.

The fifth poison is ignorance, by which is meant spiritual ignorance, unawareness of reality. In a sense this is the basic poison, the raw ingredient from which all the others are made. The traditional antidote for ignorance is meditation on the *nidānas*, the links, of conditioned co-production. This formulation gives us a way of reflecting on the truth of conditionality: that in dependence upon A, B arises.[105] It asks us to see that from our ignorance flows a whole chain of events; one could say that it's a reflection on the workings of the law of karma.

Buddhist tradition enumerates many lists of these links, one of the best known being the chain of twelve links depicted around the rim of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. This chain 'begins' – really a beginningless beginning – with ignorance, and ends with decay and death. As well as the twelve nidānas pertaining to conditioned existence depicted on the Wheel of Life, there are another twelve – the nidānas pertaining to, or at least leading to, unconditioned existence, nirvāṇa. The twelve worldly nidānas represent the cyclical type of conditionality, the Wheel of Life, and the reactive mind, while the twelve spiritual nidānas represent the spiral type of conditionality, the stages of the path, and the creative mind.[106]

These five poisons and their antidotes give us just one way of considering the negative mental states we need to overcome, and the ways we can do this. But, basically, as novice Bodhisattvas we need all the means at our disposal – and the Buddhist tradition offers us a great many – to work towards the eradication of all passions and the fulfilment of the Bodhisattva's second great vow.

The third great vow is 'May I master all dharmas.' By *dharmas* here is meant primarily the teachings of the Buddha, as contained within the scriptures and all the other teachings of all the Buddhist schools. Bodhisattvas don't belong to this school as opposed to that school. They don't even belong to the Mahāyāna as opposed to some other yāna. They belong to, they study, they master, the teachings of all schools, all sects, and all traditions. Not only that. Bodhisattvas, we are told, should also study and master even the non-Buddhist religious and philosophical systems. Some scriptures go so far as to say that Bodhisattvas should study secular arts and sciences, especially rhetoric and prosody (which were much in favour during the Indian Middle Ages), to increase their power of communication. A few of the sūtras even say that Bodhisattvas should master various trades, such as the trade of the potter. The idea is that knowing the vocabulary and outlook of these trades gives one a new frame of reference. Knowing the sort of language, both literal and metaphorical, that people use, one is able to communicate one's point of view, one's attitudes, ideals, and aspirations more and more effectively to more and more people.

If one is involved in communicating the Dharma in any way, one tends to need all sorts of skills. To run a Buddhist centre, for example, people are needed who, in addition to being committed to the Bodhisattva ideal, are good at administration, and know something about accounts and about law. To run a residential community requires people with knowledge of building, repair and decoration, wiring and plumbing, gardening and cooking – one can add to the list almost indefinitely. Commitment to the Bodhisattva ideal, in short, includes putting one's skills at the service of that ideal.

To teach the Dharma, one may need other skills too. One may need to learn to speak effectively and clearly – not just if one is in the position of giving public talks, but also in conversation. One might develop skills to communicate the Dharma in other ways too – writing articles, reviews, or books, or giving interviews on radio and television. One might develop one's artistic skills, to produce paintings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, frescoes or Buddha images; or one might acquire editorial skills, including a command of grammar, punctuation, and so on. One might go into book production, or editing magazines, or taking photographs, or translation, or learning to speak a second language. Or one might acquire academic experience, in order to influence and draw on new areas of research and learning.

Mastering all dharmas implies gaining both breadth and depth of experience. It is useful to have a working knowledge of a lot of things, but there should be at least one or two things – whether they are practical skills or areas of study – which one knows really well. And wherever our interests take us, we need to carry our basic Buddhist principles with us, so that we have something to which to relate our broadening knowledge; otherwise it will be no more than a collection of miscellaneous bits and pieces of information, even if Buddhist principles have an honoured place amongst them. To begin with it is like doing a-jigsaw puzzle – it isn't clear exactly how all the pieces fit together – but gradually a complete picture emerges. A collection of unrelated pieces of information is not knowledge. Knowledge is being able to refer things to their principles, creating a sort of cosmos out of the chaos of human experience.

To say that the Bodhisattva should master all the Buddha's teachings, all the numberless religious and philosophical systems, as well as the study of the secular arts and sciences, and various trades, is obviously to ask a great deal. What are we to make of such a grand ambition? On the mythic level, the Bodhisattva's career, as we have seen, is envisaged as covering three asamkhyeyas of kalpas, which would give him or her a lot of time to learn all these things. But on a more down-to-earth level, the general principle here is that if one wants to help other people, and especially if one wants to establish a

Dharmic connection with them, the more means of communication one has at one's disposal, the more effectively one can fulfil that task.

The fourth great vow is 'May I lead all beings to Buddhahood.' This is the ultimate aim; and the Bodhisattva works towards it by teaching, by example, and by the silent communication of his or her influence. Perhaps that is all we can know, and all we need to know, for the time being.

Together these four great vows constitute the heart of the Mahāyāna, the heart, even, of Buddhism itself. And as the practical expression of the bodhicitta in terms of the life and work of the individual Bodhisattva, they create the foundation of his or her whole subsequent spiritual career.

4

ALTRUISM AND INDIVIDUALISM IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

THERE IS A CERTAIN POETRY to the idea that Bodhisattvas are concerned not with their own Enlightenment, but with the Enlightenment of other people. However, we shouldn't get so carried away with the beauty of the ideal that we start to distort it. This is really the effect of the image often conjured up in the popular imagination of the Bodhisattva seeing, as it were, the gates of nirvāṇa shining afar off, and saying, 'No! I am not going to pass through those gates alone. I want to help others to get there first.'[107]

This image of transcendental chivalry does not do justice to the Bodhisattva ideal. Nor does the image found in popular pseudo-traditional Buddhist art of the Bodhisattva wringing his hands in ineffectual despair or gazing down with a sentimental smile over the sorrows of the world. It is not easy to find true images of the beauty and poetry of the ideal; an image that does express something of it is the sublime figure of the Bodhisattva Padmapāṇi, one of the paintings at Ajaṇta in India.[108]

As well as making the Bodhisattva into the perfect gentleman, or a particularly sentimental kind of social worker, some accounts of Mahāyāna Buddhism make a misleadingly blunt contrast between the Bodhisattva and the Arhant, the Enlightened individual of the Theravāda tradition. The Arhant is said to be concerned only with his or her own emancipation, and the Arhant ideal is therefore said to be selfish, while, by contrast, the Bodhisattva ideal is said to be unselfish.

Of course, the Buddha himself attained nirvāṇa – there doesn't seem to have

been any question of *his* postponing it – and the Mahāyāna had somehow to find a justification for this. In the *White Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha – the Buddha of the Mahāyāna, of course – is represented as saying that his parinirvāṇa is only a skilful means, not literally a parinirvāṇa as the Theravāda would understand it.[109] Some schools of thought maintain that what we think of as a Bodhisattva is that aspect of a Buddha which at the time of his 'parinirvāṇa' does *not* enter into supreme Enlightenment. It is said that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara functions in this way in the 'interregnum' between the disappearance of Śākyamuni and the appearance of Maitreya, the future Buddha. Not that a separate or distinct personality appears on the scene: what remains in the form of Avalokiteśvara is that aspect of the personality (to use an un-Buddhistic term) of Śākyamuni Buddha which does not disappear into parinirvāṇa. If nothing else, such considerations suggest that one can't discuss the whole subject too literally.

This, anyway, is the Mahāyānists' way of explaining the fact that the Buddha went ahead and gained Enlightenment. Their explanation does not impute to him the kind of selfishness of which they accuse the Arhants. To understand the emphasis on altruism of the Mahāyāna, we need to bear in mind its origins. By the time the conception of the Bodhisattva ideal was fully worked out, the act of Going for Refuge had lost its central position in Buddhist spiritual life to the act of becoming a monk.[110] The Mahāyāna to some extent was a movement or reaction against that, and the Mahāyānists therefore stressed the altruistic aspect of the spiritual life. But instead of reinstating Going for Refuge to its central position and simply emphasizing its altruistic dimension, they formulated what amounted to an entirely new ideal. Not ultimately new, because it did echo the spirit of the Buddha's original teaching, but certainly new as a way of looking at the spiritual life. The Bodhisattva ideal, together with the concept of the arising of the bodhicitta, the practice of the pāramitās, and the formulation of the vows, was at least partly intended to stress the importance of the altruistic aspect of the spiritual life, a sense of which had been lost by many people within the Buddhist movement.

In his *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, D.T. Suzuki says:

> The Bodhisattvas never become tired of working for universal salvation, nor do they despair because of the long time required to accomplish this momentous object. To try to attain enlightenment in the shortest possible period and to be self-sufficient without paying attention to the welfare of the masses, is not the teaching of Mahāyānism.[111]

Neither, of course, is it the teaching of the Therāvada. In the Pāli scriptures the

Buddha is represented as recommending his disciples to go off and teach ‘for the happiness and welfare of many people’.[112] Indeed, in Theravāda sources even *paccekabuddhas*, that is, Buddhas who make no attempt to teach, are said to practise the *brahma-vihāras*, which include the cultivation of compassion.[113] So that idea is there, preserved in Theravāda tradition, but it is not stressed or given intellectual justification as in the Mahāyāna.

It all hinges on the question of compassion. The Arhant ideal is considered by its detractors to exclude the idea of compassion, but it is impossible to imagine Enlightenment in the true sense as being without compassion. Surely – although this goes against the Abhidharma teaching within the Theravāda tradition – any kind of Enlightenment experience must have a compassionate dimension.

Perhaps the real question is whether or not there is any discernible practical difference arising out of the Mahāyāna’s exclusive claim to an altruistic motivation. Theravāda Buddhists are not noticeably less kind and helpful and friendly than Mahāyānists. If there is a difference between the traditions in this respect, perhaps one could say that there is in Mahāyāna teaching a sort of spiritual glow or warmth which is not there in the Theravāda. In the Theravāda the kindliness and friendliness is more on the human level, as it were – and very welcome it is too. But with Tibetan Buddhism, to take just one example of a Mahāyāna-inspired tradition, one gets the impression of a more definitely spiritual, even transcendental, kindliness and compassion. It’s the difference, one could say, between mettā, loving-kindness, which is wonderful, and the bodhicitta, which is still more wonderful.

It might be said that Theravāda practitioners are inclined to present their teaching in a formal way, insisting on the correct ways of doing things, while true Mahāyānists will just try to help as and when the opportunity offers, without standing on their dignity. I remember a nun I used to know telling me about a time she was staying in a Japanese temple in India. She needed to catch a train and had a very heavy suitcase, so a monk from the temple went with her to the station to carry her case. As they approached the station, the train came in and they were obviously in danger of missing it. So the Japanese monk – who was the head of the temple – just put the case on his head and *ran*. And my friend caught her train. That is the Mahāyāna spirit, one could say. It would have been an unusual Theravāda bhikkhu who would have done that. Well, he wouldn’t have carried her case in the first place. He would have wished her well and helped her, but only to the extent that his dignity as a bhikkhu was not compromised. A Mahāyānist might stand on ceremony in that way too, of course, but anyone with the true spirit of the Mahāyāna would never do so.

None of this is to say that we ourselves, in our own unenlightened state, are in

any position to look down on the Arhant. If Arhantship is lower than supreme Buddhahood, it is so only in the sense that Mount Kanchenjunga is lower than Mount Everest. Indeed, the attainment of Stream Entry, which is really the first decisive step towards Arhantship, is the most worthwhile goal for a spiritually committed person to aim for in this life. And however lofty, it is an *achievable* goal – achievable within this lifetime.

In some of its more popular formulations the Mahāyāna sometimes lost sight of the *self*-regarding aspect of the spiritual life, appearing to suggest that one could help others without having paid attention to one's own spiritual development. The Bodhisattva didn't exactly become a Buddhist social worker, but there was sometimes a great deal of emphasis on what the Bodhisattva did for others, and very little mention of what he was doing for himself by way of personal spiritual practice.

This, at least, was the Theravāda response. Followers of the Arhant ideal have always said, in effect, that charity begins at home. To want to help others to gain Enlightenment while not having gained it oneself, they say, is like trying to pull others out of a ditch when one is in the ditch oneself. In other words, it's impossible. First one must get out oneself, then one can help others to get out too.

It seems not always to have been remembered that the altruistic aspect of the spiritual life is not meant to displace the self-regarding aspect, or even alternate with it. The idea is not that one follows the Arhant path, from time to time taking a break for altruistic activities, nor that one follows the Bodhisattva path, occasionally taking time out to brush up on one's meditation and personal development. One does one's best to integrate these two aspects all the time, because one sees that there is one path, with a self-regarding and an other-regarding aspect, each a counterpart of the other.

The Bodhisattva ideal doesn't represent altruism as opposed to individualism, or saving others as opposed to saving oneself. As we have already seen, it synthesizes opposites: helping others and also helping oneself, compassion and wisdom. And altruism and individualism are synthesized in particular through the practice of the first two of the six perfections: *dāna* and *śīla*, or generosity and uprightness.

The tension – the clash, even – between regard for others and regard for self, is not, of course, confined to the spiritual life; it occurs at every level of human existence. We exist as individuals, but we also exist as members of society – that is, in relation to other individuals. We have our own needs – material needs for food, clothing, warmth, and shelter, psychological needs, emotional needs, and spiritual needs – and obviously we have to consider these. But others too have

their needs, needs of the same kind as our own, which we also have to consider, because we have to live with other people, live in society. And it often happens that our own needs conflict with those of other people; this can happen both in the wider life of the community and in our personal life.

Altruism is not simply the spirit of cooperation. A famous anarchist called Peter Kropotkin, in a book called *Mutual Aid*, which was intended as a sort of counterblast to the pseudo-Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest, maintained that mutual aid between human beings was necessary to survival and that it therefore played a crucial part in the evolutionary process.[114] Given that our very survival has always been contingent upon a certain amount of mutual aid, one cannot think of humans as being unmitigated individualists.

But one can co-operate with other human beings in one's own interests without necessarily having altruistic feelings towards them. If we accept Kropotkin's point of view, those groups of humans or proto-humans that didn't engage in mutual aid just didn't survive, so that tendency has been present in human nature for a very long time, but altruism is another matter altogether. Cooperation is essentially self-regarding, but altruism is concerned with the good of others.

Furthermore, even though mutual aid may have played its part in the survival of the human race, one cannot speak of altruism as part of human nature in the same way. It has to be learned. This is a psychological statement, not a metaphysical one. It may be that deep down in human nature there is a Buddha-nature which is fully endowed with altruism. But leaving aside metaphysical questions and taking human beings as we find them, altruism goes against the grain of human nature and definitely needs to be learned, sometimes rather painfully.

After all, how genuinely altruistic are we? When we do something for others, isn't our action usually tainted with subtle self-interest of some kind? Is it ever possible to be sure that we have done something out of pure altruism? Sometimes it is clear that someone else has acted in this way. It is generally considered that the most altruistic thing anyone can possibly do is to give their life for another. Unless one is hoping for fame after death, a reward in heaven, or something like that, there is nothing in it for oneself. But all too often altruism is tainted with more self-interested factors.

In *The Precious Garland*, Nagarjuna says:

> *Intention endowed with desire is a wish*
> *To help others motivated by desire.*[115]

‘Desire’ here suggests that one is getting something out of helping others which one is not acknowledging – basically an egoistic satisfaction. Maybe one enjoys being known as someone who helps others, or feeling superior to those one helps. One identifies with being the helper, the person everyone looks up to, the person who hands out good advice. It is rare to have a completely disinterested wish, an utterly pure motivation, to help others. There is almost always something in it for oneself, even if it is something intangible like the accumulation of merit or the promise of a reward in heaven.

Obviously, this does not mean that one should not do anything for other people until such time as one’s motivation is completely pure. One has to do what one can to help others and at the same time try to transform one’s motivation for doing it. If one acts mindfully, that in itself will help one to purify one’s motives.

Is it possible to develop altruism without having some notion of a spiritual life? It seems unlikely; but some people seem able to live very ethical lives despite having no explicit beliefs or principles. Indeed, some have been able to sacrifice their very lives for others on the basis of no metaphysical underpinning whatsoever.

This was the kind of idea people had of the Buddha when he first became known in the West. In those days it was believed that ethics depended on religion, and religion of course depended on God. T.W Rhys Davids, one of the Buddha’s early Western admirers, said of him, ‘none so Godless and none so Godlike’. To Rhys Davids and others it was a great paradox that someone who didn’t believe in God should exhibit so many spiritual qualities.

The Buddha, of course, had a very definite, albeit non-theistic, idea of the spiritual life. By contrast, some people seem able to lead a spiritual life by sheer instinct, guided by no philosophy of any kind. They don’t read their Bible, they are not interested in Buddhism, they don’t consider themselves to be religious, but they seem to possess an innate goodness. Such people are rare, though, and one should certainly hesitate to number oneself among them.

It is their circumstances that stop many people from engaging in altruistic activity. To put it in what might appear to be cynical terms, one has to be able to afford to be altruistic. If one is struggling to survive, if one doesn’t know where one’s next meal is coming from, it is hard to be very altruistically inclined. It is true that altruism involves giving not just money or material things, but time, energy, and interest. If one is preoccupied with one’s very survival, though, one just won’t be able to do that. Having said that, those who have least are sometimes the most generous; and conversely, one is not necessarily the soul of generosity just because one has resources at one’s disposal.

For all of us, true altruism includes taking care of oneself. It's a very good thing to put oneself into meeting the needs of the objective situation. It's a good thing to think of other people and forget about oneself for a while. But it is important not to neglect one's own needs – important not just for one's own sake, but also for the sake of others. If one doesn't keep oneself rested and in good condition, one isn't going to be able to do much for other people. If one allows oneself to get worn out, perhaps one's so-called altruism is a little blind. Sometimes the needs of the objective situation may mean that one has to put some strain on oneself, but one should do that only with awareness of what one is doing and a conviction that in the long run that kind of effort will be justified. One may find oneself caught up in an emergency, in a situation where people's lives are in danger; it is natural to choose not to spare oneself in such circumstances. But in general it makes sense to keep oneself in good condition so that one can be of greater and more effective service to other people.

This is easy to say; in practice it can be difficult to be sure when one is going to overstep the mark. One learns from experience what one can and should do, and what one cannot and should not do. It is important not to be precious about oneself, but equally important not to disregard one's own health and safety, even in the name of altruism.

It is quite dangerous, in a way, to think of undertaking some responsibility while having a feeling that it isn't going to be very good for one's spiritual development. Even if one is unwilling to begin with, one should be able to take on that responsibility in such a way that it is also a means to one's personal spiritual development. If one can do this, it shows that one has succeeded in unifying these two aspects of the path – altruism expressed through taking responsibility and the 'individualism' of personal spiritual practice; and this unification is necessary if one is to follow the path at all.

Work can be seen as a great Tantric guru, a great spiritual teacher. It seems generally true that people tend to grow more spiritually through doing things which at first they don't want to do than through doing what they feel like doing. Often we tend to think that if we very much want to do something, it must be good for our development. But it is important to distinguish carefully between what we *need* to do for the sake of our personal development and what we *want* to do. The long-term aim is to make no distinction between doing something as a response to the needs of the objective situation and doing something for the sake of one's own development. It should genuinely be both at the same time.

The tension between self and other which, one could say, produces the arising of the bodhicitta is typical of the process of development all along the line. This is rather similar to the dialectical movement in Hegel's philosophy, in which the

thesis is opposed or contradicted by the antithesis. Both are valid, so one can't get rid of either – an uncomfortable position to be in, but one which one can't escape. And after a while there's a breakthrough. One rises, so to speak, to a higher point of view, from which one can see that both the thesis and the antithesis have their own validity; at this stage they can be integrated into a higher position, the synthesis.

It's much the same in the spiritual life. At a relatively lower level, one inevitably experiences certain contradictions. That painful experience forces one to rise not just to a higher point of view but to a higher level of experience altogether, a level at which the contradictions are no longer contradictory. The arising of the bodhicitta is like that. Whenever there is a breakthrough from one level of spiritual experience to another, it is generally the result of some painful dilemma, some problem that can't be resolved intellectually. This is exemplified above all in the Zen koan, a paradoxical self-contradictory situation which one can only resolve by rising to a level of experience or perception where the contradiction no longer exists.

The Bodhisattva is a living contradiction, a living union of opposites at the highest possible level, in that he or she represents a synthesis of nirvāṇa and saṁsāra. This synthesis cannot be expressed conceptually. As long as we think in conceptual terms there will always be a contradiction, and any attempt to resolve that contradiction conceptually will give rise to a further concept with its own opposite, so that a further synthesis becomes necessary. The synthesis of concepts can only come about in the life of the individual for whom those concepts have meaning. Life, in other words, transcends logic.

So the Bodhisattva is the synthesis of the contradictions inherent in the path: the contradiction between dāna and śīla, and even the contradictions apparently inherent in the so-called goal, such as those between wisdom and compassion, saṁsāra and nirvāṇa. We should be careful, though, not to make the Bodhisattva into a concept; then the concept of the Bodhisattva would be opposed to the concept of the Arhant, and a further concept – or another spiritual ideal – would be required to unite them.

Until we ourselves are able to reach the point of synthesis, these contradictions tend to present themselves to us in the form of various existential dilemmas. Usually our (unconscious) strategy is to be aware of one side of the dilemma and suppress the other, but sooner or later we are going to be compelled to take both sides into consideration at once; only then can the dilemma be resolved. Of course, life and death present us with the ultimate dilemma. Wanting life, fearing death, we try to hang on to the one and shut our eyes to the other. But sooner or later we are forced to confront death, either our

own or somebody else's. We can only solve the problem of life if we are prepared to face the problem of death – indeed, to see life and death as two sides of the same coin.

Similarly, we can only solve our own problems by taking those of other people into account. In other words, the practice of *śīla* must always be accompanied by the practice of *dāna*. *Dāna* – literally giving or generosity – is the practical, altruistic aspect of the Bodhisattva's life and activity, and the first of the six pāramitās, the six perfections or transcendental virtues.

Dāna is right at the top of the list of perfections for a very good reason, which is that our natural tendency is not to give, but to take. If any new proposition comes up, whether in connection with work or home, professional activity, sport, or entertainment, our usual reaction, at least half-consciously, is 'What's in it for me?' There is always this self-referential tendency, this grasping. The fact that it is put right at the hub of the Wheel of Life is a recognition of the fact that craving – not just ordinary healthy desire, but craving – occupies a very important place in our life and activity. In fact it dominates our life, at least unconsciously. We are all in the grip of craving, swept along, impelled, by this thirst. Everything we do, everything we are interested in, has an element of self-reference.

If we are to get anywhere near Enlightenment, we have to reverse this tendency. Giving is the first pāramitā because giving is the direct opposite of grasping. It's as if the teaching is saying, 'You may not be morally scrupulous. You may not be able to meditate even for five minutes at a time. You may not dip into the scriptures from one year to the next. But if you aspire to lead any sort of higher life, then at the very least you will give.' If you find it difficult to part with things, difficult to look to the needs of others, you aren't going to get very far, spiritually speaking. On the other hand, if you are even a little bit open-handed, then whatever else you may be, there is some hope for you, from a spiritual point of view. This is the message of the Mahāyāna.

It isn't just a question of handing over one's possessions. Generosity is above all an attitude of heart and mind, indeed, of one's whole being. Walt Whitman says, 'When I give, I give myself,'[116] and this is very much the Bodhisattva's attitude. To forget about traditional definitions for a moment, perhaps we could simply define a Bodhisattva as someone who gives themself all the time, to everybody.

The Buddhist scriptures have a great deal to say on the topic of dāna, and it is also a popular theme for discourses in the East. The scriptures consider it under a number of different headings, as they tend to do with any subject, dividing and subdividing and sub-subdividing their material. Sometimes one can get a bit lost

in it all, but this systematic approach is quite helpful for serious study. Here I want to follow that tradition – remembering at the same time that our concern is with the spirit of giving, not just the technical details. The scriptures usually deal with dāna under the headings of: (1) to whom a gift is given, (2) what is given, (3) how it is given, and (4) why it is given.[117]

First, to whom should a gift be given? In principle, all living beings whatsoever are the objects of the Bodhisattva's generosity, and it is important to uphold this ideal, even though in practice very few people are ever in the position of being able to benefit the entire human race. Being more specific, the scriptures mention three classes of recipients to whom the Bodhisattva should pay particular attention. First of all, the Bodhisattva should give to his or her own friends and relations. It's no use being kind and friendly to strangers while being a difficult, awkward, uncomfortable, or even cruel person to live with. Charity really does begin at home. But it doesn't, or shouldn't, end there. In the mettā bhāvanā meditation, one starts by developing a feeling of loving-kindness towards oneself. Then one moves on to extend that feeling wider and wider, to all the people present in the room, then all the people inhabiting the town, the country, the continent, the planet, eventually the whole universe. One extends mettā not only to human beings but to all living beings whatsoever. Similarly, generosity should begin on our own doorstep, but then we should try to extend it as widely as we possibly can.

The second class of people who are especially recipients of the Bodhisattva's generosity are the poor, the sick, the afflicted, and the helpless – and among the helpless, tradition includes all animals. And thirdly, the Bodhisattva is exhorted to give to those who are leading a full-time religious life. Buddhism traditionally considers it the duty of society to support all those who are engaged in any kind of higher spiritual activity: nuns, lamas, spiritual teachers, and so on. But ideally this principle could be extended to include those engaged in any kind of creative work that expresses higher values – painters, musicians, writers. At the same time, the kind of ideal society that would take on such a duty would make no attempt to coerce either the religious person or the artist into conforming to its own ideas and ideals. The (at least implied) condition of support from the community is generally that the person being supported should, in return, support the *status quo*. But from a Buddhist point of view this is to misunderstand entirely the nature and meaning of the spiritual and creative life. The support should be freely given, with no conditions attached.

Secondly, what is given, or what can be given? Potentially, whatever can be possessed can be given away. But to assist us further, there is a sixfold classification of the things that can be given as dāna. The list starts with the

basics: food, clothing, and shelter.

In Eastern Buddhist countries, as in most traditional societies, generosity and hospitality are normal features of everyday life. People make a practice of giving something every day, just to stay in the habit of it. We are taking something every day, if only air and food; so why not give something every day? Buddhist families tend to keep a look out for a beggar or a monk to whom they can give food, or a poor person to whom they can give a few coins or a few spoonfuls of rice. The gift may be small, but at least they are keeping the habit of giving, so that generosity is part of the fabric of their everyday existence. There is a constant giving to counterbalance the constant taking that comes only too naturally.

The second thing that can be given is more psychological, and may perhaps be surprising: the gift of fearlessness. Many people are worried and anxious, strained and tense, never at ease – so this gift is very precious. Here, 'giving' is not to be taken too literally. Fearlessness is not so much given as sparked off. This goes for any positive, skilful quality that one has developed oneself, whether it is friendliness, mettā, courage, energy, inspiration, or fearlessness. What one possesses oneself, one can give – or spark off – in others. (And by the same token there's no point in thinking that one can encourage or inspire someone if one doesn't have that courage or inspiration oneself.) But why does the Buddhist tradition especially mention the giving of fearlessness?

There is not much discussion of this point in traditional sources. One might think that it was especially important at the time of the Buddha, when people faced many more immediate threats and uncertainties than we do today. But the fear of death, disease, and the loss of near and dear ones is universal; and even today people justly fear attack by wild beasts, floods, earthquakes, famine, fire, robbers and muggers, injustice and corruption. In the Buddha's day people were in some ways less protected from all these things than we are today. On the other hand, we ourselves are living with the great fear associated with the nuclear age, a fear such as has never existed before in human history. Perhaps in the modern and post-modern era there is greater need than ever before for freedom from fear.

A friend of mine in Kalimpong, a great Russian Tibetologist, once returned from a visit to America and described his experience of arriving there. Apparently he was just getting off the boat when he paused and thought, 'That's strange. There's a peculiar atmosphere, like a sort of fog – something clinging and clammy. What on earth is it?' He was a very sensitive person. He thought, 'It isn't anything physical – it isn't smoke from factory chimneys or car exhaust fumes. What is it, this grey, heavy, clinging atmosphere?' And then it struck him

that this was fear – fear exuding from this vast continent.

When a whole nation is living under the influence of fear, there is a kind of psychic poison in the atmosphere, like an oppressive cloud over the land, a dark pall, in Keats' phrase, hanging over our spirits.[118] The sense of worry and insecurity is one of the defining features of our age, aptly called the age of anxiety. And in the midst of this cloud, this darkness at noonday, people live and work and try to breathe. People have little confidence in one another, little confidence in life itself, and certainly little confidence in themselves.

The lack of authentic self-confidence that one observes in many people today is often the result (so psychologists' studies suggest) of some strong emotion which they don't want to experience, but which keeps trying to come to the surface. Half conscious of it lurking somewhere underneath, one does one's best to stop it from coming into consciousness; and if one senses it coming up, one experiences the uneasy sensation we call anxiety. Like any form of fear, anxiety is an unskilful emotion, and one to be resolved. To do this, one has to acknowledge and confront the underlying emotion, whatever it may be. Here one may need one's spiritual friends for help in identifying whatever it is that is threatening to emerge into consciousness, and for reassurance that one can deal with it, that in a sense there is nothing to be afraid of. Once confronted, these emotions lose their power, and some of them even turn out to be positive. But whether they are positive or negative, the energy invested in them needs to be integrated into one's conscious life and personality.

Those who practise meditation will know that from time to time an experience of deep fear comes up. At first it may be something coming from one's childhood, or even earlier, but a stage may come – for some people at least – when a more basic, primordial fear arises: not fear of anything in particular, but a fear that goes right down to the depths of one's being, the roots of existence. This fear, too, one has to face and overcome.

In the Mahāyāna sūtras the Bodhisattva is represented as giving not only fearlessness but self-confidence, encouragement, and inspiration. In *The Precious Garland*, Nāgārjuna says:

> *Just as farmers are gladdened*
> *When a great rain-cloud gathers,*
> So *one who gladdens embodied beings*
> *When he encounters them is good.*[119]

The reference is to the coming of the Indian monsoon. If the monsoon is even a few days late it means a bad harvest, so farmers watch anxiously for its coming

and rejoice when it comes at the right time. It is continually emphasized in Buddhism, especially in the Mahāyāna, that one should make people happy: not in a frivolous way, but by arousing genuine joy, which means helping them overcome their fears and anxieties. If one enjoys creating fear in others, that suggests a desire for power over them, but if one wants simply to make them happy, that suggests the opposite: that one is giving oneself to them instead of trying to control them for one's own purposes. The Bodhisattva, being joyful, spreads confidence and happiness wherever he or she goes. In a sense it is one's duty to be happy and joyful. One can't gladden others unless one is glad oneself.

The effect of one's positivity and inspiration can be far-reaching. In *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Gampopa quotes the *Varmavyūhanirdeśa-sūtra*:

> *A Bodhisattva puts on armour*
> *In order to gather all beings around him.*
> *Since beings are infinite*
> *So is his armour*.[120]

The Bodhisattva's 'armour' is motivation, and the idea that he 'gathers all beings around him' suggests that he is at the centre of a mandala, gathering people around him in what Buddhists call a sangha, a spiritual community. In this way one can think of the spiritual community as a mandala, with the Buddha or the Bodhisattva at the centre.

So the Bodhisattva has a harmonious, creative effect. Here is this mass of human beings, all fighting and quarrelling, trying to subdue one another, trying to amass wealth. The Bodhisattva comes among them and gradually transforms the chaos into a cosmos, the confusion into a beautiful mandala, society into the spiritual community. It's as though as soon as one decides that one is aiming to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of others, a sort of vibration is set up, and the people in one's immediate environment form a kind of mandala around one.

This happens in a small way when one organizes, say, a retreat. Lots of people turn up, with all sorts of different ideas and expectations, and all sorts of temperaments. Simply by setting the programme for the retreat, one acts as an integrating and harmonizing factor. Indeed, if one is intent on leading the spiritual life, one will have at least something of this kind of harmonizing, creative influence wherever one is, at home, at work, or on holiday. Of course, all sorts of other factors and forces are going to have their effect too, and they may counteract one's influence, but nonetheless it is there.

We will be going on to consider the spiritual community as a hierarchy in Chapter 7. Here I will just observe that one can think of that hierarchy, and one's

own place in it, in the form of a mandala, whether one is a guardian of the gates of the mandala, an offering deity within it, or performing some other function, according to whatever myth one may be aiming to fulfil in one's life, as long as one is making a spiritual effort, one will have a place in the mandala.

The third gift that the Bodhisattva aspires to give is education and culture. Wherever Buddhism went in Asia it influenced not just religious life but art, science, knowledge of all kinds. In fact, there is no real distinction to be made between religion and culture: through the arts and sciences, the heart and the mind are refined, to become more closely attuned to spiritual realities.

The effect of the encounter of Buddhism with Western culture has yet to be seen, but at present there is still a considerable gap between the two. Many of the greatest works of art in Western culture give direct expression to Christian values at least in that they depict Biblical scenes or incidents from the life of Christ. One is frequently moved by the beauty of the form while being disturbed by the content, particularly when it comes to depictions of scenes of extreme violence. Conversely, when we turn to traditional Buddhist works, while we may be inspired and deeply affected by their content, the form in which they are expressed may seem quite alien to us, so we may not be able to respond fully. Both Western art and the Buddhist tradition nourish us, but until the Dharma is given expression in our own culture in forms as sublime as those found in previous Western traditions, our responses will necessarily be ambivalent and in a certain sense unintegrated.

But one can find within Western culture works of art which are ostensibly Christian but to which one can still respond wholeheartedly. One can only turn away from a blood-stained crucifixion in horror, but there are many paintings in Western Christian art from which, even as a Buddhist, one can obtain nourishment. For instance, depictions of the Annunciation don't have to give rise to the theological issue of the virgin birth. If one just looks at the painting, what does one see? On one side is a beautiful angelic figure with wings, holding a lily in his hand, and on the other, a young woman half-bowing before him in a respectful attitude. Between the two figures there are sometimes rays of light and a dove. One's response to the picture need not be limited to the episode from the Gospels it is illustrating; one can see it as an archetypal image of receptivity on the part of the human soul to some higher influence, a messenger from some other realm. Or take the painting of Tobias and the Angel from the studio of Verrocchio. Of all the people who have looked at that painting, who has bothered to read the Book of Tobit from which the theme ostensibly derives? But the image itself – the angel leading the boy by the hand and the little dog following – is expressive of spiritual friendship, and can be appreciated as such.

In many cases one suspects that the artist himself, even though he lived in the Renaissance era, wasn't expressing anything particularly religious, but just trying to please his client, and perhaps himself at the same time. So in practice this isn't the problem that it might seem to be in theory. Very often – for example, in the case of bits of broken Gothic sculpture – one doesn't even know what the figures represent, they are so badly damaged: whether it's Saint Matthew or Saint Mark or Jeremiah the Prophet nobody knows any longer. But it doesn't matter – it's just a magnificent head of an old man with flowing locks, a long beard, and a fierce expression. One can admire it and get something from it without needing to know precisely who it is meant to be.

Conversely, in the Buddhist art of the East there are images which leave one cold because they are badly executed. Not every work of art depicting a Buddhist theme is a masterpiece. But here and there one does find a meaningful image, painting, or woodcarving. It is very much part of Bodhisattva activity to promote the creation and appreciation of works of art, as well as the extension and dissemination of knowledge in other fields of enquiry that lead to the discovery and expression of truth and beauty.

Fourthly, the Bodhisattva may, upon occasions, need to give his or her very life. This form of giving is the subject of many a Jātaka story (the Jātakas being stories about the Buddha's previous lives). Some of these stories may seem lurid, melodramatic, or simply weird. The story of Prince Vessantara, for example, describes the Bodhisattva ('Bodhisattva' in this context referring to the Buddha-to-be) giving away his wife and children.[121] We may be inclined, perhaps thinking of incidents from our own society, to feel upset or even outraged at the very idea. Were his wife and children the property of the Bodhisattva that he should give them away like so many goods and chattels? And, of course, in our society men – and sometimes women – have been known to give up their families not for any noble or altruistic reason, but simply in pursuit of their own happiness.

But the story of Prince Vessantara (which is after all from a cultural context very different from our own) is intended to illustrate how Bodhisattvas may need to give up even those who are naturally nearest and dearest to them. For some, this will seem an even harder sacrifice than that of one's own life – a sacrifice which the Bodhisattva hero of many Jātakas also makes, on one occasion, for example, sacrificing his body to a starving tigress so that she could feed her cubs.[122]

We are unlikely ever to find ourselves in a situation anything like that, but we should never forget that if we take Buddhism seriously, we may be required under certain circumstances to make great sacrifices for our ideals. In the West

at present, if we want to practise Buddhism, nobody can stop us. We can study texts, we can meditate, we can practise dāna, we can perform devotional ceremonies, we can do whatever we like, and we are fortunate that this should be so. But it isn't the case in all parts of the world, even now. We need to recognize how fortunate we are to have religious freedom.

We might even have to be prepared to sacrifice our lives for the sake of our principles. In present circumstances it may be easy enough to go along to a meditation class; but suppose one had to make one's way to it under cover of darkness, watching out for the police or the informer? If one meditated in peril of one's life, or read a book on Buddhism in peril of one's life, or stood up and spoke about the Dharma in peril of one's life – as is the case in some countries in the world today – would one do it? Or would one think, 'Well, I'll be a Buddhist in my next life; it's too difficult in this one'? One just doesn't know. All this is not to suggest that there is any virtue in throwing away one's life in a reckless or showy manner; but we must ask ourselves whether, if the sacrifice was necessary, we would be prepared to make it.

The next aspect of dāna is the giving of merits. The idea that if one does a good deed a certain amount of merit is credited to one's account, as it were, so that over time a balance accumulates, is prominent in the Theravada.[123] It's a good idea in that it encourages people to perform skilful actions, but it does tend to foster individualism; one can start to think of the spiritual life in terms of accumulating a personal wealth of merit. I once came across the example of a Jain mendicant who performed austerities for years upon end – I don't think he lay on a bed of nails, but he fasted and led a very hard life indeed – and thereby chalked up a considerable balance of merit. (Apparently there was some unit by which it was measured.) But eventually he decided to give up being a mendicant and return to lay life and set up a business. As it happened, he knew another mendicant who hadn't got so much merit but had some money. So the first mendicant sold his merit to the second, and with the proceeds set himself up in business. This is the sort of thing that can happen when the idea of merit is taken too literally.

But the Māhayāna came along and said, as it were, 'We can't have this individualistic nonsense. But at the same time, people are very attached to the idea of merit. They believe in it as a kind of possession, acquired through performing good actions. All right, let's ask them to give up their merit, or at least to share it.' In this way the Māhayāna counteracted the individualism of the previous approach. So one shouldn't hug one's virtue to oneself as though it were a favourite child on whom one was pinning all one's hopes. Francis Bacon said that money is like muck, the better for being spread, and one might say the

same about merit.

Lastly we come to the gift of the Dharma, the gift of the truth. This is the greatest of all gifts. One can give a person material things, psychological security, education and culture. One can sacrifice one's life and limbs, or even share one's precious merit. But the best gift of all is to share the truth that one has understood, perhaps after much effort, pain, and difficulty. This giving of the gift of the teaching, by word, precept, or example, is traditionally the special duty of monks, lamas, and so on. But the Mahāyāna emphasizes that we can all participate in this great responsibility. In fact, we can't help it. We are giving all the time: something is coming from us, radiating from us, all the time. If one has imbibed anything of Buddhism, one must inevitably express it in one's dealings with other people.

This doesn't mean dragging in Buddhism on every possible – or impossible – occasion. One should be careful not to become a heavy-handed Buddhist bore. There's no need to be like the ardent Roman Catholic in one of G.K Chesterton's stories who would manage to bring the Church into whatever conversation was started, so that a chat about fishing would inevitably lead to a consideration of the merits of that famous fisherman Saint Peter. One can communicate one's spiritual sensibility much more subtly and naturally than that.

If one is involved in teaching the Dharma, one should constantly be investigating whether the methods being recommended as means of personal development are actually working for the people to whom one is recommending them. One shouldn't settle down into a programme of meditation courses, pujas, and lectures and take it for granted that they must be helping people to grow spiritually. One must keep assessing whether the methods being used are having that effect. Nothing should become a matter of course.

When people say they are interested in Buddhism, very often they are not really interested in spiritual development but are seeking something else: solutions to psychological problems, or companionship, or just somewhere to go. On the other hand, some people who declare themselves uninterested in Buddhism might well become interested in what Buddhism really is. A would-be Bodhisattva intent upon giving the Dharma would go out of his way to spend time with such people, even though they are saying, 'No, I'm not interested in Buddhism.' Not everybody who says 'I want Buddhism' really wants it; equally, not everybody who says 'I'm not interested in Buddhism' is really not interested in it. So the giving of this gift requires great sensitivity and discernment.

Having considered what to give, one needs to consider *how* to give. The tradition gives several pieces of advice on this.[124] First of all, we are told, one should give courteously. I'm afraid that in the East people sometimes break this

precept, at least where beggars are concerned; when they see someone begging at the roadside they are apt to fling a coin rather contemptuously. But according to Buddhism, when one gives, whether to a beggar or even an animal, one should give courteously. Then, one should give happily. What's the use of giving something with a frown? That undoes half the effect. Also, one should give promptly. This is no trivial matter: sometimes a person's life depends upon someone else's prompt generosity.

Then, it is important to give without subsequent regret, to feel happy that one has done so, not to agonize about it afterwards, and of course not to *talk* about it afterwards. Some people find it hard to resist letting everyone know exactly how generous they are. Well, not always *exactly*. I remember once I was attending a meeting in South India, in my early days there. Before the meeting someone had sent along a minute sum of money as a contribution. Then in the middle of the proceedings he got up and said loudly to the organizer, 'Did you receive my donation?' By contrast, the spirit of true generosity is very quiet, never drawing attention to itself.

Then, the Mahāyāna sūtras say, give to friend and foe alike. If one's enemy is in need of help, one should give to him or her just as one would to a friend. And, they say, don't discriminate between the so-called good person and the so-called evil-doer when you are giving. Furthermore, we are told, one should give everywhere and at all times 'observing due proportion' – that is, giving to people according to their real needs, not their apparent wants.

Having considered what should be given, to whom, and how, we have one last consideration to make: why? Some people are motivated to give – sometimes on a grand scale – to boost their reputation. In India you sometimes get multimillionaires subscribing large sums of money for hospitals and dispensaries – on the understanding that, in return, it will be made abundantly clear, preferably in large letters above the entrance, whose generosity is responsible for the project.

Other people are generous on the basis that they are 'laying up treasure in heaven'. But according to Buddhism, this isn't at all a noble idea. The Buddha did teach that if one leads a virtuous life one will reap the rewards of one's virtue, but one shouldn't lead a virtuous life with that aim in mind. It is more appropriate to consider that, if there is anything to be gained personally from one's generosity, it is simply that through generous action one may overcome greed and thereby come a little closer to Enlightenment – not just for one's own sake but for the sake of all sentient beings.

This question of motive leads us from the subject of ordinary giving, dāna, to that of *dāna pāramitā*, the *perfection* of giving. The word *pāramitā* literally means

‘that which conveys to the other shore’ – the other shore being nirvāṇa. The tradition speaks of six or ten pāramitās, but in a sense there is only one: *prajňā pāramitdā* the perfection of wisdom, the direct realization of reality. *Dana pāramitā* is the practice of giving conjoined with the experience of reality.

For this reason, *dāna pāramitā* is often referred to as *trimaṇḍalapārisuddha* – ‘of a threefold circle of purity’; threefold because in the act of giving there is no idea of self, that ‘I am giving’; no idea of a recipient; and no idea of the act of giving. This is not giving in a state of blankness or unconsciousness – on the contrary, there is perfect, clear awareness – but the giving is natural, spontaneous, inexhaustible. One gives out of the depths of one’s experience of reality, one’s unity with the spirit of compassion in accordance with the needs of sentient beings.

Śīla, the second pāramitā, embodies the more self-regarding aspect of the Bodhisattva’s life and is connected with the idea of self-purification. Śīla can be interpreted not just as ‘ethical life’ but as something like ‘immersed in Dharma life’, living a healthy lifestyle. The word suggests habitual skilful activity: not the occasional skilful action, but the regular and consistent performance of skilful actions.

‘Uprightness’ is the more or less literal meaning of the term. It is sometimes translated as ‘morality’, but for many people this word has unpleasant connotations, being associated with conventional and arguably outworn moral attitudes, especially in the sphere of sexual ethics. Orthodox Christian ideas and ideals, which are not necessarily those of the Gospels themselves, but which are underpinned by the doctrine of original sin, have been responsible for generating such intense feelings of sinfulness and guilt in many people as to ruin their lives. All of us who have been brought up in the West are to some extent influenced by these attitudes. Even those who consciously reject Christianity, whether they be atheist, humanist, agnostic, or indeed Buddhist, are often still deeply influenced by Christian ethical assumptions. As a Buddhist one needs to understand this; otherwise, one will unconsciously carry Christian attitudes into one’s Buddhist life, which will result in confusion, especially in the sphere of ethics.

While the old moral order has to some extent broken down, a new one has not yet been established. So far we haven’t even cleared the ground. In any case, we can’t completely abolish the old moral order and establish a new one from scratch; the two will always overlap.

And we can draw inspiration from the past – not the recent past, but the dim and distant pre-Christian past, the past of pagan times. Today we can look back through 1,500 years of religious history, to the Oxford Movement of the nineteenth century, the Methodist revival before that, Puritanism before that, the

medieval church, the beginnings of the Church, right back to the introduction of Christianity. But before that, nothing: only an abyss of darkness in which we see hideous shapes vaguely swarming, an abyss from which we have been taught to shrink back in horror, the pre-Christian dark abyss of paganism. We can't feel our own roots deep down in that darkness; we feel no continuity with the past. A site like Stonehenge, that great circle of stones that has stood on Salisbury Plain for 4,000 years, is very impressive; but for us it may be no more than an archaeological monument. We don't necessarily feel any real continuity with the religious and cultural life of the people who put those great stones there.

Usually we are not aware that we have been deprived of this continuity, but we can see it if we compare our situation with that of modern Hindus. They can look back thousands and thousands of years – back to the great saints and reformers of the nineteenth century, the medieval mystics, the early medieval philosophers, back to Buddhism, back to brahminical Hinduism, Vedic Hinduism, the primitive cults before that, back and back – one single uninterrupted process, right back into the dawn of history, the mists of the past. Modern Hindus can feel their continuity with the Vedic rishis living hundreds, even thousands, of years before Christ. This surely is a wonderful feeling, to be able to feel that one's religious roots go so deep, like a flowering plant rooted deep in the earth.

But in any Christian country, one is more like a flower without roots, a flower in a glass of water, even an artificial flower, because continuity with the past, with our own religious past, has been lost. The continuity of Western religious life was disrupted by the advent of Christianity. Wherever Christianity went, first within the Roman Empire and then outside it, paganism was ruthlessly destroyed. Pagan images were smashed, stone circles were damaged, sacred groves were cut down, priests were killed. Virtually nothing of paganism survived in Britain; it was destroyed root and branch. If it survived at all, it did so in somewhat distorted forms, such as what is popularly called witchcraft. Official Christianity no longer includes much that is in any sense pagan or ethnic. Perhaps traces have survived in the churches of the Mediterranean area, in which certain practices are performed in the name of Christianity but are really remnants from earlier pagan times, in the same way that some saints were created by baptizing pagan gods and heroes.

But essentially our own special brand of paganism has been lost; our link with the past has gone. And this link must be restored. People are beginning to recognize that it is important that the old myths and legends, beliefs and practices, should be studied – not just as so much grist for the academic mill, but so that one can feel one's way back into the old myths and legends of our native

land. It is important that all of us, including Buddhists, should try to establish contact with our pre-Christian past. Indeed, I have sometimes thought that Buddhism will only become widespread in the West after a revival of paganism. Perhaps Buddhism will have to put down roots in the West before it can start producing flowers.

In what would such a renewed paganism consist? First of all, we need to be careful not to romanticize pagan culture. There were very positive elements in it, elements on which we can draw, but it would be a mistake to paint a glowing picture of a noble paganism, contrasted with a dark picture, say, of medieval Christianity. That would be neither fair nor historically correct. Also, although it would be nice to think that as people freed themselves from unhelpful ethical attitudes their natural straightforward humanity would simply blossom, it would be naïve to suppose that the demise of Christianity would leave us with a pure clean sweet-smelling humanity. The Nazis were pagan in a sense – some of them professed to look to the old pagan gods, and even revived some pagan festivals – but what sort of paganism was that?

In any case, pre-Christian pagans were by no means perfect. One reads truly horrible things about the morals of ancient Rome. Perhaps one shouldn't attach too much importance to the *Satires* of Juvenal – he was making a few points of his own in a rather heavy-handed way – but it certainly wasn't all sweetness and light before the advent of Christianity. Pagan culture wasn't all beautiful Greek statues and people walking around in flowing white garments. Quite dreadful things went on – slavery, for example, and the gladiatorial contests at the Colosseum. In certain respects Christianity was a definite improvement on all that. (And, of course, the Romans themselves were responsible for the near-destruction of Celtic paganism.)

So in contemplating a revival of paganism, I am not thinking of paganism in any specific cultic sense – not Classical paganism or Teutonic paganism – but something more like 'unspoiled human nature' or 'healthy, happy, human nature'. This, though, as far as we are concerned, is something to be cultivated, to be developed. The happy, healthy, human individual, living free and independent of the attitudes of the surrounding society, is a figment of the imagination. One doesn't encounter anybody who has not been conditioned in some way, positively or negatively, by the society in which he or she has been brought up.

In the eighteenth century people liked to speculate about what would happen if you put a child on a desert island and let him grow up by himself. What sort of human being would he become? Well, we will never know, because we cannot bring up a child in that way. The concept of the human individual who has not

been conditioned by any sort of culture is a hypothetical construct. However, one can certainly *become* a happy, healthy human being as a result of spiritual life and training.

Personally I would be happy to see a combination of Celtic paganism and Buddhism – the one for the majority, the other for the minority, and each tolerant towards the other, so that it would be easy to pass from one to another. It was rather like that in the Buddha's time: most people followed the old ethnic cults, but the Buddha was free to recruit followers from their midst.

We can't put the clock back. It is difficult to get away from Christian influences in the West. Some people are brought up without Christianity impinging on them very much, but there is no healthy pagan substitute, no ready-made paganism to make use of as an alternative to the missing ethnic element in Christianity. A truly pagan attitude has not so far developed in our Western post-Christian culture to any degree, although some people would like to think it has.

So how can we bring into our Buddhist life those elements of paganism that are especially helpful? There are two fundamental aspects of paganism, which are especially important to a happy, healthy human life: first, a sense of our connectedness with nature, and second, a more natural morality.

One of the characteristics of paganism is a sense of connectedness with the life of the earth. Official Christianity teaches that the earth was cursed as a result of the fall of man. If you see the earth through Christian spectacles, it has fallen, just as mankind has. The earth is evil because nature is evil, bound up with the devil. This is the orthodox Christian attitude, although it is sometimes left unformulated: everything natural is of the devil. God created the earth good, but it has become corrupt due to man's fall. People may say they don't believe that doctrine any more, but that sort of feeling about nature is still around, as well as the idea that nature is to be exploited, which also derives from the Old Testament.

Paganism, conversely, is a feeling of oneness with nature, a feeling that one is part of nature, and that nature is healthy and good – 'natural', in a word; innocent. And because one is part of it, one is oneself also natural, healthy, and innocent. This is the essence of paganism, and if the study of ancient ethnic religions or pagan mythology helps one to experience that, it is worth engaging in such study; otherwise, it has little spiritual value.

We could gain a more direct experience through celebrations and rituals. We could celebrate the seasons, for example: we could have a midwinter festival and a spring festival. We might feel selfconscious at first, but we would get used to it: bonfires, dancing round the maypole, all that sort of thing. There is something

analogous in the Tibetan tradition, in the form of their New Year festival. Tibetans make a big thing of this. They give it Buddhist colouring, but it definitely comes from their pre-Buddhist pagan roots. For example, horses were very important to the pre-Buddhist nomadic peoples of Tibet, and to this day horse-racing is a big part of the New Year celebration – interpreted as helping to speed the coming of Maitreya, the future Buddha!

The second area in which we could benefit from a revival of paganism is the sphere of morality – which, of course, is our main theme here. A more pagan attitude, dropping the less helpful ethical attitudes of Christianity, should not, of course, mean the complete absence of any ethical code, but a more natural morality, something closer to the realities of human life and experience.

Here we can consider a distinction dating from the earliest days of Buddhism: the distinction between natural morality (Pāli *pakati-sīla*) and conventional morality (*paṇṇatti-sīla*). Natural morality refers to behaviour that is directly related to mental states, while conventional moral behaviour is a matter of custom and tradition, and has no basis in psychology, not being related to a specific mental state. For instance, that one should try not to do things based on a mental state of craving, especially in its more neurotic forms, is a matter of natural morality; but whether one has one spouse or two, or four, is a matter of conventional morality.

Conventional morality also includes matters of etiquette and behaviour such as whether you take off your hat in a holy place or keep it on. There isn't necessarily any connection between whether you are wearing your hat or not and the degree of reverence you feel; it is simply customary in one society or culture to show reverence by keeping one's hat on, while in another culture one shows reverence by taking one's hat off. The feeling of reverence is a matter of natural morality, but how it is shown is a matter of conventional morality in most cases, although it could be said that there is a psychological connection between certain mental states and certain bodily attitudes.

Within Buddhist tradition there are some precepts, especially precepts to be practised by monks, which have nothing to do with natural morality. That a monk wears yellow robes, shaves his head, and so on is simply a matter of convention. This is clearly recognized in Theravāda tradition, in theory, though often in practice, and certainly as far as public opinion is concerned, very great importance is attached to matters of conventional morality – as much as to even the most important precepts of natural morality – and this is rather unfortunate.

Unfortunately also, sometimes people feel very guilty about not observing matters of conventional morality, especially if the society to which they belong attaches great importance to those matters, virtually as though they were matters

of natural morality. For instance, in some societies it is regarded as moral to work, and therefore immoral not to work; so people who don't work in the sense of being gainfully employed are looked down upon, regarded as slightly immoral, even made to feel guilty. Indeed, they themselves may feel guilty, as though they have done something wrong, when they have not offended against natural morality, but only gone against custom and convention. In a sense this is the difference between virtue and respectability. Sometimes the two coincide, but often they don't. One may be both virtuous and respectable, but it is also possible to be very respectable and not at all virtuous, or highly virtuous and not at all respectable.

Only matters of natural morality have any direct connection with the question of karma. One should not entangle a matter of real, substantial virtue, a matter of natural morality, with one's prejudices about what is right and wrong, which may be based merely on local custom, and have nothing to do with skilful or unskilful mental states.

It is quite important to be sure within oneself whether one is really leading a moral life or just respecting the prejudices of the group within which one happens to be. Moral life is essentially a matter of skilful mental states expressed in skilful behaviour and skilful speech. The precepts of natural morality are those precepts which prevent one from committing unskilful actions – that is to say, actions based upon craving, aversion, and ignorance – and help one to perform actions based on skilful states of mind such as generosity, love, and wisdom.

And this is the nature of the traditional precepts of Buddhism, which guide the application of ethical principles to all aspects of life. There is a set of five precepts: one 'undertakes the training principles', as the traditional wording has it, not to take life, not to take what is not given, not to engage in sexual misconduct, not to lie, and not to take intoxicants. A set of ten precepts – an elaboration of the five – involves a threefold purification of body, speech, and mind. And there are sixty-four special precepts for Bodhisattvas. There is much that could be said about the practice of these precepts, but here I want to concentrate on Buddhist ethics as applied to three basic spheres of human life: food, work, and marriage.

The most basic of these is, of course, food. You had some not long ago, and so did I; eating is just part of everyday life. Some people in some places can only afford to eat once a day, or even every other day, but most of us eat several times a day; food occupies a very important place in our lives, and takes many hours of our lifetime. An activity to which we devote so much time, energy, and money, and for which we require special provision in our houses in the form of kitchens

and dining rooms and utensils, very definitely needs to be brought within the influence of our Buddhist principles.

The most important principle here is non-violence, reverence for life. This means, among many other things, vegetarianism. Some of the Mahāyāna sūtras say that the Bodhisattva can no more think of eating the flesh of living beings than a mother can think of eating the flesh of her child. If one is to practise śīla, therefore, one needs to make a definite move in the direction of vegetarianism. Sometimes circumstances at home may be difficult – it may be impossible to be strictly vegetarian – but at least one can move towards it, perhaps by giving up meat and fish on certain days of the week, or on certain occasions. No one is perfectly non-violent; it is always a matter of degree. But we should reverence life as much as possible – this is of course an aspect of the pagan connectedness with nature we have been discussing. Vegetarianism, practised to any degree, is a direct application of the principle that guides the life of the Bodhisattva: the principle of compassion.

It should be said that the Buddha himself did not insist on vegetarianism. He considered it more important for mendicants to practise not picking and choosing what they ate, but accepting what they were given (provided they were sure that any meat they were offered had not been killed especially for their benefit). However, it seems surprising that so few Buddhists in the East have subsequently made any attempt to encourage, where they could, this most basic application of a basic Buddhist principle. In the harsh climate of Tibet vegetarian foodstuffs are certainly scarce, but many Tibetan Buddhists living in India continue to eat meat although they no longer need to do so. It isn't just the Tibetans; Thai and Burmese Buddhists are, if anything, even greater meat-eaters, and the majority of Sinhalese monks and laymen are non-vegetarian too. But perhaps non-vegetarianism is especially strange among Mahāyāna Buddhists like the Tibetans, given the Mahāyāna's special emphasis on compassion. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* contains a whole chapter about the unskilfulness of eating meat,[125] but people don't seem to take that very seriously.

In this connection Tantric teachings, misunderstood, play a part. Tibetan lamas sometimes say that when an animal is slaughtered, if certain mantras are recited over it, its consciousness is at once released and goes to a sort of heaven. Some even go so far as to say that the fact that the flesh of an animal passes through their system ensures the salvation of that animal. It isn't possible to prove or disprove such a statement, of course, but it has all the hallmarks of a rationalization.

The Thai bhikkhus I knew in India used to say that the lay people gave them meat and therefore they couldn't refuse it – it was just dropped into their bowls.

But the lay people were Buddhists and had been so for hundreds of years, and the bhikkhus had taught them to do all sorts of things, for example devising elaborate ways for women to make offerings without coming into physical contact with the bhikkhus. If they could teach the lay people things like that, why couldn't they teach them not to offer them meat? After all, they were able to explain that certain kinds of meat were prohibited and should not be offered according to the Theravāda Vinaya: human flesh, tiger flesh, and so on.[126] Could they not ask them to refrain from offering any flesh at all?

When I stayed with some of my Thai bhikkhu friends – in the place of the Buddha's Enlightenment, Bodh Gayā, of all places – every single dish they ate was mixed with meat. Sometimes when I had a meal with them, all I could eat was rice. They weren't very sympathetic, though; they clearly felt that I was just being awkward and that they were under no obligation to help me out of the difficulty I had created for myself.

The Sinhalese were much more sympathetic. Some Sinhalese bhikkhus are vegetarians, and Sinhalese lay Buddhists are very cooperative about that. Tibetans, when challenged about it, will often say, 'Yes, we know we should be vegetarian, but it's difficult in Tibet.' They do make an exception when they are engaged in any kind of puja or spiritual practice connected with the Bodhisattvas Tārā and Avalokiteśvara. Then they do observe vegetarianism, even if the pujas last for as long as ten days, because Avalokiteśvara and Tārā are especially associated with compassion.

As well as being vegetarian, one should practise loving-kindness towards oneself by eating pure and wholesome food. ('Pure' here does not mean refined to such an extent that there is no goodness left in it.) At the same time, one should eat only as much as is necessary for maintaining good health. Sometimes we forget that the purpose of eating is just to keep the body going. If one is down to a subsistence level diet, as people are in so many parts of the world, one knows this very well, but it isn't so obvious in the West, where we have an optimum diet, to say the least.

Also, one shouldn't eat neurotically; one shouldn't use food in an attempt to satisfy some other need. And one should eat quietly and peacefully. These days many people have business lunches, during which they try to do business and eat at the same time. This is grossly uncivilized conduct. Eating should be quiet, peaceful, even meditative. To eat in a public restaurant or coffee bar, where there is a lot of noise and clatter, and loud conversations going on, is not good for any sensitive, mindful person. The principle here is that one should eat mindfully, with full awareness of what one is doing. One shouldn't eat while reading a newspaper at breakfast time, or having a family argument, or even discussing

some practical matter.

For an example of mindfulness in this respect, there is nothing more beautiful than the Japanese tea ceremony. A small group of people gather together in some quiet corner, a little rustic hut in the garden perhaps, and they sit around a charcoal stove and listen to the kettle simmering away. Then, with slow, graceful, delicate, mindful movements, the tea is poured out and handed round to the guests. And people sip it, just sitting peacefully together, engaging in the ordinary, everyday activity of drinking tea.

The Japanese tea ceremony shows to what a pitch of perfection even everyday activities can be raised if we apply mindfulness. Indeed, although this statement could easily be misunderstood, one might almost say that it is better to eat steak and onions mindfully than to eat vegeburgers unmindfully. The main point is that even eating, this ordinary activity, can be made into a sort of art, a way – a *dō*, to use the Japanese word. Someone who ate and drank mindfully every day, year after year, might even gain as much spiritually as they would gain from a sustained practice of meditation. To encourage oneself to be mindful in this way, one could perhaps bring to mind a little verse or saying, reflecting, perhaps, on the source of the food one is eating.

Another area of ethics that is particularly important in the West is to do with work. We tend to think that everybody should work – that is, for money; we think it is wrong, sinful even, not to be gainfully employed. We have already considered this as an example of conventional morality. It is undoubtedly a legacy from Protestantism. Some people can't take a few days off, or even spend a few extra hours in bed in the morning, without feeling horribly guilty about it. We usually feel that we ought to be doing something. Sometimes if we see someone else just sitting around not doing anything, we feel all fidgety and uncomfortable and want to get them moving, as though the very fact of their sitting there quietly while we are so busy is a threat to us.

This is not a new thing. It is to be found, for example, in the Gospels, in the story of Martha and Mary – Martha bustling around getting everything ready, while Mary just sat at the feet of Jesus listening, when there was food to be prepared and served, and washing-up to be done. Martha was most indignant. Jesus, however, said that Mary had chosen the better part. In the West we tend to be Marthas rather than Marys; this feeling that we ought to be doing something is a sort of disease.

The Buddha never worked for his living, as far as we know. He was born into a wealthy, aristocratic family. He had lots of servants. According to all the accounts he spent most of his time in palaces with singing girls, dancing girls, and musicians. Then, after he left home as a mendicant, other people gave him

food and clothing. He never did anything to earn his keep. Of course he taught the Dharma, but he would have done that anyway; it was his nature, just as the nature of the sun is to shine. He never worked for money; he never did a day's work in his life.

I have so far been referring to work in the sense of employment; but there is such a thing as creative work. Indeed, creative work is a psychological necessity. It may be in the form of bringing up and educating children. It may be in the form of writing or painting or cooking, or engaging in some constructive social venture. To produce, to create, is a human need. But it need not be linked with employment. In an ideal society, no one would have to work for wages. One would give to the community whatever one could, and the community would give to each person whatever they needed.

However, such an ideal state of affairs is no doubt a long way off, and in the meantime we do have to be gainfully employed in the ordinary sense – and so we have to apply the principle of right livelihood. In brief, this is that our means of livelihood should involve no exploitation of others and no degradation of oneself. And however one is employed, there should always be time for study, meditation, contact with friends, and other positive and creative activities.

Another aspect of life that affects practically everybody in one way or another, formally or informally, is marriage. The Buddhist conception of marriage is very different from the traditional Western one. In the first place, in Buddhism marriage is regarded neither as a religious sacrament nor as a legally binding contract. According to Buddhist tradition, marriage is simply a human relationship which is recognized by society in the form of one's family and friends.

Even in the West the white dress, the orange blossom, the church bells ringing, and all that sort of thing are not *de rigueur* in the way they used to be, but in the Buddhist East there has never been any marriage ceremony of that kind. If anything at all is done to mark the event, the couple concerned will give a feast for their friends and relations, and just make an announcement that they are living together. A Sikkimese friend of mine and his wife didn't give their feast until they had been together for twenty years and their children had grown up. But they were not regarded as 'living in sin' in the interval. If a man and woman are living together, they *are* married. This is the Buddhist view. Marriage consists in living together, not in a legal contract, a social convention, or even an official announcement. The marriage is primarily the relationship itself. After the feast held to initiate it or celebrate it, the couple may go along to the temple or monastery and ask for a blessing, but this isn't a wedding ceremony. The monks may bless the relationship, but they don't create it – they

just recognize it and give their blessing that the couple concerned may live together happily in accordance with the spirit of the Dharma, helping each other to practise the Buddha's teaching.

With that background, it is not surprising that in all Buddhist countries, from ancient times, there has never been any difficulty about dissolving a marriage, if the people concerned wish it. Also, after marriage the woman retains her own name. This practice is now increasingly common in the West, but here it is quite a new thing, whereas in the East it has never been any other way. In the Buddhist countries of the East there is no one pattern of marriage relationship; nowhere does Buddhism say that monogamy is the only possible form of marriage. Monogamy, polygamy, and even polyandry are all to be found in Buddhist countries, and are recognized as perfectly respectable. Buddhists direct their attention entirely upon the quality of the human relationships involved.

These, very briefly, are the standard Buddhist views on food, work, and marriage – three key aspects of śīla, the predominantly individualistic, self-regarding aspect of the Bodhisattva's life. But we mustn't forget that it is *śīla pāramitā* with which we are concerned: śīla as a perfection, śīla conjoined with wisdom. Uprightness, however carefully observed, is not an end in itself but a means – a means to Enlightenment. Indeed, according to Buddhism, if śīla is regarded as an end in itself, it becomes a hindrance. It's the same with dāna. Dāna as an end in itself is humanitarianism or secular philanthropy; it is good, but it doesn't go far enough. The only real reason to practise dāna and śīla is as means to Enlightenment, for oneself and for all sentient beings.

I referred earlier to the possibility of conflict between the practice of dāna and śīla. Śāntideva refers to this in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*:

> Whoever, having been enlightened, commences to act, ought to think of nothing else. Insofar as this can be accomplished it is by means of applying one's entire being.
>
> This way, everything is well done. Otherwise, both [of the conflicting interests of dāna and śīla] may not be achieved. And the flaw of non-awareness (asamprajanya) will attain further development.[127]

Śāntideva is suggesting that this potential conflict can be resolved by doing everything mindfully, with thought, reflection, care, and awareness. If your mindfulness is strong enough any conflict between the respective claims of dāna and śīla will be resolved almost automatically. Suppose, for example, a monk encounters a woman who is seriously ill. Naturally he will want to give her

medicine and look after her – that's dāna. But because she is a woman, to have much to do with her might lead him to compromise his monastic vow, and jeopardize his practice of śīla. Thus a conflict arises within the context of his monastic life. But never mind. If he keeps up his awareness and mindfulness all the time, whatever he does, he will resolve that conflict.

Historically speaking it seems that some members of the sangha experienced a degree of tension between the demands of dāna and the demands of śīla. Some of the monastic rules were quite strict and, one would think, would have restricted the Bodhisattva's activities. For instance, there are rules about not preaching the Dharma to people wearing turbans or carrying swords.[128] The Bodhisattva, through the strength of his feeling for giving the doctrine, might well disregard these rules. Technically he would be breaking certain śīlas of the monastic law. But in effect Śāntideva is saying, 'Conflict will arise but never mind.' Be mindful, be aware, in everything you do, and then everything will work out, with regard to dāna and śīla and everything else.

This is certainly what I found during my time in India, especially when I went around with my Thai bhikkhu friends, who were generally very strict in their observance of the monastic rules. Often there was a genuine conflict between the rules and the demands of the situation. Suppose someone arranged for you to give a lecture starting at 10 a.m. and unlikely to finish before 1 p.m. When would you eat? You are not supposed to eat after noon – for a strict monk this is a very important point. We would discuss the situation among ourselves. Should we cancel the meeting so we could observe the twelve o'clock rule, or have the meeting and ignore the rule, or perhaps even fast until the next morning? Some monks would be prepared to fast, but others wouldn't be very happy about it. After quite a bit of discussion we would sometimes agree to take our meal an hour late. The bhikkhus would say, 'Never mind, it's for the sake of the Dharma.' Though they were strict Theravādins they adopted the more Mahāyānistic approach. At other times we had to ride in bullock carts – again, this is against the monastic rule, but there was no other means of transport. If we had walked, we would have got to the meeting too late to give our lectures.

Quite a few Theravāda monks in modern times experience a conflict between their desire to propagate the Dharma and the requirements of the monastic rule, which sometimes get in the way of their Buddhist work. This sort of thing must have happened a lot in India as social conditions changed and the Mahāyāna arose, and as, perhaps, some of the monastic rules were interpreted too narrowly. Sāntideva, however, is reassuring, and says that provided one is mindful at all times such conflicts will not only be resolved, but will not be experienced as conflicts in the same way. This is the union of opposites towards which all

aspects of the Bodhisattva ideal lead.

5

‘MASCULINITY’ AND ‘FEMININITY’ IN THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

TO REFER TO masculinity and femininity in any context these days is, of course, to tread on dangerous ground, and perhaps even using quotation marks will not be sufficient to guard against the everpresent possibility of being taken too literally. As we shall see, though, it is in fact quite appropriate to use these terms to characterize the third and fourth pāramitās to be practised by the Bodhisattva: *kṣānti* and *vīrya*.

Kṣānti – to be distinguished from *śānti*, which means peace – is one of the most beautiful words in the whole vocabulary of Buddhism. It links a number of associated meanings, so there is no one English word which can do it full justice. It literally means patience or forbearance, and it is the antidote to anger (as dāna is to craving). As well as the absence of anger, and the absence of the desire for revenge, kṣānti has overtones of love, compassion, tolerance, acceptance, and receptivity.

It also includes gentleness and docility. And there is even a suggestion in it of humility – though not in any artificial selfconscious sense. When Mahatma Gandhi founded one of his ashrams in India he apparently drew up a list of virtues to be practised by the ashramites. It was a long list, and at the top he put ‘humility’. But someone pointed out that if you practise humility deliberately, selfconsciously, it becomes not humility but hypocrisy. So the Mahatma crossed out ‘humility’ and wrote at the bottom of the list, ‘All the virtues are to be

practised in a-spirit of humility' – a rather different thing.

Here we will discuss three principal aspects of kṣānti: forbearance, tolerance, and spiritual receptivity. Each aspect will be introduced by a story, as a reminder that kṣānti is not something to be theorized or speculated about, but essentially something to be practised in our everyday life.

kṣānti as forbearance is illustrated by a story from the life of the Buddha himself, a story found in the *Sūtra of Forty-two Sections* – which, incidentally, was the first Buddhist text to be translated into Chinese. The original version – we don't know whether it was in Pāli or Sanskrit – no longer exists, but historically the sūtra is of considerable importance. Anyway, apparently the Buddha was walking along one day when he happened to encounter somebody – probably a Brahmin, but we don't know – who for some reason wasn't very pleased with the Buddha and immediately started to call him all sorts of names. This sort of thing often happens in the Pāli scriptures; the Buddha was by no means universally popular in his own day. Some people resented the fact that he seemed to be enticing people away from their families and encouraging them to think of nirvāṇa instead of thinking about making money.

So the man stood there for a while, abusing the Buddha with all the offensive words in his vocabulary. But the Buddha didn't say anything. He just waited for the man to stop speaking. And eventually the man did dry up – perhaps he ran out of breath. The Buddha quietly said, 'Is that all?' Rather taken aback, the man said, 'Yes, that's all.' The Buddha then said, 'Let me ask you a question. Suppose one day a friend brings you a present, but you don't want to accept it. If you don't accept it, to whom does it belong?' The man said, 'Well, if I won't accept it, it belongs to the person who is trying to give it to me.' So the Buddha said 'Well, you have tried to make me a present of your abuse, but I decline to accept it. Take it; it belongs to you.'[129]

Of course, few of us would be capable of such a measured response. If someone verbally abuses us, we tend to come up with a stinging retort, or keep the insult burning in our mind and find a way of getting our own back later on. But it is possible to learn to respond differently. How? The great teacher Śāntideva gives some hints. He says, for example, suppose someone comes along and beats you with a stick. That's a painful experience, but it doesn't justify your flying into a rage. Instead, you need to try to understand what has happened. If you analyse it, he says, it is simply that two things have come together: the stick and your body. And who is responsible for this coming together? The other person has admittedly taken the stick to you, so he is partly responsible. But you have provided the body – and where did that body come from? It came from your previous saṁskāras: your ignorance and the things you did based on your

ignorance in your previous lives. Why should you get angry with your enemy for bringing his stick, and not with yourself for bringing your body?[130] In his *Bodhicaryāvatāra* Śāntideva produces a number of reflections of this kind designed to help us practise forbearance.

Of course, it isn't just a question of practising forbearance towards people who assail us with harsh words or sticks. In Buddhist literature the contexts in which forbearance is to be practised are classified into three groups.[131] First of all, there is nature: the material universe which surrounds us, especially in the form of the weather. It is generally either too hot or too cold, or there's too much wind or too much rain or not enough sunshine. All these climatic changes demand a certain degree of forbearance. Then there are what are known in law as acts of God – natural disasters beyond human control, like fire and flood, earthquake and lightning. Occasionally we may need to practise forbearance in the face of such events as these.

Secondly, we need to be forbearing towards our own body, especially when it is sick or suffering. We shouldn't get angry with the body and all its aches and pains; we shouldn't start beating 'brother ass', as Saint Francis would say. After all, we have brought the body here; it is our responsibility. While we should always try to alleviate suffering, whether our own or that of other people, as best we can, we need to realize that there is a residue which cannot be relieved and must simply be borne with patience.

Even if we stay well, sooner or later old age and death will come. In the modern West many people refuse to grow old gracefully, with sometimes quite tragic consequences. In the East, and perhaps in traditional societies generally, by contrast, people often look forward to old age, and indeed tend to see it as the happiest time of life. All the passions and emotional turbulence of youth have subsided. One has gained experience, and with experience perhaps just a little wisdom. And having handed everything over to the younger generation, one has fewer responsibilities and plenty of time for reflection, even meditation. Death is another matter, though; for most people everywhere it is a sobering consideration. But whether we like it or not, death will come, and we are well-advised to practise forbearance towards the idea.

Thirdly, one should practise forbearance towards other people. This is, of course, far more difficult than being forbearing towards the weather, or even one's own aches and pains. Other people can be very difficult indeed. As a character in Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Huis Clos* famously puts it, 'Hell is other people.' One might add that heaven is other people too, but that's another story.

In Buddhist literature, and even in Buddhist life, the lofty ideal of forbearance is sometimes carried to impressive extremes. For instance, there is the parable of

the saw. The Buddha one day called all his disciples together and said, ‘Monks, suppose you were going through the forest one day and you were seized by highwaymen; and suppose they took a sharp, two-handed saw, and sawed you limb from limb. If in your mind there arose the least thought of ill will, you would not be my disciple.’[132] This, then, is the sort of extreme to which this ideal can – and as an ultimate aim, should – be carried. It isn’t just a question of gritting your teeth and bearing it while feeling angry and resentful inside. The Buddha’s teaching makes it clear that forbearance is essentially a positive mental attitude, an attitude of love.

Having told the parable of the saw, the Buddha goes on to say, ‘Herein, bhikkhus, you should train thus: ‘When men speak evil of you, thus must you train yourselves: Our hearts shall be unwavering, no evil word will we send forth, but compassionate of others’ welfare will we abide, of kindly heart without resentment. And that man who thus speaks will we suffuse with thoughts accompanied by love, and so abide. And making that our standpoint, we will suffuse the whole world with loving thoughts, far reaching, wide spreading, boundless, free from hate, free from ill will, and so abide. Thus must you train yourselves.’[133]

The most succinct expression of this kind of forbearance is to be found in the *Dhammapada*, which says, ‘Forbearance is the greatest asceticism.’[134] The word being translated as asceticism is *tapo*, which generally refers to penance, austerities, practices of self-mortification. There were lots of these in ancient India. People would fast for months on end, or reduce their food to a few grains of rice a day, or every other day, or once a week. They would hang head downwards from a tree and meditate like that, or stand with one hand in the air and keep it there for months until it withered away. Then there was a famous practice called the *paňca agni tapasya*, the asceticism of the five fires. To do this, you kindled fires at the four cardinal points, and when they were blazing hot you sat in between them, with the sun – the fifth fire – directly overhead. There are references to all these kinds of self-mortification in the Pāli scriptures; they were enormously popular in the Buddha’s day.’[135] Many people regarded them as means to salvation, believing that the more the flesh was mortified, the finer, purer, more subtle and more enlightened the spirit became.

But the Buddha didn’t agree. And he was speaking from experience; he had tried it all for six years unremittingly, and he had found that it didn’t work. In fact he came to see that – as he is quoted as saying in the *Dhammapada* – it is patience, forbearance, which is the greatest *tapo*, the greatest asceticism. If you want to practise asceticism, there is no need to seek out special opportunities. There is no need to sit between five fires. Just live in the midst of everyday life.

That will give you opportunities enough for the practice of forbearance. If you bear the trials and difficulties of life well, you are practising the best – and most difficult – possible kind of asceticism.

The Greek term *askein* was a very positive term which meant ‘to train’. It is unfortunate that in English the original meaning has been lost, because we do perhaps need a word with a religious or spiritual connotation which is expressive of that particular concept. Thinking of asceticism as training, everything we do as Buddhists is asceticism. It is not asceticism in the negative sense of the term to get up at six o’clock in the morning to meditate. It is simply a training. In the same way, silence is a training; ethics is a training; everything is a training.

But whether it is appropriate to use the word asceticism to refer to that training is perhaps questionable. These days it brings to mind hair-shirts, not athletic prowess. It seems strange that it should be so difficult to undo the meaning that words acquire, but it’s as though one can’t undo history. For many people the word ‘discipline’ has similarly negative connotations. Again, the word can be used positively – for example, one speaks of a discipline in the sense of a particular branch of study – but another meaning of the word discipline is the whip that the Christian monk uses to chastise himself. So although one can live a disciplined life in a very positive sense as a Buddhist, not everyone will respond positively to the idea of the Buddhist life as being a life of discipline. Indeed, some people are going to prefer to lead a chaotic, spontaneous kind of Buddhist life.

The second aspect of kṣānti is tolerance. This can be illustrated by a story from Buddhist history. In the thirteenth century the Mongols were converted to Buddhism by a great Tibetan spiritual master called Phagpa, who was the head at that time of the Sakya School, one of the four great schools of Tibetan Buddhism. A man of great influence, ability, and prestige, he was the spiritual teacher of the great emperor of China and Mongolia, Kublai Khan. In gratitude to Phagpa for his teaching, Kublai Khan gave him secular jurisdiction over the whole of Tibet. Indeed, such was his enthusiasm that Kublai Khan wanted to pass a law throughout his domains compelling all Buddhists to follow the Sakya teaching.

One might think that Phagpa would have been pleased about that, but not at all. In fact, he dissuaded Kublai Khan from passing that law, saying that everybody should be free to follow the form of Buddhism they liked best. Such, he said, is the ancient Buddhist tradition. This tolerant attitude is typical of Tibetan Buddhists to this day. In fact, it has been the attitude of Buddhists everywhere, at all times. The exceptions have been very few indeed – perhaps a handful of serious but small-scale instances of Buddhist intolerance. This is in

striking contrast to the history of the Christian Church, which, especially during the Middle Ages, involved so many instances of intolerance, fanaticism, and persecution that these things seem to have been the rule, not the exception. One has only to think of the ruthless destruction of the pagan culture of Western Europe, the wholesale massacre of heretics like the Cathars, the Albigenses, and the Waldenses, the sad and sorry story of the Inquisition and the Crusades, the witch burnings later on. All these things represented the official policy of the whole body of the Church, and everybody from the Pope downwards was involved, even some of those who were considered to be saints. One gets the impression of something almost pathological about this version of Christian history. Some people say that all this doesn't represent real Christianity. Perhaps so, but it has to be said that there are strong traces of intolerance in the Gospels themselves. The evidence suggests that Christianity had a tendency towards intolerance from the beginning, and has continued to be intolerant in many quarters right down to the present day. The only difference nowadays would seem to lie in the fact that Christian churches no longer wield sufficient power to be able to harm those who disagree with them.

It would seem that intolerance, exclusiveness, and a tendency towards persecution and fanaticism are characteristic of all forms of monotheism. If one attempted to teach Buddhism in a Muslim country, even today, one would probably pay dearly for it. But Buddhism is non-theistic: it doesn't teach belief in a personal God, a supreme being, nor does it hold that religion consists in submission to or faith in such a supreme being. According to Buddhist teaching every individual is responsible for his or her own spiritual destiny; and you can't be responsible without freedom to choose the form in which you follow that destiny. This is why there are so many different forms of Buddhism. Generally speaking they are not sects or rival bodies claiming exclusive possession of Buddhist truth; they all represent particular aspects of the one total tradition.

Although Buddhism teaches tolerance, not only towards all forms of Buddhism but towards all other religions, it isn't vague. Its tolerance is not the woolly kind that simply blurs distinctions. Buddhist tolerance is not pseudo-universalist. But while it is clear about the truth of things, it does not impose its truth-teachings on others. It is perhaps tempting to think that the more confident one is in the truth of what one believes, the more right one has to impose one's views on other people, and the greater their stupidity if they won't accept what one says. But Buddhist faith does not work like this. Buddhists should have a clear understanding of such precise, well thought-out teachings as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, conditioned co-production, śūnyatā, and so on. But perfect freedom is extended to other people to think differently. Buddhists

don’t – or shouldn’t – become upset or feel threatened or undermined at the thought that elsewhere in the world, even in their own environment, there are people who don’t accept what they accept, who don’t believe that the Buddha was Enlightened, who don’t believe that the Noble Eightfold Path leads one to nirvāṇa, who reject all that.

At the same time, it is important that Buddhists should state their views clearly, and this in itself may seem to present a challenge or even a threat. One doesn’t want to attack anyone’s beliefs for the sake of it; but teaching the Dharma traditionally has two aspects – propagating the truth and dispelling error – and sometimes the two are closely connected. You can’t express a non-theistic point of view without rejecting, and giving reasons for rejecting, belief in a personal God. Of course, that will be taken by some people as an attack on the notion of God, or on God himself. Buddhists in the West are sometimes afraid, or at least reluctant, to emphasize points of difference.

One can’t help feeling disappointed when Buddhist teachers prevaricate on the question of God. They know perfectly well that Buddhism is a non-theistic teaching, that belief in an Iśvara, a creator God, is rejected in all the Buddhist sources. But – perhaps out of concern to make some sort of common cause with Christianity – they sometimes not only play down the non-theistic character of Buddhism, but even let it appear that Buddhism is not in fact non-theistic. That is very unfortunate. To insist on this point may create antagonism, but as a Buddhist one has to take that risk. We must be completely honest about what we believe; otherwise, what is our so-called freedom of speech worth? We don’t have to be aggressive or provocative; we can say what we have to say in a reasonable and positive and friendly way. One should never indulge in purely negative, destructive criticism, but one shouldn’t prevaricate or conceal one’s views.

It is difficult for people with a Christian background to understand the nature of Buddhism. It is difficult to overcome one’s tendency to see things in a particular way, and one needs to make a very definite effort to do so. In 1840 Carlyle wrote that at the time he was writing it was difficult for people to understand or imagine the seriousness with which people in the seventeenth century took the Christian religion, and the conviction with which they believed that God was personally intervening in national politics, military campaigns, and so on. It would have been very difficult for a person of the seventeenth century in England to imagine a social order that was not solidly based on the rock of the Word of God. They honestly believed, if they considered it at all, that if people ceased to believe in God – or the Trinity, or the Incarnation – society would immediately fall apart.

Christians approaching Buddhism are in a similar position. Even if they make a sincere attempt to understand it, they are likely still to be operating with their own assumptions and concepts and trying to accommodate Buddhism within those. For instance, there's the hoary old chestnut of how it is that Buddhists, who do not believe in God, can worship the Buddha. People think they'll have you wriggling on a pin trying to explain this awful contradiction in your religion. When you lay out the reasoning step by step, the explanation is usually quite clear to them, but it represents a point of view that they had simply been unable to conceive of before.

It works the other way round too. There are Buddhists in Thailand who find it impossible to understand how any sensible human being could believe in a God who created the world. The idea makes them fall about laughing. They don't even have a word in their language for God, and it takes Christian missionaries a great deal of time and trouble to explain to them the weird notion of a personal God who has made the heavens and the earth. We have to try always to transcend the limitations of our own point of view, and at least try to imagine the possibility that someone believes something we don't. We can still reject it, but at least we won't find it incredible that someone should believe in that particular idea.

While the kind of tolerance of religious diversity which allows everyone the freedom to choose which spiritual path to follow is clearly crucial, it is equally important to speak out against views that are spiritually harmful, 'wrong views', as the Buddha called them (the Pāli term is *micchā-diṭṭhi*). A wrong view that needs to be addressed these days – perhaps rather more urgently even than belief in a personal God – is one that is often linked, and sometimes confused, with tolerance: pseudo-egalitarianism.

One way of thinking about pseudo-egalitarianism is that it is the denial of the superior achievements of certain individuals and even groups. True egalitarianism is the faith that all beings everywhere have an infinite capacity to develop as individuals, and to cultivate particular positive qualities of their own humanity to an infinite degree. Pseudo-egalitarianism is the unthinking assumption that everybody is quite literally equal and to be treated accordingly. This has become more or less a form of orthodoxy – neo-orthodoxy, one could say.

In the Middle Ages and even later it was considered unthinkable to question such doctrines as the divinity of Christ and the Trinity of the Godhead. So far as most people were concerned, if you did question them, you were so clearly flying in the face of an obvious truth that you must be either utterly stupid or inconceivably wicked. All decent, right-thinking people would automatically

react against you. They might even want to imprison you or burn you at the stake. There was no question of sitting down and talking with you about it – you were so obviously just plain wrong. This is orthodoxy: the belief that somebody is so obviously wrong that they cannot be reasoned with, but only disposed of. And what I am calling neo-orthodoxy is like that too – not a belief in this or that particular doctrine, but the attitude that if someone holds a certain view, there is no point in entering into discussion with them. In fact, it is almost impossible nowadays to say what one thinks, even in our Western 'democracies'. We don't have freedom of speech; in practice there are certain 'politically correct' things that one is allowed to say and certain things that one is not.

How does a tolerant belief or teaching or organization protect itself from an intolerant one? This is an extremely difficult question. Usually people who believe in tolerance also believe in non-violence; there is no question of defending oneself by violent means. So what can one do? Is one to allow oneself to be completely overwhelmed?

The only answer that presents itself – and it may not be a complete one – is that one must be far-sighted, diplomatic, even cunning. One must see the danger coming and take steps to counteract it before it reaches a point where only violent means would be effective. One must not hesitate to take full advantage of the law when it is on one's own side. And one must engage freely and vigorously in debate, presenting and arguing one's point of view, not letting one's case go by default. It is particularly important to protest against any misrepresentation of the Dharma. The Buddha himself corrected misunderstandings of his teachings, there's no doubt about that. And one can make such protests without becoming irate or hysterical.

The third aspect of kṣānti I want to draw out here is spiritual receptivity. This time our illustration comes from chapter 2 of the *White Lotus Sūtra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka*). This chapter opens with the Buddha sitting surrounded by his disciples: Arhants, Bodhisattvas, and so on – hundreds and thousands of them. The Buddha is seated cross-legged in the midst of the assembly, with his eyes half-closed and his hands folded on his lap, immersed in profound meditation. He sits there for a long, long time. Being Arhants, Bodhisattvas, and other highly developed beings, those in the assembly don't start fidgeting and coughing. They just sit there with him quietly, until eventually he emerges from his meditation. And when he does so, he makes an announcement. He says that the ultimate truth is very difficult to perceive. Even if he tried to explain it, he says, nobody would understand; it is so profound and vast, it so transcends all human capacity, that no one would be able to fathom it.

Naturally his disciples entreat him at least to try to communicate this truth to

them, and eventually the Buddha agrees. He says that he will now proclaim to them a teaching that is further, higher, deeper than anything they have heard before, a teaching that will make their previous understanding seem childish. But when he says this, a whole group of the gathered disciples – the text says five thousand – start murmuring among themselves, 'Something further? Something higher? Something we haven't understood? Something we haven't realized? Impossible!' And they just walk out, all five thousand of them.[136]

Their action is motivated by a natural human tendency that can be especially strong in those trying to lead a spiritual life. The tendency is to think that one has nothing more to learn, that one has sorted everything out. Of course, we are not complete fools. We'll *say*, 'Oh yes, I've got a lot more to learn. I know I don't know everything' – but we don't mean it, we don't feel it. We don't really connect with what such a statement implies: that we might need actually to change the way we think and behave. Learning something new might involve changing our whole attitude.

It isn't just a question of acquiring additional information. It doesn't mean that having learned all about the Madhyamaka School, one should be open-minded about further historical developments and the arising of sub-schools. Receptivity means being prepared for a radical change in one's whole mode of being, one's whole way of life, one's whole way of looking at things. And it's this we resist – it's this we protect ourselves against.

The Mahāyāna teaches an aspect of kṣānti called the *anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*, the acquiescence in the truth that all phenomena are in reality illusory, nonexistent, unproduced, and undifferentiated. The general sense of this is that there are certain teachings or realizations which, when one comes into contact with them for the first time, one finds deeply disturbing. They shake one's whole being to the very core, to the extent that one finds it very difficult to accept them. The *anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti* consists essentially in the attitude of not offering any resistance to these higher truths when one encounters or experiences them.

The particular higher truth referred to here is the truth that dharmas, the most irreducible elements of existence, do not in reality come into existence. Earlier Buddhist tradition spoke of dharmas as arising, persisting momentarily, and then ceasing. But the Mahāyāna teaching maintains that however minutely we may analyse our experience, the dharmas into which we analyse it cannot be said to represent actual separable entities – thus dharmas do not even come into existence. The Bodhisattva is able to accept this teaching without any resistance, and this sort of receptivity is referred to as a kind of ksānti.[137] This non-resistance is clearly very difficult to achieve; indeed, it is a characteristic of the 'irreversible' Bodhisattva, a Bodhisattva who has reached a very advanced stage

of the path indeed. (What this ‘irreversibility’ amounts to we shall see in Chapter 7.)

The natural tendency is to think that anything one doesn’t understand must be nonsense, and should be rejected without further thought. kṣānti clearly involves a lack of that kind of pride: an intellectual humility, the recognition that you don’t know everything – in fact, that you don’t know anything at all. With that sort of attitude, you are much more likely to be open to new experience or knowledge. All of this is implied in the term kṣānti.

Spiritual receptivity is of the utmost importance; without it, spiritual progress simply cannot be maintained. We need to hold ourselves open to the truth as the flower holds itself open to the sun. This is what spiritual receptivity means: holding ourselves open to the higher spiritual influences that are streaming through the universe, but with which we are not usually in contact, because we usually shut ourselves off from them. We should be ready if necessary to give up whatever we’ve learned so far, which isn’t easy by any means, and to give up whatever we have *become* so far, which is still more difficult.

How does one become spiritually receptive in this way? For a start, one can pray. As a Buddhist one need not be too scared of the idea of prayer. It doesn’t necessarily have theistic connotations. When a Tibetan Buddhist engages in an activity he calls ‘prayer’, he is not praying to God in the sense of the creator of heaven and earth, because such a conception is not part of the Tibetan Buddhist system of belief. He is praying to the Buddha, the Bodhisattvas, or the dākinīs.[138]

Prayer in its proper sense, anyway, is not for material things, but for blessings, higher understanding, wisdom, compassion. One’s prayers simply express the fact that one doesn’t have those qualities and would like to have them. If you want something in an ordinary sense, you just say to someone, ‘Please pass me the toast,’ ‘Please give me some money,’ or whatever it may be. In the case of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, they have got wisdom and compassion, which you haven’t got but would like to have, so your aspiration to develop wisdom and compassion takes the form of a request to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to *give* you those qualities. As an informed Buddhist, you know very well that wisdom and compassion cannot be handed over like a slice of toast. But nonetheless you continue to use the language of petition. Why?

The reason is that the nature of language almost compels us to think of wisdom and compassion as qualities that can be acquired or received. If we use the language of prayer, we do so because it has a certain emotive value, and expresses an openness and receptivity. It certainly doesn’t reflect a literal belief that one can be given those qualities by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In any case, one understands that those Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not really separate

from oneself. They can be regarded as symbolizing unrealized states of one's own being that one is trying to activate through prayer.

Prayer, understood in this way, is not out of place in Buddhism. It is very different from meditation. And it isn't that one is thinking, 'I'll make a pretence of asking, but I know I've really got to do it myself.' When one is praying, one really *feels* that one hasn't got what one desires, and that one must therefore ask for it. One may have an intellectual understanding that it is all within oneself, but that is not one's experience when one is praying. If one experiences the desire to pray, there is no need to stop oneself on the strength of a purely rational understanding that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are not really 'out there'.

Quite a few people over the years have told me that sometimes they feel like praying to the Buddha or to Bodhisattvas but that they tend consciously to inhibit the impulse, thinking that it is a weakness, and not a very Buddhistic one, to imagine that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can give one anything. Surely, they say, any truly spiritual goal can be achieved only by one's own efforts.

My reply is always that if one feels like praying, one should go ahead and do it, and work out the 'theology' later. If it is a genuine feeling, don't suppress it. At the very least, prayer is a means of concentrating one's emotional energies. And in any case, it is as true to say that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are outside oneself as that they are within. Either way, one is still operating within the subject-object duality. It is no more valid to think of them as existing in the depths of one's own being than to think of them as existing beyond anything one can experience or conceive of. Both are equally real – or equally unreal. Whether one thinks of that reality (which is neither subject nor object) as a sort of super-object outside oneself or a super-subject within oneself doesn't make any difference.

The experience of many poets is rather like this. Poetic inspiration can be experienced as welling up from within or as coming in from outside. Some poets genuinely experience being visited by the Muses, so to speak. But whether poetic inspiration is called up from within or called down from above amounts to the same thing. Language has severe limitations here. One is trying to introduce into one's experience within the subject-object duality something which is beyond it, and which can be thought of either as emerging from within the depths of one's own being or as something transcendentally aloof towards which one must direct one's prayers and aspirations.

There are a number of differences between this and Christian prayer. Firstly, Buddhists do not postulate the Buddha, even conceived of as a Buddha to whom one can pray, as exercising any sort of cosmic function as creator, preserver, and so on. Also, for Christians, the God to whom they pray is genuinely an object,

part of the objective universe, so to speak. But for the Buddhist, the Buddha, though experienced as an object, is in reality only a symbolic object, even a pseudo-object. At present our experience is entirely within the subject-object framework, and the minute we think of that which is beyond that framework, we make it an object. If we postulate an object – that is, the Buddha – to symbolize that which is neither subject nor object, then this Buddha-object is an object only in a purely formal and symbolic sense, whereas the God of Christian theology is an object in a real sense. If you pray to God, you are a real subject praying to a real object, but if you pray to the Buddha, you are a symbolic subject praying to a symbolic object so as to transcend the subject-object duality altogether. That is the difference. But, as I said, we can leave aside all the metaphysics. If one wants to pray as an expression of kṣānti, of spiritual receptivity, one can simply do it.

To balance kṣānti in all its forms we need *vīrya*. The word presents us with no difficulties; it means potency, driving force, energy, vigour. It comes from the same Indo-Aryan root as the English word *virility*, and also *virtue*, which originally meant 'strength'. In specifically Buddhist terms, as defined by Śāntideva, vīrya is 'energy in pursuit of the good' – good here meaning Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.[139]

So vīrya doesn't mean just ordinary activity. If one is rushing here and there all day doing this and that, being busy, getting through a lot of work, one is not necessarily practising vīrya. In his *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Gampopa defines laziness as being constantly active in subduing enemies and hoarding money.[140] If we take 'subduing enemies' as representing politics and 'hoarding money' as representing business, Gampopa is saying that to engage, however energetically, in either politics or business is simply laziness, however apparently busy one may be.

In a sense, all the other pāramits depend upon vīrya. To give, one needs a certain amount of energy. To practise the precepts, one needs energy. To meditate, one needs energy. Even to practise patience and forbearance one needs energy, at least in the form of resistance to one's own negative impulses. To develop wisdom one needs a deeper concentration of energy than is needed for anything else. So this particular pāramitā is crucially important – and it confronts us with perhaps the main problem of the spiritual life.

The problem is this: we have, let us say, a spiritual ideal, an ideal of a state, or an experience, or a goal that we want to reach. Let us say that our spiritual ideal is the Bodhisattva ideal itself, and that we have a clear intellectual understanding of this ideal. We have read or heard about it, we have understood it, we could give a connected account of it if anybody asked us. But despite our clear

intellectual understanding of the ideal and our genuine acceptance of it, somehow we don't manage to attain it. The months, the years, even the decades, go by, and although we have still got this ideal, we don't seem to have made any perceptible progress towards it. Indeed, we feel as though we're just where we started.

Why is this? We are clear about the ideal, we know what we have to do. We even make an effort – well, an intermittent effort, every now and then, for an hour or two. But nothing seems to happen. It's as though one were to stand at the foot of Mount Kanchenjunga and look up at the snow peak, and then, twenty years later, one were to find oneself at more or less the same spot. Why do we make no definite progress? The answer is almost certainly that we don't have enough vīrya. But why should this be? Why should we have no energy, no drive, for the living of the spiritual life, for the realization of the ideal? After all, far from being short of energy, we are embodiments of energy, crystallizations of psychophysical, even spiritual, energy. Our whole body, our whole mind, is made up of energy. We *are* energy.

The reason is usually that our energy is dissipated. Like a stream that is broken up into thousands of channels so that it loses its force, our energy flows out over innumerable objects, divided in numberless directions. Only a little of it goes into the spiritual life; the rest goes into all sorts of things that work *against* spiritual life, and we can end up feeling pulled apart and exhausted. Thus the real problem, the central problem even, of the spiritual life is how to conserve and unify our energies. And to do this, we have to understand the way in which our energies are at present being dissipated. Generally, one may say, either they are blocked, or they leak away and are wasted, or they are simply too coarse and unrefined.

One's energies may be blocked for various reasons. Perhaps one has been brought up to repress one's emotions, not to show or express them. It may be that one spends a lot of one's time engaged in routine work into which one can't put one's energy. One's energy may be blocked simply because one has no positive, creative outlet for it. Sometimes emotional energies are blocked on account of frustrations, disappointments, or fear of being hurt; or on account of unhelpful conditioning or education, especially of a heavy-handed religious kind. In all these ways our energies congeal, harden, petrify within us. Above all, perhaps, energy is blocked by the absence of meaningful communication. Real communication has an energizing, almost electrifying effect – it really seems as if two people can spark each other off.

Emotional energies are also just wasted, just allowed to leak away. This happens in all sorts of ways, but especially through indulgence in negative

emotions. Negativity – fear, hatred, anger, ill will, antagonism, jealousy, self-pity, guilt, remorse, anxiety – wastes energy at a catastrophic rate. This is not usually just an occasional indulgence of ours. One needs only cast one's mind back over the last twenty-four hours to see how often one has given way to these mental states – and it all means the haemorrhaging of energy. Then there are the verbal expressions of these negative emotions: grumbling, carping criticism, fault-finding, doom and gloom mongering, discouraging others, gossip, and nagging. Through all these channels energy drains away and becomes unavailable for spiritual purposes.

Thirdly, emotional energy is not available for the living of the spiritual life because it is too coarse. Spiritual life requires spiritual energy. We can't meditate with our muscles, however strong and powerful they are; meditation requires something more refined. Our energy, even our emotional energy, may be unavailable for the spiritual life because it is simply too coarse-grained.

There are various ways of unblocking, conserving, and refining our energy. Blocks can be dissolved through cultivating awareness particularly of one's own mental states, engaging in genuinely creative or at least productive work, and intensifying communication. And of course some blockages get resolved spontaneously in the course of meditation practice.

To stop wasting energy, one begins by becoming aware that one is indulging in negative emotions, and then trying to cultivate the opposite emotion: love instead of hate, confidence instead of fear, and so on. As for verbal expressions of negative emotions, these just have to be stopped by an act of will. There's nothing else that one can do about them, and they don't deserve any better treatment.

Another way of conserving energy is to introduce more silence into one's life. An enormous amount of our energy goes into talking. If one is silent for a while – a few minutes, a few hours, perhaps even a day spent quietly at home by oneself – energy accumulates within one in a wonderful way, and one feels calm, peaceful, aware, mindful. It's as though a clear fresh spring of energy bubbles up inside, pure and untouched, because it is contained within oneself, not expressed outwardly in any way.

The coarser emotional energies can be refined through practices that develop faith and devotion, like the Sevenfold Puja, and through the fine arts – music, painting, poetry, and so on. Some Buddhists maintain that the arts constitute a refined distraction from spiritual practice, but this is to miss the point. One's emotional energies have to be refined and focused if they are to be available for the spiritual life, for the practice of all the perfections, which the Bodhisattva must practise in order to attain Buddhahood.

When his or her energies are all flowing in this one direction, no longer divided, the Bodhisattva becomes the embodiment of energy. At the same time there is no hurry, no fuss, no restless busyness – just continuous, seamless activity for the benefit of all sentient beings. Sāntideva says that the Bodhisattva is like an elephant (a highly complimentary comparison in the Indian literary tradition, by the way). The elephant, especially the male elephant, is a playful beast, and he loves to bathe in lotus ponds. He merrily squirts water over himself, and trumpets, and plucks great bunches of lotus flowers, washes them carefully, and eats them. In this way he passes the day very happily. As soon as he has finished playing in one pond, he plunges into another. And the Bodhisattva is like that. As soon as one task is finished he dives straight into another with equal delight.[141]

So if one is a Bodhisattva, one doesn't think that one is doing anything very special. One doesn't think 'Well, here I am, working for the benefit of all sentient beings.' One's manifestation of energy is selfless, a spontaneous bubbling up like a fountain, an uncontrived blossoming like a flower unfolding. Sometimes the Bodhisattva's activity is spoken of as a *līlā* – a sport, a sort of game that the Bodhisattva plays. This is how he or she experiences the manifestation of the perfections, the different aspects of the path to Enlightenment, and eventually the great game of Buddhahood, the manifestation of Enlightenment itself. The word *līlā* is used more commonly in Hinduism than in Buddhism, but it is to be found in some Buddhist texts. Furthermore, the term *lalita* – which, like *līlā*, can mean 'play' – occurs in the title of a Mahāyāna biography of the Buddha called the *Lalitavistara*, a compound word which might be translated as 'The Extended Account of the Play [of the Buddha]'.[142]

The Mahāyāna, broadly speaking, taught what might almost be described as a docetic Buddhology. Docetism was the belief, which arose in early Christianity, that the body of Jesus was only apparent (from the Greek *dokeo*, 'appear, seem'), not real. This doctrine, which was especially prevalent among second-century Gnostics, stressed the divinity of Christ and denied any physical suffering on his part.

The Mahāyāna version of this arose from its teaching that the Bodhisattva career extended over three asamkhyeyas of kalpas. According to tradition, the Buddha-to-be spent the life before the one in which he gained Enlightenment in a god realm called the Tuṣita devaloka. We can imagine that after all those lifetimes of spiritual practice, by the time the Bodhisattva arrives in the Tuşita devaloka and is waiting there to be reborn as the son of Suddhodana and Māyādevī, he is a very advanced being indeed. From our point of view he is probably indistinguishable from a Buddha. And he is not at that time under the

power of karma. So – this is where the ‘docetism’ comes in – it is almost as though he emanates from himself a ray that descends into the womb of Māyādevī and is eventually, to all appearances, reborn. He does not lose his virtually Enlightened consciousness in the process. It requires just a few virtually effortless steps for him to attain supreme, perfect Enlightenment.

Looking at it in this way, all the events of the Buddha’s life could be said to happen not in reality, but as a sort of play. He doesn’t need to learn anything; he just plays at learning. He doesn’t need to get married. And he doesn’t really have a son, according to the Mahāyāna. Indeed, according to at least some Mahāyāna sūtras, the Buddha’s son Rāhula was himself an emanation from a higher world. In the same way Siddhārtha’s leaving home was a play, his studying with various teachers was a play. According to some Mahāyāna sūtras, even the gaining of Enlightenment itself was a play, because in a sense he had already gained it.[143]

At whatever level of transcendental attainment, the Bodhisattva just plays. One can regard this as a spontaneous overflowing of his or her inner realization, which transcends the immediate situation. He or she appears to participate in the immediate situation, but really it isn’t so; it is all a Īlā. ‘Play’ here is the apparent participation of a more highly developed being in a lower level of functioning, without being limited by it in the way an ordinary person would be. This teaching is quite prominent in some aspects of the Mahāyāna, though it doesn’t feature at all in the Theravāda.

The Bodhisattva takes things very lightly, in a sense. It has been said that to worldly people, ‘spiritual’ people appear frivolous because they don’t care about the things that matter to worldly people. If you are spiritually minded and you lose something, or you are not given something you were expecting, you tend to take it quite lightly, whereas a more worldly-minded person would take it very seriously indeed. In the same way, the spiritually minded person regards as a joke things that worldly people don’t find at all funny, because he or she has a greater sense of proportion. It has been said that one of the elements of humour is a sense of proportion, a sense of relative fitness. For instance, one might see a politician delivering a speech so pompously and with such self-importance that one can’t help laughing, because one can see that he is not as important as he thinks he is, or as he is trying to appear.

According to the Pāli Canon, the Buddha did say on one occasion that to laugh in such a way as to show the teeth is to be mad,[144] but perhaps one shouldn’t take this too literally. Perhaps he was thinking of uncontrollable laughter – just abandoning oneself to it, throwing oneself around and laughing in a raucous, crude, unmindful way. The Buddha himself is almost always represented with a gentle smile; and even the Abhidharma – and you can’t get much more austere

than that – lists ‘the smile of the Arhant’ among its classifications.[145] So the Abhidharma itself has a place for something like līlā, something spontaneous, just for its own sake – for the smile of the Arhant is said to be without karmic significance. Perhaps the Buddha’s smile arises from his perception of the incongruity between the conditioned and the Unconditioned; or perhaps he smiles a little at the mess unenlightened human beings get themselves into, though at the same time he responds to them with deep compassion.

Does a sense of humour have a part to play in the life of a Buddhist? Here one has to be very careful. Humour is often negative, and sometimes cruel, even sadistic or cynical. Cynicism can represent a fear of positive emotion, including one’s own positive emotion, and a fear of being taken in; and sometimes it can be a more or less refined expression of basic negativity and anger. People are often unaware of this; it can be interesting to examine more closely the things that one finds oneself laughing at. There is also a certain style of humour that goes with one’s nationality; one needs to be aware that what one thinks is funny may be simply unintelligible to people from another culture.

But humour can be a good thing. Freud speaks of wit in terms of energy release;[146] sometimes if you really let yourself go, notwithstanding the Buddha’s dim view of extravagant laughter, innocent merriment can have an energizing and freeing effect. At its most innocent, humour is to do with not taking oneself too seriously. It is easy to fall into an attitude of regarding some trivial aspect of one’s own life or work as being of world-shattering importance. It is important to cultivate a sense of proportion with regard to oneself and one’s own achievements and affairs. You need be no less serious or hard-working, but you won’t be taking yourself seriously in that self-absorbed, egoistic way.

This idea of spiritual life as a playful bubbling up of transcendental energy is a prominent feature in Indian thought and religious life. Some people take religion very seriously, even to the extent of feeling that it is somehow blasphemous to laugh in church – but the Bodhisattva’s life isn’t like that. It’s a game, a play, a sport. That is, it is an end in itself, uncalculating, natural, and enjoyable.

Vīrya is clearly the more active, assertive, creative of this pair of pāramitās, while kṣānti is the more passive, receptive, and quiescent. Between them they represent a definite polarity in the spiritual life, and two radically different approaches to spiritual practice, one stressing self-help, do-it-yourself, self-exertion, while the other emphasizes dependence upon a power outside oneself, reliance – in some cases – on divine grace. The first is the attitude of getting up and doing things oneself, while the other involves sitting back and letting things happen.

In India they have a rather charming way of referring to these two approaches:

one, they say, is the monkey attitude, and the other is the kitten attitude. When the baby monkey is born, it clings on to its mother's fur with a very tight grip. Admittedly the mother is carrying the baby, but the baby monkey still has to hold on with its. own strength. The kitten, by contrast, is completely helpless; its mother has to pick it up by the scruff of its neck and carry it. In the Indian traditions, the monkey type of approach is associated with *jñāna* or wisdom. The wise person is self-reliant and self-motivated. But the attitude of the kitten is associated with *bhakti*, the path of devotion, a feeling of dependence upon some divine power or ideal superior to oneself.

These two approaches are generally held to be contradictory, even mutually exclusive – either you depend on your own efforts, or you depend upon another power – and Buddhism is usually held to be a religion of self-help rather than self-surrender. But neither of these statements is strictly true. In Japanese Buddhism the two approaches are represented respectively by Zen Buddhism and Shin Buddhism, Zen stressing reliance on *jiriki*, self-power, while Shin, the Jōdo Shin Shu especially, stresses reliance on *tariki*, other-power – the other-power in this case being the spiritual power of the Buddha Amitābha, the Buddha of Infinite Light.

The Buddhist texts make a number of references to the helpful spiritual influences that emanate from the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. These influences are sometimes called 'grace waves', and they are said to come vibrating down from the higher spiritual regions, from Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and to be felt by those who are receptive to them. There is a parallel conception to this in Christianity – the grace of God – but it cannot be said to be equivalent, as Buddhism has no conception of a supreme being. These grace waves arise essentially within oneself – just not within the self we usually experience. They arise from depths, or descend from heights if you prefer, of which one is not usually conscious, but to which one's awareness can be extended, and which can, in a sense, be included within one's greatly enlarged self.

The point to be grasped here is that the word 'Bodhisattva' refers not to an abstract concept, but to a spiritual reality. In other words, Bodhisattvas do exist, on some other level from the one we normally inhabit and experience. But what is the connection between these two worlds? What is the connection between ourselves and the Bodhisattvas? After all, a Bodhisattva, by definition, would want to have some sort of connection with us.

Perhaps one could say that there is a sort of mutual tuning in. When you become aware of a Bodhisattva not in an abstract conceptual sense but with your whole being, when you tune in to a Bodhisattva, you are in contact with them, even if it is in a very subtle, attenuated, distant way. Something passes from

them to you, just as something passes to you from anybody with whom you are in contact – physically, emotionally, or on whatever level.

What passes from a Bodhisattva to you is what we have already referred to, translating the Tibetan expression, as ‘grace waves’, also sometimes translated as ‘blessing’. The equivalent Sanskrit word is *adhiṣṭhāna*. Perhaps one shouldn’t think of grace waves as anything special. They simply represent the possibility of communication. Just as when you communicate with another person on your own level the two of you subtly affect each other, in the same way the fact that you are aware of a Bodhisattva and they are aware of you means that you are subtly influenced or affected by them. That sort of influence is what we call grace waves.

But there is another aspect to the Buddhist conception of grace waves that does find a parallel of a kind in at least some forms of Christianity, in which the idea of grace seems to represent something almost arbitrary For instance, in Calvinism there is the concept that some people have been predestined to eternal life not on account of anything they have done, but through the grace of God, which seems to have some of the characteristics of the arbitrary will, the pure whim, of some absolute monarch. One gets the impression of something undeserved.

This conception of grace has some merit, in that, in a sense, we don’t deserve anything: not because we are miserable sinners – such a doctrine has no place in Buddhism – but because there is nothing one can do in a mundane sense to deserve the transcendental, just as one can’t arrive at wisdom by accumulating any amount of merit.

Whether one adopts the self-power or the other-power approach doesn’t matter. In either case one is confronted by the basic distinction between self and other, subject and object. One’s aim is to transcend the distinction between subject and object, so the means adopted must also transcend subject and object. When that starts to happen, progress – insight – really begins. Meanwhile, one has perforce to think in terms either of subject or of object, either of making the effort oneself, or of effort being made on one’s behalf.

In fact, though, it is impossible to separate the two. One may begin by adopting the approach of self-help, but it will soon become obvious that other-power cannot be ignored, while if one adopts the attitude of other-power, one cannot ignore self-help. If, say, in terms of Japanese Shin, one decides to rely entirely upon the vow of Amitābha, that will involve giving up reliance upon self-power. But in practice it takes a lot of effort to give up one’s own will and rely on somebody else’s effort – so it turns out that self-power has to be part of one’s approach.

Likewise, the self-power of, say, Japanese Zen, is never simply that. Take for example something as simple as walking along a road. True, you walk along it by your own effort, but did you build the road? You walk by the 'grace' of the road, as well as by the grace of the law of gravity and the fact of the earth's existence. There are definite limits to self-power; 'self-help', in other words, cannot exclude an objective element. One may make the effort to practise the Dharma, but suppose the Dharma didn't exist for one to practise? Other-power involves self-power, and vice versa. And whichever approach one takes, the aim is to arrive at a point where one is dependent neither on self nor on other, but has transcended that particular dichotomy.

A Bodhisattva combines both approaches, practising both patience and vigour, because both are necessary. Sometimes in spiritual life, as in worldly life, it is necessary to hang on – even to hang on for grim death – to make an effort, to strive and struggle. At other times it is best to let go, let things look after themselves, even let them drift, let them just happen, without interfering.

However, one needs to know when to apply each approach. Broadly speaking, it is safe to assume that a lot of self-effort or vīrya will be necessary at the beginning. Then, once that initial effort has been made, one can begin to rely more upon a power that seems to come from somewhere outside oneself, or at least outside one's present conscious self. If one starts relying on other-power prematurely, one may end up drifting away from the spiritual life altogether.

The Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna likened this to going out in a rowing boat. At first one has to make a lot of effort; it's quite a strain, especially if one is rowing against the stream. But when one finally manages to reach the middle of the river, one can hoist one's sail and the breeze will carry the boat along. In the same way, a great deal of effort is necessary in the early stages of the spiritual life, but a time comes when one makes contact with forces that in a sense are beyond oneself – though in another sense they are part of one's greater self – and these begin to carry one along.

So there is a case for putting vīrya before kṣānti in the list of pāramitās. Not that the list should, in any case, be thought of as being fixed in a particular order. People have different temperaments. If one is predominantly of an impatient, restless, angry temperament, one may need to cultivate kṣānti first, whereas if one tends to be rather sluggish or easy-going, then obviously vīrya is what one needs to concentrate on.

Either way, the successful outcome of these crucial initial stages of one's spiritual life will be finding a balance between kṣānti and vīrya, a balance which is not static but dynamic, which perpetually adjusts itself to changing circumstances. Indeed, any spiritual quality is properly developed only as part of

a rounded development. Develop understanding, by all means, but develop sympathy as well; develop sensitivity, develop tact, develop heroism, develop courage – develop everything.

I have termed the dynamic and the receptive aspects of the spiritual life 'masculine' and 'feminine', and I have suggested that the use of these terms is more or less metaphorical. But it is not *entirely* metaphorical. There is a real correspondence between biological and psychological masculinity and femininity on the one hand, and spiritual masculinity and femininity on the other. What one must bear in mind is that the Bodhisattva combines both. This may seem strange, but the Bodhisattva can be described as being psychologically and spiritually bisexual, integrating the masculine and the feminine at every level of his or her psychological and spiritual experience.

This is reflected in Buddhist iconography. With some representations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas it is hard to discern whether the figure is masculine or feminine. This iconographical convention reflects the psychological and spiritual bisexuality of the Bodhisattva, and indeed of any spiritually developed person.

The idea, or even ideal, of psychological and spiritual bisexuality is unfamiliar to us in the West today, but it was known to the ancient Gnostics, one of the heretical sects of early Christianity. The teaching was quickly stamped out by the Church, but an interesting passage has been preserved in a work known as the Gospel of Thomas, which was discovered in Egypt as recently as 1945. It isn't an orthodox Christian work, but it consists of 112 sayings attributed to Jesus after his resurrection. In the twenty-third of these sayings, Jesus is represented as saying:

> *'When you make the two one,*
> *and make the inside like the outside,*
> *and the outside like the inside,*
> *and the upperside like the underside,*
> *and (in such a way) that you make the man (with) the woman a single one,*
> *in order that the man is not the man and the woman is not the woman;*
> *when you make eyes in place of an eye,*
> *and a hand in place of a hand,*
> *and a foot in place of a foot,*
> *an image in place of an image;*
> *then you will go into the Kingdom.'*[147]

This is not the sort of teaching one normally encounters in church, but it is obviously of profound significance.

In the context of Buddhism the idea or concept, and even the practice, of spiritual bisexuality features most graphically in the Tantra, where it is represented not just by the androgynous appearance of the Bodhisattva, but by the symbol of sexual union. Here, kṣānti, the feminine aspect of the spiritual life, becomes transcendental wisdom, while energy, the masculine aspect, becomes fully realized as compassion. Thus in Tantric Buddhist art one encounters representations of a mythical form of the Buddha in sexual union with a figure who is sometimes described as the female counterpart to his own masculine form. These images are called *yab-yum*, *yab* meaning ‘father’ and *yum* meaning ‘mother’. They are sometimes regarded in the West as being obscene or even blasphemous, but in Tibet such symbolism is regarded as extremely sacred. It has nothing to do with sexuality in the ordinary sense; it is a representation of the highest consummation, the perfect balance, of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, wisdom and compassion. Although there are two figures, there are not two persons. There is only one person, one Enlightened person, within whom are united reason and emotion, wisdom and compassion.

6

ON THE THRESHOLD OF ENLIGHTENMENT

HAVING CONSIDERED HOW the Bodhisattva synthesizes dāna and sīla, kṣānti and vīrya, in his or her life, work, and spiritual experience, now we come to a still more rarefied pair of opposites: *dhyāna* or meditation, and *prajñā* or wisdom. When they are perfected, they bring us to the very threshold of Enlightenment, and the consummation of the establishment aspect of the bodhicitta.

It is with this very subtle level of experience that the kind of language we use – the terms and images by which we try to apprehend it – becomes particularly acute.

Generally, we are presented with two principal modes of human communication: the language of ideas or concepts of rational analysis, and the language of images and archetypes, metaphors, myth, and symbol. The Buddha sometimes taught using the language of concepts and abstract thought, while on other occasions he spoke the language of images, myth, and symbol, and the Buddhist tradition has continued to use both languages. They are of course equally important. The language of concepts engages the conscious mind, the rational intelligence, while the language of images, being more concrete, immediate, and vivid, tends to move us at deeper levels; it appeals to our unconscious depths.

On an intellectual level, Buddhism, historically, is characterized by clarity, honesty, and rigour of thought. The problem from our point of view, is that most of us aren’t accustomed to analysing situations and propositions, to rigorously drawing conclusions from evidence properly adduced. We tend to go on

hunches, bits and pieces of information, and little scraps of knowledge, from which we draw all sorts of weird and wonderful conclusions.

As Buddhists, therefore, we need to challenge one another to think more clearly. We don't have to be nit-picking or unnecessarily controversial, but we do need to make sure that we know what we are talking about. For example, what do the words we use really mean? If they are translations from, say, the Pāli or Sanskrit, do we know how accurate they are? Indeed, are we really clear about the meaning of the terms we use in our own language? Dictionaries are full of interesting surprises.

We don't all have to be intellectuals, but whenever we use language we can try to use it clearly and precisely; otherwise it will give us vague and inaccurate ideas. One does not avoid the undoubted dangers of intellectualism by being sloppy; and sloppy thinking may even hinder one's spiritual development. It is true that transcendental insight itself is independent of conceptual thought, but it doesn't just appear out of nowhere. It arises on the basis of the conceptual expression of the Dharma. It is on the basis of thinking about the concept of impermanence, say, that you develop *insight* into the truth of impermanence. Intellectual understanding comes first; it's a sort of springboard.

When it comes to a refined, precise intellectual concept like śānyatā, this was originally the Buddha's communication of his transcendental experience. How can one get back to the transcendental experience of which the conceptual formulation is an expression unless one thoroughly understands that conceptual expression on its own level? The traditional method for gaining insight is to reflect on some conceptual formulation that expresses the Buddha's insight or that of one of his disciples. By reflecting with one's concentrated mind on a formulation which one has clearly understood, one gets an inkling of its transcendental import.

One could gain insight into the truth of impermanence just by watching a leaf fall. In fact, people have done so. But what would the actual process be? How does one move from that experience to the universal truth of impermanence? It is probably not enough just to see one leaf fall. One must see another leaf fall, and another, and thus come to realize that all leaves fall. One doesn't just see the leaf fall; one's mind goes through certain conceptual processes.

One can develop insight through visualizing an image of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, but one has to recognize the image for what it is. Insight arises through such a practice not because the image visualized is an image of the transcendental, but because one sees it as both real and unreal. In the course of the practice the image comes intensely and vividly to life while at the same time one reflects that it has arisen in dependence on causes and conditions, and is thus

not completely real. Reflecting in this way, one sees that neither the concept ‘real’ nor the concept ‘unreal’ is sufficient to exhaust the true ‘reality’ of the situation. ‘Reality’ transcends real and unreal, existence and nonexistence. Thus the truth is realized with the help of certain conceptual formulations which on their intellectual level reflect the transcendental reality they express. This is the traditional procedure. One doesn’t go directly from perception to insight; there is always the intermediate conceptual stage.

However, meditation is in itself a process of clarifying the mind. In fact, one can’t separate meditation and clear thinking. In all Buddhist traditions, ordinary people with no cultural or intellectual gifts have gained insight. In most cases they have done so having, through meditation, got rid of all mental one-sidedness, all biases, prejudices, preconceptions, and psychological and even cultural conditioning. Their minds can thus function freely and spontaneously.

Meditation includes not only *samatha-bhāvanā*, the development of calm, but *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, the development of insight. By means of *samatha-bhāvanā*, by means of the experience of the dhyānas, one purifies one’s intelligence so that it can recognize the conceptual formulations presented by tradition, or make its own conceptual formulations which then act as a springboard for the development of insight.

Meditation – here I am using the term to signify a combination of samatha and vipassanā – is a union of purified emotion and clarified intelligence. In Buddhist terms it is *cinta-mayī-prajñā* – ‘the wisdom that comes from reflection’ – combined with the emotional positivity of the dhyānas and the four *brahma-vihāras*. This combination, intensified and raised to a higher level, is what brings about the arising of insight. Hence insight is as much an emotional as an intellectual experience. One could say that Buddhism is synonymous with these two things: emotional positivity and intellectual clarity. At their highest level they are compassion and wisdom; and at that level the two, though distinguishable, are inseparable.

Intellectual clarity is not attained by becoming better educated, reading more books, or becoming an intellectual. Indeed, becoming engrossed in theory is as unhelpful as woolly thinking. Wanting to know more and more about the theory and philosophy of Buddhism in a vain attempt to consume as much Buddhism as we can as fast as we can will just give us intellectual indigestion.

Many modern expositions of Buddhism deal so much in concepts, talk so much about Buddhist thought, Buddhist philosophy, and so on, that one can get the impression of something one-sidedly, even overwhelmingly, intellectual. It can seem as if to understand it you have to undergo a rigorous course in logic, metaphysics, and epistemology. But in ancient India, when spiritual teaching

was entirely a matter of oral transmission, people were given exactly what they needed at the time. You couldn't read a book describing the stages of the path to Enlightenment. Perhaps you would be completely ignorant of the very idea of Enlightenment. You would go along to a teacher and he would say, after a bit of conversation or just looking you up and down, 'Go away and do this practice.' You would go away and do it, perhaps for several years, and when you had mastered it thoroughly he would give you some further teaching to practise. You certainly wouldn't be given a theoretical preview.

These days we are constantly being given theoretical previews. We know the path, we know all about the different stages, we know all about prajñā, we know all about the different degrees and levels of śūnyatā. Because we are so familiar with this material theoretically, it is hard for us to distinguish between theoretical knowledge and the kind of knowledge that comes only from experience. And to recognize the difference, we may have to unknow what we know and unlearn what we have learned.

What are we to do, given the amount of Buddhist theory by which we are surrounded? The key, probably, is more and more of less and less: in other words, to focus on a very few texts or teachings or approaches to the Dharma, and deepen our experience of them through reflection and practice and questioning. Indeed, that reflection and questioning itself should be real. Our reflections and questions should be our own – not just a game of rearranging concepts. A real question springs out of one's own experience, even one's own conflict. 'The books and letters which you do not practise – give them up!' is the robust statement of the great Buddhist teacher Padmasambhava.[148]

Western culture being what it is, we are probably going to want to make at least a rapid survey of the whole field. But having made it we should get back to where we actually are, and practise and study accordingly. The Buddha used the language of clear conceptual analysis, but the purpose of that analysis was never merely theoretical.

Sometimes the Buddha made this point by using a completely different language to communicate the Dharma – as when, according to the Zen tradition, on one occasion, in the midst of a gathering of monks, he spoke no words, but simply held up a golden flower. Of all the disciples gathered there just one, Mahākaśyapa, understood what was being communicated, and responded with a smile. And that, they say, is how Zen began. That great spiritual movement, which spread throughout the Far East and produced hundreds of Enlightened masters, sprang not from a system of philosophy, not from a lengthy discourse, but from that one simple action: the holding up of a golden flower, in whose petals all the wisdom of the Buddhas was to be discerned.'[149] That is what

Mahākaśyapa understood, and that is why he smiled. He probably thought to himself that the Buddha had never done anything more wonderful in his whole life than to hold up that golden flower, which even now is continuing to transmit its beauty.

The language of symbolism is a language that we too have to learn to speak. We may be ready, even glib, with the language of ideas and concepts – we may discuss Buddhist philosophy endlessly – but this must be complemented by the language of images. This dimension of communication may be comparatively unfamiliar to us, but by immersing ourselves in legends, myths, and symbols, we can learn to understand and even speak that language.

Both these modes of communication are vital to an understanding – and an experience– of the fifth and sixth perfections, dhyāna and prajñā. As a translation of *dhyāna*, 'meditation' is good enough for practical purposes, although as with so many other terms it is impossible to find a really adequate English equivalent. Basically, dhyāna comprises two things: states of consciousness above and beyond those of the ordinary mind, and meditation practices that lead to the experience of these higher states of consciousness. In the Buddhist tradition there are a number of lists of different levels or dimensions of higher consciousness. Here I want to focus on three: the four dhyānas of the world of form, the four formless dhyānas, and the three gates of liberation. Considered together, these will give us some idea of what dhyāna is – although, of course, any explanation of this kind is no substitute for first-hand experience.

So first, the four dhyānas of the world of form, the four *rūpa dhyānas*, as they are called. The tradition usually enumerates four, but sometimes five are listed, and this sort of discrepancy should remind us not to take these classifications too literally. These four dhyānas may be a useful way of marking successively higher stages of spiritual development, but it is really one continuous, ever-unfolding process.

Traditionally there are two ways of looking at the four dhyānas of the world of form. One way is in terms of psychological analysis: trying to understand the psychological factors present in each of these higher states of consciousness. The other way is in terms of visual images.

Analytically speaking, the first dhyāna, the first of these states of higher consciousness, is characterized by the absence of all negative emotions. Tradition lists these specifically as the five hindrances – lust, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and anxiety, and doubt – but unless *all* negative emotions are suspended, at least for the time being, there can be no entry into higher states of consciousness.

This suspension is generally temporary. People are often surprised at the ease

and speed with which they move from a dhyāna experience to an experience of a very different nature. One can have wonderful meditations on retreat, then a few days later, back at home, it can seem as if one has become another person altogether. In fact, it can happen even more quickly than that. Within minutes of leaving the shrine-room, where apparently one had been deeply absorbed in meditation, one can become annoyed, depressed, lustful, anxious, or whatever it may be.

It is therefore necessary to stabilize one's experience of higher states of consciousness by tightening up one's practice of ethics, and by establishing an overall framework, a more or less systematic conception of the spiritual life within which the dhyāna experience takes place. It is possible almost to force oneself into a dhyāna state by an effort of will, but one won't be able to sustain it because it won't have the support of one's whole being behind it. This can sometimes be why a person who seems not to be making much spiritual progress may have 'good' meditations, while somebody else – who is making progress along a much broader front – perhaps doesn't. It isn't easy to ascertain exactly how people are getting on spiritually, and one should avoid jumping to conclusions. The important thing is consistency, not the occasional brilliant achievement.

Consistency, however, is not the only consideration when it comes to the question of how to go deeper in meditation. Yes, there are the hindrances to meditation to be avoided, and external distractions to keep away from; there is the space and time for one's practice to be found, so that a certain momentum, a continuity to one's awareness, can be developed. But the essence of it is that one must *want* to go deeper. At a certain point, there is going to be a lot of resistance from deep within oneself, from parts that don't want to change, don't want to be exposed. All sorts of excuses for not continuing will arise, and seem very convincing. Only a real desire to overcome this resistance will see one through.

In this respect, meditation is like any other aspect of life: to succeed, one must want to succeed. Otherwise, one won't get far. A lot of people like the idea of making a lot of money, but they don't *really want* to make it; they are not prepared to go all out to make a million dollars by the time they're thirty. People who make money do it by sacrificing absolutely everything else. They think of nothing, day and night, except making that money; all their energies are bent in that direction. It's the same with someone who really wants to be a great writer or a great musician: they throw themselves into it, and in this way find out for sure whether they have it in them or not.

The only difference with meditation is that success is guaranteed. One can spend ten years producing an epic poem, and it may be a second *Paradise Lost*

or a complete failure. But if you spend ten years meditating and you get into dhyāna states, there is no question of those dhyāna states not being the right ones. It is impossible to fail. It is sometimes said in India that if people devoted the same energy and interest to the spiritual life that they devote to material things, success would be assured, and one does see plenty of evidence that this is true. It is very noticeable how someone's energy seems to start flowing again if something they are really interested in doing comes up. Someone who professes to be too tired to go to a Dharma study class will suddenly perk up at the prospect of going to a film they have been wanting to see. If we are interested in something, we will find the energy to do it; and unless we really want to do it, we might just as well not bother.

But how does one transform a purely intellectual recognition of the rightness of something into an ardent desire to achieve it? The only way is to find some emotional connection; one has to want to want – which brings one straight back to the same problem. The only solution is to find out what one truly wants. Then one can try to link one's desire for that with whatever activity or interest or goal it is that as yet one only intellectually recognizes as being of value.

For example, one might be passionately interested in sculpture. At the same time, intellectually one knows that Buddhism makes sense. How is one going to bring head and heart together? To bridge the gap, one could perhaps make a special study of Buddhist sculpture: Gandhāran sculpture, Chinese and Japanese wooden sculpture, and so on. That interest could act as a bridge between what one has a strong feeling for and what one feels one ought to be doing. To put aside one's interest in sculpture and try to study Buddhist philosophy instead would be very difficult. Some people can force themselves for a while to study things they are not interested in, or do things they don't want to do, but no one can do that for very long. At some point there will be a strong reaction from the part of oneself that hasn't been involved and doesn't want to be involved.

So first of all one has to ask oneself, 'What do I really want to do? Do I really want to meditate? Do I really want to study the Dharma? If not, what *do* I want to do? If I had a completely free choice, what would I do?' The answer may come quite readily to mind; or one may find oneself quite thrown by the question. Sometimes one has to stop, not do anything, and allow one's real desires, skilful or unskilful, to surface. Perhaps one has been so busy, so much swept along by the whirlwind of life, that one hasn't even asked oneself what one really wants to do.

Simply asking the question does not have to lead inexorably to indulging dark, unspoken desires. One tends to suspect that if one were to allow one's desires to surface, something dreadful would be sure to come up. Perhaps it will – maybe

one will be shocked by what emerges – but why make that assumption? It is much more likely that what will surface will be some harmless, innocent, yearning which one has never been able to fulfil. And even if one's desires turn out to be unskilful, one may be able to establish some connection between them and something more healthy, skilful, or Dharmic. One might, for instance, discover that one dislikes people, to the extent that one feels quite destructive towards them. Clearly that is unskilful, but it might be possible to transfer that animosity to certain ideas. One could think in terms of annihilating one's own wrong views, fishing around for *micchā-diṭṭhis* lodged deep in one's psyche towards which one could direct one's anger and hatred. Few desires are so irredeemably and utterly negative that they cannot possibly be connected with some aspect of the spiritual life.

Once we have established – if we do – that we want to meditate, our next task is clear: to learn to inhibit – temporarily anyway – at least the grosser manifestations of our negative emotions, and the tradition outlines various ways of doing this. In positive terms, the first dhyāna is characterized by a concentration and unification of all our psychophysical energies. As we saw in considering vīrya, our energies are usually dispersed over a multiplicity of objects. Meditation has a concentrating and unifying effect. A flowing together and concentration of all the energies of our being is characteristic of the first dhyāna and in fact of all four dhyānas, in increasing degrees.

The experience of all the energies coming together, everything flowing freely, concentrated naturally on higher and higher levels, is intensely pleasurable, even blissful. In the first dhyāna this pleasure has both a mental and a physical aspect. The physical aspect is often described as rapture, and it manifests in various ways. One's hair may stand on end, or one may start to cry. Some people, when they start practising meditation, find themselves weeping violently – usually a very healthy and positive sign.

The first dhyāna is also characterized by a certain amount of discursive mental activity. One can enter upon the first dhyāna having suspended all negative emotions, unified one's energies, and experienced various pleasurable sensations, both mental and physical, but some vestige of discursive thought will still remain. It will not be enough to disturb concentration – just a sort of flickering mental activity, perhaps thoughts about the meditation experience itself. After a while this discursiveness will recede to the fringes of one's experience. It creates no real disturbance – one just carries on with one's practice.

In the second dhyāna, discursive mental activity fades away. This is a state in which one is not thinking at all. Some people find this prospect rather

frightening, as though when there is no thought, one must almost cease to exist. However, it is quite possible to be very much awake, aware, and conscious, without any discursive mental activity going on at all. In the second dhyāna one's whole consciousness is heightened, so that one is more alert and aware than usual. Even though the mind is no longer active in a discursive way, one doesn't go into a sleepy or comatose state; a clear, pure, bright state of awareness is still experienced. In the second dhyāna one's psychophysical energies become still more concentrated and unified, and the pleasurable sensations of the first dhyāna, both physical and mental, persist.

Discursive mental activity has already disappeared; in the third dhyāna it is the pleasurable physical sensations that go. The mind is blissful, but those pleasurable sensations are no longer experienced in the body, for the simple reason that consciousness is gradually withdrawn from the body. It is as though one is conscious of one's body as being a long way away, on the periphery of one's experience, rather than right in the centre, as it usually is. Just mental bliss remains, as before but intensified still further.

In the fourth dhyāna there is a further change – or rather, a further change occurs in order for the fourth dhyāna to arise. Now even the mental experience of happiness disappears. Not that one becomes unhappy or uneasy in any way, but the mind passes beyond pleasure and pain. This is difficult to understand – one inevitably tends to think of a state which is neither pleasurable nor painful as being a neutral, grey state – but it isn't like that. In the fourth dhyāna the mind passes beyond even the mental bliss of the previous dhyānas, to enter a state of equanimity. To be paradoxical, one could say that the state of equanimity is even more pleasurable than pleasurable states of mind; but of course the corollary of this does not obtain: one can't say that it is more painful than painful states – it doesn't work like that, fortunately. It is more deeply satisfying than pleasure, a positive peace which is even more blissful than bliss. In the fourth dhyāna, the total energies of one's being are fully integrated, to produce a state of perfect mental and spiritual harmony and equilibrium.

These higher dhyānas being so pleasurable, it is hard to imagine not wanting to experience them, but in practice it is sometimes difficult to enter them. The problem is anxiety. In these higher states, all the familiar sensory signposts disappear. We probably don't realize the extent to which we make ourselves at home in the material world, the *kāmaloka* as it is called in Buddhist tradition. When we begin to find ourselves in a state in which we are not experiencing anything tangible, when we don't hear anything, see anything, smell anything, taste anything, those familiar signposts start disappearing – we can become quite uneasy. And that feeling of uneasiness can prevent us from going any further.

We want to hang on to what is familiar, because that makes us feel secure. After all, what would life be like without all the familiar sensations? Would one feel oneself somehow disintegrating? That's what we are afraid of.

In a sense, to enter the third and fourth dhyānas *is* to enter a state of sensory deprivation. There are compensations, for the *rūpaloka* ('realm of archetypal form' *i.e.* the dhyāna experience) is incomparably preferable to the *kāmaloka* ('realm of sense desire'). But until one has experienced something of the *rūpaloka*, one doesn't know that. We are familiar with the safe, warm, cosy *kāmaloka*, and if we get very far beyond that we begin to enter unfamiliar territory: hence the uneasiness. It is only when one has had a certain amount of experience of the *rāpaloka*, and especially when one has started going beyond ordinary sense experience, that these states become less anxiety-inducing.

In all circumstances we tend to fear the unfamiliar: a foreign country, a strange person, a new enterprise. Anything that represents an expansion into an unfamiliar field is often accompanied by anxiety or even fear. This is quite healthy in a way, in that it makes it clear that one is moving into new territory, or apparently so. But in practice, the transition from the kāmaloka to the rūpaloka doesn't happen all at once. For a while one has a foot, so to speak, in both worlds. Sense impressions haven't disappeared completely, but at the same time – to change the metaphor – some experience of the dhyānas begins to filter through, like the rays of the sun filtering through deep water.

To describe these four dhyānas in terms of images, the Buddha chose four ordinary but apposite similes. To illustrate the first dhyāna, he asks us to imagine a bath attendant going about his work. Taking a handful of soap powder, which in ancient India came – and indeed still comes – from the dried fruit of a soap tree, the bath attendant mixes it with water, and kneads it. He continues to knead it until the soap powder is a ball, thoroughly saturated with moisture – so saturated that it can't absorb one more drop of water, while at the same time no single speck of soap powder is left dry. The experience of the first dhyāna, says the Buddha, is just like that.

The second dhyāna, he says, is like a great lake full of water. No rivers or streams flow into it, but deep down in the middle of the lake is an inlet from which fresh, cool water bubbles up and gradually permeates the waters of the lake.

To describe the third dhyāna experience, the Buddha again uses the image of a lake – a lake with great beds of lotus flowers, red, blue, white, and yellow, growing in the midst of the water, with their roots, stems, leaves, and even petals soaked in and permeated by the water. The experience of the third dhyāna is, he says, like that.

For the fourth dhyāna, the Buddha suggests to us the image of a man taking a bath on a hot day in the open air, in a stream or tank – as they still do in India. Having bathed, the man emerges, feeling fresh and cool and clean, and takes a length of white cloth and wraps it round himself. So the completed image is of such a man, refreshed by his bath, sitting down completely covered in clean white cloth. This is what the experience of the fourth dhyāna is like.[150]

These images evoke a very real sense of the nature of dhyanic experience, just speaking for themselves. But they can also be related to the more psychological analysis of that experience. The water and soap powder of the first image could be said to represent the divided energies of the conscious mind. The two disparate elements – one dry, one wet – are kneaded together till they are completely unified, just as those energies come together, and become completely integrated. In the second image, the energies of the superconscious mind bubble up into the unified conscious mind, like the cool, clear water bubbling up within the innermost recesses of the lake. Once these superconscious energies have started bubbling up, they completely permeate and transform the energies of the conscious mind, just as the lotuses – roots, stems, leaves, flowers, and buds – are completely permeated by the water. Finally, these superconscious energies not only permeate, but completely enfold the mind, just as the man who has taken his bath is enfolded by the white sheet in which he has swathed himself. To summarize the process: in the second dhyāna the superconscious mind, in the form of the water flowing into the lake, emerges as contained within the unified conscious mind; in the fourth dhyāna the conscious mind is transformed to the extent that it is contained within the superconscious mind.

The Buddha painted word-pictures to describe these states, but one could even dispense with words altogether and depict these states directly with paint and brush, as Lama Govinda has done (illustrating them through abstract paintings rather than literally depicting the images the Buddha described).[151] Some people find that the language of images speaks to them more intimately, even more truthfully, than the language of concepts.

Whatever the means, we do need to get some idea of the particular states of mind we are aiming to cultivate in meditation. The attainment of the four dhyānas of the world of form is central to the practice of meditation. Indeed, it is central to the spiritual life generally: dhyanic experience is not confined to meditation practice. The dhyānas can be experienced in all kinds of circumstances. They may arise in the contemplation of art or nature, for example, or in the course of deep communication. Ideally, a healthy, happy human being would dwell in the first dhyāna all the time.

The four dhyānas of the arūpaloka, the ‘formless’ dhyānas, are far more remote

from the experience of most meditators, but it is worth looking at them briefly in order to have a deeper appreciation of the nature of the transformation that meditation is leading us towards. They arise, one could say, out of the fourth dhyāna of the rūpaloka. The first of them is called the sphere of infinite space.

As we have seen, by the time one reaches the fourth dhyāna of the rūpaloka, one has left body-consciousness behind, together with consciousness of objects in the external world. To imagine this experience, consider what it would be like if all the objects around you now – chairs, pictures, lights, whatever is there – were to be taken away. What would be left? Just space, empty space. And if, furthermore, the whole country, the whole globe itself, the whole galactic system, were to be taken away, again, what would be left? Again, it would be just space. That is the experience one is left with if one abstracts oneself from the senses through which all objects are perceived: the experience of infinite space, space extending infinitely in all directions. In fact, even to say 'in all directions' is inaccurate, for it suggests an expansion from a certain point, whereas in this experience there is no 'here' and no 'there', just an infinity of space, all of which is everywhere.

We can reach an understanding of the nature of the second arūpa dhyāna, the sphere of infinite consciousness, by reflecting on the nature of the first. In experiencing infinite space one has, obviously, an awareness or consciousness of that infinite space. In other words, conterminous with the infinity of space, there is an infinity of consciousness, the subjective correlative of that objective state or experience. Experiencing the second formless dhyāna therefore involves abstracting oneself from the experience of infinite space, to concentrate on the experience of the infinity of consciousness. It is an experience of consciousness extending in all directions – but again, not from any particular point. It is consciousness which is present everywhere.

The third formless dhyāna is still more rarefied: the 'sphere of neither perception nor non-perception'. Here one really does take wing, although one is still within the mundane (as distinct from the transcendental). Having gone from the infinite object to the infinite subject, as it were, now one goes beyond both, to reach a state in which one cannot say – because in a sense there is no one *to* say – whether one is perceiving anything or not. One is not fully beyond subject and object, but one no longer experiences things in terms of subject or object.

Fourthly and lastly comes the 'sphere of nothingness' or of 'no particularity'. It is hard to say anything at all about this, but perhaps one could say that it is a state or experience in which one cannot pick out anything in particular as distinct from any other thing. At our present stage of experience we cannot but make distinctions – seeing a flower as distinct from a tree, a face as distinct from a

house – but when one is experiencing the fourth formless dhyāna, things don't have any particular 'thingness', so to speak. It is not exactly that they are all confused or mixed up together, but the possibility of discriminating between them doesn't exist. This is perhaps the best one can do to put this indescribable experience into words. It isn't a state of blankness or nothingness, but – this is all one can say – a state of nothingness. The particularity of things is abrogated.[152]

There are several ways of entering into and passing through the arūpa dhyānas – although for most of us this whole matter is going to be more or less academic for the time being. One may enter the first one by 'distancing' oneself from the last of the rūpa dhyānas. One tries to disengage oneself from it, as it were, and look at it in an objective way. One then expands that feeling of distance. This adjustment of attitude has to take place at a lower level of consciousness. Reflecting in a conceptual way on the limitations of the fourth dhyāna becomes possible only by coming down to the level of the first dhyāna. But on the basis of such reflection at a lower level, there may perhaps be less of a temptation to over-identify with the fourth dhyāna the next time one gets into it. So this is the basic procedure to progress from the fourth dhyāna to the arūpa dhyānas.

To be fully absorbed in the fourth dhyāna is a transporting, overwhelming experience. The tendency is to become totally identified with it, to allow it to take possession of one, to cling to it, even. But to enter the first of the arūpa dhyānas, one has somehow to detach oneself from the fourth rūpa dhyāna. Reflecting that it has arisen in dependence on causes and conditions, and that it will pass away when those causes and conditions are removed, one realizes that one should not be attached to it. Yes, one has achieved it, but in a sense it isn't really much of an attainment. Obviously one can't afford to think like this until one has reached this point; but then it is possible to start sitting loose to the experience, not allowing it to occupy the whole of one's perspective. Looking beyond it, expanding beyond it, one enters upon the dhyāna of infinite space. And in the same way one can move through the other formless dhyānas.

The four dhyānas of the world of form and the four formless dhyānas are all classified in the Buddhist tradition as mundane. None of these superconscious states constitutes Enlightenment. They are still not transcendental; they involve no direct contact with ultimate reality. This, at least, is the traditional view. However, neither are they worldly states in the ordinary sense. The rūpa dhyūnas represent a very high degree of unification and refinement of psychic energy. And as for the arüpa-dhyānas, they could even be regarded as being, to use a paradoxical expression, quasi-transcendental. Taking, for instance, the second of the arūpa-dhyānas, what does one mean by infinite consciousness? The Buddha himself, in at least two or three passages of the Pāli Canon, speaks of ultimate

reality in terms of a completely pure, radiant, infinite consciousness;[153] and some Yogācārins describe reality in terms of 'absolute mind'.[154] So there is perhaps an argument for the view that infinite consciousness refers to absolute reality itself, rather than being an entirely mundane spiritual attainment.

We are dealing with labels for experiences here; it is a question of matching them up appropriately. It could be that in the course of hundreds of years certain clearly labelled experiences can acquire further more dubious labels that one may have to question if one is to be true to one's experience. With this possibility in mind, any Buddhist text should be approached critically, as well as with faith and receptivity, as part of the process of trying to relate what one reads to one's own spiritual experience.

Putting aside our caveats as to the mundane status given to the arūpa dhyānas, we can say that, according to tradition, contact with ultimate reality, from the heights of the mundane, is made whenever the mind in the dhyāna state, whether higher or lower, turns with awareness from the mundane to the transcendental, when it begins to contemplate reality. It is then that the mundane dhyāna state becomes insight into the transcendental.

Many different transcendental samādhis may be distinguished, according to the particular aspect of reality being contemplated. Among the most vital and significant of these samādhis is a set of three known as the gateways to liberation (*vimokṣa-mukha*).[155] The first of these is what is called the signless or imageless samādhi. Here, reality is contemplated as being devoid of all conceptual constructions. One sees that no concepts have any reference to, any bearing upon, reality. Indeed, one sees that the word reality itself is quite nonsensical, because it conceptualizes what cannot be conceptualized. So one contemplates reality – not even using the word reality – as being devoid of all signs which might give the mind some hint of what to look for, or some comparison to go on.

The second gateway to liberation is the unbiased or directionless samādhi. At this level, the mind doesn't discriminate between this and that, so it has no particular goal, nor even any sense of time: no past, present, or future. Having nowhere to go, the mind stays where it is, as it were; and it contemplates reality also as having nowhere to go, no direction, no tendency, no bias towards this or that.

Thirdly and lastly, there is the 'voidness' samādhi. Here reality is contemplated as having no self-nature, no characteristics of its own by which it might be recognized or distinguished from other things. One can't say that a chair is this, a human being is that, and śūnyatā, reality, is the other. Reality isn't any thing as distinguished from any other thing or things; it has no particular nature of its own.

All this – from the first dropping away of the mental hindrances to the most exalted of superconscious states and even to a confrontation with ultimate reality – is dhyāna in the sense of the higher states of consciousness. But dhyāna can also refer to the practices leading *to* these higher states. There is a great deal that could be said on this subject, but here I will make just one observation: that dhyāna is a natural thing. Ideally, as soon as one goes to meditate, whether in a shrine-room or in a corner of one's own room, as soon as one sits down and closes one's eyes, one should go straight into dhyāna. It should be as natural and easy as that. In fact, if we led a truly human life, if we had spent the previous day in a truly human way (which would probably mean spending the previous week, month, or even year in at least a relatively human way), this instant dhyāna would certainly happen.

This is not, I need hardly say, what usually happens. We all have to struggle and sweat, even curse under our breath sometimes, as we try to concentrate in meditation. We feel disappointed; we feel that it isn't worth the effort, that we are making fools of ourselves, that we might just as well be at the cinema or watching television. But although we have to strive and struggle, the effort isn't to get into the dhyāna state. All that effort has to go into removing the hindrances to meditation. If we could only do that, we would go sailing at least into the first dhyāna.

So most meditation exercises don't lead directly to higher states of consciousness; they simply help us remove the obstacles. Practising the mindfulness of breathing removes the obstacle of distraction, practising the mettā bhāvanā helps remove the obstacle of ill will, and so on. If we remove the obstacles with the help of these methods, the higher states – at least the first of them – will naturally manifest themselves.

The Bodhisattva, of course, practises not just meditation but *dhyāna pāramitā*, the perfection of meditation. In other words, he or she practises meditation not for peace of mind (though that certainly does come) nor to get to heaven (though even that may come if desired). He or she practises meditation as one aspect of the path which will lead one day to Enlightenment for the benefit of all.

The Bodhisattva's practice of meditation does not exclude external activity. We ourselves probably find that in order to meditate we have to find a quiet place, sit still, close our eyes, and practise some form of mental discipline. But the Bodhisattva should be able, as the scriptures repeatedly stress, to be immersed in dhyāna while at the same time carrying on with various activities. Not that the Bodhisattva suffers from a sort of split personality. What appear to us to be two contradictory things are one thing in the case of the Bodhisattva. Activity is the external aspect of meditation, and meditation is the inner

dimension of activity; they are two sides of the same coin.

This will eventually be our aim too, but probably for a long time to come meditation will exclude external activity and vice versa. Although the effects of our meditation experiences will carry over into our everyday life, it will be a long time before we can meditate when we are stuck in traffic, or when we are washing the dishes, quite as effectively as we can on our meditation cushion.

If in the midst of such activity we cannot cultivate the higher levels of dhyāna, we may, with some experience of dhyāna behind us, be able to cultivate *prajñā*, the sixth and last pāramitā. *Prajñā* is from the root *jñā*, which means 'to know', and *pra* is simply an emphatic prefix; so prajñā is knowledge in the extreme, knowledge *par excellence* – knowledge, that is, of reality, of śūnyatā.

Śū*nyat*ā literally means voidness or emptiness. It is not emptiness as opposed to fullness, however, but a state beyond opposites, and beyond all words, Śūnyatā is the main theme of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, which form perhaps the most important of all the groups of Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures. There are well over thirty of these Perfection of Wisdom texts, some very long – the longest is 100,000 verses – and some very short. Among the shorter texts are the *Diamond Sūtra* and the *Heart Sūtra*, and these two present the essentials of the Perfection of Wisdom teaching and experience in a highly condensed form.

Some texts speak of twenty or even thirty-two degrees of śūnyatā, but there are four main ones.[156] They are not four different *kinds* of reality, but four progressively deeper stages of penetration by wisdom into ultimate reality, and they give us some idea – and it is only an idea – of the nature and content of prajñā. They are simply classifications and as such are conceptual constructions, not the real thing. They are not the experience itself, but only fingers pointing to the moon, to use the Zen expression.

First of all there is what is called the emptiness of the conditioned, *saṁskṛta-śūnyatā*. Conditioned existence, phenomenal existence, relative existence, is empty – empty, that is, of the characteristics of the Unconditioned. According to Buddhism, the Unconditioned has three characteristics. Firstly, it is blissful. Secondly, it is permanent – not in the sense of persisting in time, but in that it occupies, as it were, a dimension in which time itself does not exist. And thirdly, it is ultimately real. Conditioned existence, being unsatisfactory, impermanent, and not ultimately real, is empty of these three characteristics; and so the conditioned is said to be empty of the Unconditioned. In other words, we should not expect to find in the flux of relative existence that which only the Unconditioned can give us.

The second degree of śūnyatā is the emptiness of the Unconditioned – *asaṁskṛta-śūnyatā*. If we have the commensurate degree of wisdom, we see that

the Unconditioned is devoid of the characteristics of conditioned existence – devoid of the unsatisfactory, impermanent, and relatively unreal nature of conditioned existence. Just as in the conditioned you will not find the Unconditioned, so in the Unconditioned you will not find the conditioned.

These first two degrees of śūnyatā are common to all forms of Buddhism, and they obviously represent a dualistic approach which is necessary as the working basis of our spiritual life in its early stages. To begin with, we have to think, 'Here is the conditioned, there is the Unconditioned, and I want to get from here to there.' And it may well be necessary for us to spend many years of our spiritual life working on the assumption that the conditioned is the conditioned and the Unconditioned is the Unconditioned.

But eventually we have to learn to see – not just theorize, speculate, or think, but experience – that *rūpa* and *śūnyatā*, form and voidness, the conditioned and the Unconditioned, saṁsāra and nirvāṇa, ordinary beings and Buddhas, are ultimately of one and the same essence, one and the same reality. This is the third degree of śūnyatā, 'great emptiness', *mahāśūnyatā*, in which all distinctions are swallowed up.

The 'great emptiness' consists in seeing that the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned is itself empty. This distinction is merely a product of dualistic thinking, and this is not ultimately valid. It is the 'great void' because all of us, even the most spiritual of us, are afraid of disappearing into it. We want to cling on to our dualistic ways of thinking – self and others, this and that. But eventually they must all go. The great emptiness is like the tiger's cave – many tracks may lead into it, but none come out. Ultimately, your fear of it is also the reason you want to go into great emptiness – *because* 'you' (and your fear) will never come out. It swallows up every product of our dualistic vision.

The fourth degree of śūnyatā is the emptiness of emptiness, *śūnyatā-śūnyatś*. Here we see that emptiness itself is only a concept, a word, a sound. Even when experiencing *mahāśūnyatā*, one is still hanging on to subtle thoughts, subtle dualistic experiences – and even these ultimately have to be abandoned. When one comes to *śūnyatā-śūnyatā*, there is nothing to be said. All that is left is a thunderous silence.

The most celebrated of all the Perfection of Wisdom texts is the *Heart Sūtra* – so called because it contains the heart, the essence, the gist, of the whole body of the Perfection of Wisdom teachings. And the heart of the Heart Sutra is contained in its concluding mantra, '*gate gate pāragate pārasaṁgate bodhi svāhā*'. Interpreted literally – and therefore not really elucidating the true meaning – this can be translated as something like: 'Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, Enlightenment, success!'[157]

The mantra could be said to refer to the four degrees of śūnyatā. ‘Gone, gone’ means ‘gone from conditioned existence’, gone from the world. It is the experience of the emptiness of the conditioned, as a result of which one goes forth from it. Then come the words ‘gone beyond’. When one leaves the conditioned, one goes ‘beyond’ to the Unconditioned – there is nowhere else to go. With the next phrase, ‘gone altogether beyond’, one goes beyond the distinction between the conditioned and the Unconditioned – and in doing so one really does go ‘altogether beyond’.

Then we have Enlightenment, *bodhi*. There is no sentence structure here; it’s just an exclamation: Bodhi! Enlightenment! Awakening! Here, in the ultimate awakening, the idea of sūnyatś itself is transcended. It’s as though, having traversed these three degrees of śūnyatā, when one comes to the fourth, one can only fling one’s arms wide and say, in Alan Watts’ phrase, ‘This is ㅠ!’[158] The last word of the mantra, ‘svāhā’, which occurs as the conclusion to a number of different mantras, indicates auspiciousness, success, achievement. You’ve completed your task, you’ve reached your goal, you’re Enlightened. All four degrees of sūnyatś have been traversed, wisdom has been fully developed, and true success has been achieved.

The Mahāyāna doesn’t have a monopoly on śūnyatś, of course. Early Buddhism may have used different terminology, but it was referring to the same experience.[159] Stream Entry is said to be achieved upon the arising of transcendental insight; and this happens via one or another of the three doors of emancipation, one of which is śūnyatā samādhi. From the Theravāda point of view all the different levels or modes of śūnyatā identified by the Mahāyāna tend to magnify the problem of literalism which they were originally elaborated to quash. Each successive stage is simply a means of detaching oneself from – or enabling one to go beyond – a literal understanding of the ‘previous’ stage. The Theravśda would say that if one has a clear and not too literalistic understanding of śūnyatā, all these distinctions are unnecessary.

Clearly there is a distinction between the sūnyatś of the conditioned and the śūnyatā of the Unconditioned. But as long as we don’t take the notion of sünyatā itself too literally, we don’t need to go beyond that. We can regard much of the Mahāyāna doctrinal material as illustrative rather than as representing real distinctions. At most, the idea of the four different levels and thirty-two modes of śūnyatā helps one to have a fuller and clearer understanding of what reality is.

To think in terms of śūnyatā is to think of the development of wisdom as a progression through more and more advanced stages of penetration into reality. But there is another tradition which describes the simultaneous unfolding of different aspects or dimensions of wisdom in terms of the five jñānas, the five

knowledges or wisdoms. First, there is the wisdom of the *dharmadhātu*. This is the basic wisdom, the wisdom of which the other four are simply aspects. *Dhātu* means a sphere, realm, or field, and here it refers to the whole cosmos, the whole universe; while *dharma* means in this context reality, truth, the ultimate. So the dharmadhātu is the universe considered as the sphere of the manifestation of reality, or conceived of as fully pervaded by reality. Just as the whole of the solar system is permeated by the sun's rays, in the same way the whole cosmos, with all its galactic systems, its suns and its worlds, its races and its gods, is pervaded by reality. The cosmos is a sort of field for the manifestation, the play, the expression, the exuberance, of reality.

The wisdom of the dharmadhātu is the knowledge of the whole cosmos as being pervaded by – and therefore non-different from – reality. Not that the cosmos is obliterated. The houses, trees, and fields, the men and women, the sun and moon and stars, are all there, just as they were before. But now one sees that they are pervaded by, permeated by, reality. The one doesn't obstruct the other; when one sees the cosmos, one sees reality, and when one sees reality, one sees the cosmos. Rūpa is śūnyatā, śūnyatā is rūpa – form is emptiness, emptiness is form – as the *Heart Sūtra* says. In the Tantric tradition, the wisdom of the dharmadhātu is symbolized by the archetypal Buddha Vairocana, who is called 'the Illuminator' because he illuminates reality just as the sun illuminates the heavens.

The second jñāna is the mirror-like wisdom. The Enlightened mind sees truly – without distinction – anything that comes before it; it understands the true nature of everything, just as a mirror faithfully reflects all objects. If one looks into the depths of the Enlightened mind one sees everything. It is like the experience of Sudhana as described in the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*. Sudhana is a pilgrim wandering in search of truth, and at the crucial point of the sūtra he reaches a magnificent tower in south India. Entering the tower he sees the whole cosmos mirrored, stretching out to infinity – but all contained within this magical tower. In fact, the tower is a symbol of the bodhicitta, or of the Enlightened mind itself.[160]

Everything that exists is reflected in the depths of the Enlightened mind, but the Enlightened mind is not affected by whatever is reflected in it. If an object is placed in front of a mirror, that object is faithfully reflected in the mirror. If the object is replaced with another, the mirror reflects the new object. When the mirror or the object is moved, the previous reflection is not found sticking to the mirror. The Enlightened mind is like that: it reflects everything but nothing sticks. In our non-Enlightened minds, of course, the reflections stick – not only stick but congeal and get all mixed up together. But in the Enlightened mind

there is no subjective reaction or attachment, but pure, perfect objectivity. This is the mirror-like wisdom, and it is symbolized by Akṣobhya the Imperturbable, the dark-blue Buddha.

The third jñāna is the wisdom of equality or sameness. Because the Enlightened mind sees everything with complete objectivity, it sees the same reality in all things, and therefore has the same attitude towards all things. There is the same love, the same compassion for all, without distinction. Sometimes it is said that the compassion of the Enlightened mind shines without discrimination on all beings, on all things, just as the sun's rays fall now on the golden roofs of a palace, now on a dunghill. Just as the sun doesn't mind whether it gilds the roof of the palace or the dunghill, the Enlightened mind shines its love and compassion on 'good' and 'bad' alike. This wisdom of equality or sameness is symbolized by Ratnasambhava the Jewel-born, the yellow Buddha.

Fourthly, there is the all-distinguishing wisdom. While the mirror reflects all things equally, it doesn't blur their distinctive features; it reflects the tiniest detail clearly and distinctly. The Enlightened mind, in its aspect of discriminating wisdom, sees not only the unity of things but also their uniqueness; and it sees both together, reducing neither the plurality to a unity, nor the unity to a plurality.

On the philosophical level, Buddhism is neither a monism, in which all differences are cancelled out, nor a pluralism, in which all unity disappears. *We* can't help perceiving now one, now the other, but the Enlightened mind sees unity and difference at one and the same time. And it sees that, while there is a common thread between all of us, at the same time we are all uniquely ourselves, with all our idiosyncrasies. This discriminating wisdom is symbolized by Amitābha, the red Buddha of Infinite Light.

The fifth and last jñāna is the all-performing wisdom. The Enlightened mind devotes itself to the welfare of all living beings, and devises many 'skilful means' (as they are called) to help them. It does all this naturally and spontaneously. We mustn't imagine the Bodhisattva sitting down one morning and thinking, 'How can I help someone today? Let's think, maybe I'll go and help so-and-so.' The helpfulness pours forth; there is no premeditation, no working things out, no weighing the pros and cons, no wondering whether this person or that person is more in need of help, no trying to strike a balance. The Enlightened mind functions freely, spontaneously, naturally. This all performing wisdom is symbolized by Amoghasiddhi, the green Buddha, whose name means 'Infallible Success'. So these five Buddhas represent aspects of the *prajñā pāramitā*, the perfection of wisdom of Enlightenment. And, of course, they

express that wisdom in the language of images. Indeed, wisdom is probably better communicated in this way, through symbols, than it is through concepts.[161]

While dhyāna and prajñā are distinct pāramitās, they can also be considered as a unified pair, and they are thus considered by Hui-Neng, the sixth Patriarch of the Chinese Dhyāna School (usually known as the Ch'an or Zen School). In the course of his *Platform Scripture*, a series of addresses to a body of people whom he politely addresses as 'learned audience', Hui Neng has this to say on the subject of samādhi and prajñā:

> Learned audience, in my (dhyāna) system *samādhi* [the highest form of dhyāna] and *prajñā* are fundamental. But do not be under the wrong impression that these two are independent of each other, for they are inseparably united and are not two entities. *Samādhi* is the quintessence of *prajñā*, while *prajñā* is the activity of *samādhi*. At the very moment that we attain *prajñā*, *samādhi* is therewith, and vice versa. If you understand this principle, you understand the equilibrium of *samādhi* and *prajñā*. A disciple should not think that there is a distinction between '*samādhi* begets *prajñā*' and '*prajñā* begets *samādhi*'. To hold such an opinion would imply that there are two characteristics in the dharma.... Learned audience, to what are *samādhi* and *prajñā* analogous? They are analogous to a lamp and its light. With the lamp, there is light. Without it, there would be darkness. The lamp is the quintessence of the light, and the light is the expression of the lamp. In name they are two things, but in substance they are one and the same. It is the same case with *samādhi* and *prajñā*.'[162]

In other words, samādhi, which is the highest form of dhyāna, is the Enlightened mind as it is in itself, while prajñā is its objective functioning, the Enlightened mind at work in the world, as it were. We could even say that dhyāna represents the subjective and prajñā the objective aspect of Enlightenment – though in doing so we would, at the same time, have to affirm that in Enlightenment there is no subject and no object.

We have now investigated, through concepts and through images, the very heights and depths to which the practice of meditation and the development of wisdom can take us. The next step – and the point of this investigation – is to explore those heights and depths in our own experience. We are not just standing on the threshold of Enlightenment; in imagination, or at least in hopeful anticipation, we are knocking at the gate. And one day, if we are patient and determined, we will be admitted.

7

THE BODHISATTVA HIERARCHY

ACCORDING TO THE Pāli Canon, just after the Buddha became Enlightened – or rather, while he was still exploring the different facets of that experience which we usually refer to as though it were a single undifferentiated occurrence – he became aware of a very powerful aspiration. He knew that he had to find somebody or something that he could revere and respect. His fundamental impulse, it seems, so soon after his experience of Enlightenment, was to reverence: to look up, not down. After some reflection he realized that, having attained Enlightenment, there was now no person he could look up to, because no one else had attained what he had attained. But he saw that he could look up to the Dharma, the great spiritual law by virtue of which he had attained Enlightenment. He therefore decided to devote himself to reverencing the Dharma.[163]

This episode cannot be called to mind too often, especially because it is so contrary to the modern spirit of not wanting to honour or be indebted to anybody or anything. We are sometimes only too willing to look down on others, but we are unwilling to look up, and even feel resentful if others appear to be superior to us in any way. We are generally happy enough to admire and even venerate the superior physical strength, quickness of eye, and will to win of the athlete, but very often we are unwilling to respect or reverence qualities that are superior from a spiritual point of view.

Someone once made the point that in any culture where a particular principle is of such fundamental importance that it is taken for granted, no word for that

principle exists in the local language. One quite interesting reflection of this is to be found in the fact that in Buddhism there is no traditional term that corresponds to ‘tolerance’. It’s as though in order to appreciate the tolerance of Buddhism you have to be able to look at it from the standpoint of a tradition or culture that is *not* tolerant. Buddhism traditionally does not think of itself as tolerant. It doesn’t promote that concept, doesn’t recommend itself as being a tolerant religion; it has never attained that sort of selfconsciousness with regard to its own nature.

It is the same with hierarchy. Buddhism is traditionally saturated in it, to the extent that Buddhists are almost unable to step aside and see Buddhism as hierarchical. The very fact that the spiritual path consists of a series of steps or stages shows how deeply the hierarchical principle is embedded within Buddhism. In fact, the spiritual life itself is inseparable from the hierarchical principle. There is a hierarchy of wisdoms: the wisdom you hear or read about (*śruta-mayī-prajñā*), the wisdom you cultivate through reflection (*cinta-mayī-prajñā*), and, as the highest form, the wisdom cultivated in meditation (*bhāvanā-mayīprajñā)*.[164] There is a hierarchy of the different levels of the cosmos, from the *kamaloka* up to the *rūpaloka* and the *arūpaloka*.[165] And of course there is a hierarchy of persons: both the *ariya-puggalas*[166] of the Theravāda and the Bodhisattvas of the Mahāyana are organized into hierarchies. It would seem that the concept of hierarchy is absolutely fundamental to Buddhism; without it, Buddhism as we know it can hardly exist. And for that very reason, perhaps, there is no traditional word or concept for hierarchy. There are certain words that express the idea of a sequence of increasing value within a particular context, but there is no overall, generalized term covering all the different, more specific hierarchies.

But when as Westerners we approach Buddhism from the outside, as it were, its hierarchical nature certainly strikes us, and some people have to struggle with this in a way that Eastern Buddhists, with different cultural and psychological conditioning, do not. After many years as a Buddhist myself, however, my own difficulty lies in trying to sympathize with the non-or anti-hierarchical concept of equality, which seems very limited and restricting. It would seem to me that inequality is one of the most obvious things about life.

Of course, there are true hierarchies and false ones. In Europe in the eighteenth century, especially in France, the social and ecclesiastical hierarchy was completely false; it did not correspond to any facts or realities. For example, court favourites with barely the faintest pretence to piety were appointed to bishoprics. When the name of a certain courtier was proposed to Louis xv for Archbishop of Paris, he demurred: ‘No, no, the Archbishop of Paris should at

least believe in God!' – which shows how far things had gone. In the case of poor Louis XVI, who was guillotined, his real interest was in making locks, and that is what he spent most of his time doing. He had no idea about government; in other words, he wasn't really a king in the true sense of the word.

Eventually there was the great upheaval of the French Revolution and the false hierarchy was overthrown in both church and state. But in negating the false hierarchy people asserted not true hierarchy but no hierarchy, or anti-hierarchy: hence the famous slogan 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'. We have inherited a great deal from that period, politically, socially, intellectually, and spiritually. In particular, we have inherited an anti-hierarchical tendency – opposition not just to false hierarchies but to hierarchies as such. That is unfortunate. One can understand people in revolutionary France being unable or unwilling to distinguish between genuine hierarchy and false hierarchy. They didn't want to give a false hierarchy any reason for existing at all. But in calmer times we shouldn't have to reject the very idea of hierarchy in that way.

It is sometimes said that everybody is as good as everybody else 'as a person'. But this assumption is questionable. It is not as though the terms 'person' and 'individual' refer to something static; they suggest a degree of development. And some people are more developed than others; that is to say, some are better as persons or individuals than others.

The point of such an assertion of hierarchy is not to put people in their place. Quite the opposite is true, because this hierarchy is not fixed. All that matters is that everybody should be encouraged to grow, and that none of us should accept some fixed idea of our value as individuals. Our value consists in the effort we make at the level we are at rather than in some fixed position we hold in the hierarchy. If we have done our best, there can be no criticism of us.

And it does seem that competition helps people to give of their best, achieve their best, *be* their best. In one of his discourses, the Buddha spoke of each of his more.intimate disciples in turn, declaring who was best at what. And, it seems, each of them could indeed be found to be the best at something or other. One was the best at giving talks, another was the best meditator, another was the best at going for alms. Everybody excelled at something.[167]

Still, the word hierarchy is very unpopular these days, and the dictionary definition – 'a body of ecclesiastical rulers' – does nothing to make the term more appealing. But in its original sense, hierarchy meant something like an embodiment, in a number of different people, of different degrees of manifestation of reality. So one can speak, for instance, of a hierarchy of living forms – some lower, expressing or manifesting less reality, others higher, expressing or manifesting more reality. There is a continuous hierarchy of living

forms from amoebas right up to human beings – the higher the level, the greater the degree of reality.

And there is another hierarchy of living forms: the hierarchy from the unenlightened human being right up to the Enlightened Buddha. This corresponds to what in other contexts I have described as the Higher Evolution. Just as the unenlightened human being embodies or manifests more reality, more truth, than the amoeba, in the same way the Enlightened human being embodies or manifests more reality in his or her life and work, and even speech, than does the unenlightened person. The Enlightened person is like a clear window through which the light of reality shines, through which that light can be seen almost as it is. Or one can say that he or she is like a crystal or diamond concentrating and reflecting that light.

Between the unenlightened human being and the Enlightened one, the Buddha, there are a number of intermediate degrees, embodied in different people at different stages of spiritual development. Most people are still short of Enlightenment, to a greater or lesser extent, but at the same time they are not wholly unenlightened. They stand somewhere between the unenlightened state and the state of full Enlightenment, and thus make up the spiritual hierarchy, the higher reaches of which can be referred to as the Bodhisattva hierarchy. By now we know enough about Bodhisattvas to have an appreciation of the intensity of their aspiration and commitment to the spiritual life. But even among Bodhisattvas there are degrees of spiritual attainment.

The principle of spiritual hierarchy is very important. As human beings we are related to ultimate reality both directly and indirectly. We are related to reality directly in the sense that in the very depths of our being is something which all the time connects us with reality, a kind of golden thread which, though if may be gossamer thin, is always there. In some people that thread has become a little thicker, a little stronger, in others it has strengthened almost into a rope, while in those who are Enlightened there is no need for a connecting thread at all, because there is no difference between the depth of their being and the depth of reality itself. So we are directly connected in the depth of our being with reality, although most of us don’t realize it. Though we don’t see that thin golden thread shining in the midst of the darkness within us, nevertheless, it is there.

We are related *in*directly to reality in two ways. In the first place, we are related to those things that represent a lower degree of manifestation of reality than ourselves. We are related to nature: rocks, water, fire, the different forms of vegetable life, and the forms of animal life that are lower in the scale of evolution than ourselves. This relationship may be compared with seeing a light through a thick veil; sometimes the veil seems to be so thick – especially in the

case of material forms – that we are unable to see the light at all.

We are indirectly related to reality also through those forms that represent a higher degree of manifestation of reality than ourselves. This is like seeing a light through a thin veil – a veil that seems at times as fine as gossamer, and even, just occasionally, parts and falls away to allow the light of reality to be seen directly, as it is, without any mediation at all. We could say that this thin veil, through which we see the light of reality, is the spiritual hierarchy, especially the Bodhisattva hierarchy.

It is of the utmost importance for us to be in contact with people who are at least a little more spiritually advanced than we are ourselves, through whom the light of reality shines a little more clearly than it shines through us. Such people are known traditionally in Buddhism as our spiritual friends, our kalyāna mitras, and they are more important to us than even a Buddha would be. If we happened to have the opportunity to meet a Buddha, we probably wouldn't be able to make much of the encounter, or even realize the nature of the person in front of us. We are likely to benefit much more from contact with those who are just a little more spiritually developed than we are.

In this connection there is a beautiful passage in that great Tibetan spiritual classic, the *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* of Gampopa. Speaking of spiritual friends, Gampopa says:

> Since at the beginning of our career it is impossible to be in touch with the Buddhas or with Bodhisattvas living on a high level of spirituality, we have to meet with ordinary human beings as spiritual friends. As soon as the darkness caused by our deeds has lightened, we can find Bodhisattvas on a high level of spirituality. Then when we have risen above the Great Preparatory Path we can find the nirmāṇakāya of the Buddha. Finally, as soon as we live on a high spiritual level we can meet with the sambhogakāya as a spiritual friend.
>
> Should you ask, who among these four is our greatest benefactor, the reply is that in the beginning of our career when we are still living imprisoned by our deeds and emotions, we will not even see so much as the face of a superior spiritual friend. Instead we will have to seek an ordinary human being who can illumine the path we have to follow with the light of his counsel, whereafter we shall meet superior ones. Therefore the greatest benefactor is a spiritual friend in the form of an ordinary human being.[168]

This association with spiritual friends is what the Indians call *satsangh*, and they attach tremendous importance to it. Satsangh is a Sanskrit word (though it is

used in modern Indian languages too) which is made up of two parts: *sat*, meaning good, true, right, real, genuine, holy, spiritual; and *sangh*, meaning association, company, fellowship, community, even communion. So satsangh means ‘good fellowship’, ‘communion with the good’, or ‘holy association’.

The importance of satsangh has been stressed in India down the centuries because we do all need help in leading the spiritual life. We can’t get far on our own. If week after week, year after year, we had no meditation classes to go to, if we never met another person who was interested in Buddhism, if we couldn’t even get any books – because reading books of the right kind is also a sort of satsangh – if we were entirely on our own, we wouldn’t get far, however great our initial enthusiasm and sincerity. We get encouragement, inspiration, and moral support from associating with others who have similar ideals and who are following a similar way of life. This is especially the case when we associate with those who are a bit more spiritually advanced than we are, or, to put it more simply, who are just a bit more human than most people are – a bit more aware, a bit kinder, a bit more faithful, and so on.

In practice, this means that we should try to be open and receptive towards those whom we can recognize to be above us in the spiritual hierarchy, those who clearly have greater insight, understanding, sympathy, compassion, and so on. We should be ready to receive from them, just as a flower opens its petals to receive the light and warmth of the sun. As for those who are, as far as we can tell (and bearing in mind we might be mistaken), below us in the spiritual hierarchy, our attitude should be one of generosity, kindliness, and helpfulness – giving them encouragement, making them feel welcome, and so on. And with regard to those who seem to be roughly on the same level as ourselves, our attitude should be one of mutuality, sharing, reciprocity.

These three attitudes correspond to the three great positive emotions of the Buddhist spiritual life. First of all there is *sraddha*. This is often translated as ‘faith’ or ‘belief’, but it really means a sort of devotion, a receptivity to the light streaming down – as it were – from above. Secondly there is compassion, which is a giving out of what we have received from above to those who are lower in the spiritual hierarchy. And thirdly there is love or mettā, which we share with all those who are on the same level as ourselves.

In *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Gampopa goes on to say: ‘The Enlightenment of a Buddha is obtained by serving spiritual friends’ – a strong statement, to say the least, and possibly not a palatable one. The whole idea of service is rather alien to us. We are familiar with the idea of devoting ourselves to caring for our children, perhaps, or looking after our parents when they are old, but it is not always easy for us to transpose that feeling to other situations.

This is very much connected with the collapse of the idea of spiritual hierarchy, or any kind of hierarchy. If we are all equal, why should you do something for someone else? Why shouldn't he or she do it for you? Or why can't you do it on an exchange basis? 'I'll do it for you today, if you'll do it for me tomorrow.'

To put oneself in the position of serving someone is to acknowledge that the person one is serving is better than oneself in some respects. It is this that many people are unwilling to do. But unless one can make that acknowledgement, one cannot grow spiritually. In 'serving spiritual friends' one grows to become more like them – and then one finds that there are other spiritual friends to be served. Even when one becomes an advanced Bodhisattva, one finds that the universe is full of Buddhas to whom one can give devoted service. There is always someone whom one can serve.

Gampopa also says that one should 'think of a spiritual friend as the Buddha'. The idea of this is not to burden one's friend – as an ordinary human being – with the idea that he or she is a Buddha, or to try to convince oneself that they are a Buddha when one's reason tells one that they are not. One need not regard everything they do or say as the action of a Buddha. What is important is that, while one's spiritual friend may be very far from being a Buddha, he or she is at least a little more spiritually developed than one is oneself. It's as though behind one's friend stands his or her own teacher, and behind that teacher another one, back and back until, behind them all, stands the Buddha. So the Buddha is shining, as it were, through all these people, who are of varying degrees of translucency.

At least, this is one way of interpreting the advice to 'think of a spiritual friend as the Buddha'. However, Gampopa, who belonged primarily to the Tantric tradition, being a guru of the Kagyu School of Tibet, as well as one of Milarepa's main disciples, might well have intended this statement to be taken quite literally. Fundamental to the Vajrayāna is the idea that each of the Three Jewels has its esoteric aspect. And esoteric as it is, this notion is a profoundly practical one. The Vajrayanists said, in effect, that the Buddha's Enlightenment, his teaching of the truth he had discovered, and the growth of the circle of his Enlightened followers – these Three Jewels which have been revered down the ages of Buddhist tradition – all happened a very long time ago. We ourselves can have no direct contact with them, and cannot benefit from their direct influence. We have to find, in effect, our own Three Jewels. The question is, where to find them. The answer the Vajrayāna came up with was that one should regard one's Dharma teacher, one's guru, as the Buddha, the exemplar of Enlightenment as far as one is personally concerned. Similarly, one should see one's yidam, the Buddha or Bodhisattva upon whom one meditates, as the embodiment of the

truth itself. And the esoteric Sangha refuge is the company of dākinīs, with whom, according to Vajrayāna tradition, one can be in living contact. In one's own particular context the guru or teacher stands for the Buddha, and even – in the Tantric context – *is* the Buddha.

Another way of approaching Gampopa's maxim is to reflect on the teaching that every human being is potentially a Buddha. According to some Buddhist schools, if one could only look hard enough, one would see that every human being *is* in fact a Buddha, whether they realize it or not. In the case of a spiritual friend, since he or she has become at least a little Buddha-like, it is easier to see in him or her the fundamental Buddha-nature that we all possess.

Gampopa goes on to recommend not just that we should serve our spiritual friends, but that we should please them. That is, we should give them cause to rejoice in the qualities they perceive developing in us. If you please a spiritual friend and they please you, both of you will be in this state of sympathetic joy *(muditā*), and communication will be established and will flow. They will be able to teach, and you to learn.

In an interesting passage in the Great Chapter of the *Sutta Nipāta*, a certain brahmin is not sure whether the Buddha is in fact the Buddha, the Enlightened One, or whether he is just a: great man, a 'superman' or *mahāpurisa*. But it seems that this brahmin has heard of a way to find out. He has heard that the Buddhas reveal their true self, their true nature, if they are praised.[169] Praising is related to pleasing – a sort of pleasing in words. If you praise a Buddha, he cannot but show his true nature. And conversely, even a Buddha cannot show his true nature unless the situation is positive enough to allow him to do so.

It is much the same, on another level, with a spiritual friend. To please him or her is to make communication more effective, whereas to displease him or her is to set up a barrier to communication. 'Pleasing' here doesn't mean gratifying someone's ego, but relating to them in an open, free, sincere, genuine, and warm way, showing mettā, 'sympathetic joy' – that is, joy in the virtues of others – and equanimity. If you please a spiritual friend, it makes it easier for them to communicate with you, for their true nature to emerge. And you are the one who benefits from that; it is you who gains in the long run.

Although I have referred to those who are 'higher up' and those who are 'lower down', there is no question of any official grading. If we start even thinking in terms of being higher or lower than other people, we have failed to grasp the nature of spiritual hierarchy. Everything should be natural and spontaneous; the appropriate emotion, whether of devotion, compassion, or love, should flow forth unselfconsciously and spontaneously in response to whomsoever we meet.

I used to go with Tibetan friends, both lamas and lay people, to visit monasteries and temples, and it was interesting to see their responses when they entered such places. When we in the West go to a place of worship, a great cathedral or something like that, we may not know quite what to do, how to respond, what to feel. But when I used to visit temples with my Tibetan friends, there was none of that sort of confusion or inner conflict. As soon as they saw an image of the Buddha, one could almost see the feelings of devotion and faith and reverence welling up within them. They put their hands to their foreheads and often prostrated themselves flat on the ground three times. They did this completely unselfconsciously; it was natural to them because of the context in which they had grown up (a context which has now, of course, largely been shattered).

It is this kind of spontaneous emotion that creates the spiritual hierarchy: a spontaneous feeling of devotion when one encounters something higher; a spontaneous overflowing of compassion when one is confronted by other people's distress or difficulty; and a spontaneous welling up of love and sympathy when one is among one's peers. These are the emotions that should influence the whole Buddhist community. People in such a community are like roses in different stages of growth all blooming on a single bush, or like a spiritual family of which the Buddha is the head and the great Bodhisattvas the elder brothers and sisters. In such a family, everybody gets what they need; the younger people are cared for by the older ones, everybody gives what they can, and the whole family is pervaded by a spirit of joy, freedom, warmth, and light.

The Bodhisattva hierarchy concentrates all this into a single focal point of dazzling intensity. It has its own degrees, its own radiant figures, at higher and ever higher stages of spiritual development, right up to Buddhahood itself. According to the Mahāyāna, the Bodhisattva path is divided into ten progressive stages, the ten *bhūmis (bhūmi* meaning a stage of progress), each representing an increasing degree of manifestation of the bodhicitta.[170]

The scriptures say that the progressive manifestation of the bodhicitta through the ten bhūmis is like gold mixed with dross being gradually smelted, refined, and made into a beautiful ornament – like a crown for the head of a prince.[171] The gold is of course the bodhicitta, which is within us all the time but adulterated, overwhelmed, or smothered by all sorts of adventitious defilements and murkiness. The gold is pure in itself, but the defilements have gradually to be purged away, to allow the bodhicitta to manifest its own incorruptible nature.

There are four kinds of Bodhisattva who make up the Bodhisattva hierarchy: novice Bodhisattvas, Bodhisattvas of the Path, irreversible Bodhisattvas, and Bodhisattvas of the *dharmakāya*.

Novice Bodhisattvas are sometimes called ‘Bodhisattvas in precepts’. Among their number are all those who genuinely accept the Bodhisattva ideal, the ideal of attaining Enlightenment not just for the sake of one’s own individual emancipation but as a way of contributing to the Enlightenment of sentient beings everywhere. This acceptance goes very deep. Novice Bodhisattvas are not just those who have read a book about Mahāyāna Buddhism and understand the Bodhisattva ideal. They are not even just those who have taken the Bodhisattva ordination, who have formally and publicly pledged themselves to the fulfilment of the Bodhisattva ideal. They are those who are fully, from the bottom of their hearts, devoted to the realization of the Bodhisattva ideal, and are making a tremendous effort to practise it.

But if one is a novice Bodhisattva, despite one’s heartfelt acceptance of the Bodhisattva ideal and one’s strong efforts to practise it, the bodhicitta has not yet arisen within one. One has not felt, as an overwhelming experience, the urge to universal Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings taking complete possession of one’s entire being. One could perhaps say – and this is not meant unkindly – that as a novice Bodhisattva one is a Bodhisattva in every respect except the one that is most important. One has all the rest of the equipment, but the bodhicitta itself, the will to Enlightenment, as a direct, dynamic experience, has not yet arisen. At the same time, one has certainly set foot on the path. Most sincere followers of the Mahāyāna fall into this category.

As a novice Bodhisattva one devotes a great deal of time to studying the Mahāyāna scriptures, especially those that deal with emptiness, with the Bodhisattva ideal, and with the pāramitās. Not that one necessarily reads a great many books – one may read just a few volumes or even just a few pages – but one reads them again and again, soaking oneself in the spirit of these texts, trying to absorb them, to allow the teaching to fill one’s mind and heart. It is traditional in many parts of the Mahāyāna Buddhist world for the novice Bodhisattva to learn these profound scriptures by heart and repeat them from time to time, especially at the beginning or end of a meditation.

Another traditional practice for the novice Bodhisattva is simply making copies of the scriptures. This isn’t just a way of reproducing the text; the idea is that it is a meditation in itself. One has to concentrate in order to form the letters beautifully, not missing out any words or making any spelling mistakes. At the same time one is thinking of the meaning of the words, so that at least something of that meaning is percolating through, sinking drop by drop into the depths of one’s unconscious mind, quietly influencing and transforming one’s being. Traditionally, great importance is attached to the copying and illuminating of texts, just as in the Middle Ages in Europe monks spent many hours illuminating

manuscripts, burnishing them with gold, and decorating them with beautiful pictures and designs. All this studying and learning by heart and making of copies is done as a labour of love, a sādhana, a spiritual discipline.

As a novice Bodhisattva one meditates, of course, and one meditates especially on the four *brahma-vihāras*, developing towards all sentient beings loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. These practices are especially important because – so it is said – they form the foundation for the development, later an, of the great compassion that characterizes the fully developed Bodhisattva.

The next step is to direct one's attention to the practice of the perfections. And of course one performs, every day if possible, the Sevenfold Puja. One also cultivates the four factors that support the arising of the bodhicitta, as taught by Vasubandhu, and one tries to be straightforward, helpful, friendly, and sympathetic in all the affairs of daily life. This is the novice Bodhisattva: one who is deeply committed to and sincerely practises the Bodhisattva ideal, but in whom the bodhicitta has not yet arisen.

At the next level are the Bodhisattvas of the Path – that is, those who are in the process of traversing the first six of the ten bhūmis. All Bodhisattvas of the Path have experienced the awakening of the Bodhi heart (either before or upon attaining the first bhūmi), and they have also made their Bodhisattva vows and begun the serious practice of the pāramitās.

In many Mahāyāna traditions the Stream Entrant, the Once-Returner, the Non-Returner, and the Arhant of the Theravāda teaching are all regarded as Bodhisattvas of the Path – they are made honorary Bodhisattvas, as it were.[172] From the Mahāyana point of view, though they have so far all been aiming for individual Enlightenment, they can change over at any time. Even if one has progressed along the path of individual emancipation as far as it goes, one may at that point see the possibility of rising to the level of Enlightenment for the sake of all. Then, on the basis of one's previous practice of the individual path, one can take up the Bodhisattva path.

In *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, quoting the *Akṣayamatipariprcchāsūtra*, Gampopa describes the progress of Bodhisattvas of the Path as follows: 'Benevolence with reference to sentient beings is found in Bodhisattvas who have just formed an enlightened attitude; with reference to the nature of the whole of reality in Bodhisattvas who live practising good; and without reference to any particular object in Bodhisattvas who have realized and accepted the fact that all entities of reality have no origin.'[173]

The fact that 'benevolence with reference to sentient beings' is found in Bodhisattvas who have just formed an Enlightened attitude – by which Gampopa

means those in whom the bodhicitta has arisen – perhaps suggests how difficult it is to develop such benevolence. When one has at least a reasonably constant attitude of good will towards other sentient beings, one is virtually a Bodhisattva, it would seem, or a Stream Entrant in Theravāda terms. And this shows how hugely important it is to be positive towards others in spite of all their failings and one's own, and all the complications that arise therefrom to test one's patience.

Then, according to Gampopa, Bodhisattvas of the Path are capable of benevolence 'with reference to the whole of reality'. As a novice Bodhisattva you will have been developing metta towards all sentient beings, while still feeling that they are separate from yourself. But as a Bodhisattva of the Path you begin to overcome that feeling of separateness. It isn't that everything is reduced to a monistic, metaphysical oneness, but the sense of difference and separateness definitely lessens. This is difficult to describe in words – which inevitably derive from dualistic experience – but it is as though the experience of self and others begins to be permeated by something that transcends both without cancelling or negating either on its own level. The distinction is no longer absolute – the tension, so to speak, between self and others is lessened – being contained within a wider framework of reality.

For instance, with regard to the practice of giving, at the elementary or 'novice' level there might be a degree of conflict – shall I take this for myself or shall I give it to that other person? Eventually, with a tremendous effort, one may decide to be noble and give it away. But once one has developed this second level of benevolence that conflict no longer exists. One sees that whether one takes something for oneself or gives it away makes no real difference, so one can just give the thing away quite freely and happily.

As for benevolence 'without reference to any particular object' in 'Bodhisattvas who have realized and accepted the fact that all entities of reality have no origin', this occurs in the eighth of the ten Bodhisattva bhūmis. This is *anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*, the patient acceptance that dharmas do not in reality arise or pass away. In other words, one sees that in reality there is no conditionality, no causality, and one is able to face up to this fact even though it goes against all one's suppositions. One sees the whole of existence as being like a mirage, not really coining into existence and therefore not really going out of existence either. And what seals the genuine mystery of this realization is that one is all the more compassionate for it.

So the third level of the Bodhisattva hierarchy involves not so much a further step as a complete overturning of one's experience. All the normal signposts to one's experience, one's familiar ways of looking things, are transcended, and

one's compassion becomes very difficult to describe because one sees the whole of existence in a completely different way. The categories of self and others have become like a dream, a mirage. Above all, one's further spiritual progress is assured. Beyond the arising of the bodhicitta is this point upon which the whole of the spiritual life, viewed according to whatever perspective, turns.

Anyone who has tried to live a spiritual life knows how difficult it is to make even a little progress. We may look back somewhat sadly over the months or years, thinking, 'There hasn't been all that much change. I'm still more or less the same person I used to be.' Progress on the path is measured by inches, one might say. And even then, it is all too easy to slip by yards if one drops one's meditation practice or loses touch with one's spiritual friends.

When our meditation practice intensifies, it can take just a couple of days without meditating to put us – as it seems as soon as we sit down to meditate again – right back where we were months before. Of course, we have not literally gone back to where we were before – indeed it would be impossible for us to do so – and sometimes we may need to withdraw in order to move forward again more wholeheartedly. But anybody who meditates regularly will have this experience of finding that they have lost their 'edge' from time to time. The danger of falling back applies at all levels of the spiritual life. It is therefore crucial that we should reach a point beyond which we will be safe from backsliding. We need to reach firm ground.

Hence the importance of 'irreversibility'. It is found in the very earliest Buddhist texts – for example, in the *Dhammapada*, which says: 'That Enlightened One whose victory is irreversible [literally 'whose conquest cannot be conquered' or 'be made a non-conquest'] and whose sphere endless, by what track will you lead him astray, the Trackless One?'[174]

What does this mean? According to Buddhist tradition, our mundane experience naturally consists in action and reaction between opposite factors: pleasure and pain, love and hatred, and so on. Upon taking up the spiritual life – which in this context means becoming a novice Bodhisattva – you get the same process of interaction between factors, but one factor augments rather than opposes the other. One traditional description of this process is in terms of the sequence of positive nidānas or links: awareness of the inherently unsatisfactory nature of existence, in dependence upon which arises faith, then joy, rapture, bliss, calm, meditative concentration, and 'knowledge and vision of things as they really are'.[175] However, although this sequence is progressive or spiral rather than cyclical, it is reversible; you can revert back through the sequence until you are back where you started. It's a bit like playing snakes and ladders.

So the crucial point of the spiritual life is the point at which one passes from

this skilful but reversible state to a state that is irreversible. This is the point of insight, the point at which one enters the Stream, the point at which – in terms of the sequence outlined above – one gains knowledge and vision of things as they really are. This is the real object of the spiritual life. There is no need to think in terms of Enlightenment or Buddhahood; that is simply the inevitable culmination of the irreversible sequence of skilful mental states that ensues from insight. Once you have entered the Stream, yon are irreversibly bound for Enlightenment, one could say; you have sufficient spiritual momentum to take you all the way. You may still have a long way to go, but you are now safe from any danger of losing what you have gained.

It is therefore said of the Buddha's 'victory', his attainment of Enlightenment, that it is irreversible. It cannot be undone. There is no outside power that can make a Buddha no longer a Buddha. This applies not only to the Buddha, but also to the Arhant, the Once-Returner, and the Stream Entrant – and of course the irreversible Bodhisattva.

But until we have passed through that gate of irreversibility we are in a precarious position. This is why we need to make a constant effort in our spiritual life and also make sure that we are living and working in conditions that support our spiritual efforts. Until we have reached that point of no return, we need the most positive situation, the most helpful environment, we can possibly get.

This is what the Buddha was getting at in his last words, '*appamādena sampādetha'*, which can be translated 'with mindfulness, strive.'[176] To reach the point of irreversibility one has to go on making an effort – including the effort to be mindful and aware enough to ensure that the conditions one lives in are conducive to one's making the best effort one possibly can. One can make a great deal of effort, but if it does not include an effort to create more favourable conditions, one is almost wasting one's energy. On the other hand, one can be in the most favourable conditions imaginable, but if one is not making an effort, what use are those conditions? Both are necessary.

Many people become aware of the effect of positive conditions when they go on retreat for the first time. The degree to which one can change in the course of just a few days is remarkable. Just leaving the city and staying in the country, being undisturbed by the pull of trivial distractions, and doing a bit more meditation and Dharma study than you usually have time for, can transform you into quite a different person – much happier, much more positive. So it isn't enough to try to change one's mental state through meditation; one needs the cooperation of one's environment. Without this it is very difficult, even impossible, to develop spiritually up to the point of irreversibility.

This fundamental concept of irreversibility – the point at which one's commitment to the spiritual path is so strong that no conditions can sway it – has been lost sight of to some extent, both in the Theravāda and in the Mahāyāna. This is a pity. No doubt it is good to have the concept of Enlightenment before us, but it needs to be brought down to earth; and thinking in terms of Stream Entry – in the broad sense, not in the narrow sense which opposes it to the Bodhisattva ideal – helps us to do that, reminds us that we cannot afford to slacken off our spiritual effort until we have reached the point of irreversibility.

In terms of the Arhant path, one becomes irreversible at the point of Stream Entry. But on the Bodhisattva path, while the bodhicitta arises at the level of the first bhūmi, the movement towards irreversibility takes place somewhere between the sixth bhūmi, *abhimukhī* or 'the face-to-face', and the seventh, *dūramgamā* or 'far-going', while in the eighth bhūmi, *acalā*, the immovable, one is established in the state of irreversibility. If the arising of the bodhicitta corresponds roughly to Stream Entry (bearing in mind that the concepts of the bodhicitta and Stream Entry come from completely different schemata), how can these two concepts of irreversibility be reconciled? If transcendental insight is something one cannot lose, how is it possible to fall back from the bodhicitta?

Traditional Mahāyāna thinking, which regards the arising of the bodhicitta as occurring further along the spiritual path than Stream Entry, would say that in the case of Stream Entry one's irreversibility represents the fact that one cannot again be reborn in lower levels of existence, in a state of suffering, as a preta, a hell-being, or an animal; one is guaranteed rebirth as a human being and sure to make further spiritual progress. Then, later in one's spiritual life, the bodhicitta arises. One is no longer thinking in terms of Arhantship as one was when one entered the Stream. One is now thinking in terms of Supreme Buddhahood. So one progresses further and further along the path until one becomes irreversible from that goal. Until then one can still fall back from the goal of Supreme Buddhahood to the goal of Arhantship.

This is to look at these three stages as constituting successive stages of development along a single path. But from our standpoint we are in a position to try to see what the two traditions have in common, what they are both essentially concerned with. If we draw things together in that way, we can see the Stream Entry of the Theravāda as corresponding to irreversibility within the Mahāyāna context. There is no question of the Bodhisattva's irreversibility being further along the path than the Arhant's Stream Entry; it is simply a more open-ended version of Stream Entry, one could say. Or, to put it another way, the concept of Stream Entry is a narrower version of the goal the Buddha taught, the goal the Mahāyāna was trying to get back to.

So broadly speaking, although Stream Entry as formulated by the early Buddhist schools and irreversibility as formulated by the Mahāyāna are different from each other when viewed in terms of the contexts within which they developed, they are in fact concerned with the same thing. If we see that each is a historical development, we can dispense with any idea that there is really a path of individual Enlightenment, or that the development of compassion is a separate stage further along the path.

According to Theravāda teaching, Stream Entry is achieved by breaking the first three of the ten fetters that are said to bind us to the Wheel of Life.[177] The first of these fetters is belief in self – the belief that I am I, I am fixed and final. It includes the conviction that there is no such thing as universal consciousness, absolute reality, outside of oneself. Bound by this fetter, we think that we ourselves are the point upon which all the ends of the world are come (to echo a famous description of the Mona Lisa), that our personal individual existence is irreducible and ultimate.

If we examine our experience closely, we will see that this is how we feel most of the time. Sometimes a chink is made – sometimes we see something greater than ourselves – but usually we believe in ourselves in this narrow, limited, egoistic sense, as identified with the body and the lower mind. We are blind to any higher vision, any more ultimate selfhood, any more universal mind or consciousness. This belief in self in this sense is a fetter that has to be broken before we can enter the Stream and break through into a higher, wider dimension of being and consciousness.

There are different ways of looking at insight experiences, but the Theravāda conception of the breaking of fetters provides us with a standard by which to measure our progress. If we are still thinking very much in terms of me, myself, and I, clearly we haven't developed much in the way of insight. As insight develops, we make a transition from the conditioned to the Unconditioned, loosening the ties or fetters that bind us to the conditioned.

The second fetter is doubt: not in the sense of objective, cool, critical enquiry – which is actually the sort of doubt that Buddhism encourages – but a soul-corroding unease that won't settle down in anything, that is full of fears and humours and whimsicalities, that won't be satisfied, that doesn't want to know and shies away from knowing, that won't try to find out and then complains that it doesn't know. This sort of doubt, *vicikitsā* as it is called, is another strong fetter that must be broken for Stream Entry to be possible.

The third fetter is 'dependence on moral rules and religious observances'. If we are too moral, in other words, we cannot become Enlightened – which is not to say, of course, that if we are immoral we gain Enlightenment more easily. But

if we think a lot of ourselves on account of our being good, holy, and pure, if we think we've really got somewhere, and that those who do not do what we do ourselves, do not keep the rules we keep, are nowhere in comparison – we are in the grip of this fetter.

Jesus said that 'the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath,' but his most fervent followers are apt to forget that no religious observance is an end in itself. And more or less the same point, represented by this fetter, apparently tends to be lost on Buddhists just as easily. For example, in Burma there was a long-running dispute as to whether, when a monk went out of the monastery, he should cover his shoulder or leave it bare. It split the whole of the Burmese Sangha for a century: books and articles and pamphlets and commentaries were written about it, and even now it has only been settled in the sense that the parties have agreed to differ. This is no more than an extreme example of dependence upon moral rules and religious observances as ends in themselves. Something may be good as a means to an end – meditation is good, an ethical life is good, giving is good, studying the scriptures is good – but as soon as it is set up as an end in itself, it becomes a hindrance. And, of course, this almost inevitably does happen if you apply yourself to these practices with any enthusiasm. So this fetter is very difficult indeed to break. You can't do it by giving up rules, rituals, and religious observances; you do it by following them wholeheartedly but without attachment, *i.e.* as a means to an end.

In the meantime, this fetter is a reminder that there is no safe way of practising the Dharma. It is dangerous to practise the precepts, for example, in the sense that there is the possibility of practising them wrongly. To ask for a completely safe practice is to ask for a practice in which attitude doesn't matter, a practice which is always sure to be the right thing to do. But that is impossible. Attitude always counts. Where there is a possibility of skilfulness, there is also a possibility of unskilfulness, until such time as one is a Stream Entrant. One can do puja in an unskilful state of mind or for unskilful reasons. One can go on retreat for the wrong reasons. One can read Buddhist books for the wrong reasons. One can go on pilgrimage for the wrong reasons. One can adopt a wrong attitude towards one's meditation practice, thinking that it makes one better than other people. In short, it is possible to be a Buddhist for entirely the wrong reasons. There is no practice which is entirely safe from a spiritual point of view.

It is said of these three fetters that once one has broken any one of them, the others break too. So once one has fully transcended a belief in one's self as one now experiences that self, as something fixed and final; or once one has overcome doubt; or once one is able to follow moral rules and religious

observances without attachment – at that point, one enters the Stream.

Even though one has broken through the fetter of self-view in becoming a Stream Entrant, nonetheless a subtle 'I' sense persists, otherwise one would be completely Enlightened. That subtle 'I' sense is represented by the fetter of conceit (the eighth fetter) – which is broken, according to the Pāli scriptures, only when one becomes an Arhant. Clearly there is a possibility of subtle spiritual individualism, even after Stream Entry. It could be that the more advanced teachings pertaining to sūnyatā help one to resolve that – but they should be marked 'For Stream Entrants Only'.

For the Mahāyāna, of course, there is a further 'point of no return' beyond the Theravada conception of Stream Entry. If you are a Bodhisattva, you have already passed the point of no return represented by Stream Entry, but you are always in danger of falling away from the Bodhisattva ideal up to the eighth bhūmi. Only then do you become an 'irreversible' Bodhisattva. So there is a long way to go. Up to that point, there is always the danger, not of falling away from the spiritual life – that danger has been overcome long ago – but of falling back into spiritual individualism. The danger is that you will give up trying to become Enlightened for the sake of all, and just seek to gain Enlightenment for your own sake.

After all, if you take it seriously, you have to recognize that the Bodhisattva ideal is extremely challenging. You are aspiring to gain Enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, to feel compassion for all living beings – that is your Bodhisattva vow. At the same time, obviously you are in contact only with a minute fraction of them, and to feel compassion even for the people one meets is difficult enough. People, it has to be said, can be very trying, foolish, weak, and misguided.

So even the Bodhisattva of the Path, right up to the eighth bhūmi, may be tempted sometimes to give up on people in despair. One may end up thinking, 'I just can't do anything for them. Well, never mind I'll get on with my own emancipation. Let them do what they like.' And having given up the goal of universal Enlightenment, one might even achieve individual emancipation, Arhantship, nirvāna. But in relation to one's original goal, this would represent a falling away, a failure. For the Bodhisattva, one could say, nirvāna is a failure – which just goes to show how high the ideal is.

So how does the Bodhisattva become irreversible? This probably won't concern us personally for a long while, but at least let us see what the scriptures have to say. Broadly speaking, the Bodhisattva becomes irreversible through the realization of great emptiness. As we have seen, this is essentially a realization of the emptiness of the distinction between the conditioned and the

Unconditioned. When the experience of great emptiness dawns, one sees clearly that, while the distinction between the two may be useful for practical purposes, it is not ultimately valid. When one goes deeply into the conditioned one encounters the Unconditioned; and when one goes deeply into the Unconditioned one encounters the conditioned.

Spiritual individualism is based on dualistic thinking, on the idea that there is an unconditioned 'up there' or 'out there', to which one can aspire as a kind of escape from the conditioned. But when you realize great emptiness, you see that it is not so. You see that ali talk of conditioned and unconditioned, all talk of getting from 'here' to 'there', is unreal. Likewise, deciding whether to go by yourself or with others, whether to come back or stay there, is a game, a dream, a make-believe. You awake from the dream of dualistic thinking into the light, the reality, of the one mind, the non-dual mind, the non-dual reality, whatever you want to call it. You see that in its ultimate depths the conditioned is the Unconditioned. In the words of the *Heart Sūtra*, rūpa is sūnyatā and sūnyata is rūpa. There is nothing to escape from and nowhere to escape to. You also see the utter absurdity of the very idea of individual emancipation. It is this realization that makes the Bodhisattva irreversible. He or she cannot fall back to individual emancipation because there is no individual emancipation to fall back to.

If one is curious to know whether one has reached the point of irreversibility, the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures suggest various ways of telling. They say that if one is an irreversible Bodhisattva, when one is asked about the nature of the ultimate goal, one speaks not just in terms of nirvāna or individual emancipation; one always includes a reference to the compassion aspect of the spiritual life in one's reply. In this way one is known to be irreversible, whether or not one has studied the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras. Also, one has all sorts of archetypal dreams. In these dreams you may see yourself as a Buddha preaching the Dharma, surrounded by Bodhisattvas, or practising the pāramitas. In particular, you may see yourself sacrificing your life, maybe having your head cut off and feeling quite happy about it. These are other signs that one has become irreversible. And finally, a telling sign of irreversibility is that if you are an irreversible Bodhisattva, it never occurs to you to wonder whether or not you are an irreversible Bodhisattva.[178]

With the fourth and highest level of the hierarchy, the level of the Bodhisattvas of the dharmakāya, we find ourselves on a wholly transcendental plane – beyond thought and, one would think, beyond words too. But, paradoxically, Buddhism is very rich in words for ultimate reality. In English we have 'Reality', 'Truth', 'the Absolute' – and that's about it; but there are many Pāli and Sanskrit terms, each with its own special flavour, its own shade of

meaning.

The word *dharmakāya* is one of these words. People usually translate it as ‘body of truth’ and more or less leave it at that. But ‘body of truth’ conveys nothing of the true nature of the dharmakāya. Dharmakāya means, as far as it can be put into a few words, ultimate reality as the constitutive essence of Buddhahood and Bodhisattvahood, as the fountainhead of Enlightened being and Enlightened personality, from which Buddha and Bodhisattva forms come welling up inexhaustibly. We will be looking at the dharmakāya in the context of the Mahāyāna’s *trikaya* doctrine in the next chapter.

Bodhisattvas of the dharmakāya are of two kinds, we may say (bearing in mind that at this transcendental level one can’t really speak in terms of differences or kinds at all). The first consists of those Bodhisattvas who, after becoming Buddhas, retain their Bodhisattva forms so that they can continue working in the world. At least, this is the matter viewed in quite exoteric terms. According to Tibetan tradition, for instance, Avalokiteśvara is the form in which Śākyamuni himself continues to work in the world. Not that Avalokiteśvara only appears at the time of the Buddha’s death; whatever in the Buddha we term Avalokiteśvara is there from the moment he is Enlightened. But at the time of the parinirvāṇa the physical body drops away and only the Avalokiteśvara element is left, so to speak. This, broadly speaking, is the Mahāyāna view.

Secondly, there are those Bodhisattvas who are aspects, or direct emanations, of the dharmakāya, and have no previous human history. All these great and glorious figures embody one or another aspect of Buddhahood, and there are literally hundreds of them. In certain kinds of meditation you visualize a vast blue sky, free of clouds, and you imagine sacred circles – mandalas – containing hundreds, even thousands, of these Bodhisattvas, filling that infinite firmament.

These Bodhisattvas of the dharmakāya are at the very top of the whole Bodhisattva hierarchy. Most of them – both male and female forms – are represented as being of slender, graceful appearance, with long flowing hair, and decorated with ornaments of gold, silver, and so on, symbolizing in all aspects of their appearance the beauty and richness of the dharmakāya, its superabundant manifestations continually welling forth.

Avalokiteśvara is among the most prominent of all these figures. His name means ‘the Lord who looks down’, and he is so called because he looks down on the world in compassion; he represents the compassion aspect of Enlightenment. Imagine a vast blue sky, a sky which is completely empty, nothing but blueness stretching to infinity. Then, in that blue sky you see – not even a face, just the barely visible lineaments of a compassionate smile. This is the compassion aspect of reality; this is Avalokiteśvara – though of course, where there is

compassion, there must be wisdom: it is Avalokiteśvara who appears in the *Heart Sūtra*, the heart of the Perfection of Wisdom.

Iconographically he is pure white in colour and carries lotus flowers, symbolizing spiritual rebirth. His face is alive with a sweet, compassionate smile. In some depictions of him, one foot is tucked up in the posture of meditation, showing that he is deep in dhyāna, while the other foot hangs loose, showing his readiness to step down at any moment into the turmoil of the world to help living beings. As we have seen, for the Bodhisattva inner tranquillity and external activity are not contradictory, but different aspects of the same thing.

Altogether there are 108 forms of Avalokiteśvara. One of the most famous is the eleven-headed, thousand-armed form. To us this is perhaps going to seem grotesque, but the symbolism is very interesting. It is said that once Avalokiteśvara was contemplating the sorrows of the world, the miseries of sentient beings, their suffering by fire, flood, famine, bereavement, separation, war, shipwreck, and so on. He was overwhelmed by such compassion that he wept, and went on weeping so violently, we are told, that his head shivered into eleven fragments, each of which became a face. And there are eleven of them because there are eleven directions of space (north, south, east, west, the four intermediate points, up, down, and the centre), and compassion looks in all directions simultaneously. Not only that; he has a thousand arms – at least iconographically he is supposed to have a thousand arms. In truth the Bodhisattva of compassion has millions of arms, each of which is stretched out to help living beings in one way or another. With the help of this symbol, Buddhism tries to express the nature of compassion, that it looks in all directions and tries to help in all conceivable ways.

Clearly, an archetypal Bodhisattva of this kind is not quite the same as an archetypal Buddha. While the Buddha of the dharmakāya represents the ideal as realized outside space and time, the Bodhisattva represents the ideal in the process of realization within space and time. But just as, due to the limitations of the historical situation, the human historical Buddha cannot fully express what he has realized in his inner being, in the same way the individual who is trying to be a Bodhisattva can't express the full nature of the Bodhisattva ideal, because the ideal has reference not just to that individual's situation but to all space and all time.

The figure of Avalokiteśvara with a thousand arms and eleven heads expresses something of this. It wouldn't be possible for any one person in any given historical situation to do everything that is needed, but each individual can imbibe the spirit of the Bodhisattva and express that in their own way within their own life. The Bodhisattva's vow to help all beings throughout the universe

is an expression of the Bodhisattva spirit. One does one's bit by helping those beings who fall within one's particular sphere of influence. One can aspire to be one of the thousand arms of Avalokiteśvara.

Another of the Bodhisattvas of the dharmakāya is Mañjughoṣa, who represents the wisdom aspect of Enlightenment. He is a beautiful golden, orange, or tawny colour – his is the golden wisdom of Enlightenment that dispels ignorance, as the sun dispels the darkness – and he carries a sword and a book. The flaming sword in his right hand symbolizes his wisdom; he whirls it above his head, cutting asunder the bonds of ignorance and of karma, all the knotty tangles that keep tripping us up. And the book he holds in his other hand is the Perfection of Wisdom, which he holds close to his heart. His legs are crossed in the meditation posture, because wisdom springs, as the *Dhammapada* teaches us, from meditation.[179] Mañjughoṣa is the patron deity of all the arts and sciences. If you want to write a book, paint a picture, or compose a piece of music, you traditionally invoke Mañjughoṣa, and his mantra is repeated for retentive memory, understanding of the Dharma, eloquence, power of speech, and so on.

Then there is Vajrapāṇi, who represents the power aspect of Enlightenment – not power in the political sense, or in the sense of power over other people, but spiritual power. Although he has a peaceful form too, Vajrapāṇi is usually depicted in wrathful form, an image of furious energy to crush the forces of ignorance. The wrathful Vajrapāṇi is dark blue in colour, and he is not slim, slender, or graceful, but has a stout body, protuberant belly, and thick, short limbs. His countenance expresses extreme anger and he has long white teeth or tusks. He is more or less naked apart from ornaments of human bone and a tiger skin, and he carries in one hand a vajra, a thunderbolt, with which he destroys the forces of ignorance. This terrifying figure is crowned with five skulls, representing the five wisdoms. One foot is uplifted, to crush and trample all the forces of conditioned existence that separate us from the light of truth, and he is surrounded by a great halo of flames. This is the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, destroying and breaking up conditioned existence, rending the veil of ignorance, and scattering all the forces of darkness through the power of his spiritual energy.

Then, by way of contrast, there is Tārā, who appears in female form. This does not mean that she is a female Bodhisattva (just as it would not be correct to say that Mañjughoṣa is a male Bodhisattva). Bodhisattvas have gone far beyond distinctions of male and female. Some appear in a male form, others in a female form, and others now in one, now in the other.

Tārā is the spiritual daughter of Avalokiteśvara. She is usually either white or green in colour, and according to another beautiful legend she was born from the

tears of Avalokiteśvara as he wept over the sorrows of existence. In the midst of a great pool of his tears there appeared a white lotus. The lotus opened, and there was Tārā, the very essence, indeed the quintessence, of compassion.

Often she bears a blue or white lotus flower, and in her white form she has seven eyes – two ordinary eyes, plus a third in the forehead, two in the palms of her hands, and two in the soles of her feet. There is nothing blind, sentimental, or foolish about compassion – it is informed by awareness, mindfulness, and knowledge. Sometimes what passes for compassion is really no more than pity, and it just makes things worse. There is a saying that it takes all the wisdom of the wise to undo the harm done by the merely good – and, one could add, the harm done by the merely pitying.

If there is one more archetypal Bodhisattva to be mentioned along with the key figures so far described, it is Vajrasattva. He represents purity: not physical purity, moral purity, or even spiritual purity; not any purity that can be attained. Vajrasattva represents primeval purity, the original spotless purity of the mind, unsoiled and untouched from beginningless ages. We cannot purify the mind through spiritual practice. We may purify the lower mind, because the lower mind can become soiled, but we never purify the ultimate mind, because the ultimate mind never becomes impure. We purify ourselves truly by waking up to the fact that we have never been impure, that we were pure all the time. This ultimately inherent purity of the mind, above and beyond time, above and beyond the possibility of impurity, is represented by Vajrasattva.

Vajrasattva is pure, dazzling white, like sunlight reflecting from snow. He is sometimes depicted completely naked and sometimes as wearing the silks and jewels of a Bodhisattva. His mantra, which has one hundred syllables, is recited and meditated upon to purify one's faults, or rather, to purify oneself of the impurity of thinking that one is not intrinsically pure.

There are many, many Bodhisattvas of the dharmakāya, but these few must suffice by way of illustration. All of them are in the last analysis simply different aspects of our own fundamentally Enlightened mind, our own immanent Buddha mind. One could say that all the Bodhisattvas are one Bodhisattva. We speak of Avalokiteśvara, Mañjughoṣa, and so on, but we must not think of them as being literally distinct supernatural personalities 'up there' or in sorue other world. They are all different ways of looking at one and the same Bodhisattva, one and the same spiritual power at work in the universe.

In principle, there is no reason why new Bodhisattva forms should not emerge in the context of Western Buddhism, as has happened, and continues to happen, in other Buddhist cultures. In the Vajrayāna tradition, which continues to this day, new Bodhisattva forms, or at least new *dharmapāla* and ḍākīni forms, have

emerged comparatively late within that tradition, usually being recognized as a new form of an existing Bodhisattva.

In Japan, for example, Bodhisattvas emerged from amongst the indigenous deities, taking on their characteristic features. One of these Japanese divinities absorbed into the Japanese Buddhist pantheon was Hachiman, who originally had some phallic significance, but came to be regarded as a form of Avalokiteśvara. However, this tidy designation within the existing pantheon cannot hide the fact that he represents the emergence within Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhism of a quite distinctive Bodhisattva form which has its origins in the Japanese psyche.

A similar thing happened with Achala, a figure of Indian origin who assumed a distinctively Japanese form: dressed in just a loincloth, he is heavily muscled, with a lock of hair hanging down on his forehead, like that worn by Japanese wrestlers, and glaring, bulging eyes. He carries a noose, and is accompanied by two small boys whose significance is obscure but who seem to be assistants of some kind. He is associated with mountains and waterfalls, natural settings where some of his Japanese devotees live as hermits and practise austerities. His appearance is quite grim, but he is said to be very kind. All in all, he is a distinctively Japanese Bodhisattva, a specific product of the Japanese psyche or collective unconscious.

It is likewise to be expected that Bodhisattvas will take on different forms in the West, because people will perceive and experience them differently. We will probably need to start off with the traditional Eastern iconography, but at the same time we have to realize that so far as we are concerned those forms may not look in the least like the Bodhisattvas whose names they bear.

In discussing the representation of Apollo in Greek and modern neoclassical art, the nineteenth century art critic Ruskin says that because people are acquainted with, for example, the form of Apollo Belvedere, they think they know what Apollo looks like. But, he says, they don’t really know this at all. They only know what the *statue* of Apollo looks like – quite a different thing.[180] Similarly, we may think we know what Buddhist archetypal figures like Mañjughoṣa or Tārā look like, but all we really know is how these figures are represented in medieval Indian and Tibetan art. Such depictions may give some clue to what those Bodhisattvas are – but not necessarily. Sooner or later we have to work our way from the traditional appearance of a Bodhisattva to what that appearance is meant to represent. For example, what have the beautiful golden colour of Mañjughoṣa, his uplifted fiery sword, and so on, to do with Mañjughoṣa as a spiritual entity? Can we take it that Mañjughoṣa does literally look like that? In a sense yes, but in another sense, certainly not.

One has to put aside the traditional iconography and ask oneself, ‘What is Mañjughoṣa? What is the reality behind this term Mañjughoṣa? What do I experience? What is conjured up before me when I speak the name of Mañjughoṣa?’ It could be that nothing at all is conjured up. Perhaps one knows the form of the iconography but hasn’t felt one’s way through it to the reality it represents. One may know what a statue of Apollo looks like but this does not mean that one will necessarily have the slightest feeling for what Apollo represented to a sensitive Greek. In the same way, one may have read all about Mañjughoṣa and know how he is represented without having any feeling for what he represents to a sensitive Tibetan devotee.

Having got a definite feeling for what can only be called the Mañjughoṣa principle (as distinct from any particular traditional form), one then has to ask oneself what that principle would look like if it took form. One has to build up or create the form out of one’s experience or realization of the principle. Trying to do this will give one a much truer vision of what, in a manner of speaking, Mañjughoṣa looks like.

After all, the traditional iconography is only a stepping-stone. And it may be very far removed from somebody’s actual experience. The artist may have represented Mañjughoṣa according to tradition, but he will not necessarily have had any feeling for what the form represents. One might have to go back fifteen or twenty generations of artists to come to someone who saw Mañjughoṣa on a visionary level, or had a genuine feeling for him.

If one is engaging with these forms as part of one’s Buddhist practice one will sooner or later need to try to create or perceive them independently, with one’s own imaginal faculty. It is rather like going to meet someone as distinct from looking at a photograph. The photograph does give us a rough idea what they look like, but meeting them is a completely different experience.

It may be, in any case, that traditional Buddhist iconography leaves one completely cold – in which case one will have to find some other way of connecting with what it symbolizes, perhaps via the symbolism of Western art. It is a matter of gradually drawing one’s feelings into one’s exploration of these symbols and finding connections where one can. It isn’t a rational process. Even if one discovers that one does have a strong feeling for Apollo, to use that example, one can’t just say, ‘I’ve got this strong feeling for Apollo and now I’m trying to transfer it to Mañjughoṣa.’ One has to see some glimmer of Mañjughoṣa in Apollo; one has to have a sense of some real connection.

It may be a good idea to try connecting more with the mythical level of things in general. To begin with, one may have to explore literature and the arts quite widely, especially if one hasn’t paid much attention to this aspect of life before.

As one explores, one should gradually discover certain images, symbols, or myths that affect one more powerfully and positively than others.

For instance, you might find yourself fascinated, although you might not understand why, by the figure of the unicorn. So you read up about unicorns, and collect copies of pictures and tapestries in which they are depicted. Being careful not to smother your interest in merely academic study, you try to understand why the unicorn has that sort of appeal for you, and at the same time you try to intensify that feeling. Connections like this can be clues that lead one to the realm of archetypal form, of which the Bodhisattvas are especially sublime representatives.

By their very nature as ideals the Bodhisattvas of the dharmakāya represent for us a far-off goal. All we can do is form a resolute intention to traverse the immeasurable distance that separates us from those brilliant images. This intention establishes one as a novice Bodhisattva and can be publicly acknowledged and celebrated in the form of the ceremony of the Bodhisattva ordination.

The ordination has two parts: the taking of the Bodhisattva vow, usually in the form of the four great vows, and the acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts. Different lists of these precepts are to be found in the Mahāyāna scriptures, and they express a more specific, more detailed application of the great vows. The taking of the Bodhisattva vow as a part of the Bodhisattva ordination corresponds, on its higher level, to the Going for Refuge; and the acceptance of the Bodhisattva precepts corresponds to the taking of the five, or ten, ordinary precepts.

The Bodhisattva ordination is not just a ceremony. It is the natural expression of the arising of the will to Enlightenment, and as such it ideally takes place in the first bhūmi. But as a ceremony it may be taken by the novice Bodhisattva. That is, one can take the Bodhisattva ordination in anticipation, as it were, of the arising of the bodhicitta. The taking of the Bodhisattva ordination can therefore be included among the conditions in dependence upon which the bodhicitta arises.

This, at any rate, is the way it is viewed in Tibetan Buddhism: one usually takes the Bodhisattva precepts in much the same way that one might perform the Sevenfold Puja, as a means of assisting the arising of the bodhicitta. The Bodhisattva ordination has come to mean a public acceptance of the Bodhisattva ideal, regardless of whether or not the bodhicitta has arisen. It reflects what used to happen when someone met the Buddha. They would hear him teach, their Dharma eye would open[181] – or, to put it another way, the bodhicitta would arise and they would spontaneously say, ‘To the Buddha for Refuge I go.’ Taking the

vow in a sense re-enacts that scene in such a way as to encourage the arising of the bodhicitta. Thus we can speak of Going for Refuge ‘effectively’ as a means of stimulating the real Going for Refuge; in the same way the Bodhisattva ordination and the taking of vows in Mahāyāna Buddhist countries today takes place on the provisional or effective level as a means to the achievement of the real arising of the bodhicitta.

At the time of my own Bodhisattva ordination, I took the Bodhisattva precepts, but I didn’t make any vows. I considered that I had quite enough on my plate when I took those precepts. My teacher Yogi Chen[182] made the point very strongly that having taken the Bodhisattva ordination one should formulate one’s own vows, and he himself had formulated a number of sets of them, but I never felt myself that I could venture to formulate any such vows. It seemed to me that the precepts – together with the general statement ‘I resolve to gain Enlightenment for the benefit of all beings’ – were enough to be getting on with.

It must be emphasized that the Bodhisattva ordination does not confer any spiritual status. Spiritual status, in fact, cannot be conferred. It doesn’t even imply a *recognition* of spiritual status. If one takes the Bodhisattva ordination it represents a public pledge on one’s own part that one will do one’s best to live up to the Bodhisattva ideal (‘public’ here meaning ‘in the presence of the Buddhist spiritual community’). There is certainly no guarantee that the bodhicitta is going to arise at that time; it is always difficult to know if the bodhicitta has or hasn’t arisen in a particular individual. However, whether or not the bodhicitta has arisen, whether or not we are ready to take the Bodhisattva ordination, whether or not we can consider ourselves even to be novice Bodhisattvas, we can all contemplate, at least from afar, the glories of the Bodhisattva hierarchy.

8

THE BUDDHA AND BODHISATTVA: ETERNITY AND TIME

THE BODHICITTA, the will to Enlightenment, the will to achieve the liberation of all beings: this has been our constant theme. So far, however, although we have come across the distinction between the absolute bodhicitta and the relative bodhicitta, we have dealt explicitly only with the relative bodhicitta. Now, at last, we will take a look at the absolute bodhichitta – or at least try to catch a glimpse of it, or a glimpse of a glimpse.

Everything we have seen so far must surely have given the impression that the Bodhisattva follows a certain way of life. We have thought of the Bodhisattva, or would-be Bodhisattva, performing the Sevenfold Puja, developing the bodhicitta, making the four great vows, practising the Pāramitās, and so on – living and working and unfolding more and more positive qualities in this way. In other words we have thought of the Bodhisattva as treading a certain path, and aiming for a certain goal – the goal of Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

These impressions, though general, are perfectly correct. But correct as they are, there is a danger. Like so much of our thought and communication, these expressions – following a path, arriving at a goal – are metaphorical. And metaphors are not to be taken literally; they are suggestive, meant to stimulate or inspire, not to communicate in a clear-cut, scientific fashion. The danger is that we may forget this and start trying to press them to logical conclusions.

It is only too easy to think of the Bodhisattva's path in a very literal way, as though it leads up to Buddhahood just as the garden path leads to the door of a

house. We think that following the path will mean going along step by step until one day we reach the wonderful gateway of nirvāna, all glistening and golden. There it is, and we go in. It is very natural for us to think in this way – but it isn't really like that. When you come to the end of the Bodhisattva path, you don't find a gate or doorway, or any sort of celestial mansion waiting for you. You don't find anything at all. There's nothing there. The path just ends – and there you are at the end of it.

In fact, you find yourself – to use another metaphor, which is also not to be taken literally – at the edge of a precipice. The path has gone on nicely, step by step, stage by stage, mile after mile. You have counted all those milestones, and you were expecting to arrive in comfort at the entrance to a great house. But no – you find that the path ends right at the edge of a precipice. So there you are, standing on the edge, and the drop goes down not just a few feet, but what seems like miles. Somehow you know that it's bottomless, infinite. What are yon going to do?

The Zen people put it another way. They say that the spiritual life is like climbing a high and greasy flagpole.[183] When, after a great deal of effort, you get to the top, you find that there's nowhere to go. You obviously can't go any further up – and you can't come down, because at the bottom there's a Zen master with a big stick. Nor is there a cosy little platform at the top of the flagpole on which you can settle down like St Simeon Stylites.[184] There's nothing there but empty space. And, of course, you're too high up to jump. You can't go up, you can't go down, you can't stay there, and you can't jump off. What are you to do? Well, it is quite impossible to say.

This predicament arises out of the fact that 'path' and 'goal' are discontinuous. Contrary to our usual metaphorical mode of description, Enlightenment is not reached by following a path. But this doesn't mean that the path should not be followed. Paradoxically enough, you follow the path knowing that it doesn't lead anywhere.

Not even the 'right' path will take us to Enlightenment. The path, one may say, is in the dimension of time, while the goal is in the dimension of eternity. We will never reach eternity by going on and on in time. That is, one does not arrive at eternity by an indefinite prolongation of time, any more than one can arrive at a two-dimensional figure by the prolongation of a one-dimensional line. The two – eternity and time, the goal and the path – are by definition discontinuous, discrete. The Bodhisattva represents the dimension of time because the Bodhisattva path is followed in time. It's something that happens – it has a past, a present, and a future – and it doesn't go beyond time. But the Buddha represents the dimension of eternity. The Buddha represents the goal,

and the goal is attained out of time. One reaches the end of the path within time, but one shouldn't think that one attains the goal in time: one attains the goal out of time or, to put it another way, the goal is eternally attained.

There are two ways of looking at spiritual development. It can be seen in terms of advancing from stage to stage, but it can also be seen in terms of deepening one's experience of what is already there. We need both. If one thinks one-sidedly of the spiritual life as a progression from stage to stage, one is liable to become too goal-oriented. But if one thinks only in terms of deepening one's present experience, unfolding from a deep centre within oneself, one may become rather inert. It is perhaps best to think of operating in both modes at the same time, or alternating between them at different periods of one's life.

We have said that one follows the path knowing that it doesn't lead anywhere. One also follows it with no guarantee that it is the *right* path. However, it is possible to resolve this contradiction and uncertainty by balancing the model of the path with the model of unfolding. Sometimes people are over-concerned that they have got exactly the right teacher, the right mantra, the right book – that they are doing the right thing that will get them to the right Enlightenment. In a sense, it isn't possible to know. If someone came along and said 'You are on the wrong path. You are definitely going to hell,' what could you say? You couldn't prove they were wrong. You don't 'know' in that logical, demonstrable fashion. But is that sort of knowledge applicable or appropriate to Enlightenment, and the path to Enlightenment?

If it is possible to know that one is on the path to Enlightenment, it can only be because there is something within one already, however embryonic, that corresponds to what is fully developed in the Buddha. Without that consonance, one could never follow the path or gain Enlightenment. An unenlightened human being and an Enlightened human being are both human beings; so one has something in common with the Buddha, and the Buddha has something in common with oneself. What one is trying to do is increase what one has in common so that there will be less and less difference between the Buddha and oneself. When there is no difference at all, one will oneself be Enlightened.

All we can do is say 'Here I am, and there is the Buddha – or at least we have what purport to be records of a being of that sort. When I examine those records I can see that I have certain things in common with the Buddha, and although he had those qualities to a much greater degree than I do, the teachings suggest that I can develop them. So, provisionally accepting that there might be something in these teachings, I will see if I can. For instance, this text says that the Buddha was extremely kind. I can be kind myself on occasion, but I can see that I could be a lot kinder. Is it possible for me to develop more kindness?' So we try, and

we find that, yes, it is possible. Then we conclude, 'Well, if I can develop a bit more kindness, I can surely develop a lot more.' And so we go on.

It all comes down to one's own practice. There is no point in saying that one believes in the Buddha, even if the Buddha can be demonstrated to have lived, if one makes no effort to close the gap between oneself and the Buddha. It is a continuous refinement through which one becomes progressively happier and more integrated. And there will be something in oneself which insists that when one becomes more emotionally positive and more mindful, one is on the right path. When you feel healthy, no one can say 'Ah no, you're very ill.' You *know* that you're in a state of health, at least if it lasts for a little while. In the same way, if you are full of friendliness and compassion and mindfulness, no one can convince you that you are on the wrong path. The naturally self-transcending nature of the conscious being means that when you are all the time transcending yourself, you know that you are on the right path, because such a path corresponds to your innermost nature.

Sometimes you may feel as though you are unfolding like a flower; at other times spiritual life may feel more like climbing a mountain. The two modes correspond to the nature of the bodhicitta. The absolute bodhicitta is Enlightenment itself, while the relative bodhicitta is the bodhicitta everlastingly in the process of attaining Enlightenment. The two together are the ultimate realization. Thus in our spiritual life we are trying all the time to achieve that which we already have. We have to do both: realize that we already have it, but at the same time go all out to achieve it. One without the other leaves us out of balance.

We can get a sense of the possibility of combining the two from our dream life. Say, for example, you wake up with a memory of having been dreaming about travelling in India. At the same time, you are aware that this dream was really about painting a picture of a flower. Somehow you have to accept that the same dream was about both things. To your waking consciousness they seem like two alternatives, but the dream experience was both, in a mysterious way that the waking consciousness cannot apprehend. The spiritual life is rather like that. You have to have a sense of racing forward all the time, moving from stage to stage, climbing that mountain. At the same time, you have to be absolutely still, just realizing more and more deeply where you are now.

When you come to a point outside time, as it were, you realize that you have been there all the time. So when you have gained Enlightenment, you realize that you always were Enlightened. It is said that some Zen masters, on the attainment of Enlightenment, just laughed and laughed, seeing how absurd it was that they had ever imagined that they were anything *but* Enlightened. What a silly

mistake! – and a mistake on account of which they had suffered a great deal, completely unnecessarily. Even in ordinary life, we sometimes find that, after we have worried a great deal about something, we get some new piece of information which makes us realize that we didn't need to worry after all. Then it seems ridiculous to have been worrying so unnecessarily. The experience of Enlightenment is an extreme version of that. You see what a fool you were, struggling and suffering, wrestling with imaginary problems, thinking you were this, thinking you were that ... and now you can afford to laugh. What a silly Buddha you were!

The seventeenth-century Dutch philosopher Spinoza says, God is an infinite substance with infinite attributes,'[185] and adds that of these infinite attributes, only two are known to us: space and time. According to Buddhism it is because we perceive reality through these two fundamental modes of experience that we inevitably arrive either at a spatial or a temporal model of reality. All we can do is reduce the one to the other – there is no third mode by which we can reconcile the two. It would seem that reconciliation is possible only in our spiritual experience, above and beyond the level on which the contradiction, if it is a contradiction, exists. In that sense this great opposition, or incommensurability, between space-type models of reality and time-type models of reality, constitutes a sort of koan that can be solved only by an intuitive leap.

When I use the term eternity I am thinking of ultimate reality considered as *transcending* time (rather than as an infinite prolongation of time). In a sense, though, this is still misleading, because the word 'transcending' simply invites us to imagine time and eternity as existing in space, while to speak of something as being 'beyond' time is also to treat time as a form of space. One is continually brought up against the limitations of language in this way. So these expressions cannot be taken literally; one needs to try to see the point of them, through meditation or in some other way. Even the most successful conceptualization is not adequate to reality – one still has to make that intuitive leap – though it is easier to make that leap if one tries to formulate as precise a conceptual idea of the truth of things as possible.

We usually – and up to a point justifiably and correctly – think of the Buddha as a historical figure, and the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment as a historical event. To look upon the Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment as occurring within the dimension of time is not altogether wrong, so long as we make it clear that we are speaking conventionally. But only too often we go on to think of Buddhahood itself as existing in time, and this *is* altogether wrong.

Although the Buddha as a historical person may have existed within time, Buddhahood itself exists outside time, in the dimension of eternity. We can in

fact think of the Buddha as existing simultaneously on two levels: on the level of time, as a human, historical figure, and on the level of eternity, as reality itself. Then in addition to these two we can think of him as existing in an intermediate, as it were archetypal realm.

This brings us to what is known in Buddhism as the *trikāya* doctrine, the doctrine of the 'Buddha's three bodies', as some scholars are pleased to call it. This doctrine, which is central to Mahāyāna thought and practice, has been much misunderstood. *Trikāya* literally means 'three bodies', 'three personalities', or 'three individualities', but the doctrine is not referring to three bodies, much less still three Buddhas. It is really describing one Buddha, or one Buddha-nature, functioning on three different levels. In a traditional comparison, the *dharmakāya* is likened to the pure blue sky without any clouds. The *sambhogakāya* is a cloud appearing in the midst of this blue sky, surrounded by rainbows. And the *nirmāṇakāya* is the rain that falls from that cloud. Or, in Vajrayāna Buddhist art, you get the three *kāyas* depicted as Buddha figures, one above the other. The dharmakāya is a completely naked Buddha figure, sometimes with a consort, sometimes single. The sambhogakāya Buddha is a richly apparelled Buddha figure crowned and adorned with jewels. And the nirmāṇakāya is our own familiar Buddha Śākyamuni, with his shaven head, his staff, and his patched robe.

The nirmāṇakāya, the 'created body' or 'body of transformation', represents the Buddha as functioning on the human, historical level, as subject to birth, old age, and death. This seems to have presented many of the Buddha's followers with a problem: why should the Buddha be subject to old age and death? Even more problematic is the question: if the Buddha had so much compassion for the world, wouldn't he want to be reborn in the world? The Mahāyāna answer to that would be, how do we know he hasn't been? There are said to be Buddhas throughout the cosmos. How do we know that Śākyamuni was not reborn in some other world that needed his attention? This is the kind of answer the Mahāyāna would give – not very satisfactory, of course, but perhaps the question is not very satisfactory either.

In a way, the question calls for the reconciliation of the difference between the Theravāda and Mahāyāna approaches. The Theravāda clearly says – and this seems to have been the view of the Buddha himself – that on the extinction of his physical body, the state of the Buddha cannot be declared. It is one of the *avyākṛtavastūnis*, the unanswered questions.'[186] The question assumes that after the death of the Buddha's physical body either he exists but is indifferent to the welfare of the world or he does not exist. But the Theravāda excludes both these possibilities by stating that neither does he exist, nor does he not exist, nor both,

nor neither. The Theravāda wisely leaves unanswered the questions that the Buddha himself would not answer.

The Mahāyāna, attempting to be more enterprising, does try to answer such questions – though it does so entirely in terms of skilful means. It is important to remember that this is the working basis of the Mahayana: too literal a reading of Mahāyāna texts can get one into philosophical difficulties. That said, if we take the Mahāyāna view that the Bodhisattva doesn't want to gain Enlightenment for the sake of personal emancipation, but will come back again and again to help others, then the Buddha would presumably have the same attitude.

Well, of course. The Mahāyāna – in, for example, the *White Lotus Sūtra* – says that the Buddha only *pretended* to withdraw into his parinirvāṇa. According to this text, the Buddha saw that if he continued to live among his disciples, they would become dependent on him, so he deliberately allowed his physical body to drop away.[187] But can one imagine that the Buddha would not continue to be active in some other way, out of compassion? No – he may have withdrawn his physical presence, but he must certainly be working in other ways, on other levels. Indeed, according to the sūtra itself, there is a certain lofty plane where the Buddha is preaching the *White Lotus Sūtra* all the time.

The Buddha said that even in his lifetime his nature could not be fathomed; surely his nature after the death of his physical body is still more unfathomable. If you take the different traditions literally there are all sorts of intellectual contradictions, but those contradictions have to be seen within a much wider, supra-intellectual, spiritual context. You can't say, though many Theravādins do – at variance with their own scriptures – that the Buddha is dead. But neither can you say with some Mahāyānists that the Buddha is alive. Both statements go to extremes.

The sambhogakāya, literally the 'body of mutual enjoyment', is sometimes rendered – more poetically and therefore less accurately, but perhaps more truthfully – as the 'glorious body' of the Buddha. This is the archetypal Buddha form, the form in which the Buddha is perceived by advanced Bodhisattvas dwelling on a much higher level of consciousness than that on which we usually function. This archetypal form of the Buddha is the form in which the Bodhisattvas are said to 'enjoy' the vision of the Buddha – for example, the form in which, as we have seen, the Buddha is said to be eternally preaching the *White Lotus Sutra*.

The sambhogakāya represents an archetypal richness of endowment beyond the limitations of any actual historical situation. In that sense the archetypal Buddha is the Buddha beyond space and time, beyond history, but endowed with all the perfections of all the historical Buddhas and more. If you wanted to draw

a perfect human being, the most beautiful human being conceivable, you probably wouldn't do your drawing from life. You might draw one person's eyes, another's hair, and another's hands, to create an 'archetypally perfect' human being. The archetypal Buddha, the sambhogakāya Buddha, is similarly archetypally perfect, though on a much higher level.

The sambhogakāya has a number of aspects. The five principal ones are known as the Five Jinas or Five Conquerors or, more simply, the Five Buddhas, who as we have seen embody the five wisdoms of the Enlightened mind. It is important to remember that they represent not the human historical Buddha, but different facets of this glorified or archetypal Buddha, existing on this archetypal plane, in between the plane we usually experience and the plane of absolute reality.

The first of the Jinas is Vairocana. His name means 'the Illuminator', and as we have seen, he is sometimes also called the Great Sun Buddha, illumining the whole spiritual cosmos just as the sun illumines its own physical solar system. He is a dazzling white colour, and his hands are in the teaching gesture, the *dharmacakrapravartana mudrā*, the mudrā of turning the wheel of the Truth. He holds in his hands an eight-spoked golden wheel – obviously a solar symbol, as well as being the traditional emblem for the Buddha's teaching. When Vairocana is represented in a mandala, a circle of these archetypal forms, he usually occupies the central position.

Second comes Akṣobhya, the 'Imperturbable', who is represented as being of a rich dark blue colour, like the midnight sky on a clear night in the tropics. His right hand is in the mudrā called *bhümisparsa*, touching the earth, calling the earth to witness, and his emblem is the vajra (*dorje* in Tibetan), the diamond thunderbolt, the symbol of indestructible strength and power. The vajra represents wisdom, the wisdom which smashes through ignorance, which destroys all error and illusion. Ak§obhya is associated with the east.

Third is Ratnasambhava, the 'Jewel-Born', or 'Jewel-Producing'. He is golden-yellow in colour, and his right hand is in the *varada mudrā*, the gesture of giving, especially giving the gift of the Dharma. His emblem is the jewel, and he is associated with the south.

Fourth is Amitābha, the 'Infinite Light'. Amitābha is a beautiful deep, rich red, like the colour of the setting sun. His hands are in the meditation mudrā, one hand simply resting upon the other, his emblem is the lotus, the symbol of spiritual rebirth, and he is associated with the western direction.

Then fifthly and lastly comes Amoghasiddhi, 'Unobstructed or Infallible Success'. Amoghasiddhi is a dark green colour, and his right hand exhibits the gesture of fearlessness. His emblem is the double dorje – two thunderbolts or

two vajras crossed – and he is associated with the north.

These are the five chief aspects of the sambhogakāya; there are hundreds more. All of them are archetypal, existing on this higher plane, intermediate between ordinary earthbound human consciousness and the level of ultimate, absolute reality. So all of them are out of time as we usually experience it, without being out of time altogether; they occupy, as it were, a timescale different from that of our normal waking consciousness. We do sometimes come into contact with the archetypal world of the sambhogakāya. Sometimes we touch the fringes of it in deep meditation, in archetypal dreams, or in aesthetic experience of a visionary nature.

I referred to the archetypal Bodhisattvas as Bodhisattvas of the Dharmakāya, but they could also be thought of as Bodhisattvas of the sambhogakāya. One cannot distinguish between form and no-form. In their inner being, as it were, these Bodhisattvas are at one with the Dharmakāya, but at the same time they manifest on the sambhogakāya level. They are both Dharmakāya and sambhogakāya, just as the Buddha himself, during his earthly lifetime, is Dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmānakāya. Bodhisattvas of the Dharmakāya are those beings who have realized the Dharmakāya but who, in a manner of speaking, continue to retain a sambhogakāya form. The fact that they have a definite identity as Bodhisattvas means that they belong to the sambhogakāya realm, but the fact that they are Bodhisattvas of the Dharmakāya means that in manifesting that form, they do not depart from the dharmakāya realm. If a Bodhisattva – in addition to his sambhogakāya form – assumes a nirmānakāya form, he becomes an incarnate Bodhisattva or what the Tibetans call a tulku. But if he is a tulku in the full sense, he retains at least some experience of his sambhogakāya and even his Dharmakāya status.[188]

Dharmakāya, as we have seen, is usually translated ‘body of truth’, but is more accurately rendered ‘the aspect of absolute reality’. The Dharmakāya represents Buddhahood as it is in itself, or the Buddha as he is in himself. The Dharmakāya therefore represents not the human, historical Buddha, nor even the archetypal Buddha, but the real, true, genuine, ultimate Buddha. In two famous verses in the *Diamond sūtra*, the Buddha says:

> *Those who by my form did see me,*
> *And those who followed me by voice*
> *Wrong the efforts they engaged in,*
> *Me those people will not see.*
>
> *From the Dharma should one see the Buddhas,*

From the Dharmabodies comes their guidance.
Yet Dharma's true nature cannot be discerned,
And no one can be conscious of it as an object.[189]

So the Buddha is not really his physical body, nor even his archetypal form. The Buddha is the dharmakāya. The Buddha *is* reality. The message of the *White Lotus sūtra* is similar and even more explicit. We have seen that there are two modes of communication – one conceptual and abstract, the other the language of parable and myth. The *White Lotus sūtra* speaks predominantly in non-conceptual terms, and in it there is an episode which amply demonstrates the nature of the Dharmakāya.

The scene is typical of a Mahāyāna sūtra. There are thousands of the Buddha's disciples around – monks and nuns, lay people, Arhants, Bodhisattvas, together with non-human beings: dragons, celestial musicians, gods, and fierce spirits – just the usual crowd. All manner of wonderful things have already occurred when something happens that completely astonishes even this assembly, accustomed as it has become to the miraculous. All of a sudden, millions of Bodhisattvas appear out of the earth.

But when the Buddha sees all these millions of Bodhisattvas issuing from the fissures of the earth, he says, addressing his human disciples, 'Ah yes, these are all my disciples. I've taught and trained them all.' According to the sūtra – and one can well imagine this – the ordinary human disciples express even more amazement. How can the Buddha possibly claim to have taught and trained all these millions of Bodhisattvas who have appeared in this miraculous manner? They say, 'But look here, you were Enlightened only forty years ago. We recognize that you've been working pretty hard, teaching all sorts of beings – you haven't wasted any time – but it's a bit much to ask us to believe that you have trained all these Bodhisattvas. Some of them are not just ordinary novice Bodhisattvas; they've been following the Bodhisattva path for hundreds of lifetimes, thousands of years. How can they possibly be your disciples? It's like a young man of twenty-five pointing out a collection of centenarians and saying, "They're all my sons." It's impossible.'

At this point the Buddha makes the great revelation towards which the whole sūtra has been leading. He says, 'Don't think that I was Enlightened forty years ago. That's just your way of looking at it. I am eternally Enlightened.'[190] This obviously isn't the nirmānakāya or the sambhogakāya speaking. It's the dharmakāya, the real Buddha, the eternal Buddha, Buddhahood itself – not any particular individual, however great.

When the *White Lotus sūtra* speaks in terms of the eternal Buddha, one is not

to understand the word ‘eternal’ in the sense of indefinitely prolonged in time, but rather in the sense of being ‘outside’ time altogether (using this spatial term metaphorically, of course). For the *White Lotus sūtra*, as for the *Diamond sūtra*, the Buddha symbolizes the dimension of eternity, reality as existing beyond or outside time. And the Bodhisattva represents reality – even Buddhahood – as manifesting ‘in’ time.

As we have seen, the Bodhisattva follows the path, engages in certain activities, originates a progressive sequence of thoughts, words, and deeds. In other words, the Bodhisattva manifests the relative bodhicitta to an ever-increasing degree, and this process takes place in time. But we can take a broader view than this, to take in the Bodhisattva as symbolizing the whole process of life evolving into ever higher forms. The Bodhisattva symbolizes both the lower evolution – the evolution from the very beginnings of life up to human beings in their unenlightened state – and the Higher Evolution, the evolution of human beings towards Enlightenment. All this is one continuous process; or at least the process of the Higher Evolution arises in dependence upon the lower one.

We see this kind of progression in the Jātaka stories. As we have already seen, the Jātakas are one particular branch of Buddhist canonical literature (though there are also many non-cananical Jātakas) and they recount stories of the Buddha’s previous lives, showing how from life to life the future Buddha advanced in the direction of Enlightenment. Scholars have discovered that a number of these Jātaka stories are old Indian folk tales that have been turned into Jātakas by the simple process of identifying the Buddha with the hero. It’s as if we were to take Aesop’s Fables and identify Jesus with the principal character in each fable.

This has occasioned a lot of discussion, especially as some of the folk tales are animal fables. Do Buddhists take all this quite literally? Are we to think that the hero – a hare, or a deer, or a lion, or a goat – really represents the Buddha as he was in a previous life? In some parts of the Buddhist East they do honestly regard the Jātakas as depicting the previous lives of the Buddha. But we need not take things so literally. The Jātakas clearly depict the evolutionary process. In each Jātaka there is a hero, a man or animal who stands out as being more advanced than the rest, and who may therefore be said to represent a more advanced stage of evolution. It is significant that this hero is identified with the Buddha. The suggestion is that this figure represents that same evolutionary urge to develop which ultimately resulted in the ‘production’ of a Buddha.

But while the end result is symbolized by the Buddha, the evolutionary urge itself is symbolized by the Bodhisattva. We thus have two principles: a principle

of Buddhahood in the dimension of eternity, and a principle of Bodhisattvahood in the dimension of time. One is transcendent, the other is immanent. One represents perfection eternally complete, eternally achieved; the other represents perfection eternally in the process of achievement. And the one does not lead into the other; the two are discontinuous.

So is this the last word that can be said on the subject? Certainly not according to the Mahāyāna, and especially not according to the Tantra. There is no easy solution, though. We can't just say, 'Time is illusory, merge it into eternity,' or, 'Eternity is illusory, merge it into time.' They are both irreducibly there. According to the Tantra, we need to realize both simultaneously. We need to see everything as eternally achieved and at the same time eternally in the process of achievement. The Buddha sits eternally beneath the bodhi tree; he has always sat there, and he always will. At the same time, so to speak, the Bodhisattva is eternally practising the Perfections, life after life, to infinity. Buddha and Bodhisattva represent different aspects of one – the same – reality. It is this realization that constitutes the arising of the absolute bodhicitta (not that there is any question of 'arising').

The essence of the absolute bodhicitta is beautifully expressed in some Tibetan verses that form part of a practice known as 'The Confounder of Hell'. (The Confounder of Hell is one of the titles of Vajrasattva, and this particular practice is a form of Vajrasattva yoga.) These verses give a very good idea, so far as one ean have an idea at all, of the nature of the absolute bodhicitta.

The mantra-like exclamation – 'E MA O!' – with which they begin is sometimes pronounced quickly as a single word, and it often comes at the beginning of verses recited in the Tibetan tradition, as an expression of extreme wonder. Plato said that philosophy begins with a sense of wonder, and the same is true of the spiritual life. When one comes into contact with something transcendent, overwhelming, overpowering, one's reaction can only be one of wonder and astonishment. Each of the verses starts with this exclamation of wonder at the vision, as it were, of the absolute bodhicitta that is about to dawn.

EMAO
Dharrha wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
Within the birthless all things take their birth,
Yet in what's born there is no birth.

EMAO
Dharma wondrous strange.

Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
Within the ceaseless all things cease to be,
Yet in that ceasing nothing ceases.

EMAO
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
Within the non-abiding all abides,
Yet thus abiding there abideth nought.

EMAO
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
In non-perception everything's perceived,
Yet this perceiving's quite perceptionless.

EMAO
Dharma wondrous strange.
Profoundest mystery of the Perfect Ones.
In the unmoving all things come and go,
Yet in that movement nothing ever moves.[191]

This is an expression of the essence, as far as it can be expressed, of the absolute bodhicitta. Here we have, juxtaposed in a single vision, blended without confusion, reality as existing out of time, in eternity, and reality as progressively revealed in time.

It is difficult to go beyond this point, or even reach it, even in our imagination. But that doesn't mean that the absolute bodhicitta is too rarefied and remote for us to bring it into our practice, at least to some extent. To begin with, we have to realize that however long time goes on, it never reaches eternity. Time doesn't go beyond time; it just goes on and on. Consequently there is no question of getting any nearer to the absolute, any nearer to Buddhahood, which is in the dimension of eternity. In a million years we will be no nearer to eternity, or to Enlightenment, than we are now.

This isn't as hopeless as it sounds. We can turn it the other way round and say that at this very moment we are as close to Enlightenment as we shall ever be. Even a Bodhisattva on the very threshold of Enlightenment is no nearer to it than we are right now. Every moment is the last moment – whether it's this moment, or the next, or a moment occurring in a million years' time. And beyond the last

moment there's only Buddhahood. So at every moment, although we don't know it – and if we did know it, what a terrible reaction there would be! – we find ourselves at the top of the flagpole, and all we have to do is – well, what?

We have come a long way. At least in imagination, we have completed our journey along the Bodhisattva path. At the same time, we haven't gone anywhere. Likewise, the goal of the journey is eternally achieved and eternally in the process of being achieved. The Buddha and the Bodhisattva, eternity and time, are one – or are not two. With that insight, we come to the end – or perhaps the beginning – of our exploration of the Bodhisattva ideal.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Sallie B. King and Paul O. Ingram (eds.), *The Sound of Liberating Truth: Buddhist–Christian Dialogues in Honor of Frederick* J. *Streng*, Curzon, Richmond 1999. The passage is from David Eckel's 'Response to Bonnie Thurston's "In the Beginning ... God": A Christian's View of Ultimate Reality.'

2 The quotations in these three paragraphs are taken from Sangharakshita, *The History of My Going for Refuge*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1988, pp.70–2.

3 *Saṁyutta-Nikāya* ii.94.

4 The Age of Enlightenment of the eighteenth century was a philosophical movement that emphasized the use of reason to scrutinize previously accepted doctrines and traditions, and that brought about many humanitarian reforms. Writers of the period felt that they were emerging from centuries of darkness and ignorance into a new age enlightened by reason, science, and a respect for humanity. The movement was centred in France, around such figures as Diderot, Rousseau, and Voltaire.

5 Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1978, p.7.

6 *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* ii.94 in F.L. Woodward (trans.), *The Book of the Gradual Sayings*, vol.2, Pāli Text Society, London and Boston 1982, p.105.

7 Vinaya Piṭaka i.20–1.

8 Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay 'Social Aims', published in *Letters and Social Aims* (1876).

9 The famous example is that of 'Bahiya of the Bark-cloth', recounted in *Udāna* i.10, but there are many others; see for example the story of Suppabuddha the leper, *Udāna* v.3.

10 For more on the *samayasattva* and the *jñānasattva*, see Sangharakshita,

Know Your Mind, Windhorse, Birmingham 1998, pp.112–13.

11 An account of the First Council, which is said to have been held at Rājagṛha in India during the first rainy season after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, is given in the *Cūḷavagga* of the Vinaya Piṭaka. This was the first time the Buddha's disciples met to try to establish and systematize what the Buddha had taught. But the occasion referred to here is the Second Council. Some of the confusion between the different accounts of the Second Council may be due to the fact that there were possibly *two* meetings called that: one that took place about sixty years after the parinirvāṇa and another thirty-seven years later. For more information, see Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1994, pp.47–9.

12 The Four Noble Truths are (1) that life is unsatisfactory, inevitably involving suffering, (2) that the root cause of this unsatisfactoriness is craving, (3) that it is possible to attain a state free from suffering: nirvāṇa, or Enlightenment, and (4) that the way to attain this state is through following the noble eightfold path: right understanding, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right meditation, and right mindfulness. The three marks of conditioned existence are impermanence, insubstantiality, and unsatisfactoriness; and the twelve links of the chain of conditioned co-production are an expression of the law of conditionality identified by the Buddha, to be found illustrated around the rim of the Tibetan Wheel of Life. For an introduction to these and other formulations of the Buddhist path, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2008

13 *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* in Maurice Walshe (trans.), *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha-Nikāya*), Wisdom, Boston 1995, sutta 16, p.272.

14 The Abhidharma (the word simply means 'about Dharma', though its adherents came to think of it as 'the higher Dharma') began as a project to systematize the Buddha's teachings, including establishing the meaning of technical terms, collating references to the same topics, and so on. In the course of its history – which lasted several hundred years – it developed an exhaustive analysis of mind and mental events, a kind of 'Buddhist psychology'. See Sangharakshita, *The Eternal Legacy*, Tharpa, London 1985, chapter 7: 'The Fundamental Abhidharma'; and Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*, op. cit., chapter 1: 'The First Buddhist Analysts'.

15 The story is told in *Mahāvagga* viii.26 of the Vinaya Piṭaka. See also Sangharakshita, *The Buddha's Victory*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1991, chapter 4, 'A Case of Dysentery'.

16 See Mrs C.A.F. Rhys Davids and K.R. Norman (trans.), *Poems of Early Buddhist Nuns (Therīgāthā)*, Pali Text Society, Oxford 1997, pp.88–91.

17 *Vinaya Cūlavagga* chapter 7; see also Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy 1984, p.263.

18 Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, ibid., p.264.

19 This originated with the Buddha himself. The Vinaya Piṭaka quotes him as saying: 'It is impossible, bhikkhus, it cannot happen, that anyone can take a Perfect One's life by violence.' Quoted in Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, op. cit., p.264; see also Vinaya Cūḷavagga chapter 7.

20 Accounts of Moggallāna's murder are to be found in the *Dhammapada Commentary* vv.137–40 in E.W Burlingame (trans.), *Buddhist Legends*, Pali Text Society 1969; and the *Jātaka Commentary* no.523 in *Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, ed. E.B. Cowell, Motilal, Delhi 1990. See also *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, Wisdom, Somerville, Mass. 1997, pp.102–4.

21 For Milarepa's story, see *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa*, ed. W.Y. Evans-Wentz, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1951, p.247.

22 See *Sāmaññaphala Sutta (The Fruits of the Homeless Life)*, sutta 2 of *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha-Nikāya)*, op. at., pp.91–3.

23 There are many accounts of the Buddha teaching the devas; see, for example, 'Sakka's Questions', *Digha-Nikāya* sutta 21; *the Mahāmaṅgala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta*, verses 258–69. See also Susan Elbaum Jootla, *Teacher of the Devas*, Wheel No.414/416, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy 1997.

24 See *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha-Nikāya)*, op. cit., sutta 16, p.265.

25 A selection of the Ratnakūṭa sutras, which were among the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras, is to be found in Garma C.C. Chang (ed. and trans.), *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983.

26 This is from *Vinaya Mahāvagga* chapter 1, quoted in Ñāṇamoli, *The Life of the Buddha*, op. cit., p.52.

27 Sāriputta's teachings are recorded in, for example, *Majjhima-Nikāya* suttas 3,5, 9,28, 69, and 143. The *Majjhima-Nikāya* also contains teachings by Mahā Moggāllāna (sutta 15), Ānanda (suttas 52 and 53), and Anuruddha (sutta 127).

28 The list of six perfections to be practised by the Bodhisattva (see Chapters

4-6) was augmented to ten in the later tradition, and of these ten the seventh was *upāya*, skilful means. This theme is enlarged upon in many Mahāyāna texts; the *Vimalakīrti-nirdesa*, for example, stresses the Bodhisattva's need to be 'all things to all men'. See chapter 3 of Sangharakshita, *The Inconceivable Emancipation: Themes from the Vimalakīrti-nirdesa*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1995, on communication, and also on the Mahāyāna's emphasis on 'skilful means'.

29 *Dhammapada* verse 179.

30 See Robert A.F. Thurman (trans.), *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1991, pp.50–1 and p.78; also Sangharakshita, *The Inconceivable Emancipation*, op. cit. pp.101–4.

31 See, for example, the parable of the burning house in the *White Lotus Sūtra* in Bunnō Katō et al (trans.), *The Threefold Lotus Sūtra*, Kosei, Tokyo 1995, pp.85–99; commentary in Sangharakshita, *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1993, pp.43ff.

32 The T'ien-t'ai School was founded in China in the sixth century by Chih-I. It based itself chiefly on the *White Lotus Sūtra*, but, eager to unify all forms of Buddhism, undertook the project of synthesis, including the classification of Buddhist teachings into 'five periods and eight teachings'. The five periods were: the period of the *Buddhāvataṁsaka*, which, according to the T'ien T'ai, the Buddha taught immediately following his Enlightenment; that of the Āgamas, writings of the Sanskrit canon that coincide broadly with the Pāli Canon; that of the *Vaipulya* (extensive) sūtras – that is, sūtras of the early Mahāyāna, including the *Avataṁsaka* and the *Ratnakūṭa*; that of the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) sūtras; and that of the *White Lotus Sūtra* and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. This was a chronological division of the teachings; but the T'ien T'ai held the view that the Buddha also taught the teachings of the five periods simultaneously, and therefore also systematized them into eight doctrines, four concerned with method and four with content: the sudden, gradual, secret, and indeterminate methods; and the teachings of the Hīnayāna; the general teachings common to Hinayāna and Mahāyāna; special teachings for Bodhisattvas; and the complete, 'round' teaching – only the *White Lotus Sūtra* being considered to be fully complete or 'round'.

33 See Hsüan-tsang, *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World;* see also Sally Hovey Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*, Westview, 1996.

34 ‘The Vajrayāna, the “Diamond Vehicle” or “Adamantine Way”, is so called because, like the irresistible vajra, meaning both thunderbolt and diamond, it immediately annihilates all obstacles to the attainment of Buddhahood. It is predominantly yogic-magical in character, and its ideal is the siddha, “a man who is so much in harmony with the cosmos that he is under no constraint whatsoever, and as a free agent is able to manipulate the cosmic forces both inside and outside himself.”’ Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, Windhorse, Birmingham 2000 p.25. ‘Through their lifestyle some *siddhas* challenged and ridiculed the complacency and external ritual of the religious establishment in the monastic universities.’ Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, op. cit., p.139.

35 See Shwe Zau Aung and Mrs C.A.F. Rhys Davids (trans.), *Points of Controversy (Kathā-vatthu*), Pali Text Society, London 1915.

36 See W Geiger and C. Mabel Rickmers (trans.), *Cūlavaṁsa, being the more recent part of the Mahāvaṁsa*, Colombo 1953, chapter 78; see also Andrew Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, op. cit., pp.150–1.

37 In *A Concise History of Buddhism* (ibid., p.97), Andrew Skilton observes: ‘There was no such thing as a Mahāyāna Vinaya. All Mahāyānists lived in the same monasteries as their “Hinayāna” brothers, as was observed by the medieval Chinese pilgrims, though this is not to say that they did not supplement the Vinaya code with their own characteristic views on morality. In particular, the new teaching of *upāya*, “[skilful] means” relativized the regulations of the Vinaya by reasserting spiritual expediency in the service of compassion above institutional formalism.’

38 Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., p.59.

39 See s.Gam.po.pa (Gampopa), *The jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. H.V. Guenther, Shambhala, Boston 1986, pp.112ff.

40 Quoted in D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Schocken, New York 1970, pp.297–8.

41 See, for example, Edward Conze (trans.), *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, Buddhist Publishing Group, Totnes 1993, pp.140–1; or *Puja: The FWBO Book of Buddhist Devotional Texts*, Windhorse Publications, Cambridge, 2008, pp.50–3.

42 Sangharakshita’s definitions of the group, the individual, and the spiritual community will be explored in detail in a book on the sangha to be published by Windhorse in 2000.

43 See *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, op. cit., p.12.

44 Aśvaghoṣa (attrib.), *The Awakening of Faith*, trans. Yoshito S. Hakeda, Columbia University Press, New York 1967, pp.56ff.

45 See Thomas Cleary (trans.), *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, Shambhala, Boston and London 1993, p.1478.

46 These are parables from the *White Lotus Sutra*.

47 See sutta 16 of *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, op. cit., p.266.

48 ibid., sutta 17,1.2 et seq.

49 See *The Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra*, section 16, pp.33–6, in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, ed. E.B. Cowell et al., Dover Publications, New York 1969.

50 Stream Entrants or Stream Winners are to be found in various contexts in the Pāli Canon; see, for example, *Saṁyutta-Nikāya* 55, the *Sotapatti Saṁyutta*, About Stream Entrants'. And for more on Stream Entry, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, op. cit., pp.99–100.

51 See *Mahāgovinda Sutta*, in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha-Nikāya*), op. cit., p.312.

52 This touches on some quite complex aspects of Buddhist thought. All schools of Buddhism teach 'insubstantiality'; from the impermanence of all phenomena, it follows that nothing has a fixed, enduring, unchanging identity. There is no continuous self underpinning all the changing elements of one's existence; absolutely everything about one's 'self' is subject to change. Early Buddhism expressed this in terms of the famous *anātman* (Pāli *anattā*), or 'no-self' doctrine. Mahāyāna Buddhism saw it in terms of *śūnyatā*, literally emptiness. From an absolute point of view all things are empty of *svabhāva*, own-being; hence, there are 'no beings to save'. It is on the basis of this realization that the Bodhisattva engages in compassionate activity. And all schools of Buddhism, one way or another, see their purpose as to overcome what is sometimes called the dichotomy between self and other.

53 This is the point of the parable of the burning house in the *White Lotus Sutra;* see *The Threefold Lotus Sūtra*, op. cit., pp.85–99; and see also Sangharakshita, *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment*, op. cit., chapter 3, 'Transcending the Human Predicament'.

54 The ten fetters are: (1) Self-view or self-belief, (2) Doubt or indecision, (3) Dependence on moral rules and religious observances as ends in themselves, (4) Sensuous desire, in the sense of desire for experience in and

through the five physical senses, (5) Ill will or hatred or aversion, (6) Desire for existence in the plane of (archetypal) form, (7) Desire for existence in the formless plane, (8) Conceit, in the sense of the idea of oneself as superior, inferior, or equal to other people, *i.e.* making comparisons between oneself and others, (9) Restlessness, instability, (10) Ignorance – that is, spiritual ignorance in the sense of lack of awareness. (Canonical references can be found at *Majjhima-Nikāya* 64:1.432–5 and *Dīgha-Nikāya* 33: iii.234.)

On breaking the first three of these fetters one becomes a Stream Entrant. The fourth and fifth fetters – sensuous desire and ill will – are said to be particularly strong. On weakening – not breaking, but just weakening – these two, one becomes a Once-Returner (all these terms come from the Theravāda tradition). As a Once-Returner you have before you only one more birth as a human being, according to tradition, and you will then gain Enlightenment.

On actually breaking the fourth and fifth fetters, one becomes a Non-Returner. According to tradition, a Non-Returner is reborn in one of the 'pure abodes', whence the Non-Returner gains Enlightenment directly, without the necessity of another human birth.

These first five fetters are known as the five lower fetters, and they bind one to the plane of sensuous desire, as it is called. The sixth and seventh fetters refer to the 'plane of (archetypal) form' and the 'formless plane'. Once the five higher fetters are broken, one is completely free; there are no more rebirths. Such a person is known, in the traditional terminology, as an Arhant – a 'worthy one' or 'holy one'.

55 The 'balancing' nature of spiritual qualities is especially evident in the formulation of the Buddhist path called the five spiritual faculties, in which two pairs of qualities – faith and wisdom, and energy (*vīrya*) and meditation (*samādhi*), are balanced, the fifth faculty being the stabilizing one of mindfulness. For more on this, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, op. cit., chapter 9.

56 The doctrine-follower (*dhammānusārī*) and faith-follower (*saddhānusārī*) are among the seven kinds of 'noble disciple' enumerated in the *Puggalapaññati* of the Abhidhamma Pitaka. See Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1998, pp.133–4.

57 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 3, verse 27.

58 This is the law of conditionality, which is the conceptual expression of the

insight into reality that constituted the Buddha's Enlightenment experience. Conditionality includes the law of karma, although karma (i.e. the truth that one's actions, skilful and unskilful, will have consequences) is only one of five kinds of conditionality, the five *niyamas*. For more on conditionality, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, op. cit., chapter 1, 'The Essential Truth'; and for more on karma, see Sangharakshita, *Who is the Buddha?*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1994, chapter 7, 'Karma and Rebirth'.

59 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 2, verses 27–66.

60 See R.E. Emmerick (trans.), *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, Pali Text Society, Oxford 1996, pp.8–17.

61 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 2, verse 9.

62 These four factors are enumerated in the second chapter of Vasubandhu's *Bodhicittotpāda-sūtra-śāstra*.

63 According to Buddhist tradition, in this world-aeon – an unimaginably vast expanse of time – Śākyamuni, 'our Buddha', the historical Buddha, was preceded by twenty-four other Buddhas, beginning with Dipaṅkara.

64 D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, op. cit., p.304.

65 For a more detailed discussion of the faults, or marks, as they are often called, of conditioned existence (the three *lakṣaṇas*), see Sangharakshita, *The Three Jewels*, op.cit., chapter 11.

66 Tennyson, 'In Memoriam' LXXXV.

67 The ten bhūmis are enumerated in two Mahāyāna works, the *Daśabhūmika Sutra* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi-śāstra*. The stages are *pramuditā*, the joyful; *vimalā*, the immaculate; *prabhākarī*, the illuminating; *arciṣmatī*, the blazing; *sudarjayā*, the very difficult to conquer; *abhimukhī*, the face-to-face; *dūraṁgamā*, the far-going; *acalā*, the immovable; *sādhumati*, good thoughts; and *dharmameghā*, the cloud of the doctrine. For more about the ten bhūmis, see Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, op. cit., pp.490–9.

68 Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., p.65.

69 The five precepts referred to here are the set of precepts most widely known and practised throughout the Buddhist world: to abstain from taking life, from taking the not-given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from taking 'intoxicants that cloud the mind'. In their positive form, they enjoin the practice of loving-kindness, generosity, contentment, truthfulness, and mindfulness or presence of mind. The ten precepts, the ten *kuśala dharmas*, similarly focus on the ethics of body, speech, and mind;

they are an expansion of the five precepts. The first three, relating to actions of body, are the same. The one speech precept included in the five is expanded into four, including abstention from harsh, slanderous, and frivolous speech; that is, the practice of kindly, harmonious, and meaningful speech. And the practice of mindfulness becomes three mind precepts: abstention from covetousness, hatred, and false views, and the cultivation of tranquillity, compassion, and wisdom. For more on the five precepts see, for example, Abhaya, *Living the Skilful Life*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1996; and on the ten precepts see Sangharakshita, *The Ten Pillars of Buddhism*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1996.

70 See *The Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra*, sections 7–8, pp.11–22, in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*, op. cit.

71 Quoted in Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., p.66.

72 A kalpa is an unimaginably long period of time, the time it takes for a whole world system to evolve and disappear. See page 64.

73 See I.B. Horner (trans.), *Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavamsa*), in *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon*, Pali Text Society 1975.

74 The tradition of the twelve great acts in a Buddha's life comes from the *Lalitavistara*, a Mahāyāna biography of the Buddha, published as *The Voice of the Buddha* (see Note 142). The acts are: (1) waiting in the Tuṣita heaven, (2) growing in the womb of Māyādevī, (3) birth as a human for the last time, (4) attainment of intellectual and physical skills, (5) marriage and the enjoyment of sensuality, (6) renunciation of the worldly life, (7) the practice of extreme self-denial, (8) the march to the centre (i.e. to the tree under which he would gain Enlightenment, traditionally at the centre of the universe), (9) overcoming Māra, (10) attaining Enlightenment, (11) teaching, and (12) final nirvāṇa. For more on the twelve great acts, see Roger J. Corless, *The Vision of Buddhism*, Paragon House, New York 1989.

75 This is a reference to James Thurber's short story, 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty'. Walter Mitty continually escapes from the pettiness of his mundane life through dreams and fantasies of heroic scenes – with himself, of course, as the hero.

76 See *Saṁyutta-Nikāya* ii.178.

77 *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, op. cit., p.184.

78 Nāgārjuna, *The Precious Garland*, trans. Jeffrey Hopkins and Lati Rimpoche, Harper and Row, New York 1975, verse 219.

79 *The Precious Garland*, op. cit., verse 398.

80 *Sambhogakāya* is a term from the *trikāya* doctrine of the Mahāyāna, referring to archetypal, as distinct from historical, Buddhas. See page 208.

81 See, for example, 'The Sūtra of Hui-Neng', in A.F Price and Wong Mow-Lam (trans.), *The Diamond Sūtra and the Sūtra of Hui-Neng*, Shambhala, Boston 1990, pp.102–3.

82 See Edward Conze (trans.), *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and its Verse Summary*, Four Seasons, San Francisco 1995, pp.226–7.

83 The stupa, originally a structure in which the relics of a Buddha were contained, has become one of the main symbols of Enlightenment, to be found – in a variety of architectural forms – in all Buddhist countries. See page 81.

84 See J. Blofield (Chu Ch'an) (trans.), *The Sūtra of Forty-two Sections and Two Other Scriptures of the Mahāyāna School*, Buddhist Society, London 1977, section 13, p.15.

85 See *Vinaya* vol.i (*Suttavibhaṅga*), section 3, in I.B. Horner (trans.), *The Book of the Discipline*, part 1, Pali Text Society, London 1983, pp.116–23. Also the *Ānānpāna Saṁyutta* (*Saṁyutta-Nikāya*, *Mahāvagga*, bk.10). The story is also given in Ñāṇamoli's *The Life of the Buddha*, op. cit.

86 See Note 15.

87 WH. Aūden, 'A Summer Night'.

88 See D.T. Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, op. cit., pp.297–8.

89 These three 'karmically unwholesome roots' – sometimes also called the three fires – were identified by the Buddha, according to the Pāli texts, in the course of his Enlightenment experience, and he referred to them repeatedly, as well as to the 'wholesome roots' which are, simply, their absence: greedlessness, hatelessness, undeludedness.

90 See, for example, *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* i.2; v.193; ix.40.

91 See, for example, *Udāna* iv.i; *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* ix.3.

92 In 'Burnt Norton', section 3.

93 This practice is described by the Buddha in the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, sutta 62 of Bhikkhu Ñānamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, Wisdom, Boston 1995, pp.529–32.

94 Śāntideva, *Śikṣā-Samuccaya*, trans. Cecil Bendall and WH.D. Rouse, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1990, p.183.

95 The *Mettā Sutta* is the eighth sutta of 'The Chapter of the Snake' in the *Sutta Nipāta*. Buddhaghosa's description of the practice is to be found in his *Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purity*), trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy 1991, pp.288–90.

96 See *Visuddhimagga*, ibid., pp.173–90.

97 'Cromwell was about to ravage the whole of Christendom; the royal family had been brought down, and his own would have been established forever but for a small grain of sand that formed in his bladder. Rome would have trembled beneath him, but once that little gravel was there, he died, his family fell from power, peace reigned, and the King was restored.' Blaise Pascal, *The Pensées*, trans. and introduction by J.M. Cohen, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1961.

98 Rabindranath Tagore, *Gitanjali (Song Offerings*), no.95.

99 See *Visuddhimagga*. op. cit., pp.337–43.

100 The Tibetan Wheel of Life depicts six realms of existence: the realms of human beings, gods, asuras or anti-gods, animals, hell-beings, and hungry ghosts. According to tradition, one can be born into any of these realms, but is not fated to stay in any of them for eternity; once the karma that resulted in one's birth into a particular realm is exhausted, one may be reborn into another. The teaching is taken literally by some Buddhists, metaphorically or psychologically by others.

101 'Those ascetics and brahmin priests who, relying on this impermanent, miserable, and transitory nature of corporeality, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, fancy: "Better am I", or "Equal am I", or "Worse am *I*", all these imagine thus through not understanding reality' (*Saṁyutta-Nikāya* xxii.49)

'The equality-conceit (*mana*), the inferiority-conceit (*omana*), and the superiority-conceit (*atimana*): this threefold conceit should be overcome. For, after overcoming this threefold conceit, the monk, through the full penetration of conceit, is said to have put an end to suffering.' (*Aṅguttara-Nikāya* vi.49)

102 The six element practice is described by the Buddha in the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, sutta 62 of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima-Nikāya*), op. cit., pp.528–9.

103 Tibetan Buddhist practice relating to death is most famously described in the *Bardo Thödol (Tibetan Book of the Dead*), available in various translations.

104 'The dewdrop slips into the shining sea!' is the last line of Sir Edwin Arnold's epic poem about the life of the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1999, p.174.

105 See Note 58.

106 The twelve links relating to the Wheel of Life are much better known than the twelve links of the spiral. It was Mrs C.A.F. Rhys Davids who first drew attention in modern times to the existence of the latter, and Sangharakshita has brought this teaching into greater prominence. For more on these two types of conditionality, see Sangharakshita, *What is the Dharma?*, op. cit., chapter 7, 'The Spiral Path'.

107 The idea of the Bodhisattva postponing Enlightenment is first mentioned in the Pāli Canon, in the *Buddhavamsa* of the *Khuddaka-Nikāya*.

108 Padmapāṇi ('Lotus in Hand') is a form of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. The image of him painted on a wall at the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, India, dates from the fifth century CE.

109 See *The Threefold Lotus Sūtra*, op. cit., p.251.

110 See Reginald A. Ray, *Buddhist Saints in India: A Study in Buddhist Values and Orientations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York 1994, pp.402ff.

111 D.T Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, op. cit., p.63.

112 Vinaya Piṭaka i.20–1.

113 The four *brahma-vihāras*, the four sublime states – loving-kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upeksa*) – are cultivated by a sequence of meditation practices described by the Buddha in, for example, *Dīgha-Nikāya* 13.

114 P.A. Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, E Sargent, USA 1982.

115 *The Precious Garland*, op. cit., verse 427.

116 Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself', part 40.

117 Har Dayal gives textual references for these categories of *dāna*. See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., p.173.

118 Keats, 'Endymion': '... yes, in spite of all, *Some shape of beauty moves away the pall* From our dark spirits.'

119 *The Precious Garland*, op. cit., verse 173.

120 *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, op. cit., p.184.

121 See E.B. Cowell (trans.), *The Jātaka Book* xn, *Jātaka Stories*, vols.v and vi, Pali Text Society, London 1973, no.547, *Vessantara-jātaka*. *See* also Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., p.185.

122 This story is told in the *jātaka-māla*, and also in a Mahāyāna sūtra, R.E. Emmerick (trans.), *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, op. cit., pp.90–6.

123 The *locus classicus* here is the *Nidhikaṇḍa Sutta*, the eighth section of the *Khuddakapāṭha*, the first book of the *Khuddaka-Nikāya*, which says: '... prudent, you should make merit, the fund that will follow you along. This is the fund that gives all they want to beings human and divine.'

124 See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., pp.175–6.

125 D.T. Suzuki (trans.), *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, chapter 8, 'On Meat Eating', Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1999, pp.211–21.

126 *Vinaya Mahāvagga* vi.23.9–15.

127 Śāntideva, *Entering the Path of Enlightenment, The Bodhicaryāvatāra of the Buddhist Poet Śāntideva*, trans. Marion L. Matics, Allen & Unwin, London 1971, p.166.

128 These are covered in rules 59 and 66, listed in chapter 10, section 3 of the *Pāṭimokkha*.

129 See *The Sūtra of Forty-two Sections and Two Other Scriptures of the Mahāyāna School*, op. cit., section 8, p.13.

130 Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 6, verse 43.

131 See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., pp.209–13.

132 From the *Kakacūpama Sutta*, sutta 21 in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima-Nikāya* i.129, Woodward's translation).

133 ibid.

134 *Dhammapada*, verse 184.

135 See for example suttas 36, 40, and 57 of the *Majjhima-Nikāya*.

136 See Burton Watson (trans.), *The Lotus Sūtra*, Columbia University Press, New York 1993, p.30.

137 For more on *anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*, see Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words*, Windhorse, Glasgow 1993, p.267.

138 In the Tibetan tradition a (dākinī ('sky-dancer') is a female figure representing the energies of Enlightenment.

139 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 7, verse 2.

140 See *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, op. cit., p.183: ‘Gross laziness is addiction to such evil and unwholesome practices as subduing enemies and hoarding money. They have to be abjured because they are the cause of real misery.’

141 See Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, chapter 7, verse 65.

142 Published as Gwendolyn Bays (trans.), *The Voice of the Buddha: The Beauty of Compassion*, Dharma, Berkeley 1983.

143 See Garma C.C. Chang (ed. and trans.), *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, op. cit., pp.443–65, chapter 22, ‘On the Pāramitā of Ingenuity’.

144 F.L. Woodward (trans.), *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* i.259, in *Gradual Sayings* vol.i, Pali Text Sodety, Oxford 1995, p.239.

145 ‘The smile of the Arhant’ is listed in the Theravāda Abhidhamma classification of mental events as one of the karmically neutral mental events, and as being among a group of mental events that are ‘automatic’, *i.e.* not the result of past karma.

146 Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1978, p.199.

147 WR. Schodel (trans.), *The Secret Sayings of Jesus*, Fontana 1960, Saying 23.

148 Yeshe Tsogyal, *The Life and Liberation of Padmasambhava*, Dharma, Berkeley 1978, Part 11, Canto 103, p.690.

149 According to Heinrich Dumoulin in *Zen Buddhism: A History – India and China* (Macmillan, New York 1988, p.8), the earliest version of this apocryphal story is told in a Rinzai School text, *The T’ien-sheng Record of the Widely Extending Lamp*.

150 See the *Mahā-Assapura Sutta*, sutta 39 of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima-Nikāya)*, op. cit., pp.367–9.

151 Some of these pictures are reproduced in Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Creative Meditation and Multi-Dimensional Consciousness*, Quest, Wheaton, Illinois 1990, pp.174–9.

152 For a canonical description of these states of consciousness, see, for example, the *Cūḷagosiṅga Sutta*, sutta 31 of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, op. cit., pp.303–4.

153 See, for example, *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* i.10: ‘This consciousness (*citta*) is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements’; and *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* i.49–52, the *Pabhassara Suttas*.

154 The Mahāyāna Yogācāra School was founded by Maitreyanātha, Asafiga, and Vasubandhu in the fourth century. Its central doctrine was *cittamatra*, 'mind only' – the idea that the 'objective' world does not exist except in relation to mind. For a brief introduction to the Yogācāra *citlamatra* doctrine, see Sangharakshita, *The Meaning of Conversion in Buddhism*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1994, chapter 4.

155 *Visuddhimagga* xxi.66ff.

156 Some lists enumerate eighteen kinds of *śūnyatā;* see, for example, *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, op. cit., pp.168–9.

157 See Sangharakshita, *Wisdom Beyond Words*, op. cit., pp.21–36 for text and commentary.

158 Alan Watts, *This is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience*, John Murray, London 1961.

159 See, for example, the *Cūḷasuññata Sutta*, the 'Lesser Discourse on Emptiness' (*Majjhima-Nikāya* sutta 121), in which the Buddha speaks of remaining in an 'attitude of emptiness' (and also describes the four arūpa dhyānas).

160 *The Flower Ornament Scripture*, op. cit., pp.1489–96.

161 This mandala of the five Buddhas originated within Mahāyāna Buddhism, and became central to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, in whose art it is frequently depicted. For a fuller introduction to the five Buddhas of the mandala, see Vessantara, *The Mandala of the Five Buddhas*, Windhorse, Birmingham 1999.

162 See *The Diamond Sūtra and the Sūtra of Hui-Neng*, op. cit., p.94.

163 See *Samyutta-Nikāya* vi.2; *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* iv.21. For further commentary, see Sangharakshita, *Who is the Buddha?*, op. cit., chapter 5, 'From Hero-worship to the Worshipping Buddha'.

164 These are listed (in Pāli) in the *Sangiti Sutta*, sutta 33 of *The Long Discourses of the Buddha (Dīgha-Nikāya*), op. cit., section 1.9, point 43.

165 *Loka* means 'place', 'plane', or 'world', and Buddhist cosmology envisages an ascending hierarchy of these: hell realms at the bottom, then the abode of human beings (and various abodes of non-human beings), and then various heavenly realms. The *kāmaloka*, the plane of sense-desire, encompasses all non-heavenly realms, and some of the heavens also; the higher heavens belong to the *rūpaloka*, the plane of (archetypal) form, and – higher still – the *arūpaloka*, the formless plane. The fact that the *rūpaloka* and the *arūpaloka* are associated with various higher states of consciousness

suggests that this ‘cosmology’ can be taken to refer to inner psychological and trans-psychological realities, as well as to the external world.

166 Early Buddhist tradition enumerates a hierarchy of eight *ariya-puggalas,*‘noble persons’, often listed as ‘four pairs of persons’: the Stream Entrant and the one who has won the fruits of Stream Entry; the Once-Returner (that is, the one who will live only one more human existence before Enlightenment) and the one who has realized the fruition of that stage; the Non-Returner (who will gain Enlightenment from a heavenly realm) and the one who has realized its fruition; and the Arhant, who has attained Enlightenment, and the one who has realized the fruits of Arhantship.

167 *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* i.14

168 See *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, op. cit., p.32–3.

169 This is from sutta 7, the *Sela Sutta*, of the *Sutta Nipāta’s* ‘Great Chapter’. E.M. Hare (in *Woven Cadences of Early Buddhists*, Oxford, London 1947, p.87) gives: ‘I have heard it said by brahmans of old, venerable teachers of teachers, that those who have become men-of-worth, all-awakened, manifest the self when praise is uttered about them. What if I were to chant seemly verses in the presence of the reduse Gotama?’

170 See Note 67.

171 This simile is from the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*. See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Sanskrit Literature*, op. cit., p.284.

172 See Note 166.

173 *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, op. cit., pp.91–2.

174 *Dhammapada*, verse 179.

175 These are the first eight links of the twelvefold spiral path; see Note 106.

176 *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha-Nikāya* ii.156.

177 See Note 54.

178 *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*, op. cit., pp.226–9.

179 See, for example, *Dhammapada* verse 23.

180 [Reference untraced at time of going to press.]

181 The Pāli tradition speaks of five ‘eyes’: the physical eye, the divine eye, the eye of truth, the eye of wisdom, and the universal eye. The divine eye implies the faculty of clairvoyance, which is said sometimes to arise as a result of meditation. The eye of truth is what is referred to here, the Dharma eye, and its opening is synonymous with Stream Entry. The eye of wisdom

opens upon Arhantship, and the universal eye belongs to the Buddha alone.

182 Yogi Chen was a Zen practitioner and teacher with whom Sangharakshita studied during his time in the Himalayan town of Kalimpong (1949–64).

183 This is referred to in Case 46 of the Zen classic *Mumonkan, The Gateless Gate*. See Katsuki Sekida (trans.), *Two Zen Classics*, Weatherhill, New York 1996, pp.128–31.

184 Saint Simeon Stylites (387–459 CE) lived for the last forty or so years of his life at Telanessa, near Antioch, on top of a pillar about twenty metres high from which he preached to visiting crowds. His name comes from the Greek *stulos*, meaning column or pillar.

185 Spinoza, *Ethics*, pt.1, para.6.

186 See *Aggivacchagotta Sutta*, sutta 72 of *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima-Nikāya*), op. cit., pp.590–4.

187 In the sūtra the Buddha makes this point through telling the parable of the good physician. See *The Threefold Lotus Sūtra*, op. cit., pp.252–3.

188 The Dalai Lama, for example, is said to be the tulku of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteśvara, reborn again and again in human form for the benefit of all.

189 See *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajñāpāramitā Texts*, op. cit., p.136.

190 See *The Threefold Lotus Sūtra*, op. cit. pp.245–6.

191 Translated from a Mahāyāna sādhana in the possession of Sangharakshita.

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