

Year Four



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4.1

The Inconceivable Emancipation: The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa



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Introduction

Compiled by Saccanama, updated by Vajrashura

In *The Eternal Legacy*, Sangharakshita write:

The Mahāyāna's elucidation of the true meaning of the term Sangha, or spiritual community, is contained principally in the Vimalakīrti-Nirdeśa or 'Exposition of Vimalakīrti', probably the most important sūtra of its class... this is undoubtedly one of the oldest Mahāyāna scriptures, belonging to the same period, approximately, as the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka [White Lotus Sūtra] and the Aṣṭasāhasrikā [Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines]. (p. 157).

The lecture series he gave on the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, entitled *The Inconceivable Emancipation – Themes from the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, was Sangharakshita's last (from 1979) and is considered by many to be his best. It is a brilliant blend of conceptual exposition, imagery, humour, and insight – a fitting commentary to Robert Thurman's translation of a marvellous text.

Given that the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* is a Mahāyāna text, it would be good to have studied *The Bodhisattva Ideal* module from Year Three of the course. In that module, Sangharakshita covers much that is necessary background to the world of the Mahāyāna e.g. the development of the Bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva Vow, the practice of the six perfections and an exploration of the Bodhisattva hierarchy. If you have studied *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment* (from Year Three), that will also help in entering the wonderful and magical world of the Mahāyāna with its cosmic perspective and rich archetypal imagery.

Primary Study Material

The primary study material for this module is *The Inconceivable Emancipation: Themes from the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766888.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-inconceivable-emancipation/>

The original lectures can also be accessed from Free Buddhist Audio:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X19>

Note that the published version has been augmented by question and answer material and therefore represents an expansion of the original lectures.

1. The Magic of a Mahāyāna Sūtra.
2. Building The Buddhaland.
3. On Being All Things to All Men.
4. The Transcendental Critique of Religion.
5. History Versus Myth in Man's Quest for Meaning.

6. The Way of Non-duality.
7. The Mystery of Human Communication.
8. The Four Great Reliances: Criteria For The Spiritual Life.

Reading the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa

During the course of the next eight weeks, it would be great if you can find time to read the original text upon which the lectures are based. Whilst it is great to have a guide to the text as eloquent and insightful as Sangharakshita, it is also important as Buddhists that we read at least some of the original scriptures. Fortunately, with the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*, we have a very readable modern translation by Robert Thurman, published as *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (ISBN 0271012099 Pennsylvania State University and other editions). The PDF is available at: <http://huntingtonarchive.osu.edu/resources/downloads/sutras/06lotusVimalakirti/Vimalakirti%20Nirdesha%20Sutra.pdf>

It amounts to less than 100 pages so shouldn't be too taxing in terms of time or effort. Ideally, it would be great to read the text aloud in front of your shrine (a traditional Buddhist practice) but if this is not possible, just finding some quiet time each week to read a chapter or two of the text would be fine.

Study guide and suggested questions

The following questions are here to help you engage with the various topics covered in this module. They highlight some of the key themes in each chapter, and particularly focus on things that aren't raised elsewhere in the course. If you have time, you may wish to write some notes to one or more of the questions before attending your group or you may just wish to reflect on one or two of them through the week. If there is a topic that is not covered by the questions that you wish to discuss in the group then do of course raise that too.

Sometimes Dharma study can be very down-to-earth and practical, giving us straightforward advice and precepts about how we can practice the Dharma in our everyday life. At other times, as in this module, it can be an antidote to the hum-drum daily round of our ordinary lives and lift us instead into a new vision of things. Connecting with this expanded vision of spiritual life can be both liberating and inspiring. This first lecture begins by introducing us to this magical, expanded vision of the world.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. *“Every moment of our lives is unique”* (page 5).
How can you cultivate more of a sense of this in your day-to-day life?
2. *“So the Mahāyāna is that form of Buddhism which sets no limit whatever upon the spiritual potential of the individual”* (page 6).
What is your response to this limitless spiritual potential?
3. What is meant by *vimokṣa* here?
4. What does it mean to say that spiritual emancipation is *acintya* (inconceivable)?
5. *“This statement is to be taken quite literally: we don’t know anything about anything”* (page 14).
What do you make of this statement!?
6. How do magical acts illustrate the nature of the Dharma?
7. What is your immediate response to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* on first hearing the outline of its contents?

The myth (in the positive sense of the word) of 'Building the Buddha Land' has been an important part of the inspiration behind creating the FWBO. In the 1970's, when these and many other of Sangharakshita's key lectures were given, there was much talk of creating a 'new society' in the midst of the old, one supportive of spiritual practice and ideals. This lecture also uses the example of the arts as an analogy for a way of engaging creatively with the world. The role of the arts in beautifying and inspiring that new society has also been emphasised in Triratna. If you wish to explore further either of these areas, see the suggested reading below.

Also, try to make time to read chapter 1 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* during the week.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is the relationship between our state of mind and the world we perceive and inhabit?
2. What does Sangharakshita mean by the term 'cosmic bodhicitta' (p. 30)?
3. Can you relate to the story of the woman and her fish basket? If so, give one or two examples.
4. Why can't a bodhisattva keep people in the pure land? What does this mean in practical terms?
5. Explore the contradiction about whether people see the purity or impurity of a Buddha field because of how the Buddha makes it appear versus according to one's own purity.
6. "You cannot really help yourself without helping others, and you cannot really help others without helping yourself" (page 36).
What does this mean and do you agree with it?
7. In what ways is our relationship with the world essentially creative?
8. Where do we have a creative influence on others (the world)? Where does the world have a creative influence upon us (with our co-operation)? (page 42)
9. How do you respond to the notion of co-operating to build a Buddha land?

Here we actually meet the figure of Vimalakīrti, an extraordinary being living in Vaiśālī under the guise of a layman. This gives an opportunity to explore the Mahāyāna teaching of skilful means. Try to make time to read Chapter 2 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* during the week.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is meant by skilful means in the context of Mahāyāna Buddhism? Does it have any relevance to your own life?
2. *"The Bodhisattva has to take into account ... the possible effects of his skilful means on observers"* (page 49).
What might be the relationship between the motivation behind an act and the effect on others?
3. Reflect and comment on your practice of any one of the four *Samgrahavastus*.
4. What other means of unification might there be?
5. In your own words, give an account of one of the four *Pratisamvids*.
6. Why might it be misleading to think of Vimalakīrti as a layman?
7. When have you had 'a touch of magic' in your spiritual life? How can you stay in touch with this more of the time?
8. Do you think it is realistic to think in terms of 'being all things to all men' (and women)?

Here Sangharakshita explores a key idea in Buddhist history – that religion is only a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is based on chapters 3 and 4 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* so try to make time to read them during the week.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. *“Once our basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and leisure have been met, what do we need more than anything else in life? ... Surely it is freedom”* (page 66).
Do you agree with this answer? What other possible answers can you think of?
2. What are the consequences of religion becoming an end in itself?
3. How can religion enslave us? How can we make sure it doesn't? What is the transcendental critique of religion?
4. *“The rule of thumb is to upset people as little as possible, while still saying what you feel must be said”* (page 71).
Do you agree with this? If not, how do you think criticism should be dealt with in the Sangha?
5. What might an encounter with Vimalakīrti represent in the context of your own spiritual life?
6. On page 75, Sangharakshita outlines four things that can help us deal with our unskilful behaviour (alongside reviving our original inspiration):
 - a. Try to understand what you have done.
 - b. Cultivate a sense of regret.
 - c. Resolve not to do that particular thing again.
 - d. Take steps to ensure that in future you do what is right.

Can you make use of these in your own life?

7. Which is the greater danger in your own spiritual life – making Buddhism an end in itself or abandoning the raft (of the Dharma) too soon?
8. Do you have the conditions you need in your life to become free? Does Triratna offer conditions to help you become free?

History Versus Myth in Humanity's Quest for Meaning

If you can, make time to read chapters 5, 6 and 7 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* during the week.

1. *"In fact, adhi ~~the Buddha~~ ^{the Buddha} is always ~~radiating~~ ^{radiating} both light and heat all the time, just as light and heat are constantly radiating from the sun"* (page 85).
Have you ever had an experience that relates to this adhi ~~the Buddha~~ ^{the Buddha} śhāna?
2. On pages 85-86, Sangharakshita discusses the nature of effort in the spiritual life – the effort needed to be receptive; the problem of wilfulness; the right kind of effort; and distributing your effort over a broad spectrum of interests. What relevance does any of this have for your own efforts to practice the spiritual life?
3. Are our friendships like a "cold shower" rather than a warm bath? What does this mean?
4. *"Opposition is true friendship." "One's enemies are really one's friends."* (Both page 90).
What do you make of these quotes from Blake and Nietzsche on friendship?
5. *"The nature of our approach to myth is one of the basic questions that have to be faced nowadays"* (page 93).
What does this mean and do you agree with it?
6. What are the main differences between the Pāli and Mahāyāna traditions as suggested by Sangharakshita in this lecture? Which of them appeals more to you at this point in time? Why do you think that is?
7. *"We can experience the archetypal realm only because we ourselves are, on another level, archetypal beings"* (page 98).
In what ways are we archetypal beings?

8. *“Meaning must be meaning for you, something that you personally experience. Our quest for meaning is therefore our quest for ourselves, our quest for the totality, the wholeness, of our own being”* (page 98).
What do you make of this statement?
9. How might you go about “marrying” history and myth – Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī – in your own life?
10. What might communicate the myth or poetry of our own life? (Maybe bring something to the group to help share this.)

I would suggest reading chapters 8 and 9 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* before reading chapter 6 of Sangharakshita's book so that you can have a go at understanding the Dharma doors to non-duality without any kind of commentary! I would also particularly recommend Ratnaguna's article (cited below) if you want to try and understand this teaching of non-duality.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Give one or two examples of Śāriputra's problem of the chairs from your own life.
2. In the context of spiritual life, what does becoming androgynous mean? What might you need to do to become more androgynous?
3. In what way is conceptual thought dualistic?
4. *"So in the case of distraction and attention, integration is the entry into non-duality"* (page 109). How might this apply to your own meditation practice?
5. Why can't we progress spiritually without paying attention to the needs of others (page 110)?
6. *"Only transcendental individuality is strong enough to resist the pressure; to remain unaffected by the group's opinion"* (page 111). Reflect on this and identify some of its implications in your own life.
7. On page 113, Sangharakshita gives six examples of more down-to-earth doorways to non-duality. Comment on how any two of these might be relevant to your own situation. Also, can you think of any other down-to-earth doors to non-duality that might be relevant to you?
8. Vimalakīrti's 'thunderlike' silence is "more powerful, more expressive, than any words" (page 114). In what sorts of situations might we be able to experience this type of silence?

Many of the themes of this chapter require a subtle pondering and reflection. See if you can make some time in the week to do this as well as to read chapters 10 and 11 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. *"A disciplined life gives strength"* (page 118).
Comment on this.
2. *"Buddhism is a middle way between the extreme of authoritarianism and the extreme of individualistic thinking for oneself"* (page 119).
Which of these extremes do you tend most towards? How might you develop more of a middle way?
3. In the last paragraph of page 123, Sangharakshita suggests a number of questions for investigating the significance of the symbolism in this part of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*. What are your thoughts on at least one of these questions?
4. What is the significance of the world *Sarvagaṇḍhasugaṇḍhā* with its marvellous meals and communication through perfume?
5. Write something about your own experience of non-verbal communication.
6. What can we learn from the perfuming of the conditioned by 'Ultimate Reality'? How does conditioned existence 'perfume Ultimate Reality'?
7. *"It is important, therefore, that we acquire new senses and new means of communication ... that we very much enlarge the total range of our being and consciousness"* (page 131).
How could you put this into practice?

This chapter begins with the image of the stūpa which you may have already come across in the *Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment* and *Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism* modules. It goes on then to explore the notion of Dharma worship. Try to make time to read chapter 12 and the epilogue of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* during the week.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What might Dharma worship mean in the context of your own life?
2. How can you “determine the Dharma in accordance with the Dharma”?
3. How is the Dharma to be applied according to the Dharma?
4. What is the difference between natural authority and artificial authority? Is there a danger of throwing the baby (of natural authority) out with the bathwater (of artificial authority)?
5. How can you practice reliance upon the meaning rather than the expression of the Dharma?
6. How would you go about determining what is a teaching of explicit and what a teaching of implicit meaning?
7. Reflect on and clarify the distinction between *jñāna* and *vijñāna*.
8. Which of the four great reliances is most relevant for you at this point in time?

As with all the modules of the Dharma Training Course, this module concludes with the opportunity to present a project to your group on a topic arising from the material you have been studying. You may wish to take one of the suggested questions and explore it in more detail than you have been able to in the weekly meetings, or you may want to take up a theme or question of your own. Whichever you choose, the purpose of the projects is to give you the opportunity to practise the second level of wisdom more fully, i.e. the level of reflection or *cintā-mayī-prajñā*. It is also a good way to share something of your experience with the group.

Taking it Further

If you have particularly enjoyed looking into the world of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and want to explore it further, I would strongly recommend a talk given by Ratnaguna entitled *Who is Vimalakīrti?* on a Men's Event at Padmaloka in January 2009.

This talk assumes knowledge of Sangharakshita's lecture series and goes on to explore the dramatic structure of the text. As well as suggesting some answers to the title of his talk – e.g. that Vimalakīrti is a spiritual community and that he is a personification of the never-ending nature of spiritual life – Ratnaguna also explores the significance of various of the other characters, e.g. Mahākāśyapa, the Goddess, Śāriputra and the Buddha. It may well stimulate you to a new reading of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*. He also mentions several sources on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* that he has found helpful which, if you are interested, you could follow up. <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC84>

Also, Padmavajra gave a talk on the same event entitled *The Great Love and the Goddess* exploring the teachings on *mahā-maitrī* in chapter 7 of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*. <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=LOC85>

Suggested further reading for the whole series

The Eternal Legacy, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579583. Chapters 8 and 11 are good on the background to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa*. Available from Windhorse and as a downloadable PDF.

http://windhorsepublications.com/the_eternal_legacy

http://www.sangharakshita.org/online_books.html

A Concise History of Buddhism, Andrew Skilton, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766667. Chapters 11-13 give historical background to the Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna scriptures. http://www.windhorsepublications.com/concise_history_of_buddhism

Text as Father by Alan Cole. Chapter 6 – *Vimalakīrti, or Why Bad Boys Finish First*. Ratnaguna cites this in his above-mentioned talk. It is a post-modern reading of the text that needs to be read critically but it does open new doors into the text itself.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=HARiKohB7wwC&printsec=frontcover&dq=Text+as+Father>

Unit 1

The Glory of the Literary World in The Priceless Jewel, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766586 – though now out of print. This essay explores more fully Sangharakshita's idea of reading Sūtras as literature and literature as Sūtras.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=165>

http://www.sangharakshita.org/online_books.html

Unit 2

Mahāyāna Buddhism, Paul Williams, Routledge, ISBN 0415025370. Pages 224- 228 have more background on Buddha-fields.

<http://www.routledge.com/books/Mahayana-Buddhism-isbn9780415356534>

Buddhism for Today and Tomorrow, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766837 – though now out of print. Contains the lectures, given in 1976, entitled *The Nucleus of a New Society* and *A Blueprint for a New World*. These lectures explore the role of Triratna in creating a 'new society' or Buddha Land by another name.

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/books/The%20Priceless%20Jewel.pdf>

Nucleus of a New Society: <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=133>

A Blueprint for a New World:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=134>

The Religion of Art, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766314. Contains Sangharakshita's key writings on the nature and role of the arts in spiritual life.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-religion-of-art-sangharakshita-classics/>

Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition, Subhuti, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766683. Chapter 9 on *The New Society* gives a full exploration of the development of Sangharakshita's thinking on the 'New Society'.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/sangharakshita-a-new-voice-in-the-buddhist-tradition/>

Unit 3

The Skill in Means Sūtra, trans. Mark Tatz, Motilal Banarsidass 1994.

<http://www.mlbd.com/BookDescription.aspx?id=895>

Mahāyāna Buddhism, Paul Williams, Routledge, ISBN 0415025370. Pages 143 – 150 deal with the doctrine of skilful means in the White Lotus Sūtra.

<http://www.routledge.com/books/Mahayana-Buddhism-isbn9780415356534>

Skilful Means, Michael Pye. This explores the teaching of skilful means in both the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and the *White Lotus Sutra*.

https://books.google.ie/books?id=rK_UODj-IoQC

Unit 4

Alagaddūpama Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya Sutta 22). Contains both the parable of the raft and the parable of the snake.

<http://www.accesstosinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.022.nypo.html>

The Doctrine of Non-Duality in the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, Ratnaguna, Western Buddhist Review, No 3. Explores the dangers of abandoning the raft of the Dharma too soon (amongst other things – see Unit 6 too).

<http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol3/nonduality.html>

Unit 5

Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition by Subhuti (ISBN 0904766683 Windhorse Publications). The section on *A Psychology of Spiritual Life*, pages 273 – 284, give an excellent account of Sangharakshita's views on myth, archetype, gestalt and the Imagination.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/sangharakshita-a-new-voice-in-the-buddhist-tradition/>

The Mythic Context, Subhuti, available from Padmaloka Books. A transcript of three talks exploring the importance of leading our spiritual lives within a mythic context.
<http://www.padmalo.org.uk/shop/booklets>

Unit 6

The Doctrine of Non-Duality in the Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa, Ratnaguna, Western Buddhist Review, No 3. Shows how Vimalakīrti's teaching of non-duality is a restatement of the Middle Way taught by the Buddha.
<http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol3/nonduality.html>

Unit 7

The Word of the Buddha in *The Guide to the Buddhist Path*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766357. This explores the four different levels through which the Enlightened Mind tries to communicate with the unenlightened.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-guide-to-the-buddhist-path/>

The Awakening of Faith, attributed to Āśvaghoṣa (Columbia University Press). Contains the reference to Reality perfuming the conditioned and vice versa.
<http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-13156-8/the-awakening-of-faith>

Unit 8

The Meaning of Orthodoxy in Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. Free download:
http://www.sangharakshita.org/online_books.html

Who is the Buddha?, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766241. Chapter 5 – *From Hero-Worship to the Worshipping Buddha* – explores the notion of reverence and devotion in the life of the Buddha.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/who-is-the-buddha-ebook-2/>

4.2

Twenty-First Century Bodhisattva



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Module written by Akuppa

In *Year One* of this course, you will have read that the Bodhisattva is the ideal of Mahāyāna, or ‘Great Way’, Buddhism. Here is an extract of the text as a reminder of what this ideal is and why it arose:

Mahāyāna Buddhists re-emphasized the importance of cultivating a warm compassionate attitude towards other living beings. They developed a more explicit stress on selfless action for others. And they developed a new version of the Buddhist spiritual ideal, distinct from the older ideal of the Arahant – literally ‘Worthy One’ – which in the minds of some people had come to imply a cold, negative detachment. The spiritual ideal for Mahāyāna Buddhism is not someone who is liberated from this world and lives in a state of bliss, it is someone who has seen beyond the world as we know it, but still chooses to work in the world and for the good of the world, out of a deep sense of solidarity with other living beings.

This spiritual ideal was called, in Sanskrit, the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva Ideal served a dual purpose for Mahāyāna Buddhists, because it both stressed the selfless, compassionate aspect of Enlightenment, which they felt that ‘Hīnayāna’ Buddhists had lost sight of, and because it was a goal that could be aimed for by all Buddhists, regardless of whether or not they lived a monastic lifestyle.

- Week 1, Part 5, Year One.

In this module, we’re going to be exploring what it might mean to live as a Bodhisattva in today’s world. The world has changed very much since this ideal arose around two thousand years ago. Is it still possible to be liberated from the world while choosing to work for its good? And is it really possible to live in a state of bliss while keeping alive a deep sense of loving solidarity with other living beings?

The Buddha as Bodhisattva

For Sangharakshita, the rise of the Bodhisattva ideal wasn’t entirely new. It was simply a reassertion of something that had been in the Buddha’s teachings from the very start – and not only in his teachings, but more so in his life. In the episode of the monk with dysentery, for example, the Buddha and Ānanda themselves wash the sick man and place him onto a bed. The Buddha then urges the other monks to look after one another. ‘Whoever would tend to me,’ he told them, ‘should tend to the sick.’ Throughout his life, in his many encounters with

people, the Buddha is motivated by nothing but the welfare and liberation of those who he is talking with. And he encouraged his followers to do likewise, to:

Go forth for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the good and the happiness of gods and men. Let no two of you go in the same direction. Teach the Dharma which is beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful at the end. Proclaim both the letter and the spirit of the holy life completely fulfilled and perfectly pure.

The Buddha's life was not only a series of encounters with individuals, but also a response to the times he was living in. His teachings arose from his vision of suffering on the widest scale of existence. They apply to the human situation in any age. But they were expressed for particular people in particular times and places.

The Buddha lived in the Ganges Valley in the fifth century BCE. Understanding the world he lived in helps us understand his teachings. He lived in a small kingdom that would sometimes be in conflict with its neighbours. It was a farming society in which family obligations were strongly emphasized. The roles of women and men were separated on traditional lines. There was a very rigid caste system and one's birth determined one's station in life. There were many spiritual and religious traditions. Belief in local gods and spirits was widespread. Alongside this there was a Vedic belief system based on the idea of 'ātman', or fixed soul. Large-scale animal sacrifice took place. These were some of the conditions that brought happiness or suffering to the sentient beings who inhabited them.

Even from this very sketchy impression of the Buddha's world, we can see some patterns. Religious beliefs underpinned the caste system. This gave privilege and security to some and suffering to others. Religious beliefs kept women in subservient roles. They also caused untold misery for animals. Beliefs were not just a private matter. They had a big effect on the happiness or otherwise of people and animals.

The Buddha's response was not just to be kind to people in the ordinary sense, though he was always that. He was moved to wake people up. He wanted to challenge the unquestioned assumptions of the time. He couched his teachings (such as anātman and karma) in terms that would subvert harmful beliefs. He gathered around him a Sangha and accepted women and people from all castes and none. He created conditions for simple living, a breathing space for spiritual development away from the expectations of family and farm. His monastic followers wore robes and shaven heads, to eradicate the marks of caste. He personally intervened in armed conflict, persuading rival kings of the futility of war. He taught that loving kindness should be extended to all sentient beings. This led to a widespread abandonment of animal sacrifice.

All of this arose from a simple desire to end suffering. It wasn't a political position. It brought into play one's social position, friendships, living situation, livelihood and one's mostly deeply held views about life. It was founded on the possibility of personal change and self development. It was a total, radical response.

The Bodhisattva and the Modern World

How do we follow the example of the Buddha in our own time? In this age of modernity, what would the total, radical response of a Buddha to the world look like? That is what this module will be considering. But it's the same question that has been faced before by, for example, Dr

Ambedkar in India and Sangharakshita on his return to the West. As modernity extends its reach to most parts of the world, it is a question that all Buddhist traditions now face.

Imagine you are someone from that era who has travelled through time into the modern era. How would it look? What are the main things that, given some time to acclimatize, they would notice? There is only space here to guess at a few of the main features of how our age would seem to this time traveller:

- Technologies that could not have been imagined. For many people, far greater ease of transport, instant communication, better health and life expectancy, freedom from manual tasks. Also weapons of mass destruction, war and conflict affecting civilians on a greater scale;
- Mass literacy and education;
- Widespread poverty;
- Global awareness and communication, the movement of things and money across the world;
- A vastly increased human population – over seven billion people;
- Most people living in cities. Fewer forests and wild animals;
- Access to vastly more information via the internet;
- Power residing not with kings and priests, but with corporations, banks and nation states, with varying degrees of representative democracy;
- Large scale, technologically driven agriculture and factory farming;
- A general alienation from the natural world in daily life;
- A lot of people working in offices;
- Ideas such as evolution, and consciousness as an incidental by-product of material and biological evolution;
- A loss of the sense of the sacred, and the decline of religion as a binding force in society;
- The idea that as individuals, our uniqueness is what makes us real, ideas of freedom and human rights;
- The idea that one's well-being and identity is created by the objects or life experiences we consume;
- Intensive consumption of goods and energy, and massive wastage.
- Pollution of earth, skies, rivers, oceans;
- Planetary life support systems being stretched to breaking point.

This is, of course, just a sketch. You could probably come up with your own list. The point is that we tend to take as given the conditions of the times we live in. With each of the above, it's worth reflecting that, for better or worse, they are not inevitable. They've arisen on the basis of conditions, and they are changeable and interconnected.

There are some things to rejoice in, such as democracy, human rights and greater freedom from hardship. But there are also some challenges in following the Bodhisattva path in today's world:

- The sheer scale of suffering we might be aware of is unprecedented and often overwhelming;
- The nature of the threat to life is all-encompassing, such that the very existence of life on earth is in question;
- The amount of information and stimulation available to us is far greater than in the past, bringing the danger of distraction and superficiality;
- Just as there is more information available to us, there is also more misinformation;

- The consumer society plays on our desire for material comfort and security, which can be a further distraction and encouragement towards apathy;
- There is still a strong pressure to conform to society's norms;
- There are deeply held views (in ourselves as well as others) inherited from theistic religions or materialist nihilism;
- We live in a culture of cynicism and mistrust, which affirms negative emotions and values;
- People (perhaps including ourselves) identify strongly with nationality, race, gender, or political affiliation.

In meeting these challenges, Sangharakshita has gone back to the principles of what the Buddha taught. He sees these as more essential than the external forms that have built up around them. These include mindfulness, mettā and the Bodhisattva ideal.

He refers to the Bodhisattva ideal as the 'altruistic aspect' of going for refuge. Becoming less self-centred is not just an incidental outcome of the spiritual life. It is the spiritual life. We might think about our Buddhist practice in all sorts of ways – going for refuge, renunciation, meditation, the attainment of insight, or something else. But it is nothing if isn't a heartfelt opening to others in a spirit of loving kindness.

To practise within the Triratna Buddhist Community is to follow the Bodhisattva path. The mettā bhāvanā, spiritual friendship, the precepts and puja are nothing less than Bodhisattva trainings. We may or may not think of ourselves as Bodhisattvas in training. But that is what we are if we apply ourselves to the Triratna system of practice. This isn't mere spiritual rhetoric. The point is to actually give rise to Bodhicitta in the lives of ordinary people like you and me.

You may find that very inspiring. Or perhaps you find the idea of becoming a Bodhisattva too idealistic, unappealing or even a bit mad. The following points might help:

1. The Bodhisattva is ordinary.
2. A Bodhisattva is alive to what is going on in the world.
3. A Bodhisattva transforms self and world.
4. Becoming a Bodhisattva is a path of increasing happiness and bliss.
5. A Bodhisattva is someone who sees things as they really are.
6. You don't really 'become' a Bodhisattva.

The Bodhisattva is ordinary

What do you think of when you hear the word 'Bodhisattva'? A figure from antiquity, perhaps? Or an image from a shrine room wall? We might think of Bodhisattvas as being a special class of being, other than human. And in some ways, it's true that to follow the Bodhisattva path is to become different. It is an extraordinary choice. But it isn't about becoming self-consciously different from other people. On the contrary, a Bodhisattva will always emphasise connection rather than difference. This is Sangharakshita's description of the Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti from his lecture 'On Being All Things to All Men':

Vimalakīrti appears among people like one of themselves; he appears among businessmen as a businessman, he appears among government officials a government official and, above all, he appears as a layman among laymen. In reality, of course, he is quite different from other people, in reality he's an advanced Bodhisattva. But he doesn't make a point of being different. He doesn't as it were insist upon it: he doesn't insist upon being different. He doesn't appear, we may say,

among people wearing his Bodhisattva gear so to speak. He doesn't appear among people nodding his three heads and waving his four arms, which he undoubtedly has, though this is what people expect. Very often, this is the sort of thing that people expect. They think that if someone is spiritually advanced, he will appear different from others in some rather obvious, striking, peculiar, eccentric, sort of way.

So, whatever being a Bodhisattva is, it's not about taking on an exotic spiritual identity. It's not about harking back to an antiquated ideal. It's certainly not about thinking of oneself as special. It is a down to earth, meaningful myth – perhaps the most sane, meaningful myth – by which to live one's life.

A Bodhisattva is alive to what is going on in the world

To live as a Bodhisattva is to live a fulfilled human life. Their deep solidarity with other living beings doesn't arise from some sort of religious duty. It arises from being human. Sometimes the spiritual life is seen as separate from such worldly concerns as the welfare of beings. On the Bodhisattva path – on the Buddha's path – there can be no such separation. Fulfilment and freedom come from realizing our connection with others, not from seeing the world as a distraction. Sangharakshita writes:

An attitude of withdrawal from public concerns into purely personal ones is one that is not worthy of a human being – not worthy, at least of someone who is trying to be a human being in the full sense of the term. It represents an abdication of responsibility.

- A Buddhist Approach to Current World Problems, from *What is the Sangha?*

A Bodhisattva transforms self and world

If we are open to this, we immediately set up a tension in our Buddhist life. Our Buddhist practice cannot be confined to our private contemplations and attainments. It is nothing if not expressed in our relations with others and with the world. For Sangharakshita, we make progress precisely by living with this tension, attending both to our inner lives and to engaging with the world. In *Year One* of this course (*Part 4, Week 6*) you may recall that he talks about this in terms of the 'trend of withdrawal' and the 'trend of involvement.'

What one has to do is not allow the tension between these two trends to relax. If one does that, then in a sense one is lost. Even though they are contradictory, one has to pursue both simultaneously. One has to get out and stay in, see the faults of conditioned existence while at the same time feeling the sufferings of sentient beings, develop both Wisdom and Compassion. As one pursues both of these trends simultaneously, the tension builds up and up (it is, of course, not a psychological tension but a spiritual tension). It is built up until a point is reached when one can't go any further. When one reaches that point, then something happens. We might describe it as an explosion. As the result of the tension generated by following these two contradictory trends simultaneously, there occurs a breakthrough into a higher dimension of spiritual consciousness, where the two trends of withdrawal and involvement are no longer two, not because they have been artificially amalgamated into one, but because the plane on which they were seen as two different things has been transcended.

When one breaks through one has the experience of being simultaneously withdrawn and involved, 'out' of it and 'in' it at the same time. Wisdom and

Compassion have become non-dual. When the explosion occurs, when for the first time one is both withdrawn and involved, having both Wisdom and Compassion, not as two things, but as 'one' thing, then one may say that the Bodhicitta has arisen.

- Original source: *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*.

Becoming a Bodhisattva is a path of ever deeper happiness and bliss

The Bodhisattva path is often described in heroic terms – and rightly so. The Buddha's teachings are never feeble or passive. The perfections – dāna, ethics, patience and so on – need to be practised wholeheartedly if they are really to have an effect. We might, then, be tempted to think that being a Bodhisattva is a matter of miserable self-sacrifice. If we think, say, about heroic acts of generosity or patience from the point of view of not being an advanced Bodhisattva, this is how they will appear.

But the inner experience is not this. It is very important that we don't lose sight of the fact that becoming a Bodhisattva is a path. That is to say, it is progressive, something that we tread one step at a time. It's not about assuming an ideal, but about effecting an inner transformation. And that inner change will be one of deepening connection, liberation, creativity and bliss.

A Bodhisattva sees things as they really are

How can this be? After all, when we see suffering in the world, our experience is often the very opposite of bliss. We might feel despair, or be overwhelmed. The answer lies in the Bodhisattva's experience of reality. The Bodhisattva has insight into *śūnyatā*. They see reality differently. They see all phenomena as empty of intrinsic self-existence. This gives them a heart and mind that is great enough to resonate with great suffering and experience fathomless beauty at the same time.

Just as in the Buddha's day, it matters what philosophical views people hold. They affect how we treat each other and the kind of society we live in. They impact in very real ways on the well-being or suffering of beings. Our views are writ large on the world, as Subhuti describes:

It does matter, and matter very much, what views we hold. Integrity and good intentions are not enough: an intelligent understanding that accords with the ways things truly are is essential. The ideas we have about life, the attitudes we have to our experience, all shape the way we act for good or for evil. The long experience of mankind amply demonstrates that ideas really do count: we can see, for example, the terrible inhumanity that flowed from views in the twentieth century, whether fascist, communist, or colonialist. Much of the danger in the world today stems from the confrontation in the Middle East between incompatible views: Islamic, Jewish, Christian, Socialist, Neo-Conservative, Liberal and so forth.

Of course, views have been the basis for much good in the world, too, and today we must hope and work for the triumph of humanitarian views of all kinds. Considering the enormous destructive potential of modern technology, one could say that the survival of the world today depends upon the widespread influence of more helpful views about the nature of this life, humanity's meaning and purpose, and the responsibility that one human being has to another – and to other beings too.

- *Revering and Relying Upon the Dharma*.

Let's consider the effects of a materialist world-view. What difference does it make if we think that we can account for everything, even our own consciousness, on a material level? This is a

very deeply ingrained view in the modern world and often goes unquestioned. But does it account for love, meaning, beauty, truth, or any value higher or beyond our individual selves? And are the great liberating movements of history really no more than mutual pacts of self-interest?

The views we hold about the world act as a filter to the way we experience it. If I believe that everything can be explained only by material science, I will censor out or dismiss any experience of awe and mystery. My whole experience of life is reduced to one impoverished dimension.

The Buddha's view was that form and consciousness are interdependent. Experience cannot be reduced simply to one or the other. Mind, or consciousness, is no less a primary, creative force as matter. Furthermore, we don't own it exclusively any more than we own the atoms that, for a time, form part of our bodies. If we are open to this way of seeing things, we might begin to experience the world differently.

'Interconnectedness' is a term we often hear in Buddhist circles. In the modern world, we are very interconnected in terms of communications and trade. We are interconnected with each other and with all life on Earth in that we share a delicate ecosystem. We are connected – more than we often realize – in that we share the story of evolution of life on Earth with each other and other species. But if we are open to the true nature of consciousness, there is a yet more profound sense in which we are connected. We can come to realize that we are connected on the deepest level of our being.

This cannot be reduced to a simple theory. Our experience of it will not be a simple matter of concepts. It comes, rather, through our intuitive sense in meditation, in reflection and in the midst of life. It comes as a resonant sense of meaning and purpose, of deep connection with and reverence for living beings, and a sense of the sacred and beautiful in the cosmos itself. If we choose the Bodhisattva path, this will be at the heart of all our actions, and will grow stronger as we progress. As aspiring Bodhisattvas, we will at least be open to the idea that there is more to reality than the material. If we do hold other views, we will at least be aware of it and be willing to explore other ways of seeing.

This matters because it will affect how we respond to the world. Being on the Bodhisattva path is not merely to be a Buddhist who chooses to work for the welfare of others. One is not only developing kindness, but also wisdom.

With this in mind, we can tentatively begin to draw a picture of how the Bodhisattva might work in today's world. They will:

- Assert the unity and intrinsic value of life, above and beyond any distinctions such as race or nationality.
- Express a sense of beauty and sacredness.
- Reconnect with nature, with an empathic rather than utilitarian attitude to animals.
- Communicate the Buddha's teachings.
- Foster a culture of self-development, seeing all people as capable of growth and awakening.
- Live out these values in their own lives with a natural practice of ethics.

You don't really 'become' a Bodhisattva

While we might speak of individual men and women being Bodhisattvas, it is important to bear in mind that this is just a way of speaking. Bodhicitta takes us beyond the language of self

and other. The very notion of Bodhisattva implies leaving behind the self-referential viewpoint of 'I'. As we will see later in the module, Sangharakshita prefers to think of Bodhicitta as arising in the context of a spiritual community. There's only one Bodhicitta!

How this module works

Most of us are not, yet, advanced Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattva ideal provides us with a myth to live by. But we will need to take account of ourselves, with all our strengths and weaknesses. In this module, we'll be focusing on starting where we are. In the main, we'll be focusing on the mettā bhāvanā and the precepts. We'll be taking a look at some aspects of the twenty-first century world, and bringing our meditation and ethical practice to bear on it.

In each unit:

- There will be a suggested theme to bring into your mettā bhāvanā for the week. Notice if this brings up any challenges for you, and whether it inspires you to act differently.
- There will be some optional background reading on a related topic. This is not essential, but gives you an opportunity to read more widely if you wish to do so. Two books feature in the recommendations – Vaddhaka Linn's *The Buddha on Wall Street: What's Wrong with Capitalism and What We Can Do about It*; and Akuppa's *Saving the Earth: A Buddhist View*. You might wish to read them beforehand in the right order and then review the relevant chapters for each unit.

It is suggested that you read the core material early in each week, so that you have a chance to put it into practice and discuss your experience at the following session.

Mettā Bhāvanā for this week

Pay particular attention to the fifth stage. How do you approach extending mettā to all beings? Do you bring to mind people individually or collectively? What effect does this stage have on your life?

Suggested Background Reading for this week

Akuppa, *Saving the Earth*, Chapters 1 & 2.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Take a moment to think about your answer to the following question – it can be interesting to do this with another person, taking time to listen to each other for a few minutes each: What concerns me in today's world?
2. Do you feel that leaving a positive legacy in the world is a necessary part of living a meaningful life? What would you like yours to be?
3. What is your purpose in life? Is this a question that you think about consciously? Has the mettā bhāvanā affected this in any way?
4. Which of the challenges for the modern day Bodhisattva do you feel to be the greatest for yourself?

Not by hatred are hatreds ever pacified here (in the world). They are pacified by love.
This is the eternal law.

- *Dhammapada* v.5, trans. Sangharakshita.

In this unit, we'll be considering our experience of human violence and violent conflict. How can we respond with equanimity and without blame? How can we begin to put an end to cycles of violent behaviour?

While human nature may be broadly the same as in the Buddha's day, violence takes on some particularly problematic forms in today's world:

- Technology has greatly increased the lethal capability of weapons;
- Technology allows for the killing of people remotely;
- Large-scale annihilation of human population has occurred and is possible even on a global scale;
- We are much more aware of world events, so we're exposed to much more violence and conflict.

Violence can also exist in latent form. Exploitation can be maintained merely by the existence of arms. Even if they're not used, this is a form of violence. In Sangharakshita's terms, it's the operation of the power mode rather than the love mode.

All of us have had some experience of violence, either at first hand or involving someone we care about. And all of us, almost certainly, have been party to violence at least in a mild form. Our personal experiences will differ in severity. But we all have the experience of living in a world where violence and war happen. It's difficult to ignore.

Violence is the greatest challenge to our practice of the first precept. When someone's being is negated, especially if it's ourselves or a loved one, the principle of loving kindness can seem impossibly idealistic. The precept is challenging us to hold two things at once – compassion for the person who has been violated; and compassion for the perpetrator. To be capable of this even in extreme situations requires not only mettā, but a degree of insight. Without this, we will tend towards one side or the other. We will either:

- Side completely with the victim. This allows us to express our solidarity with them but by demonizing or wishing vengeance for the perpetrator; or
- Show understanding for the perpetrator, but at the expense of belittling or distancing ourselves from the impact of their actions on the victim.

To radically practise the first precept is to cultivate loving kindness to all those involved. We need to be completely open to the humanity and deepest needs of victims and perpetrators. We need to understand the needs of victims to feel that they are cherished. They also need to be free from states of hatred and vengefulness. And we need to understand the need of perpetrators to fully acknowledge their actions and reconnect with their own humanity. This, according to the formidable fifth verse of the *Dhammapada* (see above), is the only way to bring genuine peace.

This is always going to be work in progress. If we've been practising the first precept and the *Mettā Bhāvanā* for a while, we might have made some good progress that has allowed us to live more happily in our day-to-day life. One of the questions at the end of the unit invites us to reflect on our own experience of violence, and whether our Buddhist practice has helped us. This is where we need to start. If we can learn to be more loving, patient and forgiving in our own lives, only then can we become a peacemaker in the world at large.

To do so calls for a deeper practice of non-violence. In the rest of this unit, we'll be looking at two areas that pose a particular challenge in the modern world: crime and punishment, and war and peace.

Crime and Punishment

Most modern justice systems are founded on the idea that wrongs are righted by punishment. Retribution somehow restores the metaphysical order. This view has its roots in theistic religion, and modern criminal law has inherited it. The state takes on the responsibility for upholding the moral order. So if I commit a crime, I have offended not so much against the victim as against the state, and it is up to the state to take retribution. In recent years, other motivations have come to the fore, such as deterrence, public protection and prisoner rehabilitation. Nonetheless, the basic model remains one of offence and punishment.

This approach to justice is often so taken for granted that we don't question it, even if it doesn't work particularly well. But it isn't the only way of looking at things, and it doesn't have to dictate how we treat people who have committed acts of violence.

In many traditional societies, the approach was very different. The aim was not to punish but to restore harmony. This was also the case with the rules of discipline, or *Vinaya*, of the early Buddhist Sangha. The concern was not to judge as guilty or not guilty, but to help the offender understand the consequences of their actions. The immediate emphasis would be on guidance, censure or reconciliation. Only if that failed would other options, such as suspension or banishment, be used.

This was based on a much more pragmatic view of human weakness. As unenlightened beings, we all fall short of perfect conduct. We are all subject to conditions and pressures. And we all have the potential to grow and develop. With this view, there is no impulse to divide the world into 'guilty' and 'not guilty', or to stigmatize people who have offended.

This view is at odds with the prevailing attitude of blame and stigmatization of offenders. But a more Buddhist view of human nature might lead us to support approaches based on rehabilitation, reconciliation and 'restorative justice'. It might change the way we personally treat people who have broken the law, or anyone who has behaved unskillfully. In this way, we might begin to bring an end to cycles of hatred and violence.

War and Peace

In this section, we'll look at some extracts from a lecture entitled *Buddhism, World Peace and Nuclear War*, given by Sangharakshita in 1984.

Peace has become a seamless garment, and the world has either to wear the whole garment or go naked to destruction. There can no longer be any question of a scrap of peace covering one part of the world's nakedness and not another.

This makes it impossible for us to think in merely geo-political terms. We have also to think in geo-ethical, geo-humanitarian, or geo-philanthropic terms. Since peace is indivisible, so that the stark choice before us is either world peace or no peace, one world or no world, we shall be able to achieve peace only if we realize that humanity too is indivisible, and if we consistently act on that realization. In other words, we shall be able to achieve peace only by regarding ourselves as citizens of the world....

Peace in the full sense of the term will be achieved only when disputes between sovereign nation-states, as well as between smaller groups and between individuals, are settled entirely by non-violent means.

In order to achieve peace – world peace – in this fuller sense we shall have to deepen our realization of the indivisibility of humanity, and act on that realization with even greater consistency. We shall have to regard ourselves as citizens of the world in a more concrete sense than before, and rid ourselves of even the faintest vestige of nationalism. We shall have to identify ourselves more closely with all living things, and love them with a more ardent and selfless love. We shall have to be a louder and clearer voice of sanity and compassion in the world....

Above all, we shall have to intensify our commitment to the great ethical and spiritual principle of non-violence, both in respect to relations between individuals and in respect to relations between groups....

We must therefore not only abolish nuclear weapons, achieve peace in the full sense of the term, and learn to live in accordance with the principle of non-violence, as well as deepen our realization of the indivisibility of humanity and restore communication by the reinstatement of the notion of the objectivity of truth, but we must also eradicate craving, transcend both birth and death, and attain nirvāṇa, or the Unconditioned.

The situation in which we find ourselves today is dangerous in the extreme, perhaps more dangerous for humanity than at any other period in history, and time is running out. Whether we shall be able to achieve world peace and avert nuclear war we do not know. We can but do our best in a situation, which, to a great extent, is not of our own personal making. But whether we succeed in achieving world peace and averting nuclear war or not we shall still have to die, still have to face the problem of death. If we solve the problem of death it will not, in the most fundamental sense, matter whether we solve the problem of world peace and nuclear war or not – though, paradoxically, if we do succeed in solving the problem of death then we shall, in all probability, succeed in solving the problem of world peace and nuclear war too. In any case, if we solve the problem of death, the problem of birth, the problem of craving, then we shall be able to live in the world as the Buddha and his disciples lived. We shall be able to join them in chanting those celebrated verses of the

Dhammapada, the first three of which the Buddha, according to tradition, recited to the Śākya and Koliya by way of admonition immediately after he had prevented them from destroying each other:

Happy indeed we live, friendly amid the hateful. Among men who hate we dwell free from hate.

Happy indeed we live, healthy among the sick. Among men who are sick (with craving) we dwell free from sickness.

Happy indeed we live, content amid the greedy. Among men who are greedy we dwell free from greed.

Happy indeed we live, we for whom there is no attachment. Feeders on rapture shall we be, like the Gods of Brilliant Light. Victory begets hatred, (for) the defeated experiences suffering. The tranquil one experiences happiness, giving up (both) victory and defeat.

If we can chant these verses from the very depths of our hearts then we shall be living in accordance with the teachings of Buddhism, and working together for what we all most ardently desire: the achievement of world peace and the avoidance of nuclear war.

This lecture was given during the depths of the Cold War, when the main threat was the tensions between superpowers. The threat of nuclear weapons has not gone away. It is now augmented by the threat of extremist terrorism and rogue states. And it remains the case that the gap between rich and poor nations is bolstered by huge military arsenals. Sangharakshita's lecture applies now more than ever. We can distil from it six calls to action that could be taken as a Bodhisattva's guide for peacemaking in the modern world:

1. Consistently act on the realization that humanity is indivisible;
2. Intensify our commitment to non-violence with a more ardent and selfless love;
3. Find non-violent ways of resolving disputes between individuals and groups;
4. Rid ourselves of even the faintest vestige of nationalism;
5. Become a louder and clearer voice of sanity in the world;
6. Practise the Buddha's teachings more deeply with regard to birth, death and craving.

Mettā Bhāvanā for this week

There are three suggested approaches, which you might wish to try at different times through the week.

- Apply the practice to a situation of conflict that you are or have been involved in. Include all parties concerned.
- Bring to mind someone who has behaved unskillfully.
- Bring to mind all those involved in war and conflict.

Suggested Background Reading for this week

The full version of *Buddhism, World Peace and Nuclear War* by Sangharakshita can be found on Free Buddhist Audio. It is also available in his book *The Priceless Jewel*.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=162> (audio)

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/read?num=162&at=text> (text)

http://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/The%20Priceless%20Jewel.pdf



Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Do you find it challenging to have mettā for those who have been violent? What helps?
2. Do you find that it is less easy to forgive when you or someone you love has been hurt, rather than someone more distant? Why is this?
3. Does your practice of the Mettā Bhāvanā this week inspire you to practise more deeply Sangharakshita's six calls to action? Discuss each of these in the group.
4. How do you feel, if it is the case, about living in a country with a large nuclear arsenal? If not, how do you feel about that?
5. Bring up any points from the suggested background reading which have challenged or inspired you.

It is not that you just sit on your meditation mat radiating mettā towards the world but keeping well out of the way of the world. It is that mettā enters into your action and expresses itself in terms of non-violent action for the benefit of others.

- Sangharakshita, *Questions and Answers*, Guhyaloka, 1988.

In the previous unit, we looked at how, as followers of the Bodhisattva path, we might help to end cycles of violence and conflict. However, there is more that we can do. The first precept enjoins us not only to refrain from doing harm, but also to positively cultivate deeds of loving kindness. Just so, the Bodhisattva path is not only about steering ourselves and others away from violence. It is also about building unity.

How do we bring about a more unified, harmonious world? Perhaps the first step is to recognize that it is our responsibility, and that it involves the way we live our whole lives. It's not just a question of who we vote for or what values we espouse, though these are by no means unimportant. The point is that, with every interaction, we are creating unity or perpetuating division. This might start with a general attitude of friendliness. Śāntideva urges us to have a smiling face, be the first to greet and be a friend to the world (Bodhicaryāvatāra Ch.2 v.71). But it involves all aspects of how we treat others – neighbours, colleagues, friends, family, people we're buying things from, everyone – in all of our dealings with them. Are we acting from the power mode or the love mode?

When we arrive into the world, there are complex social and economic patterns already in place. We're brought up to assume that things are a certain way and that people have their place. Your own set of assumptions will depend on the circumstances of your birth. It might take the form of a certain snobbery to those who are poorer (or richer); or expectations about the roles of women and men; prejudice to those of a different race or nationality; or many more.

So we need first of all to recognize these unconscious inherited attitudes. Then we need to learn to let go of them. We need to replace them with unconditional mettā, really seeing others, and seeing all human beings as capable of growth and awakening. On this foundation, the possibility of wider social change rests.

The Dalits and Dr Ambedkar

We'll consider this by looking at the case of the Dalits in India and the figure of Dr Ambedkar. Sangharakshita has pointed out the importance of social as well as personal change as a spur to the spiritual life:

I sometimes contrast the position and the attitude of New Buddhists living in the West, especially in Great Britain, with the background and the attitude of the New Buddhists in India. Here (in the West) we are much more concerned it seems with our subjective psychological state, with our feelings.... The people who became Buddhists in India, the Dalits, for them the point of departure was social, they saw Buddhism.... which was critical of the caste system, as the key to their social, economic and even their political uplift as well as a spiritual path.

You may say that here we go from the psychological to the spiritual.... but there they go from the social to the spiritual. Because you need to have both... you need to balance the two... I certainly think that perhaps Order members, mitras and others in the West could pay a bit more attention to the objective and social issues rather than to their own subjective feelings... I hope we can learn a bit of a lesson from our friends in India who are very much concerned with social, economic and other such issues.

We must have a balanced spiritual life.

- *Remembering Ambedkar* talk, 2006.

Dalits are sometimes referred to as 'untouchables' and have experienced extreme inequality for thousands of years. Their position is underpinned by Hindu religious teachings. Caste is designated by birth. It determines your marriage, your friendships and your occupation. Higher castes believe they are 'polluted' by contact with people of lower caste or none. They have denied them education, health care and clean water. They expect them to be subservient and obedient. Sangharakshita calls this a state of virtual slavery. It is officially illegal in India, but is still widely practised.

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) was born into an 'untouchable' Hindu family (a term he used himself) in Maharashtra. As he grew up, he experienced the indignity of caste prejudice. He studied in New York and London and gained two doctorates, a level of educational attainment virtually unheard of in his community. On his return to India, he decided to challenge the caste system. He led several thousand people to a water tank in a high caste area and took a sip of the water. In Hindu terms, he had polluted it. There was a violent backlash that resulting in death threats and a long legal battle. Later, he publicly burnt the *Manusmriti*. This is an anthology of 'divinely inspired' pronouncements on Hindu social life that sanction the caste system. This unleashed another storm of abuse and threats.

Ambedkar was appointed to senior roles and posts within government. He served as Law Minister and drafted the constitution that brought democracy to the newly independent India. Due to a dispute over the Hindu Code Bill, which dealt with marriage and property rights, he resigned from the Cabinet. At the following general election he lost his place in the House of Representatives.

This was the point at which he started to publicly discuss the idea of converting to another faith to escape the designation of caste. He saw that the caste system was 'mind made' and the solution to it would lie in the mind also.

On 14 October 1956, Ambedkar took the Dhamma Diksha (initiation into the Dhamma) at a huge rally in Nagpur. In the presence of over 300,000 people he took the Refugees and Precepts from U Chandramani. He then faced his followers, and they took the Refugees and Precepts from him, embracing the Buddhist faith. For Ambedkar, the Buddhist faith gave people access to the dignity, pride and self-respect that had been denied them within the Hindu caste system.

Ambedkar died just six weeks after his conversion. His followers were left distraught and with little guidance on how to live a Buddhist life.

Nevertheless, conversions to Buddhism have continued. There are probably now 20-30 million 'new Buddhists' in India. Caste discrimination is still a reality, but the conversions have led to real social change. A higher proportion of Dalits who have converted (73% compared with 52%) have a basic education. The community is increasingly confident and self-reliant.

Ambedkar converted to Buddhism to lead the Dalits out of the caste system. He chose Buddhism because it offers a positive vision of humanity. The first step for the Dalits was to let go of their own inherited beliefs about caste. Even when beliefs are a cause of your own servitude, they are no less difficult to overcome. Ambedkar was wary that this belief might be replaced by nihilistic or materialistic attitudes. Buddhism offered instead a positive vision of all people being capable of enlightenment. This gave individuals, and their social movement, a new, transcendental purpose:

History bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. The emancipation of the mind and soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people.

- Dr Ambedkar.

Ambedkar's political philosophy was founded on the three great ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. He drew these, he said, not from the French Revolution, but from the Buddha's teachings. He applied them in India, but his philosophy is a formula for Buddhist social change in any situation. What is crucial is that they point to the sameness of personal values and wider change.

Liberty

Everyone should be free to choose their profession, friendships and marriage. Caste is an extreme curtailment of these freedoms. There are many other examples. The civil liberties movement advocates freedom of religion, privacy, expression, speech, assembly, due process and bodily integrity.

Liberty is a personal value as well as a political principle. We all carry around attitudes and assumptions, drawn from our psychological and cultural conditioning. We need to be free from them for our own sake and for the sake of others. In Sangharakshita's terms, we need to renounce use of the power mode on another person. For Ambedkar and his followers, liberty has meant, primarily, the renunciation of caste. Even if we don't participate in anything as rigid as caste, there may be more subtle ways of exerting control over people in our life.

Equality

Equality takes this a stage further. Not only do we renounce the power mode over another person, but we learn to see that they are basically the same as us. In the bigger picture, we learn to see all of humanity (to borrow another of Sangharakshita's phrases) as basically one. If equality becomes a shared social value, it is a basis for respect for every individual by every individual.

For Buddhists, this is no mere sentiment. As we saw in Unit 1 of this module, Buddhist practice can lead us beyond a view of consciousness as being reducible to the material. Consciousness is connected at the deepest level of being, and it is capable of growth and awakening. This adds a

transcendental dimension to the ordinary idea of equality. For Ambedkar, there was a direct connection between this vision and the political idea of equality. It is one of the Dharmic principles that he sought to enshrine in the Indian constitution.

Fraternity

Ambedkar understood that, without fraternity, there can be no real liberty or equality. They are all underpinned by *mettā*. We need to take the word 'fraternity' here to mean any strong bond of friendship and loyalty, applying to all genders. It carries the connotation of being a bond as strong as any ties of blood and kinship, recalling the Karaniya Mettā Sutta:

Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world:
Spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths;
Outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.
- trans. Amaravati Sangha.

If liberty and equality provide the constitution for a unified society, it is fraternity, or *mettā*, that gives it its lifeblood. Ambedkar understood that it is not enough just to write a constitution. There needs to be an actual communication and sharing of interest:

The ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society, there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. An ideal society is primarily a mode of associated living of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence to one's fellow men.
- Dr Ambedkar

This applies not only to India, but anywhere. On a global level, nothing is needed more than a shared sense of humanity as essentially one family.

The Spiritual and the Political

Dr Ambedkar is still revered by the Dalit community of India, but his legacy is a universal one. He and his followers have brought about real change by uniting the spiritual and political. It is a modern example of a movement based on transformation of both self and world. Liberty, equality and fraternity are principles that unite both of these. They provide a clear, seamless connection between our inner lives, our personal lives and our collective lives. They bring together meditation, friendships, community, culture and politics in the following ways.

Mettā Bhāvanā

There is a correspondence between the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity and three facets of the Mettā Bhāvanā meditation practice:

- Liberty: Renouncing the power mode over the person;
- Equality: Seeing them as a fellow being and capable of growth and development;
- Fraternity: Positively wishing them freedom from suffering and happiness and being prepared to act on that.

Friendships

These same principles apply to how we conduct ourselves individually towards other people. They imply both kindly well wishing towards them and a respect for their karmic responsibility and autonomy. These both arise from *mettā* in that, to really wish the best for someone is to wish for their growth and development. Friendship includes both of these aspects. If we have kindly well wishing without respect for autonomy, we might tend to be overbearing. If we have respect for autonomy without kindly well wishing, we would be indifferent and not really a friend at all.

The Communities We Build

Both of these aspects of friendship will be present in Buddhist Sangha. Sangha is based on friendship, mutual help and generosity. It is also based on supporting each person to deepen their own practice and take responsibility for their own development.

This also remains true of the Dalit communities in India. They are characterized by strong mutual support, giving care for those who need it, but with a strong emphasis on individual ethical responsibility. This emphasis originated with Dr. Ambedkar himself, who wanted to avoid a victim mentality on the part of his community and saw responsibility and dignity as the path to real change: “If you believe in living a respectable life, you believe in self-help, which is the best help.”

A Culture of Self Development

As communities based on these principles, we are contributing to the creation of a wider culture of self-development in society. We are communicating a value of human life based on awareness, kindness and awakening, rather than wealth, pleasure or consumption. In commenting on the *Sūtra of Golden Light*, Sangharakshita makes the point that the highest purpose (symbolized in this quotation by ‘golden light’) of all facets of human life is awakening:

Agriculture, commerce, the arts, the sciences, medicine, law, government, administration, diplomacy, transport, communication, advertising, entertainment, sport ... together all these things make up the world. And they become receptive to the golden light by placing themselves at the service of the spiritual development of the individual.

- Sangharakshita, *Transforming Self and World*, p.145.

Society and Politics

A lot of the political divisions in the modern world stem from the tension between social justice and liberty. Some champion equality and rights and others put the stress on individual responsibility and freedom. Ambedkar’s philosophy of liberty, equality and fraternity transcends these two poles. Fraternity, the spirit of friendship within society, is the key. It is based on a vision of human beings as being capable of growth, and whose deepest need is to develop. This gives rise to an attitude that contains friendly well wishing and support along with respect for self-reliance and self-development. Ultimately, the two are not in conflict.

So to change our society or the world, how do we foster the spirit of friendship and the value of self-development? That is a task that requires much more than political action. But it might include political engagement. It is a natural extension of our Buddhist practice that we should use whatever influence we have at the political level to bring about the conditions for liberty, equality and fraternity. For Ambedkar, it meant framing the Indian constitution, among other

things, to outlaw caste. He did this as one part of a much wider movement of spiritual and social change. It arose from a vision that the purpose of society is to support the development of the individual. It is up to us, in whatever time and place we live, to apply the same principles. We can ask the following questions of any political belief, economic system, political action, or voting intention:

- Who does it affect?
- What effect does it have on their well-being?
- Does it build a spirit of fraternity /friendship in society and the world?
- How does it encourage self-reliance and self-development?

These questions address effects on people. We could add questions about the effects on the natural world too. We'll be looking at those in the next unit.

Mettā Bhāvanā for this week

Specifically include people who are rich and privileged, and those who are powerless and poor. What responses does this bring up?

Reflect on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity as applied to the Mettā Bhāvanā, as suggested in the paragraph above.

Suggested Background Reading for this week

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street* Chapters 9 & 11.

Vajratara's talk *Dr. Ambedkar for India and the World*, available on FreeBuddhistAudio.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC2414>



Questions for Reflection and Group Discussion

1. Did you follow the Mettā Bhāvanā as suggested? Did it bring up any challenges or inspire you to positive action? If so, what?
2. What cultural conditioning do you think you inherited with regard to your attitudes to other people, especially those who differ to you in terms of race, nationality, and gender? To what extent do you think you've overcome it? Has your involvement with the Triratna Buddhist Community helped in this process?
3. Does your Buddhist practice affect your political outlook or the way you vote? If not, why not? And if so, in what way?
4. What would it mean for government and economic systems to be placed at the service of the development of the individual? Do you think that this might entail changing the prevailing power structures in the world?
5. Do you think that the Dharma can be a force for social change?
6. Bring up any points from the suggested background reading or listening which have challenged or inspired you.

In the last unit, we considered the importance of letting go of our preconceived views of other people, and learning to see them as, like us, capable of growth and awakening. We saw that this can change all our relationships with others and bring about social change. In this unit, we'll turn our attention to the non-human world. How does a Bodhisattva see non-human animals, plants and the rest of the natural world? And could this way of seeing unleash a similar transformation?

The first thing we need to do is realize that the way we currently view the living world is not necessarily the one and only true way of seeing things. We learn to see nature in a particular way, through the lens of our upbringing, our economic circumstances and our culture. It might be affected, for example, by whether we had pets, or whether we were brought up in the city or the countryside. Or perhaps the modern world, and a particular materialistic world-view, give us a particular, partial way of seeing things.

Animals

The unfailing sign of mettā is that you are deeply concerned for the well-being, happiness, and prosperity of the object of your mettā, be that a person, an animal, or any other being.

- Sangharakshita, *Living with Kindness*, page 11.

Let us begin by thinking about animals. The Buddha's own attitude towards animals was based on non-harm, kindness and fellow feeling. Within a culture of widespread animal sacrifice, he forbade his monks from eating meat that had been killed for them. He put the precept of non-harm at the heart of the path he taught. He spent some time living around a bull elephant, in a spirit of empathy and friendship. We know that this attitude gave rise to a concern for animal welfare well beyond his lifetime. The practice of sacrifice was abandoned, and the Buddhist King Aśoka some two or three centuries later, abolished hunting for sport and established veterinary clinics.

By contrast, René Descartes, the 'father of modern philosophy', thought that animals were no more than automata. He denied that they had any consciousness or sensations that should concern us. This might seem an extreme view, but it has been very influential in the modern world. It has led people involved in vivisection experiments to ignore the screams of monkeys, and regard the objections of protestors as ignorant sentimentality.

More recent science is coming to a different view, and one that is perhaps more in accord with our intuitive response. In 2012, scientists from a range of disciplines signed the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness. This asserts that:

The weight of evidence declares that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess substrates.

And there is evidence that this is by no means a rudimentary form of consciousness. There is scientific evidence (if we need it) that animals experience many emotions that are basically the same as ours – fear, friendship, grief, jealousy, shame, joy, love. In some cases, such as African grey parrots, elephants and dolphins, the levels of consciousness observed have been described as ‘near human’. Many animals are conscious of their own suffering and are capable of a kind of thinking even if they are not able to verbalise it. The point is that the emotional and even mental experience of animals, both painful and joyous, may be more similar to our own than we might imagine. To acknowledge this is not to indulge in Disneyesque, anthropomorphic sentimentality. It is something worth reflecting on. It can give rise to a sense of wonderment, connection and love.

Most people have an intuitive sense that animals are more than machines. Even so, it is easy to relegate the well-being or pain of an animal to a status somewhat below that of humans. This may be a result of scientific views, but may also come from Christian ideas of divine dominion and human stewardship of nature. If we are walking the Bodhisattva path, we need to put such preconceptions aside. We need to simply respond open-heartedly to what is there. And what is there when we look at an animal, our reason and intuition tells us, is actual felt experience.

Vegetation and the ‘Inanimate’ World

It is, perhaps, more difficult to find a sense of shared experience with a plant than an animal, let alone a rock. And yet the Bodhisattva path means developing a deep affinity with life in all its forms, even extending beyond what we may think of as the living world.

To begin with, vegetation – the environment. How do you feel about that? How do you feel towards the woods and the grass and the crops? I think this is a very basic thing, especially if one feels that man’s ancestors originated in the forests and trees, even if they did come down to earth eventually. Some people say there is an almost innate feeling for the woods and for vegetation and for nature. I think this is true. So I think there is a feeling, a positive attitude, towards all that of which, on a certain level or up to a certain point, we are a part. We’re part of that ecosystem. So there’s a question of this mettā towards all sentient things – organic life, in this sort of way as a very broad basis for our mettā towards more specialised, more individualised forms of life, that is to say the animals and human beings. People who live in cities are to some extent cut off from that positive relationship with and feeling for organic life.

- Sangharakshita, *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* Seminar, Chapter 7.

In this next extract (edited and paraphrased from the Nature of Existence seminar, 1982), Sangharakshita paints a picture of a sensitivity to nature which is very different from the prevailing materialistic view.

One needs to see things as alive rather than as dead. It’s as though when one experiences more life within oneself, one feels the life in other things, even so-called inanimate things. You feel that everything is alive, that the universe is alive. You feel that it is alive because you are alive yourself, you have empathy with what is alive. If

it was a question of choosing between a universe that was dead and a universe that was alive, the more Buddhistic alternative would be the universe that was alive. And we know in relation to the Pali Canon, some scholars have had some difficulty in reconciling the so-called animism of certain passages of the Pali Canon with the Dharma itself. You know what I mean by the animism of the Pali Canon? When the Buddha is sitting under a tree, and the tree spirit speaks to him. Well, this is animism pure and simple. It's so utterly unscientific. Everybody knows that there aren't such things as tree spirits. Spirits don't inhabit trees. Or spirits don't inhabit streams, or live in stones any more. You certainly don't get spirits in the sky or in the clouds – everybody knows that! Animism has been banished from the scientific universe. All you've got is matter moving in accordance with mechanical laws. That's the modern Newtonian vision. But one might say that what the text is really saying is that the universe is alive. Well, why shouldn't the Buddha hear a voice from the tree speaking to him as he sat there? Well what does that mean? He's got a feeling for the tree, an empathy with the tree. He feels it as alive. He feels that he is in communication with the tree, the tree is in communication with him. Surely if you have any sort of life in you, any sort of sensitivity, this is how you should feel, certainly when you are in contact with, say, the vegetable world. Maybe it's difficult to feel that brick and stone are alive. It's difficult to feel that steel is alive. I personally must admit I can't feel that plastic is alive. I recognise that as a limitation. Because one ought to be able to feel that even plastic is alive.

I remember travelling on my first visit to New Zealand, travelling on the north-west coast of North Island, and there is a magnificent kauri forest there. They are absolutely gigantic trees. I was led into this forest to see the biggest of all the kauri trees, called 'Father of the Forest,' 'Te Matua Ngaliere' in Maori. The strange thing was, standing in front of this tree, I really felt that this tree was alive. Not just alive in the usual tree-like way. It was alive almost like a sort of being, a sort of presence. I could really feel not that there was a sort of spirit in the tree lurking among the branches, but that the tree was a spirit. I actually felt this. It seemed a quite extraordinary experience to be in sort of contact with something which was alive and so big.

So, as with a number of these sort of animistic experiences in my life, I find animism a very natural attitude. I think it's quite consonant with the Dharma. I don't think these animistic passages in the Pali Canon are things to be edited out. The more you develop spiritually, it isn't that the conditioned becomes all dead to you, and dust and ashes to you. It's not like that. You experience the life of the conditioned all the more than you did before. I think it's that which is represented by this so-called animistic element in the Pali Canon. It's as though Buddhism is surrounded by a beautiful aura of animism.

It becomes real Insight, you don't just feel things as alive, you almost experience the conditioned as an expression of the Unconditioned. You see it as something for which we don't really have a word. There are some lines of Wordsworth which might apply here:

*A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking, all objects of all thoughts,
And rolls through all things*

*... a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused.*

- from Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', William Wordsworth.

Followers of the Bodhisattva path are constantly striving to deepen their sensitivity to life. That includes the life of other people, animals and plants. More than this, they are learning to see reality anew. Their sense of separateness from the universe as a whole will be softened. Something is happening beyond the idea of a conscious, alive 'me' observing a separate, dead material universe 'out there'.

Nature in the Twenty-First Century

Turning our attention again to the state of the world in the twenty-first century, we are in the midst of great changes in the non-human world, most of them caused by people:

- Widespread loss of animal habitats and ecosystems;
- An unfolding major 'extinction event' of animal and plant species;
- Pollution of earth, waters and air by harmful substances – radioactive materials, plastics, chemicals;
- Climate changes that are already harmful now and are even more dangerous in the future;
- Industrialized farming with mechanized slaughter and, often, unhealthy conditions.

One might well ask a question at this point. It's all very well nicely refining one's consciousness, but what use will this be in addressing the ecological problems in the world, with all the suffering and potential suffering they entail? And aren't the problems of the world just too urgent to wait for everyone to change in this way?

As we saw in the previous unit, the great insight of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar was that political movements need to be preceded by 'the emancipation of the mind and soul'. He embraced Buddhism because he saw that real change requires a transcendental dimension. It is not just about refining one's sensitivity to life, but about unfolding that in our individual and collective lives. In what way might this be applied to the area of ecology? Here are some characteristics of a Dharma-inspired approach to ecological problems.

Immersion in Nature

Actual contact with nature – being immersed in its sights, sounds, smells, textures – will not just be a pleasant form of relaxation but an essential element of our practice. In Sangharakshita's words:

I personally don't see the need so much in terms of awareness and contemplation, and looking at nature, though that also is important, so much as immersing oneself in nature. I appreciate the beauty of nature, but I think what I feel is important is this experience of a sort of oneness with nature on what I can only call the organic level, the level of organic life, even the biological level. I think a lot of the tensions and dis-ease and un-ease, that we experience in perhaps sexual tension, can be alleviated by more immersion in nature. When I say that, I mean immersed in nature quite literally, not just strolling in the garden, looking at all the trees and bushes, but really being in really thick, dense vegetation which has a definite effect upon one.

- *Udana Seminar*, 1975.

Sensitivity to Life

Contact with nature will be the basis for a deepening personal practice of sensitivity to life, human and non-human. This will include letting go of preconceptions about other life forms. This is cultivated through a practice of actively appreciating and enjoying nature.

This represents, we may say, the aesthetic attitude to nature, even the contemplative attitude to nature. Here there's no question of using nature. There's no question of doing anything with nature. You leave nature alone. You simply look at nature, you simply see nature. Here nature is simply appreciated for her own sake, enjoyed for her own sake, whether we are looking at a mountain, whether we are looking at the vast expanse of the sea, or whether we are looking at a tiny flower or just at a grain of sand. There is no need to idealise nature or romanticise nature, much less still to sentimentalise it as even Wordsworth sometimes did, but there is no doubt that the appreciation of nature, especially of great natural beauty, can play an important part in the spiritual life. It can have a very soothing, a very tranquillising effect, even a restorative effect.

- From *Nature, Man and Enlightenment in Transforming Self and World*.

A deepening sensitivity to life will have effects. First, it will naturally lead to ethical action, of which more later. Second, it is fulfilling just for its own sake. An openness to natural beauty gives us a richness and connection that goes to the heart of who we are as human beings. When we experience lack and disconnection, we try to fill the gap by consuming more things or shoring up an individualistic sense of security. These are the very things that seem to be causing such suffering in the nonhuman world.

A Spiritual Understanding of Nature

From this will arise something of an animist attitude to nature – seeing the universe as basically alive rather than dead. This will lead us to be more open to the actual experience of the life around us, and our connection with it. This will naturally give rise to positive emotions such as mettā, compassion and gratitude, though it will not be pantheist in form. It will not idealize, romanticize or deify nature. It would embrace an acceptance of death and change as a mark of conditioned existence. Sangharakshita describes this understanding of nature in the following terms:

This understanding is not scientific; it's not even philosophical. Essentially, it's a spiritual understanding, and it consists in seeing nature as she really is. Nature is the Wheel of Life: not as a static picture painted on a wall, but as a living, perpetually recurrent process.

- From *Nature, Man and Enlightenment in Transforming Self and World*.

Right Use of Nature

It would lead us beyond a utilitarian attitude to nature. Again, in Sangharakshita's words:

Buddhists, those who try to follow the Dharma, should be very aware of this and should try to use everything of natural origin very carefully indeed; not only that, but use as little of it as is possible, and use it, moreover, in the best possible way – that is to say, for the benefit, the true benefit of self and others. The same principle applies to our use of the natural environment: we shouldn't destroy it or spoil it in any way, as, for instance, through pollution; and above all, we should think carefully before bringing about irreversible changes.

Now all this has become the commonplace of informed and responsible thinking. There is no need for me to elaborate. I am only concerned to underline the general principle involved, that is to say that the right use of nature is part of the spiritual life.

- From *Nature, Man and Enlightenment* in *Transforming Self and World*.

The 'right use of nature' entails a thorough practice of the precepts with regard to the natural world. It implies, for example, a lifestyle based on non-harm and simplicity. We'll be exploring this further in the next unit.

A Collective Dimension

A Bodhisattva's response to ecological problems will be collective as well as individual. As part of a Sangha, for example, we can meditate in nature. And we can support each other in leading more ethical lifestyles. Collective action of this kind contributes to a wider culture of change. In so doing, we can encourage positive changes that are already taking place in wider society. Ideas that are in accord with the Dharma, such as animal welfare and ecology, have taken root in modern culture in recent decades.

If we are part of a democratic society, we also have the opportunity to use our influence on the political level to some extent. If we are developing an openness and sensitivity to all human and nonhuman life, we will naturally use this influence not just to represent our own interests, or those of our own community, country or species, but for the benefit of all beings. How might this affect the way we vote? Does it inspire us to some form of political engagement, through a pressure group or political party? Sangharakshita sees this as completely in accord with Buddhist practice:

I think as a movement, especially as an Order, we need to take a much stronger stand on issues of this sort – perhaps play a more active part, at least in our individual capacities, in the environmental movement. After all, this is completely in accordance with the principles of Buddhism.... In the course of the next twenty years, I would like to see our movement, I would like to see the Order, developing what I describe as a sort of ecological dimension. I would like to see some Order members taking up this particular interest, and working in this particular field, from the basis of their Buddhist commitment.

- Sangharakshita, *The Next Twenty Years* lecture, 1988.

Kṣānti and Vīrya

Rooted in Dharma practice, our attitude to nature and our response to ecological suffering will be characterized by the Bodhisattva perfections of *kṣānti* and *vīrya*. We have already discussed the need for a receptivity and openness to nature. *Kṣānti* implies not only receptivity, but also patience. Nature is conditioned co-production – there's no point railing against it!

Vīrya – energy in pursuit of the good – implies actions that are free from egoistic craving and aversion. If our actions are based in meditation and ethical practice, there will no energy wasted in our own unskilful preoccupations and distractions. This is liberating for us and will come as a great relief to those around us. More than that, it frees up that positive energy for the benefit of the world. Whatever activity we may be involved in, it will be calmly and diligently focused on what needs to be done.

Sangharakshita, expanding on Yeshe Gyaltsen, writes about five stages of *virya*. They are particularly befitting in view of the scale of effort that is needed to address the large scale global problems we face today (see Sangharakshita, *Know Your Mind*, p.141ff):

- Diligence which is ever ready – a basic capacity towards the wholesome, and preparedness to respond;
- Diligence which is applied work – just getting on with what needs to be done. “Motivation, enthusiasm and inspiration will arise as long as we just get on with the job.”
- Diligence which does not lose heart in the face of personal frailty. Having a sense of confidence in our own potential and not being daunted by the magnitude of our ideals.
- Diligence which does not turn back – “One doesn’t abandon one’s original intention just because the going has become more difficult than one had expected.”
- Diligence which is never satisfied – there is always something higher to be achieved, so one never rests on one’s laurels.

Mettā Bhāvanā for this week

Practice the mettā bhāvanā as usual, including nonhuman life in the fifth stage. Notice whether the nature of mettā changes as it applies to human and nonhuman beings.

Suggested Background Reading for this week

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*, Chapter 5.

Akuppa, *Saving the Earth* Chapters 4 & 7.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is your attitude to animals and how is that affected by your conditioning such as family background, beliefs, education and so on?
2. Do you experience nature as being basically alive? How can you deepen your sense of connection with it? Can you help bring about a change of consciousness with regard to the living world?
3. What is your experience of meditating in nature? Does your local Sangha practise in nature, and encourage ecological ethics?
4. How does a concern for the natural world affect the way you vote, or any other kind of political action?
5. Bring up any points from the suggested background reading which have challenged or inspired you.
6. Did you follow the Mettā Bhāvanā as suggested? Did it bring up any challenges or inspire you to positive action? If so, what?

In this unit, we'll focus on some aspects of ethics in today's world that present particular challenges on the Bodhisattva path. We'll be considering some specific ethical choices that are particularly challenging in the modern world. This is by no means a complete list. There is, after all, no shortage of ethical dilemmas that crop up in any time and place. And you may well wish to add your own to this list of contemporary challenges.

We live in a complex world. It is complex in terms of technology, trade, cities, resource use, and economic and political organization. This means that we are often far removed from the effects of our actions on people and on soil, forests, rivers and oceans. We are also bound up with collective ways of living. City living, especially, presents us with options for energy use, transport, food supply and so on. These may be cheap and easy, but might also be seriously harmful to the wider world. To extricate ourselves from these choices requires imagination and effort. All of this is a challenge to ethical living – that is, living as if all those people we affect were our brothers and sisters, and the forests and rivers were our own garden. The most meaningful and satisfying choice will not always be the easiest, just as leaving the palace wouldn't have been the easy choice for Siddhartha Gautama.

Yet the greatest difficulty is also the greatest opportunity. When we make difficult changes, we are setting up and strengthening new patterns of living that are less harmful – new ways of sourcing our food, generating energy, transporting ourselves to where we need to be. And we are, choice by choice, building a new culture, based on values of care for others, for the natural world and for future generations.

Ethical choices are also liberating for ourselves. It's not always easy to feel this at the time. Everyday life choices can seem very mundane, even if there is an element of self-transcendence in them. So what we need to do is to look out for that element, in whatever terms connect you to the inspirational core of your practice. Can you, in each of the following ethical choices, find beauty, peace, bliss, meaning? Can you treat them as part of the awakening to life of a Bodhisattva? Can you find in them a path to insight? Can you bring to them the same spirit of stillness and devotion that you might bring to a puja?

Consuming less

We live in a time when food is scarce for the many because so much land is used to supply meat and biofuels to the few. The most effective response is just to consume less, and consume more simply. In today's world, simple living frees up resources to meet other people's needs. However, it can also free us.

The Buddha taught simplicity as a guideline for living because he knew how easily distracted we are. He saw how easily we get caught up in inconsequential detail. Being caught up with

possessions alienates us from other people, or brings us into conflict or competition with them. We can become more concerned about what car we drive than the purpose of the journey; or more concerned about which phone we use than we are about the quality of what we communicate through it.

The point of simplicity is not to deny ourselves things for the sake of it, but rather to strip away some of the inessentials of life so that what is essential can shine through. The prospect might not appeal. If we try, at least for a while, to do without some of our usual distractions, we might find ourselves bored. But creating the space can also allow a richer experience of life to emerge, and a contentment that is less dependent on stimulation or possessions.

So the liberation that comes from leading a simple life is a liberation of time, energy and resources, a streamlining of our lives around their central purpose. It can lead to what Sangharakshita has called an 'aesthetic simplicity'. 'The truly simple life,' he writes, 'glows with significance, for its simplicity is not the dead simplicity of a skeleton but the living simplicity of a flower or a great work of art.'

Living free from fossil fuels

Since the Industrial Revolution, the economy of the modern world has been driven by fossil fuels. The harmful effects of this through climate change are now well documented – melting sea ice, sea level rise, ocean acidification, droughts, floods, declining crop yields, extreme weather events. There can be very little room for doubt that using fossil fuels is a breach of the first precept and, arguably, a serious one at that.

Even though fossil fuel consumption is a collective social habit, we need to take individual responsibility. That, after all, is what Bodhisattvas do. This means doing something more than waiting for politicians to sort out the problem – we need to change our own actions. Yet to do so may well involve us in effort and expense. Fossil fuel use is ingrained in our lifestyle and it's so easy – switching on a light, taking a shower, or driving to work. It is also there when we buy consumer items or animal products, because of the energy that goes into agriculture, manufacture and transport.

So what would it take to substantially reduce, or eliminate, your use of fossil fuels? Here are some of the ways you might do so:

- Switch to a renewable energy supplier;
- Install other means of generating energy, such as solar panels;
- Move house to reduce your travel needs;
- Live car free;
- Move to a smaller house, or live more communally, to reduce energy use;
- Insulate your house;
- Buy fewer things;
- Buy local, seasonal food;
- Go vegan;
- Stop flying, or fly only when necessary.

That last point raises the thorny question of what counts as 'necessary'. One precept you could take is, before booking a flight, always talk about it first with some Buddhist friends who are also committed to reducing their carbon impact. Or you could form a 'carbon kula' to discuss all your choices in this way.

The real challenge is to do all of these things and actually be happier. Can we do these things not in a spirit of self denial but inspired by a love of living beings?

Mindful use of information technology

Computers and mobile phones vastly increase the range and speed of our access to information, imagery and contact with others. Among the zettabyte of information that is now available online, there is a wealth of useful material. And much good has undoubtedly come of our ability to have cross-cultural contact and make common cause with people across the globe.

There is also, of course, huge potential for distraction and disinformation. One commentator has described our typical behaviour online as ‘mindlessly pressing levers in the hope of receiving a nugget of social or intellectual nourishment.’ We can find information on anything our mind latches onto, is this a help or distraction in our spiritual life, does it lead to a deadening of our senses, a distancing of ourselves from the experiential world? How do we guard our senses?

What happens when we buy things on the Internet, what does the ease of purchase do for our levels of contentment? Do we trawl eBay looking for things to buy? Do we keep up with the news for sheer stimulation or sensationalism? The banks make it easier for us to borrow money by applying on-line. It is so much easier to consume, does it make it more difficult to live simply?

Access to pornography is now instant and widely available, especially (though not exclusively) by men. Do we find this addictive, taking up large amounts of time, energy and money? How does it affect the people we’re watching? Does it cause us to see people as sexual objects? What effect does it have on our real relationships?

We can reach someone on their mobile anywhere they are and find out what our friends are doing daily on social media. Does it mean we have less time for each other, taking over from face to face contact? Are the benefits greater from sitting in each other’s company for study or coffee than from meeting in a chatroom? Does immediate and fast interaction mean superficial interaction? Is it possible to have virtual Sangha? Do we want one?

Letters took a day to arrive, longer to write and there was time for aesthetics and reflection. Emails can be written on the spur of the moment, sent in the next moment, and the consequences also can be instant. Is it more difficult to be mindful, kind in our expression, or generous in our attitude? Are we so involved in a culture of instant response that we are generally more impatient?

Mobile phones mean that we can be contacted by anyone anytime if we so wish. It can mean that there is an assumption and subsequent pressure to be constantly contactable. What is it like to be unavailable? Is it a problem for us or our friends or family members? If we want to be alone, or quiet, or even solitary, how difficult is this now we are used to instant communication? Does this make the idea of a retreat more or less inviting? Where can we find the solitude to reflect and practise?

Eating kindly

We have already looked at empathy for animals as part of Unit 4. One of the main practical implications for this is the question of what we eat. Many Triratna Buddhists practise vegetarianism. But what if, instead of asking “does this food come from the flesh of an

animal?” we asked, “how many animal lives did this food cost?” and “how much animal suffering did this food cost?”

These are particularly relevant questions nowadays because of intensive farming methods. A dairy cow is typically kept alive for up to five years, about a quarter of its natural lifespan. And male offspring are likely to be slaughtered at birth. The same is generally true in the poultry industry, where egg-laying chickens are kept alive for one or two laying cycles, and male chickens aren't kept alive at all.

There is also the question of quality of life. Chickens, for example, are gregarious, social animals and range widely, using trees and vegetation for cover. Even free-range conditions allow nothing like this. The cost of a single egg is not just the early death of the chicken, but roughly 24 hours (the typical laying frequency) of cramped, stressed existence.

We could also consider the general strain our food might be putting on people and ecosystems due to effects such as deforestation, processing and transportation. It is difficult to sustain ourselves without causing any harm at all anywhere. But what choices can we make to cause as little harm as possible?

Speaking out

We often think of the fourth precept as just not telling lies. But this is only half the story – the precept is telling us that to be happy, fully human and free, we need to learn how to speak out the truth. When we see something that needs to be communicated, we need to do so. Not only that, but we need to learn how to speak out skilfully in a way that can really be heard.

Our voices are part of human society and part of the ecosystem. If we see some harm being done – to people, animals or the natural world in general – then to speak out is an expression of our connection with life. By speaking out effectively, we are not only expressing, but also affirming and strengthening, our connection with life. It might take many forms – conversations with friends, writing to those in power, supporting a campaign.

To develop the skill and habit of speaking out the truth, we will need to identify and overcome our own obstacles. Perhaps we are lazy or unconfident about doing so. Or perhaps we do speak up, but we are so gloomy, angry or authoritarian that people switch off when they hear us! We need to learn how to give voice to our heartfelt connection with living beings – both those we are speaking up for, and those we are speaking to. The Buddha himself exemplified this – speaking up on behalf of those of low caste, by winning over the hearts and minds of many of those whose actions were contributing to their oppression.

Being aware of the effects of your money

Whether we are spending money or keeping it in the bank, each decision we make is sending out ripples of cause and effect. In pre-modern societies, people would probably be not too far removed from those whose goods they were buying, or to whom we were lending money. That didn't necessarily cause them to act more kindly, but at least they had some experience of the effect of their decisions.

In the age of global trade and finance, we are once again up against the problem of ethical invisibility. To act ethically – to wake up ourselves and wake up the world – we need to use some effort and imagination. Would you buy clothes at such a low price if they were made by members of your family? Would you invest in arms manufacture if it were your friends whose village was going to be bombed? Would you buy foodstuffs that are associated with child

labour and deforestation if it happened in your own neighbourhood rather than half a world away?

What other ethical challenges do we face in the twenty-first century?

The choices we've discussed in this unit are just a few examples. There are many more ways in which modern life presents challenges to ethical living. Are there others that come to mind, that you have experience of or care about particularly?

Mettā Bhāvanā for this week

When you do the Mettā Bhāvanā this week, pay particular attention to:

- Those who grow, produce and prepare the food you consume and the clothes you wear;
- Future generations.

Suggested Background Reading for this week

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*, Chapters 6 & 7.



Suggestions for reflection, research, and discussion

1. Did you follow the Mettā Bhāvanā as suggested? Did it bring up any challenges or inspire you to positive action? If so, what?
2. Does the idea of consuming less appeal to you? Do you find it easy? Share any positive experiences you have of this with the group.
3. What would it take for you to eliminate your personal use of fossil fuels? Would it require any life changes, or changes of priority?
4. Is your use of information technology mindful? What do you find difficult, and what helps?
5. What does eating kindly mean to you in practice? Do you feel inspired to take it further?
6. What ways have you found to speak out about injustices and harm being done in the world? What do you think has the most effect?
7. Do you consider the unseen effects of how you use your money?
8. Thinking about these ethical questions in general, can you experience them as a liberating part of your practice? And how might the group support each other in this?

In this unit, we will be looking at an abridged extract from *What is the Sangha?*, originally given as a lecture entitled *A Buddhist Approach to Current World Problems*. Here, Sangharakshita strongly emphasises the role of spiritual community in bringing about change in the world. We will then be asking what relationship such communities might have with the wider reform movements we see in the world. Should we just identify with our Sangha, or should we see ourselves as part of wider networks for change?

In the extract, Sangharakshita distinguishes a 'group' from a 'spiritual community'. These terms are explored in the Year Two module *What is the Sangha?* The 'group' is composed of people who will conform to its norms in order to benefit from it or be protected by it. At its worst, a kind of herd mentality might lead people to act unethically to stay in with the group. Sangharakshita is not saying it's wrong to be part of groups. In some senses, any group of unenlightened people are going to behave like a group in some way. But he is emphasising that a true spiritual community will only consist of 'true individuals'. By this, he means a person who is not only self-aware, but also emotionally positive, full of good will towards all living beings; who is also spontaneous, creative, that is to say not determined in their thinking, feeling, acting, by previously existing mental and emotional psychological patterns, whether their own or those of other people.

He begins with the predicament that most of us find ourselves in – as people who are concerned with the state of the world but feel powerless when acting in isolation.

An attitude of withdrawal from public concerns into purely personal ones is one that is not worthy of a human being – not worthy, at least of someone who is trying to be a human being in the full sense of the term. It represents an abdication of responsibility. So, given that one is helpless to effect any kind of solution to these large issues, and given too that one can't turn aside and ignore them either, what is one to do?

World problems, by their very nature, are essentially group problems, as they always have been. What is new today is the size of the groups involved and the destructive power available to them. But whatever their size, the problems arising from these groups cannot be solved on the group level. All that can be achieved on the level of the group is a precarious balance of power between conflicting interests. And that balance, as we know only too well, can be disturbed at any moment.

The only hope for humanity is therefore necessarily a long-term solution, involving more people becoming clearer about how they need to develop as individuals and co-operating in the context of spiritual communities in order to make, in their various

ways, a significant impact on the world, or on 'the group'. The alternatives before us are, in my opinion, evolution – that is, the higher evolution of the individual – or extinction. That would be my overall diagnosis of the situation facing us. As for practical ways to effect a remedy, I would prescribe four courses of action for the individual to undertake.

1. Self development

This means essentially the development of the mind, the raising of consciousness to ever higher levels of awareness. Human development essentially consists in this, and for most people the route to achieving it is through meditation.

The more demanding aspect of self-development consists in what one does with the rest of one's life in order to support one's meditation practice. One will look after one's health. One will simplify one's life as far as possible, dropping all those activities, interests and social contacts which one knows to be a waste of time. One will try to base one's life, and in particular one's livelihood, on ethical principles. One will make time – perhaps by working part-time – for study; for study of the Dharma, of course, but also for the study of other subjects of general interest: philosophy, history, science, comparative religion. Finally, one will find opportunities to refine and develop one's emotions, especially through the fine arts.

Self-development always comes first. However active you might be in all sorts of external areas – political, social, educational, or whatever – if you are not trying to develop yourself, you are not going to be able to make any truly positive contribution to anything or anyone.

2. Join a spiritual community

This does not necessarily mean joining some kind of organised body or living under the same roof as other aspiring individuals. It simply means being in personal, regular, and substantial contact with others who are trying to develop as individuals. It means being able to enjoy, and seeking out, not just the psychological warmth of the herd, but the challenge of real communication, genuine spiritual exchange.

3. Withdraw support from all groups or agencies that actually discourage, directly or indirectly, the development of the individual

Groups derive their strength from their members, so it is a basic first step to weaken the power of the group by removing yourself from among its contributing members. Otherwise you are pulling in two directions at once: on the one hand trying to be an individual, and on the other lending your support to the very forces that hinder this process. If you wanted to take this principle to its ultimate conclusion you would withdraw support from the state, as the ultimate group of groups, though this would be clearly extremely difficult, however desirable.

4. Encourage the development of individuality within all groups to which one unavoidably belongs

It may be that one cannot help having a circle of friends or acquaintances, whether at home or at work, who are not interested in any kind of self-development. One may have to remain very nominally a member of a group. Still, one can stand up for what one believes in, and speak up whenever it is appropriate to do so. It is always possible to act in accordance with one's ideals even when others cannot – or do not appear to – understand what one is doing. The way to disrupt a group is simply to encourage

people within it to think for themselves, develop minds of their own. So in the context of the group one can still work to undermine it. Even in the enemy camp, so to speak, one need not surrender one's individuality.

These, then, are the four strategies to get under way in order to begin to make a meaningful impact on world problems. A network of spiritual communities of all kinds, many of whose members would be in contact with one another, could exert a significant degree of influence, such as might, just possibly, shift the centre of gravity in world affairs.

Spiritual communities have had a crucial impact in the past, and they may, with sufficient vitality, do so again. It doesn't matter how humble a level we are operating at, or how undramatic our work may be. The true individual is not so much the king of the jungle as the indefatigable earthworm. If enough earthworms burrow away under the foundations of even the most substantial building, the soil begins to loosen, it starts to crumble away, the foundations subside, and the whole building is liable to crack and collapse. Likewise, however powerful the existing order may seem, it is not invulnerable to the undermining influence of enough individuals working – whether directly or indirectly – in co-operation.

A spiritual community is necessarily small, so the best we can hope for is a multiplicity of spiritual communities, forming a sort of network through personal contact between their members. A silent, unseen influence is exerted in this way, which we must hope will be able, at some point, to shift the centre of gravity in world affairs from the conflict of groups to the co-operation of communities. If this were achieved, if the influence of the spiritual community were to outweigh that of the group, then humanity as a whole would have passed into a new, higher stage of development, a kind of higher evolution as I like to call it.

Such a shift in the governing values of the world is probably all that can save us from extinction as a species in the not very distant future. There are certainly signs of hope, but there is also perhaps little time left. In this situation it becomes the duty of every thinking human being to take stock of his or her position, and the responsibilities that it throws up. We have to appreciate that it is, without exception, the most important issue we shall ever face, either individually or collectively. It is certainly more important than any merely religious question, anything that concerns Buddhism in the sense of a formal or established religion. It concerns both the purpose and the very survival of human life.

Reviewing our Participation in Groups and Communities

Community, this extract suggests, has a twofold significance, one inward-looking and one outward-looking. These will be part of any healthy, ethical community, from the very small up to the level of nation states. They will:

- Look inward, in that they will naturally look after the needs of their individual members, whether material, emotional or spiritual;
- Look outward and act as part of the wider world. This might be expressed in purposeful activity for the wider world. Or it might take the form of a commitment to nonviolent, non-exploitative outside relationships.

Sangharakshita suggests that we apply the four steps to all communities that we might be part of. This includes communities based on shared economic or material interest (for example, in our work) as well as those based on social, cultural or spiritual activities. They might even be applied to ephemeral relationships and transactions, such as what we buy and how we communicate with people we meet. The same questions apply and can be used as a way of reviewing all of our connections with others, a kind of 'health check' of our relationships:

- Does this community, relationship or transaction support my own development – including my meditation practice and my ethical awareness?
- If not, how do I change – either by withdrawing from it or influencing it from within?

The Power of Community

Sangharakshita refers to something that many of us experience – a sense of helplessness in the face of the large-scale problems that we see in the world. We respond to that helplessness in different ways. Some might respond with resignation or denial. Others might respond with a single-minded effort to bring about change, but in a way that ignores their own spiritual and ethical development and might therefore do more harm than good.

In either case – stasis and despair on the one hand, or thinking we can save the world alone on the other – what can help us is to think and act more as part of a community. Helplessness comes largely from thinking in simple terms of 'me' and 'world'. This perspective blinds us to the very source of power that could meet the challenges the world faces. When people act together for a common purpose, thinking not in terms of 'me' but more in terms of 'we', they give rise to resources of emotion, energy and wisdom not available to the isolated individual.

Sangharakshita makes the point at the end of the extract that the world's need for spiritual community is a matter of survival. We need spiritual community whether our aim is self-development, or to change the world, or both. As the Hopi saying goes, 'the age of the lone wolf is over.'

The Triratna Buddhist Order and Community

Sangharakshita's main response to current world problems was, of course, not just to give a lecture on the topic, but to found what is now the Triratna Buddhist Order and Triratna Buddhist Community. He founded it to support individual self-development through meditation, ethical awareness and reflection on the Buddha's teachings – the conditions in which Bodhisattvas might arise. Given that it transcends individual identity, he came to see that the Bodhicitta was more likely to arise in a spiritual community than narrowly in one individual.

Ordination marks a wholehearted commitment to effectively go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. In other terms, the Order is intended as a context in which to cultivate Bodhicitta. Sangharakshita's system of practice culminates in the stage of Spontaneous Compassionate Activity:

Once the individual Goes for Refuge Effectively, Positive Emotion takes on a new dimension. Maitrī becomes a matter of striving for self-transcendence, first seeing one's own self as equal with others and then subordinating self to maitrī as a transpersonal force. One begins, in other words, to cultivate bodhicitta. The practical consequence is that one increasingly feels oneself to be serving something that infinitely transcends oneself, often as embodied in work to spread the Dharma – for many Order members this takes the form of work for the collective project that is the

Triratna Community. One will cultivate a sense of a duty to the Dharma, which will be felt as more compelling than one's own personal likes and dislikes.

- Sangharakshita, *Initiation into a New Life*, 2011.

A Society Inspired by Bodhicitta?

Could this change the world? Will it be enough to avert the worst of the catastrophic consequences of our actions that we are being warned of? One answer is that we don't know and that awareness and loving-kindness are worth cultivating for their own beautiful sakes, rather than to achieve a future goal. Nevertheless, it is only human to ask the question.

It might help, at least, to consider some ways in which, as part of spiritual communities, we might exert an influence, and the context in which this might happen:

- First, in the extract above, Sangharakshita refers to this as a 'silent, unseen influence', comparable to that of an earthworm burrowing under foundations. It is one of features of *samānāthatā* (the Bodhisattva practice of exemplification) that, beyond the occasional glimpse, one never quite knows what influence one is exerting. We can't expect it to be something we can put our finger on and say 'we did that!'
- Social and political changes are, in any case, unpredictable. They are not led by government decree. Values shift, movements arise, cultures change, peaceful revolutions happen. We are not operating in a world of linear cause and effect, but in a world that is much more dynamic and open to human creativity.
- We are not alone. Sangharakshita sees change being exerted by a 'network of spiritual communities'. Together, these can engender a culture of self-development that can change the values of society as a whole.
- One might include in this network not only self-proclaimed 'spiritual' communities, but any that is based on *mettā* and ethics. We are likely to find common cause with, and perhaps actively take part in, many of the countless groups who are committed to positive actions, whether that be political campaigning, ethical business, benign technology, community building and so on. We can see ourselves as part of a much wider movement for change.
- We have particular contributions that we can make to this wider movement for change – our own practice of meditation, mindfulness, ethics, *mettā*, friendship and a new, awakened way of seeing the world. We should cultivate confidence in these, and not underestimate how vital and powerful they can be.

A community that is infused with bodhicitta will have no need for authoritarian hierarchy. This is, in a world of power structures, a force for change in itself. We'll conclude this unit with this extract, in which Sangharakshita draws on the image of the pure land of Sukhāvati as the nucleus of a new society:

Sukhāvati is not just another world in that sort of sense, Sukhāvati is something which we can, which we have, in fact, to create on this earth to the fullest extent that we possibly can. We have to improve things here on Earth, have to make them more and more and more conducive to the flowering of the spiritual life and the attainment of Enlightenment and that is why we have created our own Sukhāvati on howsoever small a scale, howsoever embryonic or germinally we have created our own Sukhāvati, our own nucleus of a new society. We have created the society in which there is no room for representing, no room for authority, no room for power. The very idea of representing, the very idea of authority, the very idea of power is absurd in such a place as Sukhāvati where the bodhicitta reigns supreme. We create a society in which there is only room for the individual or individuals in free

association with one another, create a society which is governed by, inspired by, the principle of the Great Friendliness and the Great Compassion, a society which is inspired by wisdom, a society inspired, above all, by the bodhicitta, the will to Enlightenment, by all, for all and all in all.

- Sangharakshita, *Authority and the Individual in the New Society* lecture, 1979.

Mettā Bhāvanā for this week

Reflect on the lines from the Sevenfold Puja:

"I rejoice with delight in the good done by all beings, through which they obtain peace, with the end of suffering."

Cultivate this attitude to all those who are engaged in positive actions to bring about the end of suffering, including people in your own Sangha and in the world generally.

"Maitrī becomes a matter of striving for self-transcendence, first seeing one's own self as equal with others and then subordinating self to maitri as a transpersonal force."

Reflect on whether you experience mettā as a force greater than yourself.

Suggested Background Reading for this week

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*, Chapters 2 & 3.

Akuppa, *Saving the Earth*, Chapter 3.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Did you follow the Mettā Bhāvanā as suggested? Did it bring up any challenges or inspire you to positive action? If so, what?
2. Is there any group you are currently part of where you feel some ethical tension or an inability to act from your own conscience? What do you feel is the most appropriate way to respond?
3. What do you think helps someone to maintain their individuality in the face of pressure to conform to the group?
4. Can you think of examples of groups or organisations that might be compatible or incompatible with self-development?
5. What should be our attitude to the state? Can you think of aspects of the state as a positive community that benefits its members and acts ethically in the world?
6. Do you agree that a network of spiritual communities could exert a significant influence over world affairs? Do you think it's already happening?
7. What relationship, if any, do you think Buddhist Sangha might have to wider movements for change? Do you think Buddhist groups should be actively involved in such movements?

May I be the doctor and the nurse for all beings, until the world is cured. May I be food for the hungry, and wealth for the poor. May I be a protector for the unprotected, a guide for the lost, and a boat to the other shore. May I be a lamp for those who need light, and a bed for those who need rest. May I be a servant to all beings.

- Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Ch. 3, vs. 7-9, 17, 18.

In this concluding unit, we'll summarise some of the ways in which our practice might influence the world. We'll consider how this influence is magnified the more wholeheartedly we commit to the path. Given that wholeheartedness itself is something to be cultivated over time, we'll look at how we might work towards the ideal of following the Bodhisattva path in the twenty-first century. We'll conclude with a puja to Avalokiteśvara, an ancient symbol for a very modern spiritual path.

A Bodhisattva is somebody who has penetrated the essence of voidness and compassion. Their understanding of *śūnyatā*, the fact that everything is empty of fixed selfhood, has opened into a natural and unbounded compassion. In our own exploration of the Dharma, even at a much less exalted level, we might experience shifts of view in this direction.

Three such shifts seem to be of particular importance in this module:

- Freeing oneself up from fixed opinions, prejudices and habitual ways of seeing;
- An understanding that other people are, like us, 'work in progress' – evolving and capable of growth;
- Waking up to the 'livingness' of other people, other beings and the cosmos in general, as a felt sense of interconnectedness and beauty.

Śūnyatā cannot be reduced to these shifts of view. They are merely the early illuminating rays of Bodhicitta dawning in the world.

When such shifts occur, they cannot fail to affect the world. We're rarely aware of even a fraction of the way these changes ripple out into the world, but we should not let that lessen our confidence in them. When practised in the context of a spiritual community, they will give rise to perspectives, values and cultural shifts in wider society, such as:

- the practice of meditation;
- values of non-violence and tolerance;
- the idea of individual responsibility for one's actions;
- radical simplicity of lifestyle;
- the central value of awareness and self-development;

- the possibility of individual growth leading to a radical shift of consciousness;
- a vision of humanity as one;
- a way of living out social values of liberty, equality, fraternity;
- a new relationship with the natural world;
- a path of expanding awareness and beauty;
- a radical understanding of existence as interconnected;
- the example of Sangha, people working together for a higher purpose, free from authoritarian structure.

The world needs the Dharma. It offers a response to individual and global problems on the deepest possible level. Its presence in the world cannot be taken as given, but depends entirely on the choices of individual people. The continuation of the Buddha's Sangha into the next generation depends on the commitment of women and men today. Their presence in the world tomorrow, even, depends on our practice today.

While they are listed as a number of different things, they really comprise one thing – Bodhicitta. Sangharakshita speaks of Bodhicitta in various ways – 'will to enlightenment'; 'bodhi heart'; 'a profound spiritual or transcendental experience ... which reorientates our entire being'; 'a sort of cosmic will at work in the universe'; 'a supra-personal force'. As the culmination of the spiritual path, we might say that it is the point where our own deepest needs for freedom, peace and meaning meet the deepest needs of the world.

Dedicating one's practice

We often think of our personal and inner lives as being the natural domain of our Buddhist practice. Sometimes our view of the wider world, our political opinions and our economic lives, can feel like a separate matter. This module may have helped break down the barrier. If it has done so to any extent, we might notice that our motivation to practise has shifted. Let us look at what this might mean in relation to some areas of practice – ways in which we can make a direct connection between our practice and suffering in the world:

Cultivating a connection with the Buddha

A successful Dharma life requires an imaginative connection with the Goal, some definite sense of reality beyond self-clinging. If there is no such connection and sense then spiritual life becomes no more than a refinement of self-identity, at best.

- Sangharakshita, *Buddhophany*.

To cultivate a connection with the Buddha is to embody the goal of the Bodhisattva path in our imaginations. The Buddha (or any Buddha or Bodhisattva) is guide, example, teacher, spiritual friend. But he is not only our guide on a journey towards individual fulfilment, but our guide in bringing about a better world.

Mettā Bhāvanā: We need to develop the ability to cherish and appreciate ourselves. The Mettā Bhāvanā is the first step towards unlocking the heroic. It is hard to live with awareness in the modern world, and to be exposed to so much human suffering. The first thing we need to do is to acknowledge that this awareness is painful. If we don't, then we will either be overwhelmed, or we will retreat into our comfortable, private sphere. In the first stage of the Mettā Bhāvanā, we find that we can begin to truly embrace who we are and our place in the world. We can begin to be more conscious of our response to the world – despair, feeling overwhelmed, apathy or whatever it might be – and we can turn towards it in the Mettā Bhāvanā. In the Mettā Bhāvanā as a whole, we are experiencing our connection with all living

beings more and more deeply. As we practise, we will become more and more attuned to their needs. Thus, the practice can be the ground from which a sense of purpose and direction for our life might arise. A general desire to benefit others, or the world, can transform into a specific path of action.

The Precepts: The five precepts are clear principles that make our lives freer, happier and more effective in the world. They are radical tools for change. In any situation we find ourselves in, however confusing or unclear things may be, we can turn to the precepts to point the way to action. They will bring connection with others, truthfulness, clarity, simplicity, and purpose to all that we do.

Friendship and Sangha: Sometimes, the idea that ‘I’ can change the world is exactly what holds us back from making real change. It is true that we can develop strengths and qualities that can help the world. But if our approach is individualistic, focusing just on our own contribution, we will be more prone to either a joyless conceit, or a sense of inadequacy and despair. How can just one person, with all the limitations on time and energy, prove equal to the scale of the task facing us? We will also miss the opportunity of doing what is more likely to make a difference – that is, to join with others. So, rather than ask the question, “How can I save the world?” it might be more helpful to look around for those who are already engaged in skilful action, and then join in. This is the spirit and purpose of the Sangha. Unity with others, in a spirit of purpose and friendship, is a much more powerful force in the world than the lone hero.

Reflecting on the Dharma: Rather than deepening our understanding of teachings such as karma, impermanence and *anattā* for the sake of our own peace of mind, we do so because we see the need for these perspectives in the world. They dispel widely held views that perpetuate suffering.

Going for Refuge: According to Sangharakshita, Going for Refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is the defining act of the Buddhist. It is to accept the Buddha, along with his teachings and the community he founded, as the ‘pole star of our moral firmament’. It involves a turning not only of the intellect but also our emotions and our will. And this turning has an altruistic aspect, which came to be expressed as the Bodhisattva path. For some, that altruistic aspect may have been conscious from the outset of Buddhist life. Others may discover it later on. Whichever is the case, it implies that Going for Refuge is the deepest possible response to suffering. Even when all else fails, and when we don’t know what else to do, we can go for Refuge, not only for our own sake, but for the sake of the whole suffering world. And we can trust that positive change will result from that act.

Wholehearted Commitment

We need wholehearted commitment to the spiritual life. This is something more than inspiration, and more even than day-to-day ethical practice. It is putting one’s practice of the Dharma, for the sake of the world, at the very centre of one’s life such that it informs major life decisions and reorients one’s life. If the Dharma really is going to be of some help to the troubled world, our connection to it needs to be deep and strong. If you have ever met anyone who has dedicated their life to a greater cause in this way, you may well have found them impressive, and felt inspired to examine and change your own life. To the extent that we can embody a similar depth of commitment, we tap into a similar unselfconscious potential to influence others and change the world.

Wholehearted commitment cannot be equated to this or that lifestyle choice. But it is bound to find outward expression in some way. It will, especially, express itself in a desire to free up as much of our time and energy as possible to communicate the Dharma. If we really see the world's need for the Dharma, and the potential for change it unleashes, the motivation to do this will arise. The Buddha, from the time of his Enlightenment, spent most of his days, and much of his nights, teaching the Dharma to human as well as nonhuman beings. Whether we are drawn to communicate the Dharma formally or informally, verbally or nonverbally, the impulse to share will be there.

Sangharakshita set up the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community on the basis of Going for Refuge because it is commitment that makes us a Buddhist, rather than any particular lifestyle expression. And yet he considers the monastic ideal, in its true sense, to be the deepest possible response to the world's suffering. This is an extract from *Transforming Self and World*. (This being a commentary on the *Sūtra of Golden Light*, we can take 'preachers of the *Sūtra of Golden Light* to symbolize people committed to communicating the Dharma.)

Nowadays, unfortunately, we may say, the earth goddess has got out of control. Nature has got out of control; not, of course, nature outside man except so far as this has been disturbed by man himself. It is nature inside man that has got out of control. It is the natural human energies that have got out of control. The conditioned pursues the conditioned relentlessly. Hardly anyone pursues the Unconditioned. Emphasis is almost exclusively on material values. But if civilisation is not to collapse, if mankind is not to destroy itself even, there must be a very, very much stronger emphasis on spiritual values. There must be a revival of spiritual life, and by 'spiritual life' I mean real spiritual life, not just the old conventional religiosity, which we have, or should have, outgrown.

What we need, in fact, we may say, is an uncompromising assertion of the monastic ideal in the truest and best sense. What we really need are more monks, more preachers of the *Sūtra of Golden Light*, more people who understand the true relation between nature, man and Enlightenment.

- Sangharakshita, *Transforming Self and World*.

So while the Triratna Buddhist Order and Community is not based on formal monasticism, these words of Sangharakshita suggest that we do need a spirit of wholehearted commitment if we are to embody Bodhicitta. While the outward form might be different in the twenty-first century, we need the same radical commitment as the Buddha inspired in his lifetime. Subhuti expresses this in what he calls 'sūtra-style monasticism'. This is based on five principles of successful renunciation: chastity, fewness of possessions, simplicity of lifestyle, careerlessness and community living (see 'A Buddhist Manifesto'). Dr Ambedkar also envisioned a new kind of Sangha, based on a core of people who would be devoted to the good of society, with minimal family responsibilities and simplicity of lifestyle. They would, in particular, refrain from personally owning property, which Ambedkar regarded as being at the root of much inequality and conflict.

We need to construct a lifestyle for ourselves that encourages a happy state of freedom from craving of all kinds. We need to reach a point where our lives are not dominated by desires for sexual pleasure, social status, status through work, money, owning a particular house, owning this or that object or ticking off experiences from our 'bucket list'. If we're going to reach this happy state, it is something we need to actively explore in our lives, trying it out in small and

progressively bigger ways. Then, through sharing our lives, we will be truly free to be a friend to other people, and a friend to the world and all living things.

Cultivating Wholeheartedness

A fully developed Bodhisattva will not experience a conflict between their own happiness and responding to the suffering of the world. Until that point, we will naturally experience the two as being in conflict. As aspiring Bodhisattvas, we must at least have been inspired by the Bodhisattva ideal. We will have at least some inkling that the path to happiness and the path to creating a better world are in fact one. At the same time, we should not be surprised if we experience some resistance to the idea. The idea of following the Bodhisattva path might seem just too idealistic; or the sense of insecurity it involves might give rise to fear. It might appear as something that will make us less happy rather than happier; or as just another demand on our time and energy. Or, on the other hand, we might feel very inspired by the Bodhisattva ideal, but without taking ourselves and our own practice fully into account.

In this module, we've considered the idea of following the Bodhisattva path in the twenty-first century, of dedicating ourselves to practising the Buddha's teachings in a way that is vividly alive to the world we're living in. The Bodhisattva ideal is a high ideal, and you may have responded with inspiration or resistance, or both. Whichever is the case, we need to bring a sense of stillness and patience. Rather than feeling the need to either reject the ideal or to seize on to it rather too wilfully, we can sit with it, and just follow. Rather than rushing to resolve any tension in our response, we can acknowledge the tension as a transformative, creative presence.

This is a way in which we can follow the Bodhisattva path. We need to become aware of the apparent tension between our own happiness and that of all beings, and continue, with patience and energy, to allow it to change us. If we find that we plunge into a lot of activity that is not really rooted in awareness, positive states of mind and self-development, perhaps we are grasping the ideal too wilfully. If we find we're becoming preoccupied with our personal happiness or attainment, perhaps we are losing sight of it altogether. If we find that we're becoming steadily more sensitive to other people and living beings with a greater sense of beauty and love, and are re-orienting our lives and relationships with the world, then perhaps these are signs that we're on the Bodhisattva path.

A Puja of Dedication

To close the module, your group is invited to perform a puja of dedication. The Sevenfold Puja is a practice to bring about the arising of Bodhicitta. It does so by exploring the very tension we've been discussing, bringing to mind both the ideal, in the form of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and our own present selves with all our shortcomings and limitations. It creates an atmosphere of receptivity to the Dharma and the opportunity to dedicate ourselves more deeply.

You may wish to use this puja as a particular opportunity to dedicate any changes you might have been inspired to make in following this module. Or you may wish to offer your own practice for the benefit of the world, making the connection between personal practice and the needs of the world.

It is suggested that the puja be dedicated to the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteśvara. As a symbol of the awakened mind-heart reaching out to living beings, he is the archetypal symbol of the Bodhicitta at work in the world. He symbolizes also the Triratna Buddhist Order, or, at least, what the order aspires to become. And in the myth of the thousand-armed, eleven-

headed Avalokiteśvara, we have a striking image not only of the goal, but of the Bodhisattva path:

In an age long ago, there was a young follower of the Buddha Amitābha. Moved by the Dharma and ardent for progress, he knelt before his beloved teacher with head bowed, joined his hands in reverence and took the following vow:

“Blessed Lord, for endless aeons, I vow to manifest in all the realms of Saṃsāra and devote myself to the liberation of beings from all suffering. If I, even once, incline towards a narrow concern for my own happiness, may I be broken into a thousand pieces.”

And so the young man devoted himself to the task, lifetime after lifetime circling the realms of suffering to the sound of the mantra *oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*. To denizens of the hells, he learnt to become a leaf of balm to soothe their burning flesh. To hungry ghosts, he offered himself as nectar to satisfy their incessant longing. To beings caught in the brutish realms, he became a treasure of learning to waken their awareness. To the jealous gods, he turned himself into a sword of true self-mastery. In the deva realm, he transformed himself into a melody, sweet and pure, gently whispering the truth that all things change. In the human realm, he manifested as a renunciant monk treading the path of peace.

In these ways, the young man rescued thousands, hundreds of thousands of beings, from the rounds of suffering. He freed each of them like a bird from a cage, until the sky was alive with liberated beings.

One day, the young man paused from his efforts to survey the worlds of beings. What he saw was a scene so incomprehensibly vast it overcame his senses. He saw all the beings he had led to freedom. And beyond them, he saw horizons beyond horizons, realms upon realms, filled with uncountably more beings in all kinds of torment. Beings caught by their own karma in hopeless rounds of pain, oppression and imprisonment, lifetime after lifetime after lifetime. His vision was filled with their contorted faces; his hearing with their piercing cries. Swooning with the stench of suffering, he fell to his knees and cradled his head in his hands. In his anguish, the only thought that came to him was “it is hopeless, those whom I have helped amount only to a grain of sand, a drop of water in a great ocean. My vow is unattainable. It would be better for me to devote myself solely to my own happiness.”

At that very moment, the young man felt from above a great force striking him, like a great hammer blow from a distant lifetime. He felt his body and heart-mind break into a thousand shards; his head shatter into ten fragments. He was utterly defeated. He was overcome with pain, his vow broken, his life force spent. In the fathomless dark depths of his confusion and despair, only one point of light remained, and with his last breath he uttered its name – Amitābha.

From this point of light there grew a deep red light, a light that filled the vastness. As it suffused his consciousness, the young man felt himself being put back together. The pain of brokenness gave way to the bliss of unbounded loving-kindness. Surveying his new body, he found that for each of the thousand shards, there was now an arm reaching out into the great sea of beings. On each palm, an eye with which he could witness their suffering, and in each hand, a different implement to end their

suffering. He found that each fragment of his head was now a new face, facing the ten directions. And placed above them all, he felt none other than the head of his beloved teacher. While he had been one, now he was many in one. While he had been bound to time and place, now he was unbounded. While he had been separate, now he was inseparable from the Buddha Amitābha. He had become Avalokiteśvara, the lord who looks down, his body now of pure white light, carrying a lotus flower, and his smile radiating compassion in all directions.

Mettā Bhāvanā for this week

Do the practice in its standard form this week. Reflect on the ways we've suggested working in the Mettā Bhāvanā throughout this module. Have these affected the way you approach the practice?

Suggested Background Reading for this week

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*, Chapter 4.

Akuppa, *Saving the Earth*, Chapter 8.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What difference does your practice of the Mettā Bhāvanā make in the way you lead your life? How does it inspire your sense of purpose in life?
2. What do you feel to be the most significant benefits to the world of your practice, and of the Sangha to which you belong?
3. Do you feel inspired by the example of the early Buddhist Sangha? What practical difference would it make to your life for you to commit yourself more wholeheartedly?
4. Do you feel any resistance to the idea of becoming a Bodhisattva for the twenty-first century? How could you work with that?



Projects

To complete this module, you are invited to take an aspect of it and explore it more deeply in the form of a project. You might, for example, look at:

- An issue in the modern world that you care about and its relationship to ethics and Buddhist practice;
- An ethical dilemma you face in modern life;
- The challenge of wholehearted commitment and what this means to you;
- Explore what an economic system or government devoted to the development of the individual might look like;

- Something about the idea of the Bodhisattva path in relation to the modern world that inspires you.

Further Resources

Saving the Earth: A Buddhist View, Akuppa, Windhorse Publications.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/saving-the-earth-a-buddhist-view/>

The Buddha on Wall Street: What's Wrong with Capitalism and What We Can Do about It, Vaddhaka Linn, Windhorse Publications.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/saving-the-earth-a-buddhist-view/>

Going Beyond Capitalism: A Buddhist Perspective, Vaddhaka. A ground-breaking talk given at the Triratna International Retreat in 2014.

<https://vimeo.com/96757414>

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC2032>

Beyond Capitalism- Radical Dharma For the Modern World, Vaddhaka. Two talks given in Padmaloka exploring the effects of capitalism on community and on work, and asks us to consider what should be our individual and collective Buddhist responses to the decline of community and the degradation of work in our modern society.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC2212>

Unit 1

Saving the Earth, Akuppa, Chapters 1 & 2. See above

Unit 2

Buddhism, World Peace, and Nuclear War, Sangharakshita.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=162>

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/books/The%20Priceless%20Jewel.pdf>

Introducing the Great Love, Padmavajra

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=OM690>

Unit 3

The Buddha on Wall Street, Vaddhaka Linn, Chapters 9 & 11.

Dr. Ambedkar for India and the World, Vajratara.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC2414>

In this talk from the 2007 Order Convention, Subhuti speaks with passion about the urgency he feels for his work in India.

www.videosangha.net/video/Subhuti-about-his-work-in-Ind

Dr Ambedkar and the Dhamma Revolution, Subhuti, 2005. For some atmospheric background to Dr Ambedkar and the work of TBMSG/Tiriratna in India.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM733>

Dr Ambedkar - Dhamma Revolution, Padmavajra. A tribute to the life of Dr Ambedkar and celebration of his work for the Dharma.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=OM543>

Dharma Revolution East and West, Subhuti, Padmaloka, 2010. Subhuti explores how Dr Ambedkar's revival of Buddhism in India has far reaching implications for us practicing Buddhism in the West.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC347>

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC348>

Jai Bhim by Nagabodhi. The classic introduction to TBMSG and Dr. Ambedkar.

www.sangharakshita.org/bookshelf/jaibhim.pdf

Ambedkar and Buddhism, Sangharakshita. Gives a more thorough and detailed account of the links between Ambedkar and his own approach to the Dharma.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/ambedkar-and-buddhism/>

http://www.sangharakshita.org/books/Ambedkar_and_Buddhism.pdf

Unit 4

The Buddha on Wall Street, Vaddhaka Linn, Chapter 5.

Akuppa, *Saving the Earth* Chapters 4 & 7.

Nature and the Greater Mandala, Tejopala. Exploring the relationship between a Dharma perspective on life and the urgency of the need to care for nature, given as part of the Urban Retreat 2015.

<https://vimeo.com/146171302>

Buddhism and the Natural World: Deep Ecology, Deep Dharma, Kamalashila. On the connections he feels deeply between Buddhist practice and the environmental movement/philosophy of 'Deep Ecology'.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=OM727>

Unit 5

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*, Chapters 6 & 7.

The Gift Relationship, Vaddhaka. Exploring how the 'dana economy' can play a part in building an alternative economic world.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC2203>

Unit 6

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*, Chapters 2 & 3.

Akuppa, *Saving the Earth*, Chapter 3.

The *Year Two* module *What is the Sangha?* has lots more on the individual, the group and the spiritual community.

Unit 7

Vaddhaka Linn, *The Buddha on Wall Street*, Chapter 4.

Akuppa, *Saving the Earth*, Chapter 8.

Awake to the Cries of the World, Padmavajra and Subhuti 2001. Gives a very practical sense of how to follow the Bodhisattva ideal.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=OM473>

4.3

The Brahmavihāras



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Module compiled by Vajrashura

Throughout the ancient scriptures of the Pāli Canon it is made clear that the way to Enlightenment involves the cultivation of the emotions at every step, most often in the form of the four Brahma Vihāras.

- *Living With Kindness*, Sangharakshita.

Now, Kalāmas, one who is a noble disciple – thus devoid of greed, devoid of ill will, undeluded, alert, and resolute – keeps pervading the first direction [the east] – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with good will. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with good will: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

He keeps pervading the first direction – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with compassion. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with compassion: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

He keeps pervading the first direction – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with appreciation. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with appreciation: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

He keeps pervading the first direction – as well as the second direction, the third, and the fourth – with an awareness imbued with equanimity. Thus he keeps pervading above, below, and all around, everywhere and in every respect the all-encompassing cosmos with an awareness imbued with equanimity: abundant, expansive, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.

- From *The Kalama Sutta*, *Anguttara Nikāya* 3.65.

Brahmavihāras loosely translates as ‘divine abidings’. They lead to sublime mental states, and can be very rich and beautiful practices indeed. They’re also called ‘the immeasurables’, as there is no limit to how far you can take them – no limit to how much mettā, karuṇā, muditā and upekkhā you can cultivate, and no limit to how far on the path to Enlightenment they can carry you.

In his lecture *A System of Meditation*, Sangharakshita says that “the development of positive emotions ... is absolutely crucial for our development as individuals”, and the *Brahmavihāra* meditations are one of the main ways of cultivating positive emotions.

This module is an exploration of positive emotion and the *Brahmavihāras*. The structure of the module is as follows over five weeks:

1. Exploring positive emotion as part of Sangharakshita’s ‘System of Dharma Life’, as presented by Subhuti.
2. Exploring and doing the *Mettā Bhāvanā*.
3. Exploring and doing the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā*.
4. Exploring and doing the *Muditā Bhāvanā*.
5. Exploring and doing the *Upekkhā Bhāvanā*.

Each time your mitra group meets you’ll be meditating together, exploring each of the *Brahmavihāras*, and discussing your experience of the practices.

You may know these practices already. You may have been on a meditation retreat which focused on them. That’s great because you’ll be able to help people in your group who are new to them. And you’ve got the opportunity now to reflect on them again and review the extent to which they are alive in your practice of meditation and your daily life.

Home practice during the module

Outside of your weekly groups, you’ll be doing the practices each day. You might like to check in with someone else from your mitra group each day about how your meditation is going – a ‘meditation buddy’. This could be anything from a simple text to a short phone call each day.

We’d also recommend that you keep a meditation diary during the module, recording after each meditation how it went. A meditation notebook provides a means of monitoring your meditation practice – it can be a simple log or a systematic analysis, just as you like. At times when you are practising meditation more intensively, or when you want to look at your daily practice more closely, some form of meditation diary can be a very useful aid.

There is audio material – talks and led practices – available to help you in all this.

What’s required from you?

A commitment to:

- Go to your mitra group meetings for the duration of the course.
- Keep up a regular meditation practice over the course, the aim being a daily practice of at least 30 minutes, but, whenever possible, a 50 minute sit. Obviously the more meditation you do, the better the module will likely be.
- Keep a meditation diary for the duration of the course. This is an outline of what practice you did, when and for how long; to what extent you were concentrated and how that felt; to what extent you were distracted and what the nature of that distraction was. It’s up to you how much detail you include. Some people construct a chart that they fill in. Other people prefer to write more extensively. For the *Brahmavihāras* you could make a note of who you put into the various stages.
- Do any given preparation between meetings.

- And, if it's possible, pair up with someone in the group as 'meditation buddies', i.e. you meet up, phone or email each other at some point in the week to talk about your meditation experience.

Given that this module is mainly meditation based, you might want to give serious consideration to changing the conditions in your life, so as to be more supportive to meditation over these next few weeks. This could include reducing input, being less busy, spending more time in nature and attending your local Buddhist centre more.

As you probably know, there are *Brahmavihāras* retreats that you could go on, perhaps after doing the module with your group. That would certainly give you a valuable opportunity to take these practices further.

The programme

Each week has a suggested programme that assumes that you go through the material in five weeks. But you and your group leader may decide to extend that somewhat, depending on your particular local circumstances, or maybe cover the material over a weekend retreat.

Your group may chose to spend longer on any or all of the *Brahmavihāras*, which may require, and certainly will reward, further investigation. For example, you could add an extra week for each of *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā*, which was largely meditation based, doing a *Mettā Bhāvanā*, having a tea-break and a short chat about the relevant practice, and then doing that practice.

Introductory reading and resources

If you can, please find the time either before or during the course to read Sangharakshita's book *Living with Kindness*, which is his commentary on the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta* and an excellent companion text to this module.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/living-with-kindness-the-buddhas-teaching-on-metta-2/>

You can also listen to Ratnavanadana's introductions to the *Brahmavihāras*, which are part of a much longer series of talks on the *Brahmavihāras*.

<https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/01-the-brahma-viharas-as-a?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

<https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/02-the-words-brahma-viharas?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

This week is an extract from a talk by Subhuti in 2013 at Padmaloka entitled Positive Emotion. Although the talk was given to men training for ordination, the material here is relevant for anyone trying to live the Dharma life. The link to the full talk is available in the resources section near the end of this document.

Please read this material early in the week so that you can reflect upon the material and the suggested questions beforehand. Make notes of anything you are not clear about or questions you may have and bring them to the group.

When Bhante first used the term ‘positive emotion’, in the talk on the system of meditation, he was arranging the various practices that we teach in the Order and Movement into a sort of hierarchy, and he was trying to show where the *Mettā Bhāvanā* fits into the schema. But when you look a bit more closely, and try to generalize these elements of the system into aspects, or even stages, of a Dharma life, it becomes clear that the term ‘positive emotion’ is far too fuzzy. A lot that is called ‘positive’ I feel quite negative about! And ‘emotion’ is a very fuzzy word, covering as it does mere feeling, as well as motivation. In Buddhism we are much more precise about the distinction between the volitional, affective side of things, and the passively felt side of things – I’ll go into this later. So when we speak of ‘positive emotion’, we need to be quite clear that by ‘positive’ we mean ‘skilful’, or *kusala* in traditional Buddhist terminology; and by ‘emotion’ we mean something more like ‘motivation’ or ‘volition’ – volitional activity of body, speech and mind. In other words, karma.

So really, this is the stage of the development of skilful karma. The previous stage or aspect, integration, consists of fully grasping the fact that you are a moral agent, realizing fully what that means. But now you need to start working in the moral field, you need to work to develop skilful karma. This first of all implies *dharma-vicaya*, the discrimination of mental events, which is the second of the *bodhiyaṅgas*, after *sati* (mindfulness or awareness). The development of skilful karma first of all requires you to be able to tell the skilful from the unskilful, to know what volitions and actions are skilful and what are unskilful. First of all we need to understand this rationally; we must be able to recognize what we mean by skilful and unskilful. These terms can be spoken of in terms of their effects, and in terms of their qualities. The skilful has a beneficial effect in the world, and has a beneficial effect on you: it modifies you in the direction of greater openness, awareness, happiness, fulfilment, and so on. As for its qualities, it is characterized especially by feelings of love and well-wishing, of *mettā*; by a mood of generosity, of opening yourself up, of non-acquisitiveness; and by mental clarity, by the recognition of what really *is*, to a greater or lesser extent. The unskilful, of course, is characterized by the opposite of these.

We need to train ourselves to recognize the skilful and the unskilful, firstly becoming quite clear what the terms mean, and then training ourselves to recognize what they refer to in our own experience. For this, we have precepts to guide us. The precepts are very important in developing skilful karma. They tell us, in general, the kind of behaviour you could expect from someone who is naturally entirely skilful because they don't have the seeds of the unskilful in them: they tell you how an Arahant, Buddha, or Bodhisattva behaves. Such a one naturally acts skilfully, because he has eliminated the self-clinging that is the underlying cause of unskilfulness. Thus the precepts give us a portrait of somebody whose actions are completely skilful, against which we can check our own actions. Through doing this we can activate *apatrāpya*, our sense of moral shame in relation to those whose morality we admire (not those whose rejection we fear, or who we want to impress for our own benefit). We, as it were, learn to see what is skilful and unskilful in relation to their behaviour, as described by the precepts, whether the five or the ten, or however many you like.

But we need to do more than train ourselves in checking our behaviour against some external, abstract framework; we must also learn to see the skilful and unskilful through a direct moral sensitivity. This is encompassed in the term *hrī* (Sanskrit) or *hiri* (Pāli), which is often spoken of as moral shame, in the sense of a direct feeling of moral pain as a result of an unskilful action or impulse. The deliberate cultivation of this moral sensibility is extremely important in Buddhism. In a way it is equivalent to an aesthetic sense. When you see, for example, a beautiful spring day, you don't need to ask yourself 'what are the characteristics of a beautiful spring day?' and then check whether the day possesses those characteristics. You *know* it is a beautiful day, you feel it very directly. You feel your emotions opening up and a smile coming to your face, you feel your blood warming and your energy flowing. There are states in which you are so alienated from what is around you that you find yourself thinking 'oh, it's a beautiful day', but you can't feel it. Most characteristically, however, you directly experience beauty. It is the same with the moral sense, insofar as you have an immediate response either of moral approbation or of disgust, so that when you see somebody do something morally good, your heart goes out to them, and when you see an action that is morally wrong, you can sense yourself shrinking from it; and you have the same responses in relation to yourself and your own actions.

This moral sense is a key aspect of awareness. Often we speak of *smṛti* or *sati* (mindfulness or awareness) as though it is a cold, hard searchlight, looking objectively at things, seeing them as they are. But awareness is, if you like, warm; it is sensitive. When you are truly awake, when you are truly mindful, you are also aware of the aesthetic and moral quality of life around you and inside you. It is very significant that in Buddhism morality is, in the end, natural. It is natural in the sense that karma is built into things, part of the way things are; and also because we have a natural responsiveness to the moral quality of things. It is this, fundamentally, that we need to be training ourselves in: a direct, natural moral sensitivity.

I should stress that this responsiveness to the skilful and unskilful, this opening up to the skilful and shrinking from the unskilful, is quite different from a responsiveness to the 'nice' and the 'nasty' – to feelings of pleasure and pain, or of like and dislike. It is important to understand that skilful states can be painful, and unskilful states can be pleasurable. The experience of skilful states may in the first place be accompanied by pain. For instance, recognizing your own past unskilfulness is highly skilful; but the accompanying regret and even disgust is painful, and can often make you wince or grimace. *Hrī* and *apatrāpya*, when they are connected with one's unskilfulness, are highly positive mental states, but they are painful in character. Or, rather, they are *skilful* mental states, but painful in character. I think this is why 'positive' is not a very good term, because it crosses the boundary between

pleasurable and skilful, and you can get them mixed up. In Buddhism there is a very sharp, clear distinction made between *vedanā* and *karma* – between pleasure and pain on the one hand, and skilful and unskilful on the other.

Skilful states can be painful not only when you experience remorse or regret. There is also a painful sense of loss when a creative opportunity passes from you. You may feel a skilful sense of regret when you leave a retreat, because something that has been so constructive for you is now over. It is natural to feel sad about that, and that feeling is, in a sense, painful, but I think it's actually quite important to feel that regret. In this connection, I remember a seminar with Bhante, where Bhante was talking about a story connected with the Songs of Milarepa, in which Rechungpa goes off to India again. Despite Milarepa pleading with him to stay, Rechungpa thinks he knows best, so off he goes, and Milarepa, who knows he will die before Rechungpa returns, sits on a rock gazing after him for a long time, until some of his disciples come and ask him what is happening, and he says 'Rechungpa, my heart son, is leaving me; I will never see him again, and I feel sad'. Bhante dwelt on the fact that even such an exalted being as Milarepa, who clearly had penetrated very deeply into the Dharma, even he felt the loss of his friend. When something creative is in play, Bhante said, you feel its passing, and you regret it. In a sense Milarepa would never be parted from Rechungpa: he was beyond that, and in a way so was Rechungpa. They would always be in contact, just as Bhante said he was always in contact with Dhardo Rimpoche and never felt his lack. But nonetheless, when you part physically, something very creative can't happen. Where there is real friendship, real connection, a real creative situation, you regret its passing – and if you don't, you can't appreciate its presence. So that is a painful feeling, but it is a skilful feeling, because it is connected with the unfolding of the Dharma. Or again, when you see your friends suffering, or indeed when you see anyone suffering, if you are at all human you will feel the pain of that. But that empathy, that *mettā*, is very skilful.

So we mustn't mix up painful with unskilful. A lot of painful feeling *does* come from unskilful action, but pleasure and pain *in themselves* are not skilful or unskilful: they are simply *vipākas*. Similarly, the unskilful can be very pleasant! There is the famous English saying, 'revenge is sweet', which describes the sense of delight in seeing your enemies fall. We don't have a proper word for this in English, but the Germans do: *schadenfreude* – that terrible emotion of delight in another's pain. It is an important term, insofar as it is useful to identify something that so often we disguise and hide from ourselves. One could go on; there is a long list of these pleasurable, unskilful things that we do. Some pleasure, of course, is just innocent, neither skilful nor unskilful, such as the pleasurable taste of cooking. Even the delights of sex are, in themselves, innocent. It is the craving and projection that gets mixed up with these things that is the problem.

A lot of our *dharma-vicaya* is connected with the disentanglement of *vipākas* from *karmas*, seeing that our current *vedanā* is, in a way, nothing to do with us as we are now – it is to do with ourselves in the past, or with somebody else altogether. It is not your fault that you suffer from particular social circumstances, but how you respond to them, *that* is your karma, that is where the notions of skilful and unskilful obtain. You can't be blamed for a brick falling on your head, but how you respond to that *is* up to you – if you're awake enough to do it! So yes, the first task in developing skilful karma is distinguishing between the skilful and the unskilful, and especially distinguishing them both from merely pleasant or painful *vedanā* – the *vipāka* aspect of our experience. I do think this is one of the most misunderstood aspects of Buddhist teaching, and it is important that you really clarify this, and that you learn to distinguish in your own experience as it unfolds between what is simply happening to you

because of previous karma or other conditioning factors, and what you are setting out now through your volitional activity.

Distinguishing *vipāka* from karma involves learning more to catch the moral flavour in our consciousness, the moral sensitivity or sensibility. You'll find on retreat that you become more morally sensitive both to your own mental states and to what's going on around you, and as you go back into your normal life you can often feel a sort of blunting. I remember experiencing this very strongly after a long solitary retreat I did on a Greek island. When I came off retreat and went to Athens, which is a pretty grim city until you get right to the centre, my moral and aesthetic sensibility was wide open, and I was quite shocked at what I experienced around me. After a while, however, I became used to it, not only to the ugliness of so much of the surroundings in that city, but also to the coarseness of behaviour and interaction that I saw. So we can recognize this moral sensibility opening up and then gradually closing down, and we need to be struggling to open it up more and more.

Going back to the schema of the *bodhiyaṅgas*, after *dharma-vicaya* comes *vīrya* – effort, which here means the effort to choose the skilful. The skilful doesn't naturally unfold. According to the schema of the four kinds of noble person – stream entrant, once-returner, non-returner, arahat – it is not until non-returnership that you break greed and hatred; you only weaken them with once-returnership. Those strong unskilful motivations remain in you almost until you've lost your taste for the sense world. They go very, very deep! The roots of unskilfulness are very deeply embedded in the whole structure of our psycho-physical being, and it requires a lot of effort to choose the skilful and to reject the unskilful. Effort – deliberate, conscious effort. Checking ourselves, saying no to our unskilful impulses, choosing situations that promote the skilful, rejecting situations that promote the unskilful: all this requires a lot of effort, it doesn't happen naturally.

Developing skilful states requires conscious effort. It requires discriminating certain unskilful trends and tendencies in yourself, and even rejecting them – of course, doing so in a sensitive and sympathetic way, understanding what underlies them and so on, but, in the end, saying no. It is a very important point, and one we still have to struggle to make clear even within our movement. Despite Bhante's fifty years of teaching, there are still confused ideas around in this connection. The one I keep hearing still is that there is a developmental model and a non-developmental model. *There is no non-developmental model*. Let us be very clear about this: Non-developmental models are not Dharmic models. You get them in some sorts of Advaita Vedanta, and Krishnamurti and things like that, but in Buddhism there is definitely a developmental model, an idea of growth. Don't take my word for it, go and look at what the Buddha had to say – 'You have to grow in this Dharma and discipline', which means making an effort. Moreover, *samyak-vāyāma* – right effort – is a key aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path. If you look at things from the final point of view, of course there is no effort; the Buddha doesn't have to make an effort, because he has got rid of everything that you have to make an effort to get rid of. So having got rid of everything that you have to make an effort to get rid of, you don't have to make an effort – my logic is irrefutable! But when you're not there, you have to make a lot of effort. There is no model of spiritual life that does not consist of conscious effort, of conscious development.

We make this conscious effort to develop skilful mental states and mental attitudes through following the precepts, through meditation practices like the mindfulness of breathing and the *Mettā Bhāvanā*, through all the other practices available in the Triratna Buddhist Community. Especially we make this effort through communication, through the mutual exploration of what it means to be skilful, and what it means to be unskilful. In communication we can look

deeply into the springs of our unskilfulness, and try to find in us deeper sources for skilfulness; we can work hard to uncover what is going on in the psychology of our moral life.

If we engage in that sort of enterprise our moral sensibility is sharpened, and it means that we're more and more likely to choose the skilful. In the end, it's a matter of direct experience. The Buddha says in the *Kālāma Sutta*, 'when you of your own experience' – you might even say, 'in your own conscience' – 'know these things to be blameable, because they lead to harm, to self and to others, then refrain from them'. Your moral life emerges from this direct sensitivity. Of course, the opposite is also true: when you know through your own conscience, through your own moral sensibility, through your own experience, that these things are praiseworthy, praised by the wise, delightful to you because they lead to happiness and pleasure for self and other, then *do* them. That's what you're fundamentally trying to cultivate in yourself, in your effort to work at skilful karma, at positive emotion. *Mettā Bhāvanā* of course is one of the most important activities for developing this but it is by no means the only one.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Does thinking of positive emotion as 'skilful volition' or 'skilful intention' change your relation to it? Explore this in the coming days – thinking of cultivating skilful volitions – and see what effect it has on your Dharma life. Then report in to the group about it when you meet again.
2. *"The deliberate cultivation of ... moral sensibility is extremely important in Buddhism. In a way it is equivalent to an aesthetic sense."*
How do we respond to *hṛī* and *apatrāpya* when we experience in our Dharma lives? Do we think of them as positive emotions? How might they be 'equivalent to an aesthetic sense'? How might we consciously cultivate a deeper sensitivity to them?
3. Explain in your own words the "very sharp, clear distinction made between *vedanā* and *karma*" in Buddhism referred to in the text.
4. *"The first task in developing skilful karma is distinguishing between the skilful and the unskilful, and especially distinguishing them both from merely pleasant or painful vedanā – the vipāka aspect of our experience. I do think this is one of the most misunderstood aspects of Buddhist teaching, and it is important that you really clarify this."*
Are there times when you confuse the pleasant with the skilful and the unpleasant with the unskilful when it is not actually the case? Give examples of incidents when you have done this or when you might well do this. How might you avoid doing this in the future?
5. *Virya*, effort, is needed to choose the skilful – the skilful doesn't naturally unfold unless you are already at a high level of attainment. Is this our experience? Do we consciously cultivate *vīrya* in our lives? How might we do this?
6. *"Non-developmental models are not Dharmic models."*
Are we clear what is meant here? Discuss any responses we have with the group.

Home practice for the week

- Do the *Mettā Bhāvanā* most days, complemented with periods of the *Mindfulness of Breathing* as required on other days (or as well as the *Mettā Bhāvanā* if you have the opportunity to do both).
- Keep a journal of how you got on and stay in touch with your ‘meditation buddy’.
- Listen to Padmavajra’s talk a few days in advance of the week 2 group meeting.

The focus for this week is mettā, the first of the *Brahmavihāras*, and the foundation of the other *Brahmavihāras*. To prepare for this week's meeting, listen to and reflect upon Padmavajra's excellent talk *The Power of Love*, available at

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1829>

This talk was given on a Men's Event (retreat) in Padmaloka Retreat Centre in 2013. It begins with Padmavajra chanting the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta*, one of the central teachings of the Buddha on loving-kindness. (This text of the sutta is also included in English at the end of this document for your reference.) After this he talks about the *Mettā Bhāvanā* generally, and then proceeds to explore each stage of the practice, as well as exploring how mettā can lead to wisdom and liberation.

You should also have done the *Mettā Bhāvanā* most days of the week before the class. If you have time, you might also like listen to some of Ratnavandana's talks in the *Resources* section, but don't worry if you don't have time.

Suggested schedule for group meeting

- Report in about your practice of the *Mettā Bhāvanā* during the week, and anything sparked off by the material last week or Padmavajra's talk.
- Group leader leads through the practice, or else plays the audio download of the lead-through by Kamalashila. You may like to read aloud the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* beforehand (you can find the sutta at the end of this document).

Afterwards, discuss:

- How you got on with the practice.
- You might also like to discuss recognising the enemies of mettā, described below in the extract from Kamalashila's book.
- How you might deepen your practice of the *Mettā Bhāvanā* in the coming week, resolving to do the practice a number of times in the coming week.

Resources

Three short talks on mettā, Ratnavandana.

- <https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/03-the-brahma-viharas?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>
- <https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/04-the-near-enemy-of-metta?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

- <https://soundcloud.com/thebuddhistcentre/notes-on-the-metta-bhavana-by?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

All these talks by Ratnavandana are part of a longer series on the Brahmavihāras which you can use and listen to if you have time.

Mettā Bhāvanā – Full Lead-through, Kamalashila.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=M11B>

Extract from Kamalashila's *Meditation*

Hatred, the desire to harm another person, is – fairly obviously – the **far enemy of mettā**. We can view the mettā practice as a way of overcoming the tendency towards hatred.

Hatred is a fault that each of us has to varying degrees. Broadly speaking, hatred arises when our desires are frustrated. Since other people frequently get in the way of our achieving our desires, we are often tempted to indulge in it. In each of us there is usually some residue of unconscious resentment, irritation, and anger – all of which are forms of hatred – which can build up until we find some unfortunate person on whom we can ‘unload’ our feelings. But this residue very much affects our happiness; hatred is a very painful, and damaging, emotion.

The **near enemy of mettā** – that is, the emotion we are in danger of mistakenly interpreting as genuine friendliness – is sentimental attachment or pema. Pema is an emotional attachment to another person, our craving of some kind of experience from them.

This attachment may be very subtle or very obvious. It can range from a slight tendency to sentimentalize or idealize someone to strong sexual desire. It's quite easy to confuse pema with mettā: it is common for people to consider that they are experiencing purely altruistic feelings towards someone, when in fact they simply ‘fancy’ them.

An example of the same kind of misunderstanding can occur on the part of parents towards their children – genuine desire for the child's well-being may be mixed with ideas that he or she must grow up according to the parent's own personal wishes. This confusion is not restricted to parents – it is an attitude that can form in the mind of any more experienced person with regard to a less experienced person. And from the opposite point of view, examples of pema can arise in our relationships with older people – we can regard them, unknowingly, as being like a father or mother, and perhaps have expectations that they will protect or look after us.

However, don't become over-concerned about your mettā being ‘adulterated’ with pema. Remember that the idea is to mature emotionally, rather than get rid of ‘sins’. Think mostly in terms of developing the positive quality of mettā – whilst being aware of the likelihood that pema still remains in your attitude somewhere. Your development of *Mettā Bhāvanā* will inevitably have elements of attachment mixed in with it. But as with unrefined gold, such elements may be ‘panned out’ through regularly cultivating the quality of mettā, until just the real thing remains.

But the process cannot be hurried. Emotional refinement is essentially a matter of growing up – growing out of your need-based response to others, growing towards the spontaneous desire to give and to help. Such growing up requires insight into the essentially frustrating nature of need-based attachments. This insight cannot be hurried, because need-based attachments are

generally very strong! All the Brahmavihāras, especially the Upekkhā Bhāvanā, can help to develop this maturing insight.

Home practice for the week

- Continue to do the *Mettā Bhāvanā* most days, complemented with periods of the *Mindfulness of Breathing* as required.
- Keep a journal of how you got on and stay in touch with your ‘meditation buddy’.
- Read the notes for next week a few days in advance of the meeting.

Suggested schedule for group meeting

- Report in about your practice of the *Mettā Bhāvanā* during the week.
- Discuss and explore the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* together, having read these notes beforehand.
- Group leader leads through the practice, or else plays the audio download of the lead-through by Ratnavandana. You may like to read the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* beforehand (you can find the sutta at the end of this document).

Afterwards, discuss:

- How you got on with the practice.
- Any near and far enemies of karuṇā you experienced.
- Any positive experience you had of karuṇā once it started to flow.
- How you might integrate the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* practice into our lives in the coming week, and resolve to do the practice a number of times in the coming week.
- How you might imbue your life off the meditation cushion with more karuṇā in the week ahead.

Introduction

The cultivation of compassion is of central importance in Buddhist practice. In fact, compassion is seen as the emotional equivalent of wisdom, so wisdom and compassion are two sides of the same coin. Bhante has commented that if you want to test if you have wisdom, you could just as well ask yourself ‘well, have I become more kind, more compassionate?’ So we need to cultivate compassion!

There are lots of ways and practices to cultivate compassion in Buddhism. This week we’re going to focus on the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā*, the cultivation of compassion and the second of the Brahmavihāras.

Karuṇā

Each of the Brahmavihāras is a natural response of mettā to particular circumstances. Karuṇā is the heart’s natural response of mettā to suffering. **Karuṇā is the desire to relieve the suffering of another person so that they may be happy.** It is usually translated as ‘compassion’ but the full translation is more accurately ‘compassionate activity which is based upon wisdom’.

Karuṇā is quite an active force. It’s a volition, a desire, not just a feeling-tone (*vedanā*). When you’re truly in karuṇā, it’s as if you want to jump up to help the person, not just feel sorrow or sorry for them.

As discussed in Week 1 of this module, the distinction between a volition and a feeling-tone is important. A feeling-tone is either painful, pleasant or neutral, and is something we simply experience as a fruit of previous actions. Everything we experience, including the person we bring to mind in a meditation practice, have associated feeling-tones for us. We may find them or some aspect of them pleasant or unpleasant to bring to mind. For example, in the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* we may find it unpleasant to bring their suffering to mind, and may want to focus instead on what we like about them, which is pleasant.

A volition (*samskāra*), on the other hand, is an active desire to do something. In this practice, it ideally is a response of wanting to end the person's suffering somehow, regardless of the feeling-tone they evoke. We might also experience unhelpful volitions in the practice, such as wanting to push away their suffering so we don't have to experience it.

So in the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* it's not about just feeling the person's suffering and the unpleasantness of it. If we just felt the person's pain without anything else, we'd probably just get bogged down in that, or we'd end up in horrified anxiety or some similar mental state. It's about cultivating the positive volition which is *karuṇā*, rather than dwelling on whether we find it painful or pleasant.

Karuṇā is not just a simple desire for the ending of suffering; it's an active and appropriate response to suffering. What we're cultivating through the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* is the ability to respond, and respond appropriately, with genuine compassion, to whatever suffering we encounter in the world.

In describing *karuṇā*, Bhante quotes Tennyson in describing a Bodhisattva's experience of *karuṇā* – it is “a painless sympathy with pain”. It is painless in the sense that the Bodhisattva is not lost in it, is not rendered immobile by it, and yet can sympathise and empathise with the person who is suffering. In our practice of it, however, we may actually be a bit uncomfortable taking in someone's pain. But even though there may be some discomfort, *karuṇā* is a very positive and enriching experience.

What we do in the practice

Because we're looking at suffering, which is painful, it's very important to do it on the basis of *mettā*. It is best to have our *Mettā Bhāvanā* up and running well so that we can really engage with this practice. It is a demanding practice. At the same time, it's a very beautiful practice, that can bring something completely new into our meditation and Dharma lives if we have not done it before. Doing it, we can even feel like it is the first time we really open up to suffering in another person.

Full attention to setting up is important, and being as aware, content, confident, emotionally positive as we can be. Then we start to cultivate *mettā*, first and foremost. This is really important! The main thing, if we get lost, or are unsure, is simply to come back to cultivating *mettā* once more.

Then, on the basis of *mettā*, we 'look directly' at the suffering of another person. We allow awareness of the person's suffering to be in our experience simultaneously with the experience of *mettā*ful states that we're cultivating. We bring the *mettā* we're experiencing to 'touch' the suffering you see in the other person.

This creates a tension and the mettā transforms into karuṇā, which has a different ‘flavour’. This new ‘flavour’ of mettā can be subtle, so don’t try to force it, just do the mettā, be receptive, and trust in the practice. It’s important to give yourself the benefit of the doubt here, and leave space for this new ‘flavour’ of mettā to become clear. If, after a little time, you think you’re still only doing mettā, then engage more with the suffering of the person. You then continue to work with this experience of karuṇā, allowing it to flow as best you can.

If you ever lose it or get distracted, don’t try to create the karuṇā again – in a way you can’t really create karuṇā directly. Instead, come back to mettā, then introduce an awareness of suffering again, and allow karuṇā to re-emerge once more.

Our responses to suffering

Watch out for usual reactions to suffering. We can get into stories like “their suffering is their own fault”, or “they deserve it”. This can particularly happen in the difficult person stage, but it can be there in any stage. For example, we may have a friend who’s just come out of a disastrous romantic relationship, and you might find yourself thinking “Well, what did you think was going to happen? Everyone knew it was going to be a train-wreck!” Work with these responses and try to respond with compassion, regardless of the circumstances of the suffering.

You may also need to watch out for a sense of superiority because the person is suffering, especially if you are not particularly subject to that sort of suffering yourself. It may be useful to reflect that you too suffer in different ways, and while the circumstances are different, the person dislikes suffering just as you dislike suffering, regardless of the causes.

As with mettā, there are near and far enemies of karuṇā. The **far enemy of karuṇā** is cruelty. Cruelty here usually means subtly or not so subtly enjoying the person’s suffering. Again, this can be particularly true in the difficult person stage, though at any stage we may be more prone to *schadenfreude* (pleasure derived by someone from another person’s misfortune) than we think. It’s important to simply acknowledge that we can do cruelty, and try to work with it – coming back to mettā again, and empathising with the suffering person.

There are two **near enemies of karuṇā**. The first is sentimentality. This is where we are not really engaging with the person, and instead dwelling in a superficial emotional response to their suffering. For example, we may simply say “you poor thing! That’s terrible!” but not actually be really engaging with the suffering. We need to acknowledge this and focus more on the fact of the person’s suffering and your own genuine kindness towards them.

The other near enemy is horrified anxiety. Here the suffering is too much for you and you become a little alienated from your experience. You feel a little removed from your emotions, a little cut off, a little numbed. You can feel that it’s a bit too much to take in, or you feel like just crying with despair. We may feel depressed, without a sense of connection with others, and ask ‘what’s the point of it all?’ This response is more common than you might suppose, especially off the cushion in a suffering world.

The *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* is quite a sober practice. A sober feeling is quite normal, and often when we do this practice the atmosphere in the room will change to reflect this. But this soberness is still imbued with the desire to help people with their suffering. We still feel strong in our mettā, and in our desire to help them.

It's very important that if we ever get lost or horrified, we come back to mettā, particularly for ourselves if necessary. And we do this as much as we need to, for as long as we need. Horrified anxiety or numbness is not a useful emotion, so there's absolutely no point in getting stuck in it. If you keep getting lost in it, it might be better to leave the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* for now and just come back to the *Mettā Bhāvanā* again for a time.

You'll know you're doing karuṇā properly if:

- You are in touch with your own heart and you can feel in touch with positivity, despite the suffering.
- You are in touch with the other person, and you are taking in, and can bear to take in, their suffering.
- You feel engaged with the practice – the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* is a particularly engaging practice.

Stages of the practice

The practice is in six stages, and before we do them we take whatever time we need to set up, connecting with the foundations of mindfulness with a kind and open heart.

Stage 1: Get in touch with mettā, both for oneself but also mettā that is potentially for everyone
We don't do karuṇā towards ourselves here, we just do mettā. We permeate our consciousness with mettā, without any strain – a small trickle of well-wishing is better than straining for universal unconditional mettā. We dwell in this mettā for ourselves for a time, allowing it to deepen.

Stage 2: Karuṇā for a suffering person

We choose someone we know of who has some kind of suffering or pain – physical, emotional, social, spiritual. They don't have to be a good friend, but it may be easier if they are. Pick someone whose suffering we can easily relate to and empathise with – we understand what it would be like to suffer in this way. It doesn't have to be major 'objective' suffering; it's simply that they are suffering.

Don't judge whether they should or should not be suffering. Choose someone whose suffering isn't overwhelming and all encompassing – we need to be able to handle it without simply going into horrified anxiety.

We start with mettā, then bring the person to mind, and then bring their suffering to mind, all the while staying in touch with mettā. If we like, we touch their suffering with our mettā, desiring our mettā to be a balm for their suffering. In time, karuṇā will arise or emerge – the mettā somehow 'turns' its shape into karuṇā.

We check in with ourselves regularly – are we getting into horrified anxiety / sentimentality / cruelty? In fact, we do this in all the stages.

The first experience of karuṇā can be quite powerful, so don't be too surprised if this is so. Once karuṇā is flowing here, you can simply continue it into the following stages when the time comes.

Stage 3: Karuṇā for a good friend

Now we let go of the person in stage 2 and, staying in touch with the karuṇā (or mettā if we've lost touch with karuṇā), we bring to mind the good friend. Bring to mind that your good friend *can* suffer, and even if their life is good they do suffer, even if the only suffering they

experience is the suffering of not being Enlightened. But we don't really need to go this abstract; one doesn't have to look very far to see that everyone suffers.

Stage 4: Karuṇā for a neutral person

All beings experience suffering, even ones you don't know very well.

Stage 5: Karuṇā for a difficult person

Watch out here for cruelty or *schadenfreude* – taking pleasure in the downfalls of others. A way to counter this is to reflect that, like us, they don't want to suffer, and suffering is painful for them in the same way as it's painful for us. Don't get into stories like “well, if they didn't carry on the way they did, they wouldn't suffer this way”. Simply feel *karuṇā* towards them.

Stage 6a: Equalise our karuṇā for all five persons, including ourselves.

All the people we have brought to mind suffer, including ourselves, and all want to be free of suffering. We open our heart equally to all, going beyond our likes and dislikes, to simply feel *karuṇā* for all five people.

Stage 6b: Make our karuṇā all-inclusive

All beings are equally subject to suffering, all equally want to be happy and free from suffering. In whatever way works for you, expand your awareness to include all beings in your *karuṇā*. We can do this in the same way as we would in the *Mettā Bhāvanā*.

After the meditation

Do a few minutes of just sitting. If you feel strong sadness or have slipped into horrified anxiety, do some self-mettā for a time as needed.

Resources

Two introductions to *Karuṇā*, Ratnavandana.

- <https://soundcloud.com/thebuddhistcentre/01-intro-to-karuna-dalai-lama?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>
- <https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/05-karuna-over-identification?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

More on *karuṇā* and the stages of the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā*, Ratnavandana.

<https://soundcloud.com/thebuddhistcentre/02-ayya-khema-and-nyanaponika?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

Led *Karuṇā Bhāvanā*, Ratnavandana.

<https://soundcloud.com/thebuddhistcentre/03-guided-karuna-bhavana?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

Home practice for the week

- Do the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* meditation at least every second day, balancing it as needed with the *Mindfulness of Breathing* or the *Mettā Bhāvanā*.
- Re-read the notes for the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* again after having done the practice a couple of times.
- Read the notes for next week a couple of days in advance of the meeting.

Suggested schedule for group meeting

- Report in about how our practice of the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā* got on during the week.
- Discuss and explore the *Muditā Bhāvanā* together, having read these notes beforehand.
- You may want to do the suggested workshop on rejoicing in merits.
- Group leader leads through the practice, or else plays the audio download of the lead-through by Ratnavandana. You may like to read the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* (you can find the sutta at the end of this document).

Afterwards, discuss:

- How you got on with the practice.
- Any near and far enemies of muditā you experienced.
- Any positive experience you had of muditā once it started to flow.
- How you might integrate the *Muditā Bhāvanā* practice into your life in the coming week, and resolve to do the practice a number of times in the coming week.
- How you might imbue your life off the meditation cushion with more muditā in the week ahead.

Muditā

Each of the Brahmavihāras is a natural response of mettā to particular circumstances. We've seen how karuṇā is the response of mettā to suffering in others. By contrast, **muditā is the response of mettā to happiness or joy in others**. It's described as 'taking delight in others' happiness and good qualities', and is usually translated as 'sympathetic joy'.

We could see muditā as a necessary counterpart or balance to karuṇā, and a good counterpart to gloominess or horrified anxiety. If karuṇā involved the desire to leap up to help the person, muditā is very much wanting to celebrate the person, rejoice in them, tell them how much you appreciate them and their good qualities.

The two main objects of muditā are people's happiness and people's positive qualities.

Rejoicing in happiness

There are many sources of joy in people's lives – there can be the joy of going away on holiday, for example, or of winning money while gambling. However, the aspect of muditā we're concerned with here is primarily a response to any happiness which arises from skilful causes, or at least from causes that are not unskilful. So it is best to focus on people's joy that arises from actions that are at least ethically neutral.

It may be worth reminding ourselves that there's nothing wrong with pleasure or joy in Buddhism, in and of themselves, and they are good things to rejoice in (again with the proviso that they are not the result of unskillful activities).

It's worth being aware that we are cultivating *muditā* for people in response to their happiness, rather than merely thinking about the pleasure they are experiencing. For example, we try to be actually happy for their happiness at going away on holiday, rather than just thinking about how nice it would be to go away on holiday ourselves!

Obviously, happiness is different to pleasure, though we can over-identify happiness with pleasure a large part of the time. What we could call 'real happiness' arises from who and what we are – from our skilful mental states that we've cultivated – whereas pleasure is merely a fruit of previous actions, a *vipāka*. Of course, there is a deeper pleasure in the real happiness that arises from skilful mental states, and this is the type of pleasure to which we can most easily respond with *muditā*.

So in the *Muditā Bhāvanā*, we rejoice in this kind of happiness, which ultimately is the fruit of actions based upon the good.

Rejoicing in positive qualities

We don't need to know a person really well to get to know and appreciate their positive qualities – even with the 'neutral person', we can often see positive qualities, or imagine positive qualities they may have. In the *Muditā Bhāvanā*, as well as rejoicing in people's happiness, we also make the effort to see and rejoice in people's good qualities.

By 'good qualities' is meant the qualities that involve positive mental states, and actions through which these positive mental states are expressed. For example, you might rejoice in how generous a person is, or how kind they are, or what a loyal friend they are. 'Good qualities' are qualities that move us, which help us to admire the person, that we feel *should* be rejoiced in. If we've ever had our merits rejoiced in, or seen someone else's merits being rejoiced in, we know what a positive experience it can be to focus on and draw out someone's good qualities.

These positive qualities may not be particularly visible to everyone, so in the *Muditā Bhāvanā* we simply tune into whatever positive qualities you can connect to in a person, even if those good qualities are relatively 'worldly'. We can be aware of people's good qualities at many different levels, but it's worth saying that the qualities that are more in line with the Dharma – such as generosity, kindness and wisdom – will probably have more of an effect upon us and deepen our *muditā* than more 'worldly' qualities.

Workshop on rejoicing in merits

Can we think of someone easy to rejoice in, someone whose qualities we can rejoice in? Pair up and do so now for a few minutes. Report back. What are we feeling for the person right now?

What we do in the *Muditā Bhāvanā*

As in the *Karuṇā Bhāvanā*, we dwell in *mettā* for a time to begin with. Then we allow our *mettā* to touch the person's happiness. Or we dwell in *mettā*, and reflect upon the person's good qualities. As we do this, the *mettā* will change into *muditā*, which has a different tone.

It may be dramatic, or it may not feel very different – it may be that your *mettā* is already quite imbued with *muditā*. In any case, give yourself the benefit of the doubt. If you get lost,

come back to mettā again and then either dwell upon the person's happiness again, or on their good qualities.

Our responses to joy

Watch out for what are often our usual reactions to joy. The **far enemy of muditā** is resentment or envy. This often takes the form of an unfavourable comparison between oneself and the person – we feel that we are less because they seem to have more. A good antidote is to come back to and dwell in mettā, deepen our appreciation for our own qualities, and off the cushion to be more open to others rejoicing in us.

There are two **near enemies of muditā**. The first is vicarious satisfaction. This is where you appreciate the person's good qualities because those qualities reflect well upon your association or emotional involvement with the person. In other words, their qualities are an expression of your own qualities because you're associated with that person. For example, you might rejoice in how the person is getting on well at meditation, especially since you gave them some tips on how to take their meditation deeper! In vicarious satisfaction you sit in the warm glow of knowing their good qualities are because of you.

The second near enemy is flattery, which is insincere praise of the person to get them to like you more or to get something from them. It might even be that you think well of them so that they will think well of you in return.

To counteract both vicarious satisfaction and flattery, we need to pay closer attention to the person themselves, to try to appreciate what their experience of happiness and good fortune is really like. We need to return to actual genuine appreciation of the person.

One other thing to look out for is simply dwelling in pleasant feelings about the person – we actually want to be moved to rejoice in them. As with karuṇā, muditā is a dynamic feeling, a volition, a positive desire to rejoice in the person. We can know we're in strong muditā when we want to get up off the cushions and congratulate the person, or rejoice in them to others.

Stages of the practice

The practice is in six stages, and before we do them we take whatever time we need to set up, connecting with the foundations of mindfulness with a kind and open heart.

Stage 1: Get in touch with mettā, both for oneself but also mettā that is potentially for everyone
We don't do muditā towards ourselves here, we just do mettā. We permeate our consciousness with mettā, without any strain – a small trickle of well-wishing is better than straining for universal unconditional mettā. We dwell in this mettā for ourselves for a time, allowing it to deepen.

Stage 2: Connect with a 'boon companion'

Here we connect with someone who's very emotionally positive or skilfully happy, or who is engaged in skilful activities – someone who it's easy to naturally rejoice in or feel muditā for. It could be a spiritual friend, or even someone like Bhante, who is our main source of Dharma teachings.

Dwelling in mettā, we allow it to touch this person's happiness. Or we dwell in mettā, and reflect upon the person's good qualities. Our mettā will turn into muditā.

Stage 3: Muditā for a good friend

We continue with muditā here, this time for the good friend.

Stage 4: Muditā for a neutral person

We may not know much about the person, but we can almost always find something to rejoice in. For example, it may be enough to simply rejoice in someone because they're a Buddhist and are Going for Refuge. Or it could be something simple and small, such as the local shopkeeper's friendliness as he or she serves you.

Stage 5: Muditā for a difficult person

Here we try to see the person more broadly than just an irritant, and to realise that they, too, have good qualities. It can be helpful to remember that almost certainly someone in their lives appreciates them and values them.

Stage 6a: Equalise our muditā for all five persons, including ourselves

All five people have good qualities we can rejoice in and admire, not just the ones we like.

Stage 6b: Make our muditā all-inclusive

In whatever way works for us, we expand our awareness to include all beings in our muditā. We are aware of the fact that all beings possess good qualities, no matter how 'ordinary' they may appear to be. We can expand out to all beings in the same way as we would in the *Mettā Bhāvanā*.

After the meditation

Do a few minutes of just sitting.

Home practice for the week

- Do the *Muditā Bhāvanā* meditation at least every second day, balancing it as needed with the *Mindfulness of Breathing* or the *Mettā Bhāvanā*.
- Re-read the notes for the *Muditā Bhāvanā* again after having done the practice a couple of times.
- Read the notes for next week a couple of days in advance of the meeting.

Resources

Introductions to Muditā, Ratnavandana.

- <https://soundcloud.com/thebuddhistcentre/01-introduction-to-mudita-a?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>
- <https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/06-mudita-joy-with-others?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

Led *Muditā Bhāvanā*, Ratnavandana.

<https://soundcloud.com/thebuddhistcentre/04-guided-practice-of-the?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

Suggested schedule for group meeting

- Report in about how our practice of the *Muditā Bhāvanā* got on during the week.
- Discuss and explore the *Upekkhā Bhāvanā* together, having read these notes beforehand.
- Group leader leads through the practice, or else plays the audio download of the lead-through by Ratnavandana. You may like to read the *Karaniya Mettā Sutta* beforehand (you can find the sutta at the end of this document).

Afterwards, discuss:

- How you got on with the practice.
- Any near and far enemies of upekkhā you experienced.
- Any positive experience you had of upekkhā once it started to flow.
- How you might integrate the *Upekkhā Bhāvanā* practice into our lives in the coming week, and resolve to do the practice a number of times in the coming week.
- How you might imbue your life off the meditation cushion with more upekkhā in the week ahead.

Upekkhā

Each of the Brahmavihāras is a natural response of mettā to particular circumstances. We've seen how karuṇā is the response of mettā to suffering in others, and how muditā is the response of mettā to happiness or joy in others. Upekkhā is a little more complex, a little more subtle than these. It's also something that's probably less part of our everyday experience.

The usual translation of upekkhā is 'equanimity', but this doesn't really do justice to the experience of upekkhā. With karuṇā and muditā it's easy enough to see how they quite explicitly arise out of mettā. Upekkhā, on the other hand, contains mettā, karuṇā and muditā – they're all implicit elements of upekkhā. But also within upekkhā is an element of reflection upon conditioned arising. We need to make a connection with the implications of things arising and passing away in order for upekkhā proper to arise.

In life we and others experience joys and pains, happiness and unhappiness. Happiness arises in dependence upon conditions, and when it happens to people we can feel muditā for them. Suffering arises in dependence upon conditions, and when it happens to people we can feel karuṇā for them. But we can also reflect that happiness and suffering will simply continue to arise and pass away, arise and pass away, arise and pass away.... There's no end to the arising and passing away of happiness and suffering.

So we have to step back from our emotional investment in each of the arisings of happiness or suffering, step back from our emotional investment in each of the passings away of happiness or suffering. We need to identify less with each arising and each passing away, and instead connect with the truth of conditionality, in particular that happiness and suffering constantly arise and pass away.

This stepping back could be called a 'positive detachment'. This is an exclusively positive emotional engagement which doesn't imply emotional non-involvement or alienation or severance from. We're detached in the sense that we're not buying into our usual reactions of cravings, aversion and indifference that we do in the quest for happiness and the avoidance of suffering. We're not even buying into the quest itself. At the same time we're still deeply responsive to the world, responding appropriately with mettā, karuṇā and muditā as needed.

All this is in the experience of upekkhā.

Experiencing upekkhā

So what does upekkhā actually *feel* like? When you're in it, you're able to be steadfast and non-reactive in the face of whatever joy and suffering you encounter. When someone is experiencing suffering, you're able to really take in that suffering and feel compassion for them, but also with a knowledge that the suffering will pass. You wouldn't become reactive to or caught up in the suffering.

Similarly, when someone is experiencing joy, you'd be really able to take in that joy and feel joy for them, but also with a knowledge that the joy will pass. And again you wouldn't become caught up in or reactive to the joy.

Upekkhā feels like a deep centeredness, being somewhere where the worldly winds can't touch you at all, yet you are still imbued with love. It can feel like you're stepping back a bit into a positive and protecting space, yet, perhaps paradoxically, you're still deeply able to take in whoever you're bringing to mind.

What we do in the practice

In each of the stages of the *Upekkhā Bhāvanā*, including the first stage of upekkhā for ourselves:

- We cultivate mettā for the person.
- We bring to mind that the person at times suffers, at times has 'downs', often caused at least partially by their unskillful actions, and we allow our mettā to tend towards karuṇā.
- We bring to mind that the person at times experiences joy, at times has 'ups', often caused at least partially by their skillful actions, and we allow our mettā to tend towards muditā.
- While still cultivating mettā for them, we sit with an overall sense of the person having these downs and ups, and downs and ups, in their lives.
- Through seeing the pattern of these ups and downs, we step back a bit from the individual ups and downs, to see in this pattern conditionality at work in their lives.
- So rather than being emotionally invested in each of the ups and downs, you see the person as a whole, as a process, their experience as a series of conditioned arisings. And you see how a down will almost always follow an up and an up will almost always follow a down.
- By bearing all this in mind, while doing mettā, the mettā will turn in to upekkhā. You step back from the individual ups and downs, and become more centred and equanimous to it all.

So we can now say that **upekkhā is that complete non-reactivity in the face of all the ups and downs in our experience, which is completely permeated by an unwavering emotional positivity.**

To summarise again: simply stay in touch with mettā, see how people suffer, see how people experience joy, and reflect upon the ever-changing, conditioned nature of these states. A helpful reflective tone to bring in is how these states will continue to arise and pass away, and have done so for all our lives, indeed previous lives too.

Note that you may need to give the practice time and have patience, and don't worry if it feels that not much is happening initially.

Enemies of upekkhā

Just as upekkhā is a more subtle Brahmavihāras, the near and far enemies of upekkhā are also a bit more subtle. The **near enemy of upekkhā** is neutrality. This is a lukewarm, apathetic lack of interest, a passive indifference to the person. You are neither attracted nor repulsed by them. It can seem pointless even taking an interest in them at all. We can mistake this for upekkhā sometimes, but it lacks the emotional positivity and engagement of upekkhā. A good way to test if you're in indifference is to bring to mind the person's suffering a little more, and your upekkhā should take on the tone of karuṇā a little more.

The **far enemy** of upekkhā is cold indifference. This is an active, hardened, cultivated indifference to people. By contrast, upekkhā contains the experience of compassion for people, and contains the experience of sympathetic joy for people. If you're in a state of cold indifference, come back to a deeper sense of mettā for and engagement with the person.

Stages of the practice

Set up, taking whatever time you need. Then in each of the stages, follow the instruction given above to cultivate upekkhā for the person.

Stage 1: Develop upekkhā for oneself

When mettā is there, develop upekkhā for your own ups and downs. Develop a centeredness for your own arisings and passings away.

Stage 2: Develop upekkhā for a neutral person

This should be someone who doesn't provoke strong reactions of aversion or attachment.

Stage 3: Develop upekkhā for a good friend

Stage 4: Develop upekkhā for a difficult person

Stage 6a: Equalise your upekkhā for all five persons, including yourself

Stage 6b: Make your upekkhā all-inclusive

Expand your awareness to include all beings in your upekkhā. You can reflect on how *all* beings experience 'ups' and 'downs', joys and pains, and dwell in a deep upekkhā for all that lives.

After the meditation

Do a few minutes of just sitting.

Home practice for the week

- Do the *Upekkhā Bhāvanā* meditation at least every second day, balancing it as needed with the *Mindfulness of Breathing* or the *Mettā Bhāvanā*.
- Re-read the notes for the *Upekkhā Bhāvanā* after having done the practice a couple of times.
- After having done it for a week or so, take stock of where you want to go next with the *Brahmavihāras*. For example, you might want to keep doing them for a time, or go on a *Brahmavihāras* retreat.
- You might also want to review what effect doing the *Brahmavihāras* have had on you, now that you have been doing them for a few weeks. The effects of the practices are not always immediately visible, and they may be more clear now.

Resources

Introductions to upekkhā, Ratnavandana.

- <https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/06-mudita-joy-with-others?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>
- <https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/07-uppekha-equanimity-lukewarm?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

Led *Upekkhā Bhāvanā*, Ratnavandana.

<https://soundcloud.com/thebuddhistcentre/03-guided-meditation-the?in=thebuddhistcentre/sets/ratnavandana-brahma-viharas>

Additional Resources

Living with Kindness, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/living-with-kindness-the-buddhas-teaching-on-metta-2/>

Positive Emotion, Subhuti. Talk four of a series of eight talks called *The Five Aspects of the Dharma Life*, given at Padmaloka to men training for ordination in 2013.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X74>

Notes on the Brahmavihāras, Tejananda, Microsoft Word Document.

<http://www.vajraloka.org/tejanandasarticles/Brahmaviharas.doc>

Introduction to the Brahmavihāras, by Rijumitra.

<https://soundcloud.com/freebuddhistaudio/02-rijumitra-introduction-to-the-brahma-viharas>

Brahmavihāras and the Key Moment, by Kulaprabha.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC99>

Introduction to the Brahmavihāras, by Ratnavandana.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC2296>

The Purpose and Practice of Buddhist Meditation: A Source Book of Teachings, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-purpose-and-practice-of-buddhist-meditation-a-source-book-of-teachings/>

Introducing the Great Love, Padmavajra.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM690>

Mettā Bhāvanā – Introduction and Basic Tools, Kamalashila.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=M11A>

The Karaniya Mettā Sutta

Translated by Padmavajra

This must be done by one who is skilled in the Good,
Who understands the way to attain (the deepest) Peace.
They should be capable, straightforward – perfectly straightforward – beautifully spoken,
responsive and free of all conceit.

Contented, easily satisfied, with few wants and not over-busy.
With peaceful senses, intelligent, modest, not greedy after gifts (and status).

Nor should they do the slightest thing for which wise ones might criticise them.

(Then they should meditate like this:)
May all living beings be happy and at peace:
May they have deep-welling happiness.

May all living beings: weak or strong, omitting none – tall, middle-sized, or short, subtle or
gross of form, seen or unseen,
Those dwelling near or far away,
Born or unborn – may every living being abound in Bliss.

May none deceive another, nor despise any person
whatsoever in any place. May they not wish any harm
to one another out of anger or ill will.

Just as a mother protects with her life her child – her only child –
Bring forth an all-embracing (loving) mind.

Bring forth unbounded love for all the world:
Above, below, across, in every way,
Love unobstructed; without any enmity.

Standing or moving, sitting, lying down,
Whatever you are doing, (be) free of laziness and
Wield this blessing power of mindfulness of boundless love:
For this is what wise ones call ‘Abiding in the Divine’.

Not falling into views, skilful, filled with perfect vision,
With all craving for sense desires gone,
Truly they are liberated from repeated birth.

4.4

Transforming Self and World: The Sūtra of Golden Light



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Module compiled by Saccanama, modified by Vajrashura

The Sūtra of Golden Light – or *Suvarṇabhāṣottamasūtra* – is an example of what is known as a *vaipulya* sūtra (as is the *White Lotus Sūtra*). Sangharakshita writes in *The Eternal Legacy*:

...[the term *vaipulya*] is indicative of much more than the size of these texts... It mainly serves to point out that, in principle at least, each of them embodies, not merely this or that individual item of the Buddha's Teaching, but a comprehensive presentation of the total Dharma which, in respect of both theory and practice, is complete in itself without reference to any alternative formulation. (p. 94).

It is one of the later Mahāyāna Sūtras and is particularly focused around the practice of confession. In his lectures on the sūtra, entitled *Transforming Self and World – Themes from the Sūtra of Golden Light*, Sangharakshita explores the transformation of self through the practice of confession and then the transformation of the world through the ordering of all worldly activities around the transcendental golden light. The sūtra also contains much rich symbolism and dream imagery as well as some early Tantric material.

Given that the *Sutra of Golden Light* is a Mahāyāna text, it would be good to have studied *The Bodhisattva Ideal* module from *Year Three* of the course. In that module, Sangharakshita covers much that is necessary background to the world of the Mahāyāna e.g. the development of the Bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva Vow, the practice of the six perfections and an exploration of the Bodhisattva hierarchy. If you have studied *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment* (from *Year Three*), that will also help in entering the wonderful and magical world of the Mahāyāna with its cosmic perspective and rich archetypal imagery.

Primary Study Material

Like *The White Lotus Sūtra* and *The Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* study modules, the main focus for our exploration of the Sūtra will be a series of lectures by Sangharakshita, this one given in 1976. Sangharakshita chose to explore this sūtra under the general heading of *Transforming Self and World* and the eight individual lectures are as follows:

1. The Growth of a Mahāyāna Sūtra.
2. The Bodhisattva's Dream.
3. The Spiritual Significance of Confession.
4. The Protectors of the Dharma.
5. Buddhism and Culture.
6. Nature, Man and Enlightenment.
7. Buddhist Economics.

8. The Moral Order and its Upholders.

All of these are available from Free Buddhist Audio.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X15>

Windhorse Publications released a book of this series, entitled *Transforming Self and World, Themes from the Sutra of Golden Light*. The first version of this book had much seminar material inserted into the lecture. A newer, edited version of *Transforming Self and World* was released in 2008. Much of it is the same but the chapter on *Confession* was been substantially edited. It does not look like this book is still in print, but the eBook is still available. However, we recommend listening to or reading the original lectures on Free Buddhist Audio.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/transforming-self-world-ebook/>

Reading the Sutra of Golden Light

Alongside listening to or reading Sangharakshita's commentary on the sūtra, an important aspect of this module is reading the sūtra itself. Part of the purpose and impact of the Mahāyāna sūtras is that they take us out of our normal world or frame of reference and, as good as Sangharakshita's commentary may be, it is not a substitute for reading the sūtra itself. Hopefully by this point in the course, reading such a text will not be too unfamiliar and you will be able to find your own way in to the particular world of the sūtra. The best way to read the text is to read it aloud in front of a shrine. Fortunately, the sūtra itself is relatively short (at least compared to *The White Lotus Sūtra*) and it may well be possible for you to read the whole text in front of your shrine during the next eight weeks. If you can't find the time to read it aloud, then just finding some quiet time to read a chapter or two each week would be fine.

The text which Sangharakshita used when he gave the lectures is that translated from the Sanskrit by R. E. Emmerick and published as *The Sūtra of Golden Light* by the Pāli Text Society, ISBN 0860134164. It is currently available in a paperback version.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=7yosAAAAIAAJ>

However, there is also a new translation from the Tibetan available on the web which you may wish to download and print. It is made available by the *Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahāyāna Tradition* (FPMT). Please be aware that Emmerick's translation has 19 chapters and the Tibetan translation has 21.

<http://fpmt.org/education/teachings/sutras/golden-light-sutra/download/>

Study guide and suggested questions

The following questions are here to help you engage with the various topics covered in this module. They highlight some of the key themes in each chapter, and particularly focus on things that aren't raised elsewhere in the course. If you have time, you may wish to write some notes to one or more of the questions before attending your group or you may just wish to reflect on one or two of them through the week. If there is a topic that is not covered by the questions that you wish to discuss in the group then do of course raise that too.

In this first lecture, Sangharakshita introduces the universal perspectives and historical precedents which form the basis of the sutra, and offers a brief résumé of its contents. Listen to or read the talk and reflect upon what's said.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=123>

1. Sangharakshita opens the lecture talking about different ways we can relate to the spiritual life, e.g. as development, growth, opening, transformation. In what ways and terms do you tend to see the spiritual life? Which of the ways he mentions resonates with you the most?
2. *“Many of us ... if we were honest with ourselves, if we were to allow ourselves to think and to feel at all deeply, would have to admit that we wanted even to die, wanted to be reborn [spiritually].”*
Is this your experience? In what kinds of conditions do you feel most in touch with this?
3. Do you tend to see transformation in terms of spiritual death and spiritual rebirth? Why / why not? What might the dangers be of not seeing it in these terms?
4. How alive is the Bodhisattva Ideal in your spiritual life? Is it something you think about and try to act upon regularly?
5. How do you respond to Sangharakshita's descriptions of the world of the Mahayana sutra? Are you able to let go of the more rational and approach its “great literary beauty” more poetically?

4.4.2

The Bodhisattva's Dream

This week we will move into the sūtra itself and its magical dream world. Please listen to or read the second talk in the series, entitled *The Bodhisattva's Dream*.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=124>

Also, if you can, read chapters 1 and 2 of the sūtra.

1. What is your own experience of the “dream state”? Does it make you aware of different states of consciousness than the waking state? Have you had any experience of higher states of consciousness through dreams? What effect (if any) have these experiences had on your life?
2. What is the difference between a difficulty and a problem as Sangharakshita describes them? Give an example of each from your own life.
3. In the seminar material on this lecture, Sangharakshita says that, for koan practice to work you have to have great faith in the master, otherwise you won't accept their responses to your solution. What might the implications of this be for you?
4. Write down some of your associations with the following images from the Sūtra:
 - Ruciraketu's expanding house.
 - The appearance of the four-Buddha Mandala.
 - Ruciraketu falling asleep and going into the dream state.
 - The golden drum.
 - The brahmin.
 - The Golden Light.

As we have seen, the chapter on Confession forms the heart of the sutra. As the sutra itself is comprehensive on this theme, so Sangharakshita's commentary is also substantial. It is a long lecture (an hour and a half) so give yourself plenty of time to listen to and reflect on it.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=125>

If you have time, please read the whole of chapter 3 from the sutra.

1. What are your own associations with confession? Have you had any positive experience of the practice of confession? What has been the effect?
2. What is the point of Sangharakshita's distinction between the psychological, the spiritual and the transcendental?
3. Sangharakshita suggests the following three factors make up the complex phenomenon of guilt:
 - a. The consciousness of having done wrong, or at least of having done something which someone else didn't want you to do.
 - b. Fear of being punished when you are found out.
 - c. The painful consciousness of having done something which will lose us the love of someone on whom we are emotionally dependent.

Does this match with your own experience of guilt (assuming you have experienced it!)? Are there any other factors in your experience? If so, what are they?

4. How might you distinguish between neurotic guilt and a more healthy remorse at your unskilful actions?
5. Sangharakshita says that for confession, we need to be with people in the spiritual community and who share our spiritual ideals. Have you had any experience of trying to confess to the wrong kind of person? If so, what effect did it have on you (and them)?
6. What "oppressions" do you feel operate in your own life?
7. *"It's only natural that we should rejoice in the merits of others, only natural that, enjoying spiritual happiness and well-being ourselves, we should rejoice in the spiritual happiness and well-being of others too."*

Do you find it possible to rejoice in other people?

8. How might you now describe the spiritual significance of confession? Do you have a sense of this significance in your own life?
9. How might you make confession a more regular part of your own spiritual life? Who might you do it with, and in what context?

Having looked at the practice of confession, we now move from the transformation of self to the transformation of the world. Whilst, in keeping with the sūtra, Sangharakshita gives some background to Indian mythology (in this and the following lectures), it is important not to let what may seem a very alien mythology get in the way of the underlying points that the sūtra is making. So try to make your own connections with the various gods and goddesses that we will be meeting over the next few weeks.

Please listen to or read the lecture *The Protectors of the Dharma*, before your group meeting, and if you have time, chapter 6 of the sūtra.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=126>

1. *"The two pictures [the Indian and Western view of the universe] are useful for different purposes."*
Do you agree with this? If so, what might those purposes be?
2. *"A mandala [is] a harmonious arrangement of psychological, spiritual, and transcendental energies around a common central principle ... the principle of Enlightenment."*
Can you see your own life as a mandala? What is the central principle around which it tends to be organised?
3. The mandala is protected both by the four great kings and the gaurīs. What might be the function of both of these in your own personal mandala?
4. *"The four kings represent the forces of balance and harmony in the cosmos ... between the psychological and the spiritual."*
Why is this important? What might the four kings represent in your life?
5. *"On the level of the individual human life it means that there is no such thing as purely psychological positivity in the sense of a positivity whose support comes only from a psychological source."*
Can you see the limits of such purely psychological positivity in your own life? What is your experience of 'positivity' from psychological sources?
6. *"The positive energies of the cosmos, the energies that make for balance and harmony ... cannot sustain themselves, cannot nourish themselves. They have to be sustained, have to be nourished, can only be sustained, only be nourished, by the Transcendental."*
Is this your experience? How might 'the Transcendental' nourish your positive energies more?
7. What do you make of the notion of intellectual dragons who don't practice the precepts? Is there any relevance for your practice here?

Here we encounter the first of three goddesses that come to pay homage and offer themselves in the service of the sūtra – Sarasvatī, the goddess of culture. Please listen to or read the lecture *Buddhism and Culture* before your group meeting and if you can, chapter 7 of the sūtra.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=127>

1. *"[Sarasvatī] represents human nature in its more developed state, or human activities in their more polished and refined forms. We could even say that she represents the cultivated person, the cultivated mind."*
How important do you think it is to become more refined and cultivated? Is this a live theme in your spiritual life? How might you make it one if not?
2. What is the difference, in your own experience, between a crude emotion and a refined one?
3. *"It's people who must place themselves at the service of the spiritual development of the individual. Only then will the world be transformed."*
How do you put yourself at the service of the spiritual development of the individual? Does it help transform the world? How might you intensify your practice of it?
4. *"Sarasvatī really represents the monk's own cultured, cultivated consciousness, represents the refined, powerful emotions associated with that consciousness, emotions which have now become integrated with the spiritual life and which therefore contribute to the realisation of the transcendental, the realisation of the golden light."*
How do you understand this? Do you ever experience the emotional experience that Sarasvatī represents here?
5. Do you find a tension between the cultural influence of the East on Buddhism and your Western culture? How do you resolve it, if so?
6. What is the difference between Sarasvatī and Mañjughoṣa? How do you respond to the symbolism of Mañjughoṣa?

Dṛḍhā, whom we meet in this chapter, is the earth goddess who bears witness to the Buddha when Mara comes to sow doubt in his mind on the night of his Enlightenment. Here she comes with promises to protect the sūtra. Please listen to or read the lecture *Man, Nature and Enlightenment*, and read chapter 10 of the sūtra.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=128>

1. *“Those human energies which are part of nature can be placed at the service of the golden light – they can be transformed. But nature herself cannot be transformed.”*
What do you think Sangharakshita means by this? Is your own view of nature in line with this?
2. What are the implications of “the right use of nature” being part of the spiritual life?
3. Does the aesthetic and contemplative appreciation of nature form a part of your own spiritual life? If so, what are the benefits of such a practice for you?
4. What does “seeing nature as she really is mean and how can you cultivate a sense of it?
5. *“You cannot be totally committed unless you are free from all mundane ties and responsibilities.”*
What does Sangharakshita mean by this? Do you agree?
6. *“The monastic life is the best and happiest of all lives.”*
“The monk is one who leads an angelic life, who is happy.”
Sangharakshita here gives a very positive impression of the monk’s life. What is your own response to the monastic life? How does the happiness of the monastic life compare with your own happiness?
7. *“...man is a being in conflict, in conflict with himself, in conflict within himself... There is a great battle taking place in every human being, the forces of nature fighting with the forces of Enlightenment, Dṛḍhā the earth goddess with the golden light.”*
Can you relate to this conflict within yourself?

In the module on the *Buddha's Eightfold Path* in *Year Two*, we encountered the Buddha's teaching on Right Livelihood and began to explore some of the implications of this particular aspect of the Buddha's teaching. Here we return to the topic via the symbolism of Śrī, the goddess of wealth, and look at it in a broader context. Please listen to or read the lecture *Buddhist Economics*, and chapter 8 of the sūtra.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=129>

1. What is your basic attitude towards earning and spending money? Which of the following do you associate money with?
Freedom, security, prestige, extravagance, corruption, materialism, generosity, greed, thriftiness, status-anxiety, enjoyment.
2. What do you think about giving money for Dharma work? Is it something you do?
3. Do you agree with Sangharakshita's exploration of the psychological differences between giving and paying (pp. 178-179)?
4. Given that you are probably not living as a monk, what relevance can you take from each of Śrī's gifts to the monk: zeal, garments, begging bowl, 'bed' or 'seat', medicines?
5. What do you make of ethical investment? Do you invest your own money ethically?
6. What relevance do any of the three aims of a Buddhist team-based Right Livelihood project have for your own work situation? In what way can your work support your spiritual practice?

This concluding unit looks at the whole issue of morality within society as a whole through the ‘*Chapter on Instruction concerning Divine Kings*’. Please listen to or read the final talk, *The Moral Order and its Upholders*, and read chapter 12 of the sutra.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=130>

1. What is your response to the notion of an ordered society as portrayed here? What is your own assessment of the society you live in, i.e. is it based on a moral order? Does it support ethical action and the development of the individual?
2. Can you think of any examples of righteous kings (or rulers or leaders) from history or the present day? If so, what characterises their leadership?
3. “...the social order should mirror the law of karma.”
What are the implications of this for the society you live in? How might it look different to how it is now?
4. “Parents are divine kings on a small scale.”
Do you agree with this and with Sangharakshita’s subsequent reflections on parenting and the moral order?
5. How strong do you feel the moral order is in your area or country? What might you do to restore or enhance the moral order further?
6. “It is only this [Golden Light] that can really transform.”
Having now completed this module, do you feel more in touch with or open to the Golden Light?

As with all the modules of the Dharma Training Course, this module concludes with the opportunity to present a project to your group on a topic arising from the material you have been studying. You may wish to take one of the suggested questions and explore it in more detail than you have been able to in the weekly meetings, or you may want to take up a theme or question of your own. Whichever you choose, the purpose of the projects is to give you the opportunity to practise the second level of wisdom more fully, i.e. the level of reflection or *cintā-mayī-prajñā*. It is also a good way to share something of your experience with the group.

Taking it Further

If you have felt inspired or moved to explore any of the themes in this series further, you may find the following resources helpful. They may also be helpful for your project:

Suggested further reading for the whole series

The Eternal Legacy, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579583. Chapter 15 has more background on the context of the Sūtra of Golden Light.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-eternal-legacy/>

A Concise History of Buddhism, Andrew Skilton, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766667. Chapters 11 and 12 have details on the origin of the Mahayana and on the rise of Mahayana scriptures.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-concise-history-of-buddhism/>

Sangharakshita – A New Voice in the Buddhist Tradition, Subhuti, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766683. Chapters 9 and 10 explore Sangharakshita's thinking on the creation of a 'New Society' and of a new Buddhist culture.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/sangharakshita-a-new-voice-in-the-buddhist-tradition/>

A Survey of Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. The opening section of *Chapter One – The Approach to Buddhism*, presents a slightly different take on what a traditional society, orientated around the Transcendental, might look like.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-survey-of-buddhism-ebook/>

21st Century Bodhisattva, Akuppa, *Module 2 of Year Four* of this course. A good look at being a Bodhisattva in the modern world.

Unit 1

The Magic of a Mahayana Sutra, Sangharakshita. Gives another introduction to the Mahayana and introduces another sutra, *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa*. This is the subject of *Module 1* on *Year Four* of this course.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=143>

Unit 2

Shamanism by Mircea Eliade. Chapter 5 (on the drum) and chapter 2 (on dreams).

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=xeVZNAEACAAJ>

Units 3

Bhaddali Sutta from *Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 65). Bhaddali makes a transgression of one of the training precepts but his confession is heard and forgiven by the Buddha.

<http://www.mahindaramatemple.com/e-tipitaka/Majjhima-Nikaya/mn-65.htm>

Know Your Mind, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766799. Pages 125-9 explore *hrī* and *apatrāpya* ('shame' and 'respect for wise opinion'), the two guardians of the world.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/know-your-mind-the-psychological-dimension-of-ethics-in-buddhism/>

Mind in Harmony, Subhuti, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 9780904766790, also covers this ground in chapter 8 – *Faith and shame*.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/mind-in-harmony-the-psychology-of-buddhist-ethics/>

Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community, Subhuti, Madhyamaloka booklet. This is an excellent exploration of how we can develop an ethical conscience and use confession as a spiritual practice.

https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/othertexts/Subhuti/FBA182_Remorse_and_Confession-Subhuti.pdf

Unit 4

Buddhist Cosmology, Randy Kloetzli (Motilal Barnasidass). This gives an account of the traditional Buddhist cosmology as well as relating it to traditional Western cosmology.

<http://www.mlbd.com/BookDescription.aspx?id=660>

Unit 5

The Religion of Art, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. An indispensable source for Sangharakshita's views on the importance of art in spiritual life.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-religion-of-art-sangharakshita-classics/>

Buddhism and the West, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. Explores in principle what the integration of Buddhism into Western society and culture might look like.

<http://www.sangharakshita.org/books/buddhism-and-the-west.pdf>

Unit 6

Forty-Three Years Ago and *Was the Buddha a Bhikkhu?*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. Both of these books explore Sangharakshita's own experience of being a Theravādin monk and his encounters with monastic formalism.

http://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/forty-three.pdf

http://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/meaning-of-conversion.pdf

Unit 7

The Buddha's Eightfold Path, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 9781899579815. Chapter 5 on right livelihood has some discussion of the principles of Buddhist economics. You can also hear the original lecture on Free Buddhist Audio.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-buddhas-noble-eightfold-path-2/>

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X07>

The Buddha on Wall Street, Vaddhaka, Windhorse Publications, explores our economic world from the moral standpoint established by the Buddha.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-buddha-on-wall-street-whats-wrong-with-capitalism-and-what-we-can-do-about-it/>

Small is Beautiful, E.F. Schumacher. The chapter on Buddhist Economics is referred to in the text.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=Cj8sAAAAMAAJ>

Buddhism and Business Relationships, Chapter 17 of *What is the Sangha?*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. Takes a different look at economic relations in the light of the Buddha's teaching in the Sigālaka Sutta.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/what-is-the-sangha-ebook/>

Buddhist Economics, Venerable P.A. Payutto, Buddhadharma Foundation.

http://www.urbandharma.org/pdf/Buddhist_Economics.pdf

Unit 8

Going forth and Citizenship, Subhuti, in *Western Buddhist Review*, No.1. Explores the responsibilities that we have as citizens as well as the use of the power mode in political matters.

<http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol1/citizenship.html>

Being a Buddhist Parent, Chapter 13 of *What is the Sangha?*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. Has a lot more to say about the role of parenting in Buddhist life. See above.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/what-is-the-sangha-ebook/>

Buddhist Parenting, Karunagita is an audio talk from the *Dharma Warriors* series given at the Buddhafeld Festival in 2006. A transcript is also available.

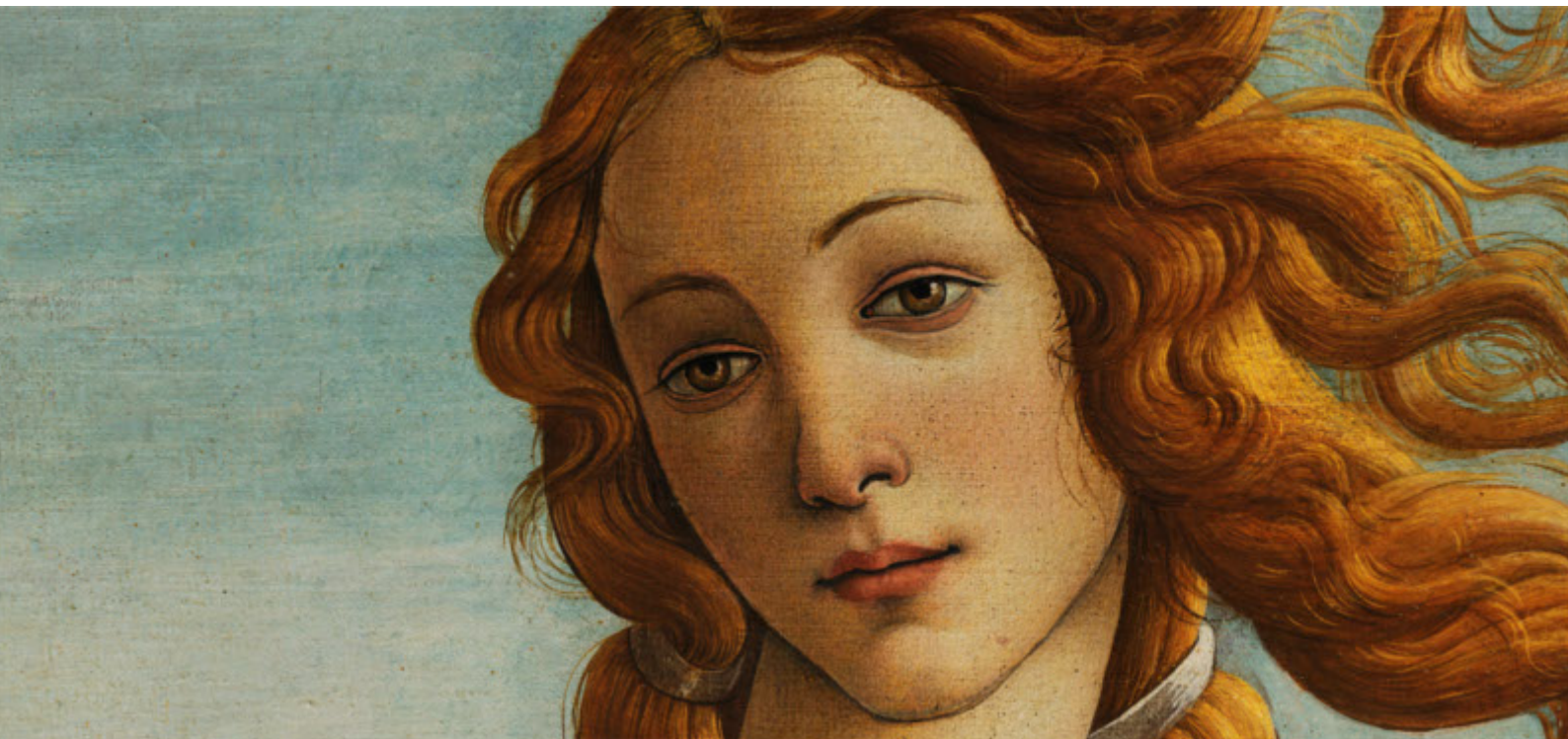
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM780>

A Path for Parents, Karunagita, Windhorse Publications ISBN 9781899579709, also explores parenting in the Buddhist life.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-path-for-parents/>

4.5

Mind in Harmony



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Module compiled by Vajrashura

The purpose of this module is to describe the mind from the Buddhist point of view, and then to use this description as a tool for transforming the mind so that it becomes more ethical, finds greater fulfilment, and ultimately attains liberation.

The text will provide a handbook for transforming the mind through systematic training, and is especially useful for working in the ethical arena of our Dharma lives. The main focus will be on the ethical and practical implications of Buddhist psychology.

We'll be working from Subhuti's book *Mind in Harmony*. This book is based upon two main sources: the Abhidharma of the Yogacara School, and Sangharakshita's *Know Your Mind*. The Abhidharma was the attempt, carried out by a number of the early schools, to systematise the Buddha's teaching about the nature of mind. The Yogacara was a Mahāyāna school, which developed its own version of the Abhidharma. *Know Your Mind* is Sangharakshita's own exploration of this material. More information on the Abhidharma and the Yogācāra is available in chapter one of the book.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/mind-in-harmony-the-psychology-of-buddhist-ethics/>

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/know-your-mind-the-psychological-dimension-of-ethics-in-buddhism/>

Subhuti's aim in writing the book is to help people to recognise their mental states for what they really are, to be able to label them accurately, and understand their ethical significance – to know our minds, in essence.

It is hoped that this module will help you to develop the mindfulness necessary for identifying your mental states, especially habitual ones, so that you can encourage those that are positive and valuable, while letting go of those that are negative and unhelpful to your spiritual growth. By understanding more clearly the workings of your own mind, you may also find it easier to develop compassion for others, since we are all in the same predicament. What you will be engaging in is the time honoured Buddhist practice of *dharma-vicaya* – the process of discerning, discriminating, identifying and investigating mental events.

Although the module refers to Buddhist 'psychology', it is important to remember that, unlike Western psychology, the purpose of exploring the mind in Buddhism is to assist the development of higher states of consciousness that can lead us to Insight. From unit two onwards, therefore, in addition to the study material and discussion, there is the opportunity

for a period of meditation to help create the inner tranquillity, clarity and insight necessary for effective examination of our mental states.

Study and reflection each unit

The module is divided into ten units, each of which will probably correspond to one week's session. There are a series of questions attached to each unit to help you engage with the material, though you may well have additional or alternative questions of your own that you choose to use.

You may choose to spend extra time on some units, as the material is a little dense in places. Also some sections of the book will be left out, to fit the course into ten units – you may choose to spend extra weeks on the omitted material. For example, Subhuti very much recommends reading the material in chapter 5 on the ethical significance of feeling and interpretation and how these can be contaminated and egoistic. The material on 'thinking-of' and 'thinking-about' in chapter 7 is also very important.

We strongly recommend reading each unit's reading material early in the week and then spending time reflecting upon it, using the suggestions below for each unit.

You may decide to approach the questions in a confessional way – exploring how you fall short of your ethical ideals in terms of the subject matter of each unit, how you can do better going forward into the future. We recommend Subhuti's booklet *Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community* as a resource to read more about confession and how to do it.

https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/othertexts/Subhuti/FBA182_Remorse_and_Confession-Subhuti.pdf

The study material for this unit will be *Chapter 1 – Going deeper*. Please read this material early in the week so that you can reflect upon the material beforehand. Make notes of anything you are not clear about or questions you may have and bring them to the group.

1. Do you experience your Dharma life ‘going deeper’ the longer you practice? What does it mean for you to go deeper? How do you know you are going deeper?
2. *“It’s only after we have made our commitment that we really take the measure of the obstacles that stand in our way.”*
Has this been our experience after you committed to the Dharma life? If so, what obstacles have you encountered?
3. In your private moments, are there areas in which you fall short, ethically speaking, i.e. in what Subhuti calls ‘the morality of the private moment’? How might you guard the mind in situations such as these?
4. How might you set up a regular habit of disclosure when it comes to ‘the morality of the private moment’? What areas do you *not* want to talk about, and why not? What might the benefit be of sharing these?
5. What exactly have you been working on in your Dharma life this past week, and are you merely ‘surviving’ rather than ‘thriving’? Be as precise as possible in answering this. What might you work on, and how might you have a clearer sense of what you should be working on, in the week ahead?
6. Looking back on your involvement in the Sangha, what are your tendencies when it comes to disharmony? Do you get excessively preoccupied with the other person’s behaviour and motives and neglect your own?
7. Subhuti describes the different dynamics that he has experienced in order meetings in both India and the West. Do you see any of these dynamics in yourself and in your own group Dharma meetings? How might you bring more conscious awareness to them, both as an individual and as a group?
8. How do you relate to the ‘right effort’, as explored by Subhuti? Do you feel you make too much or too little effort? How might you apply more appropriate effort in the week ahead?
9. Why is having both intuition and a conceptual framework necessary for the Dharma life? Do you tend to over- or under-emphasise either one of these? What might the dangers be of this?

The study material for this unit will be *Chapter 2 – Mind watching*. Please read this material early in the week so that you can reflect upon the material beforehand. Make notes of anything you are not clear about or questions you may have and bring them to the group.

Get into the habit of mind-watching during your week, noticing what kinds of mental states you get into. Use the teaching of the dyads to help notice more deeply what's going on. Reflect upon the nature of mind, in particular its three qualities – it is transparent, cognition and momentary – and see how this affects your experience of yourself. Reflect upon the questions below.

1. How do you respond to Subhuti's three "big ideas" in the first section of chapter 2?
2. In your daily life, does it feel as if there are simply "two kinds of thought" that you can do, as described by the Buddha? If not, can you simplify things so that you can see them in this way, or it is more nuanced than this?
3. Do you feel you pay enough attention to your habits (both negative and positive)?
4. Practise using the dyads this week when mind watching. Are there any that you find particularly useful?
5. What do you understand to be the difference between a positive and negative mental state? Can you think of examples of how your mental state has directly affected your experience of the world?
6. How would you define 'mind'? How is it different from the brain?
7. The mind is *transparent*, *cognition* and *momentary*. What does this mean in your own words? How does seeing the mind as each of the following affect your experience of yourself? Explore this in the coming days as you live your life.

Meditation and reflection

Sit for 15 minutes or so. Spend the first few minutes gently following the breath, or just sitting. Then start dropping in questions for reflection like "What is the mind?" "Where does it reside?" "What colour is the mind?" "Where is the mind in the body?"

You could also drop in statements for reflection, like pebbles into a still pond. Some suggestions are "the mind is transparent", "the mind is knowing", "the mind is momentary", or some variations on these.

The study material for this unit will be *Chapter 3 – The constants* and *Chapter 4 – The constants and karma*. Please read this material early in the week so that you can reflect upon the material beforehand. Make notes of anything you are not clear about or questions you may have and bring them to the group.

Get into the habit of mind-watching. Focus this week on recognising the constants in your experience. Spend a few minutes at the end of each meditation noticing each of the five constants.

1. No self can be found above, behind or beyond the constants. How do you respond to this? Do you feel the constants contain the totality of your experience?
2. Make a point of pausing a few times each day to investigate what pleasurable and/or painful feelings you are experiencing. Notice if they immediately turn into likes and dislikes. Can you notice any “gap” between the feeling and the dependently arising emotion?
3. Try looking around you at the objects of your perception without labelling them – for example taking in a chair or a person without getting caught up in those labels. What difference, if any, does it make to the quality of your experience?
4. Will is the energy that impels consciousness to seek out and involve itself with objects. Do you see this happening in your daily experience? It is a constant, so it is constantly there – can you practise watching how your will shapes your world?
5. Do you see how attention is constantly “taking hold” and then “holding on” and then “leaving hold” of objects of experience?
6. Do you see how contact and feeling are karma-result? And how will is karma-creation? Is it useful to see these as such in your daily Dharma life, for example in meditation?
7. How “wise” does your attention tend to be in your daily life? Where do you tend to fall into “unwise attention”? What situations or mental states tend to strongly reinforce your habit of “unwise attention”?
8. How might you support yourself to move away from ‘unwise attention’ and practise more “wise attention”? What situations or mental states tend to reinforce your habit of “wise attention”?

9. Can you see how interpretation, usually karma-result, can start to be something you actively create through your choices? How does your experience of work, for example, depend upon your choices of interpretation? Or other areas as well?
10. How “shallow” does your interpretation tend to be in your daily life? Can you think of an example of shallow interpretation of a recent situation or mental state you have experienced? How might you have deepened your interpretation?

Meditation and reflection

Sit for 15 minutes or so. Spend the first few minutes gently following the breath, or just sitting. Then move into a period of simply sitting and gently noticing the flow of the constants and seeing if you can identify them. Can you be aware of each of them? Are some easier to be aware of than others? Can you see some are karmic-creation and others are karma-result?



Note

Subhuti very much recommends reading the material in chapter 5 on the ethical significance of feeling and interpretation and how these can be contaminated and egoistic. It would be worth reading this section when you have the chance, and discussing them in the group if possible.

4.5.4

The Intensifiers

The study material for this unit will be *Chapter 6 – The intensifiers*. Please read this material early in the week so that you can reflect upon the material beforehand. Make notes of anything you are not clear about or questions you may have and bring them to the group.

Get into the habit of mind-watching. Focus this week on recognising the intensifiers in your experience, in particular spending some time in each meditation reflecting on and getting familiar with them. Use them in your meditation practice, and notice which intensifier you need to focus on in any one situation. Dwell with each intensifier and see if it opens into the next.

1. Emotional engagement:
 - a) What are you attracted to, what do you find yourself emotionally engaged with, in your day? Is there anything that really fascinates you? What effect do these have on you, and what conditions are there for this attraction and fascination to happen?
 - b) What blocks you from being more emotionally engaged with the Dharma and meditation?
 - c) What can you do about your lifestyle, environment and your friendships to help deepen your emotional engagement with the Dharma and with meditation?
 - d) Are you refining yourself? Do you believe that you even need to refine yourself? Where do you experience your pleasures?
2. Resolve:
 - a) Are you intellectually convinced by the Dharma and by meditation? Why do you think the Dharma and meditation are good and useful things to do?
 - b) What stops you committing to the Dharma and to meditation?
 - c) How might you strengthen your resolve for the Dharma in the week ahead?
3. Attentiveness:
 - a) Are you attentive over time to your practice of meditation and the Dharma, or do you do it in fits and starts? Does this reflect a wider pattern in your life?

- b) What gets in the way of you being more attentive to your Dharma practice?
 - c) What can you do to deepen your attentiveness, especially off the cushion, in the week ahead?
4. Absorption:
- a) Where do you get absorbed in your daily life?
 - b) Can you be a bit more absorbed in meditation? How might you do this in the week ahead?
 - c) What stops you from deeper absorption in meditation?
 - d) Can you find positive, simple things to do in which you can get absorbed in outside of meditation? Obviously these should be at least ethically neutral, but better if they're skilful, e.g. mindful walking in the garden or a park.
5. Penetration:
- a) In what ways do you already see into the true nature of things in your Dharma life? How might you deepen your ability to do this?
 - b) In the week ahead, practise seeing how the small things in your life are impermanent, insubstantial and unsatisfactory. What difference does this make?
 - c) When seeing things truly, you will experience them as unnameable and unique, as open and illimitable, with nothing you actually need, and nothing to be sought after or chased. Have you already have glimpses of this in your Dharma life so far?

Meditation and reflection

Spend 15 - 20 minutes doing the Mindfulness of Breathing, looking out for the presence of the intensifiers and any experience of them as a progressive series.



Note

Subhuti very much recommends reading the material in chapter 7 on 'thinking-of' and 'thinking-about'. It would be worth reading this section when you have the chance, and discussing them in the group if possible.

The study material for this unit will be *Chapter 8 – Faith and shame*. Please read this material early in the week so that you can reflect upon the material beforehand. Make notes of anything you are not clear about or questions you may have and bring them to the group.

Focus on the questions below as reflection for the week before the study group, so that you can share these with the group when you meet.

1. Faith is the mind's natural responsiveness to higher values, to what is good and admirable. Can you think of times when:
 - a) You are moved by seeing or experiencing goodness in others?
 - b) You are moved by something someone said or did?
 - c) You are moved by something you heard or read?
 - d) You are put in touch with a truth beyond your everyday experience?
2. Do you see faith as a positive mental event, which though intuitive, can be tested in reason and experience? Is this at odds with any religious views you previously held or encountered whose understanding of faith is set as being opposed to reason?
3. Deep faith is faith in fundamental existential truths. Have you had that response to any aspect of the Dharma? How might you cultivate this type of faith more?
4. Lucid faith is the beauty of goodness as you sometimes witness it in other people. Have you had this response to the Buddha or to fellow Sangha members? How might you cultivate this type of faith more?
5. Longing faith is the desire to close the gap between yourself and the goal. Do you experience a desire to close the gap between you and the goal? Do you experience a longing to be free of your afflictions? How might you cultivate this type of faith more?
6. How do you tend to respond when you fall short of your ideals? Do you see how scrupulousness and reverential shame are useful in the Dharma life? Would scrupulousness be enough for us? Can you bring reverential shame more into your life?

7. When you fall short of your ideals, do you experience scrupulousness or guilt? How might you know the difference? How might you cultivate more scrupulousness?
8. Do you experience reverential shame when you fall short of your ideals? Might you bring people to mind to help cultivate this? How might you set up more explicit connections and communication to spark off reverential shame more fully when you do fall short of your ideals?
9. Do you see yourself doing unscrupulousness or shamelessness in your life? For example, cynicism is a form of unscrupulousness. If so, can you get to the bottom of why you do this?

Meditation and reflection

Spend 15 minutes doing first stage of the *Mettā Bhāvanā* meditation, opening to a sense of confidence and trust in yourself and your practice. Bring to mind, with kindness, any shame or remorse that you may be experiencing. You might consider confessing this to someone appropriate afterwards.

This week prepare by reading *Chapter 9 – Contentment, goodwill and compassion*. Do this early in the week so that you can reflect upon it. Focus on the questions below as reflection for the week before the study group, so that you can share these with the group when you meet.

1. What kinds of craving do you typically do in your day? Do you see how this might be an attempt to bolster your identity?
2. How far do we see our partners or objects of romantic interest as real people or as objects “that will remove the pain of our longing and the insecurity that gnaws at the root of our identity”? How might we deepen our appreciation of them as real people independent of our needs and insecurities?
3. What views that you see manifesting in your everyday life are you most deeply attached to?
4. Do you experience contentment in your life? What conditions are usually there when you experience contentment? How could you move more from the types of craving mentioned in the previous questions to more contentment?
5. Do you do unhelpful nostalgia? Similarly, are you attached to certain future outcomes? Why might both of these be unhelpful?
6. Have you a tendency to avarice in any area of your life? E.g. money, food, favours. How might you let this go more?
7. Which of concealment, pretence and deceit are you most subject to? What don’t you want to share with people? Are there situations in which you could be more open? Are there people with whom you could be more open?
8. Do you experience hatred as an attempt to destroy something causing you suffering? Which of rage, resentment, spite and envy are you most prone to? How are you working with this?
9. Which of the levels of goodwill mentioned do you mainly operate on in your daily life? How might you move to a deeper level?
10. Do you do malice in your life? In what contexts? What are you doing about it?

Meditation and reflection

Spend five minutes cultivating mettā, and then ten minutes just sitting in meditation, looking particularly at the tendency in your mind to move towards or away from an aspect of experience. When you find yourself doing craving or aversion, check does this arise out of boredom, impatience, desire for comfort, desire for pleasure, or something else. Notice and familiarise yourself with these tendencies in your mind, and learn to recognise them off the cushion too.

This week prepare by reading *Chapter 10 – Clarity and ignorance*. Do this early in the week so that you can reflect upon it. Focus on the questions below as reflection for the week before the study group, so that you can share these with the group when you meet.

1. In what ways do you tend to do conceit in your life? How might you work on it in a way that is healthy?
2. Do you get intoxicated with yourself? If you do, where do you experience it most strongly? How might you work to become less intoxicated?
3. Do you tend towards eternalism or nihilism? Do you tend to see the best or expect the worst? Does this tendency cause you any difficulties in your life? Do you take this tendency into account in your life and your Dharma practice?
4. You really need to believe that your actions matter – that they affect you and your world. If you do really believe that actions matter, do your actions and behaviour always match this belief? Do you have a sense of karma in your everyday life?
5. Can you think of any examples of where you behave like a “good Buddhist”? How can you become more authentic in your practice of the Dharma?
6. Are you clear about the Three Jewels and your responses to them? Or do you need to clarify your vagueness? Are you committed or does something lurk in your being that holds you back?
7. Do you have people with whom you can discuss your ‘honest doubts’ and who can help you clarify your vagueness? Are you clear about where you’re vague?
8. Is the teaching of the *Three Levels of Wisdom* useful for you as you try to embody the truth more and more? What level are you likely to be mostly working at?
9. “*The mind is like a mirror that happens to be obscured by a thick coat of dirt.*”
The dirt here is your afflictions, especially ignorance. How might this way of thinking about the Dharma life be useful? How might it be not useful?

Meditation and reflection

Spend 15 minutes doing the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation, bringing as much clarity as possible to the breath and noticing any tendency to doubt or indecision.

This week prepare by reading *Chapter 11 – Ardour, serenity, and equanimity*. Do this early in the week so that you can reflect upon it. Focus on the questions below as reflection for the week before the study group, so that you can share these with the group when you meet.

1. Are you particularly prone to any of these first three types of inertia? Do you fall for any of the second three types of inertia also? How might you overcome these? In what circumstances do you tend to fall short in your efforts, and fall prey to inertia?
2. Do you get ardour from the desire to close the gap between yourself and Enlightenment, in whatever way you think of Enlightenment? What does this ardour feel like?
3. Do you find any of the traditional kinds of ardour particularly inspiring? Which one do you particularly need to cultivate? How might you do this?
4. Do you experience stagnation in your life? Is it a lack of physical energy, a lack of ardour, a lack of mental pliancy, or a mix of the three? Can you understand what underlies it, e.g. an internal conflict? How do you work with it?
5. Do you experience serenity? Is it at a physical level, a mental level or in the form of a mental pliancy and adaptability? How might you cultivate each type more?
6. Which are you more affected by in your meditation – distraction or restlessness? Which are you more affected by outside of meditation? Are they linked?
7. Are you too accepting of distraction and restlessness in your life? What strategies do you employ to counter distraction and restlessness?
8. Where do you experience equanimity? Do you have experience of the different levels of equanimity? How might you experience more equanimity in your life?

Meditation and reflection

Spend 15 minutes simply sitting in meditation, with the emphasis on balanced effort – making just enough effort to be aware of where the mind wants to go and cultivating a sense of lightness and ease. Notice your tendencies towards inertia, restlessness and distraction, and also towards ardour, energy and equanimity.

This week prepare by reading *Chapter 12 – Mindfulness and the mind*. Do this early in the week so that you can reflect upon it. Focus on the questions below as reflection for the week before the study group, so that you can share these with the group when you meet.

1. How would you describe what mindfulness is to someone who has not come across the concept before?
2. Attentiveness is defined as the effort to become more conscious of what your senses are telling us, as well as attending to the feeling tone of this sense experience. Does this definition help you to be more attentive in your day? How might you live being more alive to the senses and how they feel?
3. In what kinds of circumstances are you deeply attentive? And deeply inattentive? What conditions lead to both of these?
4. Awareness (*samprajanya*) is being mindful in particular of the constant of interpretation; it is the unceasing, moment-to-moment effort to bring your interpretation in line with reality. Does this way of thinking about it help you in your mindfulness practice? Do you practise this awareness in your daily life?
5. In which of the four levels of awareness do you tend to be strongest? And weakest? How might you improve on the ones in which you're weakest?
6. Vigilance is that aspect of mindfulness that knows the afflictions of craving, hatred, etc. are the enemies of the spiritual life and should be avoided. Do you normally consider this aspect when you're cultivating mindfulness? How might you remember it more in your daily life?
7. Do you remember all three kinds of mindfulness when you are developing mindfulness? Or do you focus on one more than the others?
8. Which aspect of mindfulness might you benefit from paying particular attention to right now in your Dharma life?

Meditation and reflection

Spend 15 minutes doing the Mindfulness of Breathing, paying attention to each of the three aspects of mindfulness. You could see this as attentiveness to what's there, staying true to your sense of purpose, and working with hindrances and unskillful mental states as they arise, and also working appropriately with the mind as it deepens into absorption.

This week prepare by reading *Chapter 13 – The psychology of liberation*. Do this early in the week so that you can reflect upon it. Focus on the questions below as reflection for the week before the study group, so that you can share these with the group when you meet.

1. Every moment of your unenlightened existence is “always more or less distorted and is always somewhere on the continuum from unskilful to skilful”. Having got this far in the module, are you beginning to see this more in your experience? How might you pay even more attention to this going forward?
2. If the existential situation described in question one was all there is, what would your response be? Would this existential situation be enough for you to happily live your life?
3. Have you had echoes of the “first evolution of mind” – open spacious awareness untrammelled by desires or thoughts? If you tried Subhuti’s “experiment” for getting a sense of this, did you have any success? Do you see and notice how the second and third evolutions then take their grasp?
4. How might you practise identifying “*with* the world around us, rather than *against* it”? What might this look like in your daily life?
5. Subhuti describes how the first step to escape is faith, and then practising ethics, meditation and wisdom. He gives details of each of these steps and how they relate to the 51 mental events. Using his description, where on this path do you feel you need to work most intensely right now? How might you do this more fully? Where do you fall short?
6. How do you respond to the description of the Enlightened mind, where the five constants of experience are dissolved into the five *jñānas*?
7. Do you particularly resonate and find inspiring any particular one of the five *jñānas*? Can you say why?
8. Do you experience any flashes of something like the *jñānas* in your life, e.g. spontaneous generosity or compassionate activity?

Meditation and reflection

Dwell upon the image of the Mandala of the Five Buddhas for a time. Does it communicate to you anything of Enlightenment that the concepts you’ve been studying do not? Is there any particular figure you’re attracted to? Why?

To complete this course, you are invited to take an aspect of it and explore it more deeply in the form of a project.

It may be that there is a particular positive mental event that you aspire to and would like to find ways of developing more consistently in your life. Or perhaps you have discovered a tendency to a negative mental event that you want to be more aware of and find ways of transforming. Or something in the material may just have sparked your interest and you'd like to look into it in more depth.

This is your opportunity to make the material more your own and help consolidate your understanding of it.

Resources

Below is a selection of works that you may want to refer to in order to further explore the material in this module.

Know Your Mind, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. One of the two texts on which Subhuti bases this book.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/know-your-mind-the-psychological-dimension-of-ethics-in-buddhism/>

Mind and its Functions, Geshe Rabten, ISBN: 9783905497 46 5, published by Edition Rabten. The other text on which Subhuti bases his talks.

http://www.rabten.eu/xv303_en.htm

Mind and Mental Events, Subhuti. A series of talks given at the Men's Order Convention in 2001, much of which is incorporated into this course. Talk four includes 'the four variables', which have not been included in the course, but which form two pairs of neutral mental events that can become positive or negative and are therefore useful to know something about.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X38>

What is Mind, Dhammadinna. A clear and interesting talk given at the Women's Order Convention in 2001 that explores the nature of mind. It links with much of the material on this course. This talk can be found in a booklet available from Taraloka that also contains other talks on the mind.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM795>

Mindfulness and the Mind, Subhuti. An article in *Madhyamavani*.

<http://madhyamavani.fwbo.org/8/mindfulness.html>

There are various booklets of talks by Subhuti available from Padmaloka and Tiratanaloka that explore aspects of the material in an imaginative and inspiring way. For example:

- *Remorse and Confession in the Spiritual Community*. A very clear and helpful look at the mental states of śraddhā, hrī, and apatrāpya, and how they relate to the practice of confession.
- *Going For Refuge*. Especially the section *Characteristics of Faith*.
- *The Mythic Context*. Especially the section *To see with angel's eyes*.

The Shepherd's Search For Mind, Milarepa, in Volume One of *The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*, trans. Garma C. C. Chang. This is the text of a conversation between the 11th century yogi and a simple shepherd boy who is gently led to insight through directly experiencing his mind. The seminar on this text with Sangharakshita is available at

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/read?num=SEM089>

4.6

Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism



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Introduction

Module compiled by Saccanama

As with his series on the Bodhisattva Ideal, Sangharakshita's aim here is not any kind of historical analysis of his subject but an attempt to bring alive its inner spiritual meaning and make it relevant to our own living of spiritual life in the modern world. Given that his approach is to explore the Tantra in terms of its creative symbols, it would be helpful to find as many ways as possible to engage directly with these symbols rather than just think about them or discuss them. So it may be helpful to see the next 8 weeks as a chance to enter into the rich world of Tantric symbolism through, e.g. the making of appropriate shrines; dwelling on full colour images of the various symbols; familiarising yourself with ritual objects; making offerings; chanting mantras and exploring the effects of different colours etc.

So rather than just a study session, these next eight weeks can be an opportunity to create and dwell in a ritual space in which you can meet the various symbols that Sangharakshita introduces.

Primary study material

The primary study material for this module is the series of lectures by Sangharakshita published in book-form as *Creative Symbols of Tantric Buddhism*, ISBN 1899579478 available from Windhorse Publications.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/creative-symbols-of-tantric-buddhism-ebook/>

The series comprises the following lectures:

1. The Symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life.
2. The Tantric Symbolism of the Stūpa.
3. The Symbolism of the Sacred Thunderbolt or Diamond Sceptre of the Lamas.
4. The Symbolism of the Cosmic Refuge Tree and the Archetypal Guru.
5. The Symbolism of the Cremation Ground and the Celestial Maidens.
6. The Symbolism of Offerings and Self-sacrifice.
7. The Symbolism of Colours and Mantric Sound.
8. The Symbolism of the Five Buddhas, 'Male' and 'Female'.

Audio recordings of the original lectures are available from Free Buddhist Audio. If you have time, I would urge you to listen to the lectures. Although they were given in 1972, in a much earlier stage of the history of the FWBO/Tiriratna, the inspiration and sense of occasion come across much better when you can hear Sangharakshita rather than just read the words from a printed page. Please be aware that the book has more material in it as excerpts from seminars have been edited into it.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X13>

Study guide and suggested questions

As with the other modules, the suggested questions are here to help you engage with the main points in the text. You may wish to read them before reading the text so that you can focus your reading and reflection. However, the questions are not likely to be definitive so if there are other issues or questions you have, feel free to raise them in your group.

4.6.1

The Symbolism of the Tibetan Wheel of Life

For this unit, you will need to read both the Introduction and Chapter 1 – The Tibetan Wheel of Life. The symbol of the Wheel of Life has already featured in *Week 3, Part 4 of Year One* but here Sangharakshita explores it in greater depth and in the context of Tantric symbolism.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is a symbol? How does it differ from a sign or a concept? Give an example of an important symbol from your own life.
2. How can you develop receptivity to the symbols of the Tantric path that we will be exploring? Give one or two specific examples of things you could do over the next eight weeks.
3. When you look into the mirror of the Wheel of Life, which of its many images strikes you most strongly? Why do you think this image speaks to you so strongly?
4. The six realms represent habitual ways of being that we all inhabit from time to time. Which of the realms do you feel most familiar with? Describe that realm from your own experience. You could also ask a friend which realm they think you dwell in most and see if your answers correspond! Are there any realms that you feel completely unfamiliar with?
5. What does the Buddha's offering in that realm tell you about how you can work with your mental states to free yourself from that realm? What would be a concrete example of the Buddha's advice for you? Try putting it into practice over the coming week, noticing what effect it has.
6. Do the Buddha's offerings in the realms give you any ideas as to how you might respond more helpfully to other people dwelling in those realms?
7. What conclusions can you draw from the teaching of the Buddha seeds and how these are distributed through the six realms?
8. Why is the image of the hare in the moon so important?

You will have encountered the symbol of the stūpa already if you studied *The Drama of Cosmic Enlightenment* in Year Three of the course. Unit 6 of that module – *Five Element Symbolism and the Stūpa* – covers similar, but not identical, ground to this unit. Please read *Chapter Two – The Tantric Stūpa* before your group meeting.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Look for images of stūpas (on the web or in books) – what is your response to them? Which aspects of them, if any, have significance for you? Bring any images you do find to the group session to share with others.
2. What is rūpa? What do you understand by the term “objective content of the perceptual situation”?
3. What is the function of initiation? What place does it have within Triratna? Have you had an experience of your “dormant psycho-spiritual energies” being activated in any way?
4. Try painting or making a simple stūpa and notice your response to the different elements of it.
5. Set aside some time during the week to notice the different elements, both in your own experience and in the world around you. If you have time, write something about each element.

4.6.3

The Symbolism of the Sacred Thunderbolt or Diamond Sceptre of the Lamas

Here, Sangharakshita introduces us to the *vajra* or diamond thunderbolt, after which the Vajrayāna is itself named. Please read *Chapter Three – The Sacred Thunderbolt* before your group meeting.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is your response to the symbol of the vajra?
2. In what ways is the vajra a symbol for reality?
3. How do you respond to the figure of wrathful Vajrapāṇi?
4. *“Any shattering experience has an element of reality in it. If an experience shatters, it is real – and if it doesn’t shatter us, its authenticity may be questioned”* (p 59).
Have you had any experience that you would call shattering? If so, what led up to it and what were its effects on you?
5. *“There is certainly room for a great deal more intensity in the spiritual practice of most Western Buddhists”* (p. 60).
What could you do to intensify your own spiritual practice?
6. Why do you think the symbol of the vajra is so central to Tantric Buddhism?
7. Vajrasattva – ‘the being of the vajra’ – is strongly associated with purity – why should this be so? What are your own associations with purity? How do you respond to the figure of Vajrasattva?

4.6.4

The Symbolism of the Cosmic Refuge Tree and the Archetypal Guru

This unit we will be looking at the Refuge Tree, and in particular the traditional Nyingmapa version of the Refuge Tree as this was the version of the practice that Sangharakshita was given by Khachu Rimpoche when he lived in Kalimpong. (See Sangharakshita's autobiography *Precious Teachers*, p.85).

The role of the guru is also explored in Sangharakshita's lecture *Is a Guru Necessary?*
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=90>

This is studied in the *Year Two* module *What is the Sangha?* Please read chapter 14 of the book before your group meeting.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is the difference between escape and escapism? Are there any elements of escapism in your own approach to the Dharma?
2. What might the esoteric refuges be in your own life? Talk about this with a good friend and see if they agree with you!
3. "...but within it (the Sangha) there may be just a few people whose company you find so stimulating that they can be the third esoteric refuge for you" (p. 89).
Are there any people in your life like this?
4. Why don't we have gurus in Triratna? Should we have them?
5. What is a spiritual lineage? What is transmitted within it? What might it mean in the context of Triratna? Do you feel part of a spiritual lineage yourself?
6. "...all life is participating in this great process, the cosmic Going for Refuge" (p. 98).
What does this phrase 'Cosmic Going for Refuge' mean to you? How could you cultivate a stronger sense of it in your own life?

The Symbolism of the Cremation Ground and the Celestial Maidens

This is a very rich lecture looking at some of our deepest fears and how we can confront them. Through doing this, we can begin to transform our deepest and most powerful emotions, liberating the energy held in them for our spiritual practice. Please read *Chapter Five – The Cremation Ground and the Celestial Maidens* before your group meeting.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Have you had any close encounters with death? e.g. have you been close to death yourself? Have you been with someone else when they have died? Have you seen a corpse? If so, what has been your response to these situations? What has been your experience of funerals? Have you been to a Buddhist funeral?
2. Keep a journal for each day this week in which you write down all the experiences of impermanence that you notice.
3. What situations give rise to fear within you? What attempts have you made to face your own fears?
4. *“If you are going to teach the ḍākinīs, you have to find them first”* (p. 122).
Have you found that your spiritual life has begun to free up your energies? If so, how and in what way? Are there any other things you can do to free your energies?
5. *“In fact, in all forms of Buddhism, great importance is attached to the heroic virtues: courage, self-confidence, self-reliance, energy, initiative”* (p. 115).
How are these virtues relevant to your own practice of Buddhism?
6. *“The symbolism of the ḍākinī thus offers a way of integrating one’s unconscious contents by personalizing them and conducting a dialogue with that personalized form”* (p. 124).
Have you ever attempted such a dialogue? What has been the outcome if you have?
7. *“She (the ḍākinī) represents that spiritual ideal of self-abandonment to the Three Jewels”* (p. 126).
What might it be like to really give yourself to the Three Jewels in this way?
8. How can you distinguish between a growth promoting cremation ground and a situation that you simply can’t handle?

This is a great exploration of the whole area of offerings in the Buddhist tradition. Given this theme, you may want to make a practice this week of making fresh offerings each day to your shrine at home. Please read chapter six before your group meeting.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. If you had an honoured guest coming to stay with you, what would you do to make them feel welcome?
2. If you were to make your own (non-traditional) offerings to the Buddha, what would they be?
3. How can the making of offerings function as an effective spiritual practice? When you have made offerings, what effect has that had on you?
4. Gratitude (*kataññutā* in Pāli) has been defined as “knowing and recognizing what has been done to one for one’s benefit”. Does reflecting on the benefits you have received from others help you to connect with a desire to make offerings?
5. What do you make of the symbolism of the Mandala that is offered to the Buddha? What might it look like to make such an offering in terms of modern Western cosmology?
6. *“Egoism is not an entity, but an attitude”* (p. 150).
To what extent does the making of offerings help you to overcome such egoism?
7. How would you offer yourself to the Buddhas?
8. Spend some time quietly on your own in nature, relax and try to open up to its aliveness. What do you notice when you do this?

With this week's theme, perhaps you could recite 108 mantras of one of the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas that you feel a connection with at some point during each day. Or you could choose a colour to which you are drawn, noticing how that colour manifests in the world as well as the effects that colour has on you. Read chapter 7 of the book.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Is colour symbolism universal or culturally specific? Explore this using some specific examples.
2. What is your favourite colour? What associations does that colour have for you?
3. Spend time really looking at colours in nature – e.g. flowers, the blue sky, the green of a forest. What are your emotional responses in each case? Are there any resonances with your favourite Buddha or Bodhisattva?
4. What application do the four Tantric rites have, if any, to your spiritual life?
5. What role does beauty play in your spiritual life? What are the advantages and dangers of being led by beauty?
6. Are you inspired by the arts? By beautiful paintings? By music? How could these things be an aid to spiritual practice for you?
7. How is a mantra a 'sound symbol'?
8. What is your experience of the spiritual value of mantras?

To conclude the series, Sangharakshita here looks at one of the richest and most important symbols of Tantric Buddhism. Read chapter 8 of the book.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Which appeals more to you – the figure of the historical Buddha or one of the archetypal Buddha forms? Why do you think that is?
2. If you have time, draw two different mandalas – one a mandala of your life and the other the ideal mandala of the Five Buddhas (this last doesn't have to be figurative but could just have the colours and/or symbols arranged in a mandala pattern with the three walls of the mandala etc.).
3. Which of the five Buddhas – male or female – appeals to you most and why?
4. Why do you think the five female Buddhas represent the Wisdom aspect of Enlightenment and the five male Buddhas the compassion aspect?
5. Write down your thoughts and associations with each of the Five Wisdoms (p. 185).
6. How do you respond to the yab-yum and wrathful figures of the Mandala of the Five Buddhas?

As with all the modules of the Dharma Training Course, this module concludes with the opportunity to present a project to your group on a topic arising from the material you have been studying. You may wish to take one of the Suggested Questions and explore it in more detail than you have been able to in the weekly meetings or you may want to take up one of the symbols we have been exploring over the last 8 weeks and go into it in more depth. Whatever you choose, the purpose of the projects is to give you the opportunity to engage with the material more fully. It is also a good way to share something of your experience with the group. If you are unsure what to do for your project, talk to your group leader.

Taking it Further

If you have felt inspired or moved to explore any of the themes in this series further, you may find the following resources helpful. They may also be helpful for your project.

Suggested further reading for the whole module

Tibetan Buddhism – An Introduction, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766861. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the Four Foundation Yogas and Tantric initiation.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/tibetan-buddhism-ebook/>
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X08>

A Survey of Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 0904766934. Chapter 3 places the Tantra in the context of the development of the various Mahayana schools.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-survey-of-buddhism/>

Buddhist Thought, Anthony Tribe, Paul Williams and Anthony Wynne, Routledge, ISBN 041520701. Chapter 7 on the Tantra gives an up-to-date academic overview of the Tantra. Anthony Tribe also has the Order name of Anandajyoti.
<https://books.google.ie/books?id=BVvFBQAAQBAJ>

Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism, Lama Anagarika Govinda. Explores various Tibetan teachings and practices through the mantra Om Mani Padme Hum. Govinda was a good friend of Sangharakshita's.
<https://books.google.ie/books?id=zK7l3hUuOwC>

The Way of the White Clouds, Lama Anagarika Govinda. A passionate and inspired narrative of his pilgrimage in Tibet where he describes eloquently his great joy at the beautiful colours and dramatic landscapes there. Available in PDF also.
https://books.google.ie/books?id=3_YKAAAAYAAJ
<http://avaxbooks.me/anagarika-lama-govinda-the-way-of-the-white-clouds-pdf.html>

A Guide to the Deities of the Tantra, Vessantara, Windhorse Publications.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-guide-to-the-deities-of-the-tantra/>

Unit 1

Journey to Il Convento and *St Jerome Revisited* in *The Priceless Jewel*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications. These two short essays explore Sangharakshita's response to Christian religious art and his exploration of the faculty of the Imagination.

http://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/The%20Priceless%20Jewel.pdf

Journey to Il Convento: <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=163>

St. Jerome Revisited: <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=164>

The Wheel of Life, Kulananda, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579303. A short but clear overview of the Wheel of Life.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-wheel-of-life/>

The Wheel of Birth and Death, Bhikkhu Khantipalo, The Wheel Publication Nos. 147/148/149, available from Access to Insight website. This gives a fuller historical background to the Wheel in the Pāli tradition.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/khantipalo/wheel147.html>

The Buddhist Vision, Subhuti, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579362. This is an excellent exploration of the whole Buddhist Path using the symbols of the Wheel of Life, the Spiral Path and the Five Buddha Mandala. He is particularly good on the mental states that create each realm.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-buddhist-vision-a-path-to-fulfilment/>

Unit 2

Psycho-cosmic Symbolism of the Stūpa, Lama Anagarika Govinda, Dharma Publishing, ISBN 0913546364. Explores the proportions and symbolism of various kinds of Buddhist stūpa.

<http://www.wisdom-books.com/product/psycho-cosmic-symbolism-of-the-buddhist-stupa/1063/>

Buddhist Saints in India, Reginald Ray, Oxford, ISBN 0195134834. Chapter 10 explores what Ray calls the 'cult of the stūpa' in Buddhist history and practice. Also available in PDF.

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/buddhist-saints-in-india-9780195134834>

http://www.ahandfulofleaves.org/documents/Buddhist%20Saints%20in%20India_A%20Study%20in%20Buddhist%20Values%20and%20Orientations_Reginald.pdf

Unit 3

The Vajra and the Bell, Vessantara, Windhorse Publications. A concise exploration of the symbolism of vajra and bell written in an approachable and direct style.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-vajra-bell/>

Unit 4

The Refuge Tree, Aloka, Padmaloka Books. A detailed exploration of the Nyingmapa Refuge Tree based on talks given by Aloka at Padmaloka.

<http://www.padmalo.org.uk/shopbooklets.html>

The Refuge Tree as Mythic Context, Aloka, Padmaloka Books. A more practical guide to engaging with the various images and symbols that make up the Refuge Tree.

<http://www.padmalo.org.uk/shopbooklets.html>

Teachers of Enlightenment, Kulananda, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579257. An introduction to the Going for Refuge and Prostration practice used within the Triratna Buddhist Order and to the figures of the Triratna Refuge Tree.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/teachers-of-enlightenment-the-refuge-tree-of-the-western-buddhist-order/>

Unit 5

A Guide to the Deities of the Tantra, Vessantara, Windhorse Publications. Explores the more well-known *ḍākinī* figures.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-guide-to-the-deities-of-the-tantra/>

Unit 6

What is the Sangha?, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 1899579311. Chapter 19 is an excellent exploration of gratitude.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/what-is-the-sangha-ebook/>

Ritual and Devotion in Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, ISBN 9781899579334. Chapters 5 and 6 explore Worship and Offerings in the context of the Sevenfold Pūjā.
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/ritual-and-devotion-in-buddhism/>

Unit 7

Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism, Lama Anagarika Govinda. Chapter 1 is particularly good on mantra and mantric sound.
<https://books.google.ie/books?id=zK7l3hUuOwcC>

The Way of the White Clouds, Lama Anagarika Govinda. Part 2, Chapter 2 explores colour as ‘the living language of light’.
https://books.google.ie/books?id=3_YKAAAYAAJ
<http://avaxbooks.me/anagarika-lama-govinda-the-way-of-the-white-clouds-pdf.html>

Unit 8

Female Deities in Buddhism by Vessantara (ISBN 1899579532 Windhorse Publications). Vessantara here explores the Five Female Buddhas (along with other female deities).
<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/female-deities-in-buddhism/>

Over the last 6 or 7 years, Vessantara has begun to develop significant material on these little explored figures in the Buddhist tradition. If you want to explore this material, this is the best place to start. You can also access his pujas and other written material on the five female Buddhas via his website.

<http://vessantara.net/>
<http://vessantara.net/wp-content/uploads/five-female-buddhas.pdf>

Mantras of the Five Consorts, Vessantara. Audio talk.
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=OM678>

4.7

The Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva



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Module compiled by Vadanya

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* of Śāntideva is one of the most influential Buddhist texts of all time. It describes the approach of what has been called, “The Golden Age of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism”, and its teachings form the basis for much of Tibetan Buddhism. The Dalai Lama says that it is his main inspiration, and that he reads it every day. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* was the first text on which Sangharakshita led study after founding the Western Buddhist Order, and he has always held it up as one of Triratna’s core texts. In the original mitra study course it was envisaged that all mitras would study the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* in addition to Sangharakshita’s lecture series.

Śāntideva and the origins of the text

Śāntideva lived in northern India around 800CE. When he composed the text he was a monk at the great monastic university of Nālanda. In factual terms we do not know much about his life, except that he wrote at least one other book, the *Śikṣā Samuccaya* (Compendium of Practice), which is an encyclopaedic work of scholarship. (Trans. Bendall, C, and Rowse W, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1922, 1971). Whereas the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* was written in verse, the *Śikṣā Samuccaya* is a prose guide to the path which incorporates quotations from a large number of Mahāyāna sūtras, many of which are now lost, or exist only in Chinese or Tibetan translations. We know that Śāntideva was a devotee of Mañjuṣa, which is in keeping with his extensive scholarship.

There is a standard mythological version of Śāntideva’s life, which is described in Kulananda’s book, *Teachers of Enlightenment* (Windhorse Publications, Birmingham 2000). According to this, Śāntideva was regarded as a lazy, ignorant monk by his fellows, because he slept all day; but he practised all night, when others were asleep. He was given the nickname ‘Monk of the Three Attainments’ by the other monks – the Three Attainments being eating, sleeping, and defecating. He was invited to address the assembled monks of Nālanda as a joke, to show him up and humiliate him. But instead of disgracing himself by showing his ignorance, Śāntideva delivered the *Bodhicaryāvatara* in beautiful Sanskrit verse from the platform, then rose into the air and vanished. He is said to have then spent the rest of his life living among the poorest and most downtrodden sections of society, teaching and practising the Dharma.

The myth of the apparently lazy monk is a nice story, but in view of the scholarship shown in the *Śikṣā Samuccaya* it seems unlikely that Śāntideva really ever seemed quite such a dunce. Essentially the story is trying to convey that the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* comes from a different level of consciousness, from profound levels of inspiration, and not from mere academic scholarship.

Bodhicaryāvatāra means something like ‘Guide to the Path of Wisdom’, or ‘Guide to the Path of Awakening.’ *Bodhi* means awakening, or the wisdom of Enlightenment. *Caryā* means path or way path. *Avatāra* means guide.

In Tibetan circles the text is sometimes called the *Bodhisattva Caryā Avatāra*, and this reflects the way the title is usually translated – as for example ‘Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life’. This describes the text fairly well – it is a guide to the path of practice of the trainee Bodhisattva, both in terms of how to cultivate interior motivations and mental states, and of how to act in everyday life to develop and express these mental states.

The Bodhisattva Path

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a guide to the Bodhisattva Path, but we should not think of this as a new path, or a higher path. The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is a restatement of basic Buddhism, in a form that particularly emphasises altruism, concern for others, and practising for the welfare of the world. This is nothing new: if we go back to early Buddhism, the Buddha repeatedly emphasised that we should be practising, “...for the welfare of the many, for the wellbeing of gods and men,” and not just to become happier and more liberated ourselves. This altruistic aspect may have got rather lost sight of for a while after the Buddha’s death, until Mahāyāna Buddhists felt the need to re-emphasise it. The Bodhisattva Path is introduced in different ways in several parts of the Dharma Training Course for Mitras, most notably in the Bodhisattva Ideal module.

The Six Pāramitās and the structure of the text

There are several formulations of the Bodhisattva Path, but the simplest and most widely applicable is that of the Six Pāramitās. According to Conze, ‘pāramitā’ means something like ‘way to the other shore’ or ‘way beyond’. The pāramitās could therefore be called the Six Transcendent Practices, or the six ways to transcend ourselves. For reasons to do with the history of translation they are usually called the Perfections, which is perhaps a bit misleading. The structure of the text can be mapped on to the pāramitās as follows:

- *Chapters 1–3*: Dāna (generosity) – these chapters are about how we cultivate an overall attitude of generosity; of giving ourselves to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and all beings.
- *Chapters 4 & 5*: Śīla (ethics) – particularly emphasising mindfulness as the basis of ethics.
- *Chapter 6*: Kṣānti (patience).
- *Chapter 7*: Vīrya (effort, energy).
- *Chapter 8*: Dhyana (meditation).
- *Chapter 9*: Prajñā (wisdom).
- *Chapter 10*: Dedication – not part of the pāramitās structure.

The text is also divided into two parts (or three with the dedication). In chapters 1, 2 and 3 we are led through a progressive series of reflections and meditations that lead us to experience the mindset we need to commit ourselves to the path; an attitude of self-surrender to the Buddhas, and of giving ourselves to all beings. Chapters 2 and 3 form the basis for our Sevenfold Pūjā. Chapters 4 to 9 look at how we develop and express this mindset through the way we live our lives.

This course uses a shortened text which covers Śāntideva’s main points, clarifies the language of the more scholarly translations, and eliminates repetition. The approach has been to bring out the relevance of the text for present-day practitioners, rather than to treat it as a document of historical or scholarly interest. The text you will be using is based mainly on three translations: Crosby and Skilton, Wallace and Wallace, and Batchelor, and the approach has

been to look for the meaning conveyed by all three and to re-express this in what I hope is accessible English. Headings have been inserted in the text to clarify the structure.

Approach and timetable

The suggested approach to this study is to read the text aloud in short sections during the study session, discussing each section as it comes along. The material for each week includes an introduction, the text itself, and then a section called ‘commentary and questions’, which breaks the text into bite-sized pieces suitable for reading then discussion, and gives some comments and questions about each section. It is suggested that the group uses this commentary to structure the discussion, reading each of these sections of the text aloud, then discussing the points made in the text, with the aid of the questions where appropriate.

It is also suggested that while you are studying the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* you might take this opportunity to immerse yourself in the text, reading and rereading it as part of your daily practice. You may also want to look at some of the full-length translations of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and at some reference material – references are given later – but this is not essential. Your study leader also has access to a *Teachers’ Guide* that gives extra information.

The suggested timetable for the module is as follows (although your study leader may find it appropriate to change this):

- Week 1 – General introduction, plus chapter 1
- Week 2 – Chapters 2 & 3
- Week 3 – Chapters 2 & 3, plus pūjā
- Week 4 – Chapters 4 & 5
- Week 5 – Chapter 6
- Week 6 – Chapter 7
- Week 7 – Chapter 8
- Week 8 – Chapter 9, plus dedication of merits from chapter 10

References and further reading

The Bodhicaryāvatāra – A Guide to the Buddhist Path to Awakening, Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton (translators), Windhorse Publications, Birmingham, 2002.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-bodhicaryavatara-a-guide-to-the-buddhist-path-of-awakening/>

A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, Steven Batchelor (translator), Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, 1979.

<http://goo.gl/xV8avy>

A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life, Vesna Wallace and B. Alan Wallace (translators), Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY, 1997.

<http://www.shambhala.com/a-guide-to-the-bodhisattva-way-of-life-2972.html>

The Endlessly Fascinating Cry, Sangharakshita. Transcribed study seminar.

https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminartexts/SEM063_Endlessly_Fascinating_Cry_-_Complete_Text.pdf

Meaningful to Behold – A commentary to Śāntideva’s Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, Tharpa Publications, London, 1980.

<http://tharpa.com/us/meaningful-to-behold.html>

Introduction

The first chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is called *Bodhicittanusamsa*, or ‘Praising the Bodhicitta’. It is a reflection on just how good it would be to have the attitude that the Bodhisattva path develops and expresses. This is a logical place to start, because the first stage in obtaining anything is to really want it, and the first stage in wanting something is to see its benefits. So this is where Śāntideva starts – by getting us to connect with just how good it would be to have the attitude and spirit which motivates a Bodhisattva – in other words the Bodhicitta.

What is the Bodhicitta?

Bodhicitta literally means something like ‘wisdom mind’ or ‘awakening heart’. (Bodhi means the wisdom of Enlightenment, or awakening; citta means heart/mind.) In the Sevenfold Pūjā we translate the term as ‘Will to Enlightenment’, which brings out its volitional aspect. The Bodhicitta is often described as the will to become enlightened for the sake of all beings. It is the spirit, mindset and attitude of the Bodhisattva, and the driving force for following the Bodhisattva path. Sangharakshita talks about it as a transpersonal force that operates in the universe, which no individual can ‘get’ or attain, but which we can open up to, align ourselves with, and allow to act through us.

The term ‘Bodhicitta’ does not refer to something new in the Buddhist tradition, which the Mahāyāna invented. As has already been pointed out, the Buddha repeatedly exhorted his followers to practise, “for the welfare of the many” and exemplified this in his life. Sangharakshita describes the Bodhicitta as the altruistic aspect of Going for Refuge. He says that this aspect is essential, and that, “There is no such thing as an individualistic awakening.” Insight is about seeing absence of separate selfhood, and therefore our relatedness with other beings, so that wisdom and altruism are two sides of the same coin.

As the Bodhicitta is the altruistic aspect of Going for Refuge, it can be experienced at different levels, like the other aspects of Going for Refuge. Although Sangharakshita speaks of the full-blown arising of the Bodhicitta as an exalted spiritual experience, we can also experience it at the ‘effective’ and ‘provisional’ level, and gain a correspondingly weaker version of the benefits described in the text. If this were not the case, the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* would be aimed at beings on a different plane from ourselves, and have no application to our spiritual practice. There would be little point in us studying it. In fact Śāntideva makes it plain that the text is not just aimed at spiritual superheroes, but also at people who experience many of the same difficulties with the spiritual life that we do. At our level we might experience the Bodhicitta more as an altruistic, other-regarding motivation to practise the Dharma, and to engage in service to the Dharma and Sangha, rather than as a cosmic will acting through us!

Chapter 1: The Benefits of the Bodhicitta

Reverently bowing to the Buddhas, to the Dharma, and to the noble sons and daughters of the Sugatas, I shall briefly explain the path of practice of the Buddha's disciples, according to the scriptures. [1]

This precious opportunity, with the leisure and other conditions needed to practise the Dharma, is extremely rare. This is what makes life meaningful – if we waste it now, when will it come again? [4]

Like a flash of lightning on a black stormy night, that gives one instant of clarity, so, by the power of the Buddha, the worldly mind is sometimes lit up for a moment by skilful intentions. But the power of good is weak, while the power of darkness is strong. If it were not for the Bodhicitta, what could conquer this darkness? [5, 6]

The Buddhas have seen that the Bodhicitta is the one blessing that brings true joy and bliss. Those who want to transcend the sufferings of conditioned existence, those who want to relieve the suffering of others, and those who want to experience joy in their own hearts, should never abandon the Bodhicitta. [7, 8]

The moment the Bodhicitta arises in someone, fettered and weak in the jail of cyclic existence, he is instantly hailed as a son of the Sugatas, and honoured by gods and men. [9]

The Bodhicitta is the philosopher's stone that transmutes the base metal of this body into the gold of the Buddha Jewel. Grasp it tightly, and use it well. [10]

Like a banana tree, every other good thing bears fruit for a time, and then dies. But the Bodhicitta does not wither, and continues to bear fruit. It protects us like a great hero. Like a great fire it instantly burns up evil habits and past karma. [12–14]

There are two kinds of Bodhicitta: Bodhicitta as an aspiration, and Bodhicitta put into practice. The difference is like that between someone who wants to go travelling, and someone who actually goes. [15, 16]

Even to aspire for the Bodhicitta brings great benefits, but nothing like those that come once we begin to act on our aspiration. From the moment we definitely decide to live and practise for the benefit of all, a continuous stream of merit rains down on us, even when we are asleep or distracted. [17–19]

This state of mind, in which we care more for others than they care for themselves, is a miraculous jewel, and its arising is a wonder. It is the source of the world's joy, and the cure for the world's suffering. There is no way we can fathom the depths of its goodness. [24–6]

Look at most living beings: hoping to escape suffering, they run straight towards it; looking for happiness, in their delusion they destroy their own happiness, as though they were their own enemy. [28]

But the Bodhicitta gives real happiness, it dispels suffering, and it drives off delusion. It is the best teacher, and the best spiritual friend. [29, 30]

I bow down to those in whom this precious jewel of the mind has arisen; I go for refuge to those sources of joy, who bring happiness even to those who harm them. [36]

COMMENTARY AND QUESTIONS

Chapter 1: The Benefits of the Bodhicitta

Reverently bowing to the Buddhas, to the Dharma, and to the noble sons and daughters of the Sugatas, I shall briefly explain the path of practice of the Buddha's disciples, according to the scriptures. [1]

Question: Why do you think he starts with 'bowing'?

This precious opportunity, with the leisure and other conditions needed to practise the Dharma, is extremely rare. This is what makes life meaningful – if we waste it now, when will it come again? [4]

To begin firing up our motivation to start serious practice, Śāntideva reminds us that we have "a precious opportunity". In contrast to the overwhelming majority of beings in the universe, we have what is needed to do something truly meaningful with our lives. The traditional list of the conditions needed to practise the Dharma and so live meaningfully includes the following:

- Being born as a human being.
- Being healthy enough in body and mind to practise.
- Being born in a civilised land.
- Living in a time and place where a Buddha has appeared, the Dharma is available and a Sangha exists.
- Having enough resources and leisure to be able to devote time and energy to practice.
- Having enough 'merit' to come across the Dharma and Sangha.
- Having enough faith (also due to past merit) to respond positively to the teachings.
- Not having been conditioned to hold wrong views so firmly that we can't accept the Dharma.

Question: Do you have a sense of being fortunate to be able to practise the Dharma?

In what ways is our present situation fortunate, compared to people living at other times and in other places?

Like a flash of lightning on a black stormy night, that gives one instant of clarity, so, by the power of the Buddha, the worldly mind is sometimes lit up for a moment by skilful intentions. But the power of good is weak, while the power of darkness is strong. If it were not for the Bodhicitta, what could conquer this darkness? [5, 6]

Question: Is the power of good really weak, and the power of darkness strong?

The Buddhas have seen that the Bodhicitta is the one blessing that brings true joy and bliss. Those who want to transcend the sufferings of conditioned existence, those who want to relieve the suffering of others, and those who want to experience joy in their own hearts, should never abandon the Bodhicitta. [7, 8]

Question: How could being more selfless bring us joy?

The moment the Bodhicitta arises in someone, fettered and weak in the jail of cyclic existence, he is instantly hailed as a son or daughter of the Sugatas, and honoured by gods and men. [9]

Question: Can you relate to the idea of conditioned existence as a prison? Do you have any sense of longing for release?

The Bodhicitta is the philosopher's stone that transmutes the base metal of this body into the gold of the Buddha Jewel. Grasp it tightly, and use it well. [10]

Like a banana tree, every other good thing bears fruit for a time, and then dies. But the Bodhicitta does not wither, and continues to bear fruit. It protects us like a great hero. Like a great fire it instantly burns up evil habits and past karma. [12–14]

Śāntideva tells us that once we have adopted the Bodhicitta as our underlying attitude and motivation, it begins to transform us, as the philosopher's stone of the alchemists was said to transform base metals into gold.

Question: Does this image appeal to you?

Question: What does Śāntideva mean by saying that all other good things are like a banana tree?

Question: How might the Bodhicitta protect us 'like a hero'?

Question: Why might the arising of the Bodhicitta burn up bad habits and evil karma?

There are two kinds of Bodhicitta: Bodhicitta as an aspiration, and Bodhicitta put into practice. The difference is like that between someone who wants to go travelling, and someone who actually goes. [15, 16]

Even to aspire for the Bodhicitta brings great benefits, but nothing like those that come once we begin to act on our aspiration. [17]

From the moment we definitely decide to live and practise for the benefit of all, a continuous stream of merit rains down on us, even when we are asleep or distracted. [18]

Question: Why should just aspiring for the Bodhicitta bring any benefits?

This state of mind, in which we care more for others than they care for themselves, is a miraculous jewel, and its arising is a wonder. It is the source of the world's joy, and the cure for the world's suffering. There is no way we can fathom the depths of its goodness. [24–6]

Question: Why might Śāntideva describe the arising of the Bodhicitta as 'a wonder'?

Look at most living beings: hoping to escape suffering, they run straight towards it; looking for happiness, in their delusion they destroy their own happiness, as though they were their own enemy. [28]

Question: How do we 'run straight towards' suffering and destroy our own happiness?

But the Bodhicitta gives real happiness, it dispels suffering, and it drives off delusion. It is the best teacher and the best spiritual friend. [29, 30]

Śāntideva tells us that the Bodhicitta attitude, far from being a way to give ourselves a hard time, is in fact the real source of happiness, unlike 'normal' ways of looking for happiness, which in fact bring suffering.

Question: Why might the Bodhicitta 'drive off delusion'?

I bow down to those in whom this precious jewel of the mind has arisen; I go for refuge to those sources of joy, who bring happiness even to those who harm them. [36]

Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* form the basis for our Sevenfold Pūjā. Śāntideva did not invent the sevenfold pūjā – there is a version of it in the (earlier) *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* – but the words we normally use come from a translation of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*.

In these chapters Śāntideva more or less follows the structure of the sevenfold pūjā, but he doesn't do this strictly – he elaborates on it and sometimes mixes up different stages. For example, confession and going for refuge are very long and mixed up together, and combined with a long reflection on death, while some sections just get a verse or two.

The aim of these two chapters (and of the sevenfold pūjā) is to cultivate a state of mind in which we open ourselves to the Bodhicitta, and commit ourselves to practising the Bodhisattva Path. In chapter 1 we reflected on how good it would be if we could do this, in order to generate *chanda*, strong desire and enthusiasm.

Then, in chapters 2 and 3, Śāntideva takes us through a progressive series of reflections, meditations and spiritual 'moods' designed to lead us towards a wholehearted giving of *ourselves* to the Bodhicitta, to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and to all beings. The way in which we act out this supreme act of dāna in our lives is then described in chapter 4 onwards.

Chapters 1 to 3 can be seen as representing dāna in the Six Pāramitās structure, in that they are about developing an attitude of giving *ourselves*. We are not ready to do this fully, so the pūjā is a sort of rehearsal, which, if we do it often enough and with enough intensity, will lead to the real thing.

In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* the main section on Going for Refuge comes after 'Confession', because for Śāntideva regret for past harmful actions seems to be an important motivation for committing to the Three Jewels. In the unabridged text there is just one verse on Going for Refuge before the Confession section. The rest is sandwiched between lengthy passages of confession and reflection on death.

TEXT

Chapter 2 – Confession

Worship, offerings, and prostrations

In order to embrace the precious Bodhicitta, the jewel of the mind, I make offerings to the Buddhas, to the sublime Dharma, and to the sons and daughters of the Buddha, who are oceans of excellence. [1]

Conjuring them up in my mind, I offer all the flowers in the world, all the fruits, and all the fragrant herbs. I offer the clear refreshing waters, the crystal mountains, the tranquil forests, and the wild places. I offer vines bright with flowers, I offer trees heavy with fruit, I offer lakes adorned with lotuses, and the haunting cry of the wild geese. [2–6]

I offer myself completely to the Buddhas and their sons. Take possession of me, sublime beings – I reverently devote myself to your service. [8]

When you possess me, I am freed from fear. When you possess me, I work for the benefit of all. When you possess me, I am freed from my unskilful karma, and in the future I commit no more. [9]

In my mind's eye I invite the sages to a fragrant bathing chamber, with jewelled pillars and mosaic floors of clear crystal. While music plays I invite them to bathe in flower-scented water. I dry them with soft cloths, and anoint their bodies, which shine like heated gold. I dress them in richly coloured robes, and adorn them with bright jewels and ornaments. [10–14]

I garland them with flowers, envelop them in heady clouds of incense, and offer them many kinds of food and drink. I offer jewelled lamps on golden lotuses, and strew drifts of flowers on the perfumed floor. [16, 17]

To those whose very essence is maitrī, I offer cloud-like palaces in the sky, to which thrilling music, poems, and songs of worship drift upwards, while flowers rain down incessantly on all shrines and images, and on all the jewels of the true Dharma. [18, 20, 21, 23]

With as many bodies as there are atoms in the universe, I prostrate to the Buddhas of the past, present and future, to the Dharma, and to the sublime Sangha. I bow to all shrines and sacred places, to all teachers, and to all worthy practitioners. [24, 25]

Confession and Going for Refuge

Standing with folded hands before the Buddhas in the ten directions, before the Bodhisattvas of great compassion, I acknowledge the harm I have caused, in this life and past ages: the harm to myself, the harm to the Three Jewels, and the harm to other beings. [27–31]

How can I escape the results of my karma? O Guides of the World, please grasp me quickly, so that death does not come before it is wiped out. [33]

Here and now I go for refuge to the Buddhas who protect the universe. Wholeheartedly I go for refuge to the Dharma they have realised, and to the community of Bodhisattvas. [48, 49]

I offer myself to Samantabhadra, I give myself to Mañjuśrī, I cry out to the compassionate Avalokiteśvara, asking him to protect me. I bow down to Vajrapāṇi – at the sight of him the messengers of death scatter in all directions! [51–3]

I have ignored your advice, O great guides, but now, seeing my danger, I go for refuge, and ask for your protection. Someone afraid of an ordinary illness will take their doctor's advice. But I have ignored the advice of the all-knowing doctor, about the worst of diseases. Is there no end to my stupidity? [54–7]

If I am careful on an ordinary cliff, how much more care should I take at the top of a precipice that drops for huge distances, through great tracts of time? Yet I take my pleasure, while my end gets nearer and nearer. Do I think I will escape death, when nobody else does? Instead I should keep in mind that unskilfulness always leads to suffering, and that I need to liberate myself from the effects of my karma. [58–60, 63]

Standing with folded hands before the Guides of the World, fearful of the suffering I have stored up for myself, I confess all the unskilfulness I have piled up in my delusion. Prostrating again and again, I ask the leaders to accept my confession. What is not good, O Protectors, I must not do again. [64–6]

Chapter 3: Embracing the Bodhicitta

Rejoicing in merit

I rejoice with gladness in the good done by all beings, which frees them from the lower states. I rejoice in the release of beings from the sufferings of cyclic existence. I rejoice in the nature of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and in the teachings of the wise. I rejoice with a heart of gladness in all expressions of the Bodhicitta, the mind that wishes all beings to be happy, and works for the benefit of all. [1–3]

Asking for teaching

With hands folded in reverence I beg the Buddhas in all directions to shine the light of the Dharma, to light up the world for we who wander, bewildered by darkness. With hands folded in reverence I ask the Conquerors who wish to pass into Nirvāṇa, to please stay here for endless ages, and not to leave this world in darkness. [4, 5]

Transference of merit and self-surrender

May the merit I have gained by these actions relieve the suffering of all beings. With no sense of loss I give my body to all beings, I give them all my pleasures, and all my merit from the past, present, and future. [6, 10]

Enlightenment is giving away everything, and Enlightenment is my heart's goal. So let me give everything away to sentient beings! [11]

I give this body to beings to do with as they please. May I never cause them harm, and may even their anger towards me benefit them. Those who criticise me, those who are unjust to me, those who harm me, those who mock me – may they all share in Enlightenment. [12–16]

May I be the doctor and the nurse for all beings, until the world is cured. May I be food for the hungry, and wealth for the poor. May I be a protector for the unprotected, a guide for the lost, and a boat to the other shore. May I be a lamp for those who need light, and a bed for those who need rest. May I be a servant to all beings. [7–9, 17, 18]

Just like the earth, water, fire, and air, that are useful in many ways to the beings throughout infinite space, so may I too support the life of all beings, until we are all liberated. [20, 21]

Commitment and celebration

Just as the Buddhas before me took up the Bodhicitta, just as they trained in the Six Perfections, so now I too, for the welfare of the world, embrace the Bodhicitta. So now I too will train in the Bodhisattva's Path. [22, 23]

Today my life has borne fruit. Today I have been born in the family of the Buddha. Today I have become one of the Buddha's sons. Everything I do from now on should be worthy of this noble family. [25, 26]

Just like a blind man, who by chance finds a jewel in a heap of rubbish, so by some chance this precious attitude has arisen in me. [27]

This is the elixir of life, that puts an end to death. This is the priceless treasure, that ends all poverty on Earth. This is the supreme medicine, that cures the world's disease. This is the bridge to freedom, that leads from unhappy states. [28–30]

This is the moon of the mind, whose light banishes our darkness. This is the brilliant sun, that burns off the mist of delusion. This is the essential butter from churning the milk of the Dharma. [30, 31]

For the whole caravan of humanity travelling the roads of existence in search of happiness, this will give them joy. [32]

Today in the presence of the Buddhas I invite the world to be my guest at a great feast of delight. May humans, gods, and all beings rejoice! [33]

COMMENTARY AND QUESTIONS

Chapter 2 – Confession

Worship, offerings, and prostrations

In order to embrace the precious Bodhicitta, the jewel of the mind, I make offerings to the Buddhas, to the sublime Dharma, and to the sons and daughters of the Buddha, who are oceans of excellence. [1]

First Śāntideva announces the purpose of the next two chapters – which is to help us to open ourselves up to the Bodhicitta, by following a series of mini- meditations which culminate in us dedicating ourselves to the Bodhisattva path. The first stage of this sequence is making offerings – we usually call it 'worship'.

We begin by putting ourselves in the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in our imagination. Then we express respect, and we start practising dāna, giving to them in our imagination.

Question: Do you imagine yourself in the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas when you take part in a pūjā? If so, how do you do this – e.g. do you visualise them, or just try to get a sense of their presence?

Conjuring them up in my mind, I offer all the flowers in the world, all the fruits, and all the fragrant herbs. I offer the clear refreshing waters, the crystal mountains, the tranquil forests, and the wild places. I offer vines bright with flowers, I offer trees heavy with fruit, I offer lakes adorned with lotuses, and the haunting cry of the wild geese. [2–6]

As the first stage of making offerings we conjure up in our minds the beauties of nature, and offer these to the Bodhicitta, and to the higher beings who express it.

Question: Why might offering the beauty we see in nature be a good place to start?

I offer myself completely to the Buddhas and their sons. Take possession of me, sublime beings – I reverently devote myself to your service. [8]

When you possess me, I am freed from fear. When you possess me, I work for the benefit of all. When you possess me, I am freed from my unskilful karma, and in the future I commit no more. [9]

Here Śāntideva moves into a different gear – he offers himself to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, foreshadowing what comes later in the pūjā. He also points out that this giving of ourselves to the Bodhicitta would be the end of our negative mental states based on self-centred craving – he uses fear as an example – and would free us from our unskilful karma.

We could think of ourselves as physically acting out this giving of ourselves when we bow to make offerings to the shrine in the pūjā.

Question: What is your emotional response to the idea of self-surrender, and why?

Question: What do we normally surrender to – what normally rules our actions and our lives? Might surrendering to the Bodhicitta be an improvement on this?

Question: Can you think of any less emotionally loaded ways of expressing what Śāntideva means by surrender?

Question: Why might giving ourselves as a servant to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas free us from fear and other negative mental states?

In my mind's eye I invite the sages to a fragrant bathing chamber, with jewelled pillars and mosaic floors of clear crystal. While music plays I invite them to bathe in flower-scented water. I dry them with soft cloths, and anoint their bodies, which shine like heated gold. I dress them in richly coloured robes, and adorn them with bright jewels and ornaments. [10–14]

I garland them with flowers, envelop them in heady clouds of incense, and offer them many kinds of food and drink. I offer jewelled lamps on golden lotuses, and strew drifts of flowers on the perfumed floor. [16, 17]

To those whose very essence is maitrī I offer cloud-like palaces in the sky, to which thrilling music, poems, and songs of worship drift upwards, while flowers rain down incessantly on all shrines and images, and on all the jewels of the true Dharma. [18, 20, 21, 23]

From offering the beauties of the tangible natural world, we now move to a visionary, archetypal level.

Question: How do you respond to this imagery?

Question: It could be argued that we all worship something – we all allow certain goals, drives, principles or values to rule our life. What do you worship?

Question: Is there anything you see as higher than yourself, and worthy of worship? If so, do you ever express this? How?

With as many bodies as there are atoms in the universe I prostrate to the Buddhas of the past, present and future, to the Dharma, and to the sublime Sangha. I make reverence to all shrines and sacred places. I bow to all teachers, and to all worthy practitioners. [24, 25]

Here we move on to ‘salutation’ – the Sanskrit means something like bowing or prostration. Traditional commentaries recommend imagining ourselves emanating a vast number of copies of ourselves ‘as numerous as the atoms in the universe’, who all bow down or prostrate to all the manifestations of the Bodhicitta, the Buddhas, and the Bodhisattvas. In this way we identify ourselves with the whole universe, and see the whole universe bowing to the Bodhicitta.

Question: Why is bowing an important practice?

Confession and Going for Refuge

Standing with folded hands before the Buddhas in the ten directions, before the Bodhisattvas of great compassion, I acknowledge the harm I have caused, in this life and past ages: the harm to myself, the harm to the Three Jewels, and the harm to other beings. [27–31]

How can I escape the results of my karma? O Guides of the World, please grasp me quickly, so that death does not come before it is wiped out. [33]

Śāntideva points out that even from a self-centred point of view regret about our past unskilfulness is appropriate, because we have stored up a lot of suffering for ourselves. Traditionally this sense of regret is sometimes likened to someone who realises that they have drunk poison. The only real antidote to this poison is the arising of the Bodhicitta – so Śāntideva asks ‘please grasp me quickly, before death hunts me down’.

Question: How might we harm ourselves by our unskilful actions? How might we harm the Three Jewels?

Here and now I go for refuge to the Buddhas who protect the universe. Wholeheartedly I go for refuge to the Dharma they have realised, which destroys the fears of cyclic existence, and to the community of Bodhisattvas. [48, 49]

I offer myself to Samantabhadra, I give myself to Mañjuśrī, I cry out to the compassionate Avalokiteśvara, asking him to protect me. I bow down to Vajrapāṇi – at the sight of him the messengers of death scatter in all directions! [51–3]

I have ignored your advice, O great guides, but now, seeing my danger, I go for refuge, and ask for your protection. Someone afraid of an ordinary illness will take their doctor’s advice. But I have ignored the advice of the all-knowing doctor, about the worst of diseases. Is there no end to my stupidity? [54–7]

Question: What are the connections between Going for Refuge and Confession? Which should come first?

If I am careful on an ordinary cliff, how much more care should I take at the top of precipice that drops for huge distances, through great tracts of time? Yet I take my pleasure, thinking, “Death won’t come today,” while my end gets nearer and nearer. Who has made me immune to death? Do I think I will escape it when nobody else does? How can I take my ease? Instead I should keep in mind that unskilfulness always leads to suffering, and that I need to liberate myself from the effects of my karma. [58–60, 63]

Here we have a meditation on the inevitability and awesomeness of death, which is much longer (and more frightening) in the unabridged text. For Śāntideva an awareness of the inevitability of death is an important spur to practise.

Question: Why might mindfulness of death spur us on to practise?

Question: Does it make any difference to the effectiveness of meditating on death if we don’t believe in rebirth, as Śāntideva obviously does?

Standing with folded hands before the Guides of the World, fearful of the suffering I have stored up for myself, I confess all the unskilfulness I have piled up in my delusion. Prostrating again and again, I ask the leaders to accept my confession. What is not good, O Protectors, I must not do again. [64–6]

Question: How do you respond to the idea of confession?

Question: Do you accept that you have accumulated a lot of unskilful karma?

Question: What is the spiritual value of confession? What attitudes are needed for confession to be effective?

Question: How might we approach confession when we regret a pattern or habit, but know that at the moment we are powerless to commit ourselves never to repeat it?

Chapter 3 – Embracing the Bodhicitta

Rejoicing in merit

I rejoice with gladness in the good done by all beings, which frees them from the lower states. I rejoice in the release of beings from the sufferings of cyclic existence. I rejoice in the nature of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and in the teachings of the wise. I rejoice with a heart of gladness in all expressions of the Bodhicitta, the mind that wishes all beings to be happy, and works for the benefit of all. [1–3]

Here we rejoice in, delight in, celebrate, all expressions of positive spiritual qualities, from the highest, most archetypal levels (e.g. the ‘nature of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas’) through the more concrete ways that these qualities manifest themselves in our lives (e.g. ‘the teachings of the wise’), to the small everyday positive actions of the ordinary beings around us (‘the good done by all beings’).

Question: Why might rejoicing in merit align us with the Bodhicitta?

Question: Do you often rejoice and celebrate? Do you think you are good at it – or do you resist it?

Question: What gets in the way of rejoicing and celebrating?

Asking for teaching

With hands folded in reverence I beg the Buddhas in all directions to shine the light of the Dharma, to light up the world for we who wander, bewildered by darkness. With hands folded in reverence I ask the Jinas, who wish to pass into Nirvāṇa, to please stay here for endless ages, and not to leave this world in darkness. [4,5]

Here we are acknowledging our need for guidance from something higher than our present everyday self. Entreaty and supplication, or asking for teaching, is an expression of our receptivity and desire to be taught.

Question: Who or what do you think we are asking for guidance from here – human beings wiser than ourselves, our own inner wisdom, or Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that exist as forces outside ourselves? Which of these can you relate to?

Question: What conditions or practices help you to be more open to the voice of this ‘something’ – however you see it? What stops us receiving such guidance?

Transference of merit and self-surrender

May the merit I have gained by these actions relieve the suffering of all beings. With no sense of loss I give myself to all beings, I give them all my pleasures, and all my merit from the past, present, and future. [6, 10]

Question: What is ‘merit’? How might worship, confession, rejoicing and so on give us merit?

Question: What is the spiritual significance of transferring this merit to others?

Enlightenment is giving away everything, and Enlightenment is my heart’s goal. So let me give everything away to sentient beings! [11]

Question: How is Enlightenment ‘giving away everything? And if that is what it is, do you really want it? What positives does it have?

I give this body to beings to do with as they please. May I never cause them harm, and may even their anger towards me benefit them. Those who criticise me, those who are unjust to me, those who harm me, those who mock me – may they all share in Enlightenment. [12–16]

May I be the doctor and the nurse for all beings, until the world is cured. May I be food for the hungry, and wealth for the poor. May I be a protector for the unprotected, a guide for the lost, and a boat to the other shore. May I be a lamp for those who need light, and a bed for those who need rest. May I be a servant to all beings. [7–9, 17, 18]

Just like the earth, water, fire, and air, that are useful in many ways to the beings throughout infinite space, so may I too support the life of all beings, until we are all liberated. [20, 21]

This attitude of giving ourselves to all beings, which directly precedes making a commitment to follow the Bodhisattva Path, is the goal of the pūjā. Inevitably this attitude is beyond us as we are now, and we will probably want to argue with parts of the text, although other parts may appeal to us. But we need to remember that in this part of the pūjā we are rehearsing an attitude we are not yet fully ready for, in order to prepare the way for it to arise more strongly in the future.

Question: Can you relate to this attitude of giving yourself to all beings – or at least get a taste of it?

This is where our normal Sevenfold Pūjā ends. What comes next is a commitment to follow the Bodhisattva path, to become a ‘trainee Bodhisattva’ as an expression of this attitude of supreme generosity and concern for others.

Commitment and celebration

Just as the Buddhas before me took up the Bodhicitta, just as they trained in the Six Perfections, so now I too, for the welfare of the world, embrace the Bodhicitta, so now I too will train in the Bodhisattva’s Path. [22, 23]

This is the culmination of Chapters 2 and 3 – the commitment, or vow, to follow the Bodhisattva Path. What follows is then a celebration of the fact that this – far from being a self-punishing act of martyrdom – is in fact the fulfilment of our highest potential, and the answer to our existential problems. This section does not appear in our usual pūjā, because it is only relevant if we are in fact ready to take the Bodhisattva vow.

Today my life has borne fruit. Today I have been born in the family of the Buddha. Today I have become one of the Buddha’s sons and daughters. Everything I do from now on should be worthy of this noble family. [25, 26]

Just like a blind man, who by chance finds a jewel in a heap of rubbish, so by some chance this precious attitude has arisen in me. [27]

This is the elixir of life, that puts an end to death. This is the priceless treasure, that ends all poverty on Earth. This is the supreme medicine, that cures the world’s disease. This is the bridge to freedom, that leads from unhappy states. [28–30]

This is the moon of the mind, whose light banishes our darkness. This is the brilliant sun, that burns off the mist of delusion. This is the essential butter from churning the milk of the Dharma. [30, 31]

For the whole caravan of humanity travelling the roads of existence in search of happiness, this will give them joy. [32]

Today in the presence of the Buddhas I invite the world to be my guest at a great feast of delight. May humans, gods, and all beings rejoice! [33]

When we give a feast or a party we provide something enjoyable for our friends with a sense of joy and celebration. Here Śāntideva compares taking the bodhisattva vow with making such a joyous act of dāna on a huge scale – it is like giving a feast or a party for all beings, inviting them all to come and enjoy themselves.

Questions: How might taking the Bodhisattva vow be like:

- a. Being born into a noble family?
- b. Finding a jewel in a heap of rubbish?
- c. The elixir of life?
- d. A treasure that ends poverty?
- e. The sun, that burns off the mist of delusion.
- f. The essential butter from churning the milk of the Dharma?



A Bodhicaryāvatāra Pūjā

For use with chapters 2 and 3.

Offerings

In order to adopt the Bodhisattva Spirit

The sacred Bodhicitta

The jewel of the mind

I make offerings to the Buddhas

I make offerings to the Dharma

And to the Sons of the Buddha [and/or daughters]

Who are oceans of excellence

Conjuring them up in my mind

I offer all the flowers in the world

I offer all the fruits

I offer all the fragrant plants

I offer the clear refreshing waters

The crystal mountains

The tranquil forests

And the wild places

I offer vines bright with flowers

I offer trees heavy with fruit

I offer lakes adorned with lotuses

And the haunting cry of the wild geese.

Conjuring these things up in my mind

I offer them to the sages

And to their sons [and/or daughters]

Who are oceans of excellence.

Salutations

As many atoms as there are
In the thousand million worlds
With so many bodies I bow down
To all the Buddhas of the Three Eras
To the true Dharma
And to the noble Sangha.

I pay homage to all the shrines
And places in which the Bodhisattvas have been
I make profound obeisance to the teachers
And those to whom respectful salutation is due.

I bow down to all those
Who express the Bodhicitta
I go for refuge to those
Who are fountains of joy.

Going for Refuge

This very day
I go for my refuge
To the Buddhas who protect the universe
To the Dharma they have realised
And to the community of Bodhisattvas.

I offer myself completely
To the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
Take possession of me
I am your servant.

When you possess me
I am freed from my delusions
When you possess me
I am freed from my wrongdoings
When you possess me
I am freed from fear.

Please possess me
Most noble beings
In admiration and devotion
I give myself to you.

*Refuges and Precepts***Confession**

Standing with folded hands
Before the leaders of the world,
Before the Buddhas in the ten directions
Before the Bodhisattvas of great compassion,
I acknowledge the harm I have caused

In this life and past ages,
The harm to others,
The harm to myself,
And the harm to the three jewels.

Standing with folded hands
Before the guides of the world
I make this aspiration-
Such acts in the future
I will not do.

I have ignored your advice
Oh great beings.
How can I escape
The results of my karma?

I give myself to Mañjughoṣa,
I offer myself to Avalokiteśvara,
I bow down to Vajrapāṇi:
At the sight of him
The messengers of death
Run in all directions.

I offer myself to you
O great beings,
Please grasp me quickly,
Before death hunts me down.

Rejoicing in Merit

I rejoice with delight
In the good done by all beings,
Which frees them from the lower states.
I rejoice in the release of beings
From the sufferings of saṃsāra.
I rejoice in the nature of the Bodhisattvas,
And in the teachings of the wise.

I rejoice with a heart of gladness
In all expressions of the Bodhicitta,
The mind that wishes all beings to be happy,
And works for the benefit of all.

Entreaty and Supplication

With hands folded in reverence
I beg the Buddhas in all directions
To shine the light of the Dharma,
To light up this world
For we who wander
Bewildered by darkness.

With hands folded in reverence

I beg the Great Beings
Who wish to pass into Nirvana
To please stay here for endless ages,
So that life in this world does not grow dark

Transference of Merit and Self-Surrender

With no sense of loss
I give myself to all beings,
I give my merits
For the benefit of all.

May I be the doctor,
May I be the nurse,
For all beings,
Until the world is cured.

For those in poverty
May I be wealth,
For those in pain
May I be balm.

May I be a light
For those who are lost,
May I be a harbour
For those that need shelter.

Like the earth and the water,
Like the fire and the air,
May I be a servant
To beings on Earth
Until the world is whole.

Just as the Buddhas before me
Took up the Bodhicitta,
Just as they trained
In the six perfections,
So now I too,
For the welfare of the world,
Set my mind on enlightenment,
So now I too,
For the welfare of the world,
Will train in the Bodhisattva's path.

Today my life has born fruit,
Today I have been born
In the family of the Buddha,
Today I have become
One of Buddha's sons. [or clan]

Just like a blind man
Who finds by chance

A jewel in a dung heap,
So by some chance
This precious attitude
Has arisen in me.

This is the elixir of life
That puts an end to death.
This is the priceless treasure
That ends all poverty on earth.

This is the supreme medicine
That cures the world's disease.
This is the bridge to freedom
That leads from unhappy states.

This is the essential butter
From churning the milk of the Dharma.

For the whole caravan of humanity
Travelling the roads of existence
In search of happiness,
This will give them joy.

Today in the presence of the Buddhas
I invite the world to be my guest
At a great feast of delight.
May humans, gods, and all beings rejoice.

Introduction

The Sanskrit titles of these two chapters both relate to mindfulness:

- Chapter 4: *Bodhicittapramāda* – ‘*apramāda*’, or ethical vigilance, with regard to the Bodhicitta.
- Chapter 5: *Samprajanyarakṣaṇa* – guarding ‘*samprajanya*’, or continuity of purpose.

Apramāda and Samprajanya are two of the three main Sanskrit words that are often translated as ‘mindfulness’ – the third being *smṛti*. In the Buddha’s last exhortation – often translated as “With mindfulness strive on.” – the word used is *apramāda*, which implies clear recollection of our precepts, and close attention to the ethical nature of our acts of body, speech and mind.

Sangharakshita often translates *samprajanya* as ‘continuity of purpose’; one aspect of it is keeping our goals and aims in mind.

Apramāda links our present awareness to the past – especially to the precepts, resolutions and vows we have taken on. Samprajanya links our present awareness to the future, as it means we keep our aims for the future in mind, so that our present actions help to bring these goals about. Of course these goals would not be limited to external practical things – they would include our own growth and development, and the growth and development of the Sangha.

These two chapters represent śīla in the structure based on the six pāramitās. Śāntideva seems to think that mindfulness is the basis of ethics, which makes sense when we remember he is talking about *apramāda* and *samprajanya*, which both have a strong ethical element, and in view of the fact that just about all the other ethical qualities we might think of are dealt with in other chapters.

These two chapters represent a transition in the text: from developing a particular mental attitude and approach to life, to actually putting this into practice; from the path of vision to the path of transformation; from opening up to other-power, to exerting self-power. This is where we have to start putting in some effort, where we have to make an act of will, and challenge our habits, where our self power has to kick in and align itself with the other power we were opening up to.

Chapter 3 culminated with the Bodhisattva vow, the vow to practise for all beings, and with an outburst of joy about this. But now we have to put that into practice. This is what Chapter 4 is all about, and to a certain extent Chapter 5. We all know what it’s like to make a commitment

when we're inspired, and then to have to face the reality of everyday life when we're not inspired. We go on retreat, think we'll never be the same again, but by the afternoon of our first Monday back at home our old patterns have taken over. We come up against our habits and our habitual ways of thinking, feeling, speaking, and acting. We realise that it is not quite as easy to change these as we thought. It is going to be hard, it is going to be uncomfortable, we are going to need some warrior spirit – so Chapter 4 emphasises this warrior spirit.

TEXT

Chapter 4: Apramāda, or Ethical Vigilance

From promise to practice

After embracing the Bodhicitta in this way, a Son of the Jinas should strive hard to put his resolve into practice. In the case of some decisions, which are rash or not properly thought out, it might be right to have second thoughts. But why should I back out of a commitment that has been thought through and approved by the great wisdom of the Buddhas and their sons – and even by me, for what that's worth! [1–3]

If going back on even a small generous impulse has bad karmic effects, what would be the effect of backing out of a promise made to the whole world? So I must act firmly on my commitment. Unless I make the effort now, I shall fall to lower and lower states. [5, 6, 8, 12]

This precious opportunity

When will an opportunity like this come again: the arising of a Buddha, faith, a human life, the freedom to practise, adequate health, enough food to live, and no major problems? If I can't practise now, what will I do when I am stunned by the sufferings of the lower states? In those states it is hard to act skilfully, which is why the Buddha said that being born a human is as unlikely as a turtle in the vast ocean accidentally putting its head through a single floating yoke as it surfaces. After getting such a fleeting opportunity, nothing could be more stupid than not to practise. [15, 16, 18–20, 23]

The power of the kleśas

But though I have somehow found this unimaginably lucky state, I am somehow led back towards those same old lower states of being. I seem to have no will about this, as though I were under a spell. What is going on here? What is driving me? What is it that lives inside me? [26, 27]

Enemies like greed and hate don't have bodies to attack me, they aren't brave or intelligent. How do they make me their slave? But still they strike me down from inside my own mind. Why don't I boil with rage at this? Patience about this is completely out of place! [28, 29]

Human enemies can't send me to hell. But my mighty enemies the kleśas can send me there in an instant. Human enemies become friends if we treat them kindly. But when we are kind to the kleśas they just cause us even more suffering. [30, 33]

Warrior-like determination

So I won't rest until these enemies are struck down in front of my eyes. Look at worldly warriors: they are passionate to kill their enemies, they don't count the pain from blows, arrows and spears, they won't give up until they win, and they proudly show off their wounds and scars. Why then, when I'm fighting for the Great Cause, when I'm trying to kill my real enemies, the real cause of all suffering – why do I shy away from a little pain? [36–8]

Look even at lowly folk like fishermen and ploughmen: just for the sake of their livelihood they put up with all sorts of discomfort, like the sun's heat and the freezing cold. Why then can't I show some endurance, when it is for the sake of the whole universe? [40]

I have promised to free the universe from the kleśas, but I haven't yet freed myself. When I made my commitment to the Bodhicitta I was intoxicated, I wasn't taking my limitations into account. But now I can't turn back from destroying the kleśas. [41, 42]

I'm going to be bloody-minded about this, and wage a grudge war of vengeance! The only negative emotion I'm going to spare is the desire to murder the kleśas! [43]

I don't care if my guts spill out. I don't care if my head falls off. But I'm never going to grovel to my arch-enemies, the kleśas! [44]

If we defeat a human enemy, they can take refuge in another country and regroup. But where can the kleśas go, if I rout them out of my mind? The kleśas are weaklings, to be cowed by the glare of wisdom. They are just based on illusion.

So, heart, free yourself from fear, and devote yourself to striving for wisdom. [45–7]

Chapter 5: Guarding *Samprajanya*, or Continuity of Purpose

The importance of mindfulness

It is just not possible to practise the Dharma without keeping a careful guard on the mind, which wanders so easily. The wandering mind is like an untamed elephant in rut, and it causes more havoc. Unless we watch it carefully it will plunge us into hell. But if, like an elephant, we tether the mind with the ropes of mindfulness, then we will be safe and happy. [1, 2, 3]

When we tame our mind we tame all threats and problems, because all suffering and fear comes from the mind. This is the Buddha's teaching. We can't cover the whole world in leather, but if we put leather on the soles of our feet it has the same effect. [4–6, 13]

Just as a wounded man in the middle of a rough crowd guards his wound with great care, we need to guard our mind in bad company. The determined practitioner who keeps this attitude can never be broken, even in the worst company – even among wanton young women! [20, 21]

If we don't keep our mindfulness, what will happen to all our other vows and precepts? Just as a sick man isn't fit for any work, so a distracted mind can't do anything useful. It is like a leaky jug: nothing that is heard, reflected upon, or developed in meditation stays in it. [16, 17, 24, 25]

Many people know the Dharma, have faith, and try hard, but come unstuck because of lack of mindfulness. That band of thieves, the kleśas, searches for a way through our defences. When they have found one, they rob us of the opportunity for a good life. So always keep the guard of mindfulness at the door of your mind. [26, 27, 29]

Strategies for maintaining mindfulness

Mindfulness comes easily to those who are lucky enough to live with their teacher and practise under their guidance, if they have great respect for his good opinion. [30]

Those who are not so lucky should remember that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas see everything that happens everywhere. Everything is laid out in front of them, and before them we stand. Meditating on this, we should keep mindfulness of the presence of the Buddhas at all times, maintaining a sense of shame, respect, and awe. [31, 32]

We should also read and recite the scriptures over and over again. Constantly reminding ourselves of the teachings helps us to guard the mind, and to remember to put the teachings into practice. [103–7]

‘Negative’ mindfulness – controlling sensory input and our reactions

To start with, we should develop a non-reactive state of mind by acting as if we had no senses at all – just like a block of wood. [34]

When out and about we shouldn’t look around distractedly. We should stay mindful of our purpose, aware of our body, and should constantly observe our mind. Before moving or speaking we should examine our mind, and then act appropriately and with self-possession. [38, 39, 41, 47]

When the mind experiences attraction or aversion, we should neither act nor speak, but remain like a block of wood. When the mind is inflated or critical, full of arrogance, intoxicated, evasive, dishonest, when it looks down on or blames others, we should remain like a block of wood. [48–50]

The reactive mind is greedy for possessions, respect, fame, and status, or just wants the attention of an audience. It longs to hold forth, it cares nothing for the good of others, it is always seeking its own advantage, and longing for an opportunity to preach its opinions. It is intolerant, idle, cowardly, disrespectful, foul-mouthed, and biased in its own favour. So we should remain like a block of wood. [51, 52, 53]

‘Positive’ mindfulness

Having mastered our lower nature in this way, we should give up frowning and always have a smiling face, being the first to greet and talk to others, a friend to the universe. We should speak kindly and look straight at people’s faces, as if drinking them in with our eyes. [71, 80]

Our mind should serve our will and other beings, unshakeable as a great mountain, knowing the world to be like a magical display, full of serene confidence, calm, eager to help others, unwearied by the conflicting desires of the spiritually immature, knowing that they are like this because they are possessed by the kleśas. [55–8]

Using all situations as practice

Whatever situation we are in we should make it a part of our training. Every activity is a spiritual practice for the person who acts like this. [99,100]

Conclusion

In brief, mindfulness means observing the body and the mind at every moment. We need to actually put this into practice, and not just talk about it. When we are sick, what use is it just to read a medical textbook? [108,109]

Chapter 4: Apramāda, or Ethical Vigilance

From promise to practice

After embracing the Bodhicitta in this way, a Son of the Jinas should strive hard to put his resolve into practice. In the case of some decisions, which are rash or not properly thought out, it might be right to have second thoughts. But why should I back out of a commitment that has been thought through and approved by the great wisdom of the Buddhas and their sons – and even by me, for what that’s worth! [1–3]

Śāntideva starts by telling us the purpose of the chapter – we have made the resolve in chapter 3, now we have to consider what’s needed to put it into practice.

If going back on even a small generous impulse has bad karmic effects, what would be the effect of backing out of a promise made to the whole world? So I must act firmly on my commitment. Unless I make the effort now, I shall fall to lower and lower states. [5, 6, 8, 12]

Question: Why does going back on a generous impulse have bad karmic effects?

This precious opportunity

When will an opportunity like this come again: the arising of a Buddha, faith, a human life, the freedom to practise, adequate health, enough food to live, and no major problems? If I can’t practise now, what will I do when I am stunned by the sufferings of the lower states? In those states it is hard to act skilfully, which is why the Buddha said that being born a human is as unlikely as a turtle in the vast ocean accidentally putting its head through a single floating yoke as it surfaces. After getting such a fleeting opportunity, nothing could be more stupid than not to practise. [15, 16, 18–20, 23]

We often put off serious, radical practice until sometime in the future, when we imagine the situation will be more favourable. Here Śāntideva is pointing out the foolishness of this. Actually our situation right now is likely to be as good as it gets. In the future we may well fall into a ‘lower state’ in which it is almost impossible to practise. Śāntideva sees this in terms of future rebirths, but we could just as well see it in terms of this life. Our present situation is fortunate and very precarious, so “If not now, when?”

Question: Have you come across the analogy of the turtle and the floating yoke?

Question: Assuming a belief in rebirth, do you think it is so unlikely to be born a human? Do you know Sangharakshita’s views on this?

Question: What are some circumstances that might well happen in this life that would be the equivalent of being ‘stunned by the sufferings of the lower states’ and would largely stop us practising?

The power of the kleśas

But though I have somehow found this unimaginably lucky state, I am somehow led back towards those same old lower states of being. I seem to have no will about this, as though I were under a spell. What is going on here? What is driving me? What is it that lives inside me? [26, 27]

Question: Have you ever felt as though you were ‘under a spell’, and not able to put your higher volitions and resolutions into practice?

Question: Śāntideva asks, “What is going on here?” What do you think is going on when we seem to be ‘under a spell’.

Enemies like greed and hate don’t have bodies to attack me, they aren’t brave or intelligent. How do they make me their slave? But still they strike me down from inside my own mind. Why don’t I boil with rage at this? Patience about this is completely out of place! [28, 29]

Here is one of many examples of Śāntideva using negative emotions for a positive end. He uses anger as a source of energy for attacking the kleśas, a theme he elaborates colourfully as we go on. Elsewhere he suggests the same approach with other emotions that are usually seen as negative, such as pride.

Human enemies can’t send me to hell. But my mighty enemies the kleśas can send me there in an instant. Human enemies become friends if we treat them kindly. But when we are kind to the kleśas they just cause us even more suffering. [30,33]

Śāntideva’s approach is very different from the self acceptance advocated by many contemporary therapists, etc. Present day self-help books often advise us to be kind and accepting to all aspects of ourselves. Śāntideva tells us that if we are kind to the kleśas – which we could see as aspects of ourselves – they will just cause us more suffering.

Question: Who do you think is right, Śāntideva or the present-day therapists and self-help guides? Do they have the same goal?

Warrior-like determination

So I won’t rest until these enemies are struck down in front of my eyes. Look at worldly warriors: they are passionate to kill their enemies, they don’t count the pain from blows, arrows and spears, they won’t give up until they win, and they proudly show off their wounds and scars. Why then, when I’m fighting for the Great Cause, when I’m trying to kill my real enemies, the real cause of all suffering – why do I shy away from a little pain? [36–8]

Look even at lowly folk like fishermen and ploughmen: just for the sake of their livelihood they put up with all sorts of discomfort, like the blazing heat and the freezing cold. Why then can’t I show some endurance, when it is for the sake of the whole universe? [40]

I have promised to free the universe from the kleśas, but I haven’t yet freed myself. When I made my commitment to the Bodhicitta I was intoxicated, I wasn’t taking my limitations into account. But now I can’t turn back from destroying the kleśas. [41,42]

I'm going to be bloody-minded about this, and wage a grudge war of vengeance! The only negative emotion I'm going to spare is the desire to murder the kleśas! [43]

I don't care if my guts spill out. I don't care if my head falls off. But I'm never going to grovel to my arch-enemies, the kleśas! [44]

Here Śāntideva gets into his stride, invoking our warrior spirit to help us put our resolve into practice. His approach could be described as tantric – instead of suppressing the warrior energy of aggression, we use it to help us break through our old patterns.

Question: Do you like this approach to the spiritual life, or dislike it? What factors in our past conditioning might have conditioned this reaction?

Question: Are there any dangers in this approach? Are there any dangers in the opposite approach, of being kind to and accepting of our unskilful motivations?

Question: Might there be a middle way?

Question: Are the kleśas really 'parts of ourselves', so that declaring war on them involves being unkind to ourselves?

If we defeat a human enemy, they can take refuge in another country and regroup. But where can the kleśas go, if I rout them out of my mind? The kleśas are weaklings, to be cowed by the glare of wisdom. They are just based on illusion. So, heart, free yourself from fear, and devote yourself to striving for wisdom. [45-47]

Question: Why might the kleśas be 'cowed by the glare of wisdom'?

Question: How do you express your warrior energy? How could you bring more of this energy into our spiritual life?

Chapter 5 – Guarding samprajanya, or continuity of purpose

The importance of mindfulness

It is just not possible to practise the Dharma without keeping a careful guard on the mind, which wanders so easily. The wandering mind is like an untamed elephant in rut, and it causes more havoc. Unless we watch it carefully it will plunge us into hell. But if, like an elephant, we tether the mind with the ropes of mindfulness, then we will be safe and happy.[1,2,3]

In this and all the following chapters Śāntideva starts by telling us why the quality he is describing is absolutely essential for the spiritual life. Here, and in the following verses, he makes the point that we can't really do any spiritual practice unless we have enough awareness of ourselves and recollection of the teachings and precepts.

When we tame our mind we tame all threats and problems, because all suffering and fear comes from the mind. This is the Buddha's teaching. We can't cover the whole world in leather, but if we put leather on the soles of our feet it has the same effect. [4–6, 13]

Question: Is it true that if we tame our minds we tame all threats and problems?

Just as a wounded man in the middle of a rough crowd guards his wound with great care, we need to guard our mind in bad company. The determined practitioner who keeps this attitude can never be broken, even in the worst company – even among wanton young women! [20, 21]

If we don't keep our mindfulness, what will happen to all our other vows and precepts? Just as a sick man isn't fit for any work, so a distracted mind can't do anything useful. It is like a leaky jug: nothing that is heard, reflected upon, or developed in meditation stays in it. [16, 17, 24, 25]

Here is the crux – without mindfulness we will not keep any of our other vows and precepts.

Question: What Dharma teaching is Śāntideva referring to in the last sentence?

Many people know the Dharma, have faith, and try hard, but come unstuck because of lack of mindfulness. That band of thieves, the kleśas, searches for a way through our defences. When they have found one, they rob us of the opportunity for a good life. So always keep the guard of mindfulness at the door of your mind. [26,27,29]

Question: Can you think of examples from your own practice where you have come unstuck because of lack of mindfulness and long-term continuity of purpose?

Strategies for maintaining mindfulness

Mindfulness comes easily to those who are lucky enough to live with their teacher and practise under his guidance, if they have great respect for his good opinion. [30]

Those who are not so lucky should remember that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas see everything that happens everywhere. Everything is laid out in front of them, and before them we stand. Meditating on this, we should keep mindfulness of the presence of the Buddhas at all times, maintaining a sense of shame, respect, and awe. [31, 32]

We should also read and recite the scriptures over and over again. Constantly reminding ourselves of the teachings helps us to guard the mind, and to remember to put the teachings into practice. [103–7]

Question: What helps you to keep mindfulness of your aspiration and practice? Is your present life situation conducive to this? How could you get more of whatever helps?

'Negative' mindfulness – controlling sensory input and our reactions

To start with, we should develop a non-reactive state of mind by acting as if we had no senses at all – just like a block of wood. [34]

When out and about we shouldn't look around distractedly. We should stay mindful of our purpose, aware of our body, and should constantly observe our mind. Before moving or speaking we should examine our mind, and then act appropriately and with self-possession. [38, 39, 41, 47]

When the mind experiences attraction or aversion, we should neither act nor speak, but remain like a block of wood. When the mind is inflated or critical, full of arrogance, intoxicated, evasive, dishonest, when it puts others down or blames others, we should remain like a block of wood. [48–50]

Śāntideva says the first step in practising śīla is to stop our reactivity, by ‘remaining like a block of wood’.

Question: Is remaining like a block of wood really necessary for our practice? Do you think Śāntideva might be exaggerating for effect, but still making a valid point?

The reactive mind is greedy for possessions, respect, fame, and status, or just wants the attention of an audience. It longs to hold forth, it cares nothing for the good of others, it is always seeking its own advantage, and longing for an opportunity to preach its opinions. It is intolerant, idle, cowardly, disrespectful, foul-mouthed, and biased in its own favour. So we should remain like a block of wood. [51, 52, 53]

Śāntideva is not above playing for laughs, but he is also making an important point. The reactive mind isn’t just a bit naughty, and in need of a little tidying up. Seen in a true light, the reactive, egocentric mind is ugly and ridiculous. As long as we think that our usual mind only needs a bit of sprucing up to be acceptable, we will just be tinkering at the edges in our spiritual life.

Question: Have you ever had the experience of seeing your reactive mind as being as ugly and ridiculous as Śāntideva describes?

‘Positive’ mindfulness

Having mastered our lower nature in this way, we should give up frowning and always have a smiling face, being the first to greet and talk to others, a friend to the universe. We should speak kindly and look straight at people’s faces, as if drinking them in with our eyes. [71, 80]

Our mind should serve our will and other beings, unshakeable as a great mountain, knowing the world to be like a magical display, full of serene confidence, calm, eager to help others, unwearied by the conflicting desires of the spiritually immature, knowing that they are like this because they are possessed by the defilements. [55–8]

Mindfulness isn’t all about just stopping our reactivity, it is also about bearing in mind (and acting according to) the Dharma, which will transform the way we speak, act, and live our life. In the first of these two verses Śāntideva focuses on recollecting our practice of mettā/compassion; in the second he focuses on wisdom.

Question: What would it be like to keep the teachings contained in these two verses in our mind at all times? What difference would it make to your life?

Using all situations as practice

Whatever situation we are in, we should make it a part of our training. Every activity is a spiritual practice for the person who acts like this. [99, 100]

Question: Do you limit your spiritual practice to certain special times or places – for example when you are at the Centre, when you are meditating, or when you are on retreat?

Question: Are there some situations that you think are somehow outside the scope of your spiritual practice? How could you make more of your everyday life, with all its trials and tribulations, a part of your practice?

Conclusion

In brief, mindfulness means observing the body and the mind at every moment. We need to actually put this into practice, and not just talk about it. When we are sick, what use is it just to read a medical textbook? [108,109]

Question: If mindfulness is as important as Śāntideva says it is, do you place enough importance on cultivating it? What could you do to cultivate more mindfulness? Could you take a precept to act on this in the week ahead?

Question: What do you do that reduces your mindfulness? Could you do less of those things?

Introduction

Having dealt with dāna and śīla, Śāntideva now moves on to the third of the pāramitās, or ways of self-transcendence. From here on, each chapter is named for a pāramitā, until the last chapter, which is an extended dedication of merits.

Kṣānti is often translated as ‘patient forbearance’, but this perhaps suggests a passive attitude, whereas in fact kṣānti is an active quality that requires strength and courage in the face of difficulty. We could define kṣānti as *an attitude of determination to stay in positive mental states even in apparently adverse circumstances*.

What kṣānti is *not* is a passive failure to engage constructively with circumstances, events and people, because of indifference, apathy, timidity, laziness, low self-esteem, victim mentality, martyr mentality, and so on. Nor does kṣānti involve repression or denial of emotions like anger and sadness – rather it involves acknowledging these emotions, but not allowing them to upset our positivity or rule our actions. To work creatively with difficult emotions we first need to own up to them and be aware of them. People who repress and/or deny difficult emotions may need to learn to experience and express their feelings before they can practise kṣānti, which belongs to a higher stage of the path. Kṣānti is about transcending an already-strong ego; self-expression, assertiveness and so on are about developing a strong ego in the first place.

In talking about kṣānti Śāntideva focuses particularly on not allowing ill will to arise, by not blaming others when things are not as we would like. He focuses on this because it is the most serious breach of the Bodhisattva vow, but he also touches on timidity, weakness and dejection in the face of suffering.

TEXT**Chapter 6: The Practice of Kṣānti**

The benefits of kṣānti, and the harmfulness of its opposite

Ill will and resentment destroy all the benefits of spiritual practice. Ill will is the most destructive state, and kṣānti is the best ascetic practice. So we should develop kṣānti in every way we can, and with all the effort we can muster. [1, 2]

When the thorn of ill will is stuck in our heart, our mind can’t find peace, we can’t enjoy anything, and we sleep badly. If we are twisted by ill will, even those who depend on us will want to bring us down. Even our friends won’t want to know us. We can be as generous as we like, but no one will like us. To be blunt, there is just no way that an angry and resentful person

can be happy. But the man who defeats anger will be happy, both in this life and the next. [3–6]

Freeing ourselves from dependence on outer events

We feed ill will by allowing ourselves to become unhappy when events do not go according to our likes and dislikes. So I shall starve this con-man rather than feeding him as my guest, knowing that his only purpose is to harm me. [7, 8]

Whatever happens to us, even if we fall into adversity, we should not allow this to disturb our happy state of mind. When we allow ourselves to be made unhappy by events, nothing is enjoyable, and we fall into unskilful states. Why be unhappy if we can do something about it? And what's the use of being unhappy about something we can't do anything about? [9, 10]

Learning to endure pain and discomfort

With practice anything becomes easy. So, by learning to tolerate slight discomforts, even great pain becomes bearable. So we should practise seeing the discomfort caused by bugs, fleas and mosquitoes, hunger and thirst, or itches and rashes as nothing to bother about. Then we will be able to graduate to the suffering caused by cold and heat, rain and wind, travelling, illness, and eventually even imprisonment and beatings. If we don't learn to tolerate these things, our mental distress will just make us suffer even more. [14–16]

In battle some people are spurred on by the sight of their own blood, while others faint even if they see someone else's. The difference is entirely in the mental attitude – do we have a courageous or a cowardly approach? [17, 18]

In fact it is good that we have to suffer some pain and discomfort. Suffering reduces our arrogance and intoxication, it helps us develop compassion for others, it promotes a fear of unskilful acts, and it makes us long for the Buddha. [21]

Learning to tolerate other people: people are driven by conditions

We don't get angry at an attack of indigestion or nausea, even though it causes suffering. So why do we get angry at sentient beings? Their unskilfulness is just as much the product of conditions. Nothing arises independently. Everything is dependent on other things, and these other things are dependent on other things again. So why should we get angry at phenomena that are not autonomous, but exist like the things we see in a magical illusion? [22, 25, 31]

If someone hits me with a stick, I don't blame the stick. But the person is wielded by ill will, just as the stick is wielded by the person. [41]

So, if we see a friend or an enemy behaving badly, we should remember that their behaviour is caused by conditions, and not allow it to disturb our happy state of mind. [35]

It is just as deluded to get angry at someone who acts unskilfully as it is for them to do the unskilful act in the first place. Understanding this, we should do our best to act in a way that causes everyone to develop maitrī towards each other. [66, 67, 69]

Learning to tolerate other people: people are deluded – as we are!

People cause themselves all sorts of sufferings, refusing to eat because of anger, or because of their obsessions, for example with women they cannot have. They are driven to commit suicide, or to harm themselves by taking poisonous intoxicants, by eating unhealthy food, and by doing all sorts of unskilful things. Driven by the kleśas in this way, they

harm even their own dear selves, so how can you expect them not to harm others as well? They are like madmen, driven insane by the kleśas. The only sensible response is compassion, not anger. [35–8]

In fact this harmful madness masks their real nature. In essence, beings are good. To get angry at them is ridiculous. And we should remember that we too behave in the same way that they do – we too cause pain to other living beings. [40, 42]

Causes of resentment: concern for gain and loss

If we feel resentful about harm to our prosperity or possessions, we should remember that our money and goods will last for just this one life, whereas the results of our karma will affect us for many lifetimes. Even if we get rich and have many pleasures for many years, when we die we will be left empty-handed and naked, like someone who has been robbed. What is the point of living for something that comes to nothing in the end, especially if this means a life of ugly deeds and ugly mental states? [55, 59]

Causes of resentment: concern for praise and blame

Criticism, harsh words, and humiliation do not cause us any physical pain. So why do we get so angry about them? We feel delighted when anyone praises us, and pained when anybody criticises us, which is simply the absurd behaviour of a child. In fact praise just makes us feel more comfortable with ourselves as we are, and destroys any urgency about our will to progress. Those who criticise us are in fact doing us a favour. [53, 97–9]

Causes of resentment: concern for status and fame

Respect, fame and status don't give us merit or a long life, they don't make us healthy or immune to disease, and they don't bring any physical pleasure. Yet people deprive themselves of real benefits just for the sake of a big name and reputation, even driving themselves to an early death. [90, 92]

When our reputation or status is attacked, our mind howls like a child whose sandcastle has been knocked down. But the chains of reputation and status have no place on someone who is looking for liberation. Why should we resent those who free us from this bondage? [93,100]

When our qualities are praised we want everyone to be pleased, but when someone else's talents are praised we are jealous. We are supposed to have aroused the Bodhicitta, wanting happiness for every living being, yet we burn inside on seeing someone honoured! How can we be resentful at someone else's happiness? We should be wishing all people as much of every sort of happiness as is possible for them! [79, 80, 81, 83]

Righteous indignation

We are not even justified in feeling anger or resentment towards those who damage rūpas and shrines, or who criticise the Dharma. After all, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas hardly get angry about such actions! Nor should we get angry when someone hinders our altruistic actions. There is no spiritual practice equal to kṣānti. [64,102]

When people harm our teachers, our relatives, or those dear to us, we should see that this has come about because of conditions, and rein in our anger. In fact we should treasure someone who gives us the opportunity to practise patience, because they help us along the path to Awakening. [65]

The devotional perspective

How can I be resentful or arrogant towards those beings who my masters, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, place above themselves – at whose happiness they are joyful, and at whose sufferings they grieve? To satisfy sentient beings is to satisfy the Lords of the Sages, and to offend them is to offend the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. [121,122]

Right now, to worship the Tathāgatas, with my entire being I offer myself as a servant to the world. Let streams of beings put their feet on my head. Those whose very nature is compassion see this whole world as identical with themselves, so in fact they appear in the form of these good people! These very people around me are the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas! How can I be resentful towards them? [125,126]

This attitude, and this alone, is the worship of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This alone is the fulfilment of my goal. This alone cures the suffering of the world. Let this alone be my practice. [127]

Conclusion

Never mind about serving other beings as the way to Buddhahood! Don't you see that it is also the way to good fortune, fame, and happiness right here and now?

Serenity, health, joy, and long life, along with the happiness and riches of a king – the person who practises kṣānti gets all these even while they are still in Saṃsāra. [133,134]

COMMENTARY AND QUESTIONS

Chapter 6: The Practice of Kṣānti

The benefits of kṣānti, and the harmfulness of its opposite

Ill will and resentment destroy all the benefits of spiritual practice. Ill will is the most destructive state, and kṣānti is the best ascetic practice. So we should develop kṣānti in every way we can, and with all the effort we can muster. [1, 2]

For each pāramitā, Śāntideva starts by telling us why this is a completely essential practice if we want to progress on the Path. Here he identifies ill will as the opposite of kṣānti, and says it is the most spiritually destructive state. (Most translations say 'anger', but this opens up a debate about whether anger can sometimes be positive. Crosby and Skilton say 'hatred', but this seems too extreme: we probably will not really hate our friend because they forget to do the washing-up, but we may still get quite reactive!)

Question: Why does Śāntideva see ill will as the most destructive state?

Question: "Kṣānti is the best ascetic practice" is a reference back to early Buddhism. Do you know what Śāntideva is quoting from?

When the thorn of ill will is stuck in our heart, our mind can't find peace, we can't enjoy anything, and we sleep badly. If we are twisted by ill will, even those who depend on us will want to bring us down. Even our friends won't want to know us. We can be as generous as we like, but no one will like us. To be blunt, there is just no way that an angry and resentful person can be happy. But the man who defeats anger will be happy, both in this life and the next. [3–6]

Śāntideva makes the point that kṣānti isn't only a spiritual practice, it is also the key to worldly happiness. Negative emotions like resentment and ill will are painful, and they poison our relationships with others. We cannot be happy if we harbour them.

Freeing ourselves from dependence on outer events

We feed ill will by allowing ourselves to become unhappy when events do not go according to our likes and dislikes. So I shall starve this con-man rather than feeding him as my guest, knowing that his only purpose is to harm me. [7, 8]

The point Śāntideva is making is that if we want to practise kṣānti and go beyond ill will, we need first to stop making our happiness dependent on getting what we like and avoiding what we don't like.

Whatever happens to us, even if we fall into adversity, we should not allow this to disturb our happy state of mind. When we allow ourselves to be made unhappy by events, nothing is enjoyable, and we fall into unskilful states. Why be unhappy if we can do something about it? And what's the use of being unhappy about something we can't do anything about? [9, 10]

Kṣānti is not passivity – if it is possible and worthwhile to do something about the situation, then we should do so. But often circumstances are beyond our control, so our choice is between accepting reality gladly, or else making ourselves more unhappy than we need to be.

Question: What might be some of the near-enemies of kṣānti? What is the far enemy?

Learning to endure pain and discomfort

With practice anything becomes easy. So, by learning to tolerate slight discomforts, even great pain becomes bearable. So we should practise seeing the discomfort caused by bugs, fleas and mosquitoes, hunger and thirst, or itches and rashes as nothing to bother about. Then we will be able to graduate to the suffering caused by cold and heat, rain and wind, travelling, illness, and eventually even imprisonment and beatings. If we don't learn to tolerate these things, our mental distress will just make us suffer even more. [14–16]

Here Śāntideva starts analysing kṣānti according to the things in our circumstances that we allow to cause negative mental states. He starts with the inevitable pain and discomfort that we experience by virtue of having a human body.

Question: Is it true that with practice we can learn to be more tolerant of discomfort and pain?

Question: What does he mean by saying 'If we don't learn to tolerate these things, our mental distress will just make us suffer even more'? Do you believe this?

Question: What unavoidable things do you complain about? Could you undertake to be more equanimous about these things?

In battle some people are spurred on by the sight of their own blood, while others faint if they see someone else's. The difference is entirely in the mental attitude – do we have a courageous or a cowardly approach? [17,18]

Question: Can you think of other examples where our mental attitude determines the way we experience pain or discomfort?

Question: Are there any activities in which you take part that cause physical discomfort, or even a degree of pain, but which you enjoy? Could you apply the attitude you bring to them to other aspects of life?

In fact it is good that we have to suffer some pain and discomfort. Suffering reduces our arrogance and intoxication, it helps us develop compassion for others, it promotes a fear of unskilful acts, and it makes us long for the Buddha. [21]

Question: Do you agree that pain and discomfort can have positive results? Can we think of examples from your own life?

Question: Could we grow, develop – or become Enlightened – if we lived a life without suffering?

Having looked at *kṣānti* as an equanimous, robust attitude to physical suffering, Śāntideva now moves on to the biggest source of our reactions, frustrations, and negative mental states – other people.

Learning to tolerate other people: people are driven by conditions

We don't get angry at an attack of indigestion or nausea, even though it causes suffering. So why do we get angry at sentient beings? Their unskilfulness is just as much the product of conditions. Nothing arises independently. Everything is dependent on other things, and these other things are dependent on other things again. So why should we get angry at phenomena that are not autonomous, but exist like the things we see in a magical illusion? [22, 25, 31]

If someone hits me with a stick, I don't blame the stick. But the person is wielded by ill will, just as the stick is wielded by the person. [41]

So, if we see a friend or an enemy behaving badly, we should remember that their behaviour is caused by conditions, and not allow it to disturb our happy state of mind. [35]

It is just as deluded to get angry at someone who acts unskilfully as it is for them to do the unskilful act in the first place. Understanding this, we should do our best to act in a way that causes everyone to develop *maitrī* towards each other. [66, 67, 69]

Here Śāntideva points out that, in view of the Buddhist idea of conditionality, it is absurd to blame or get annoyed at people for their actions.

Question: Is it ever right to blame other people for their actions? Are there circumstances in which this is necessary?

Question: What difference would it make to your mental states if you stopped blaming other people for anything, and accepted that we are all deluded, conditioned beings, who are bound to sometimes behave in unwise and even unskilful ways?

Learning to tolerate other people: people are deluded – as are we!

People cause themselves all sorts of sufferings, refusing to eat because of anger, or because of their obsessions, for example with women they cannot have. They are driven to commit suicide, or to harm themselves by taking poisonous intoxicants, by eating unhealthy food, and by doing all sorts of unskilful things. Driven by the kleśas in this way, they harm even their own dear selves, so how can you expect them not to harm others as well? They are like madmen, driven insane by the kleśas. The only sensible response is compassion, not anger. [35-38]

In fact this harmful madness masks their real nature. In essence, beings are good. To get angry at them is ridiculous. And we should remember that we too behave in the same way that they do – we too cause pain to other living beings. [40, 42]

An aspect of the wisdom perspective is seeing that all unenlightened beings – including ourselves – are a bit mad. We all harm ourselves, and we all harm others. When we recognize that we too harm others, we see that we have no right to blame others, because we too act from the same greed, hatred, and delusion that motivates them.

Question: Can you think of examples of ‘mad’, self-harming behaviour that you see other human beings engaging in? Do you ever behave in a way that harms yourself?

Question: If a friend was temporarily insane for some reason – perhaps a disease, the effects of poison, or a blow on the head – would we feel ill will towards them for their behaviour, or compassion? Assuming the latter, could you extend this tolerance more widely?

Question: Is it true that we all cause pain to other living beings? Can you think of examples of the way quite ordinary people (like yourself) cause harm to other beings?

Causes of resentment: concern for gain and loss

For the next few verses Śāntideva analyses kṣānti in terms of the Eight Worldly Winds, but omitting the pleasure/pain duo, which has already been dealt with in an earlier section.

If we feel resentful about harm to our prosperity or possessions, we should remember that our money and goods will last for just this one life, whereas the results of our karma will affect us for many lifetimes. Even if we get rich and have many pleasures for many years, when we die we will be left empty-handed and naked, like someone who has been robbed. What is the point of living for something that comes to nothing in the end, especially if this means a life of ugly deeds and ugly mental states? [55, 59]

Question: How do you feel when you lose some money, or a possession gets broken or spoiled? When this happens to someone else, does it seem as serious?

Question: To what extent do you go for refuge to money and possessions? (A good guide might be the extent to which you are willing to take risks with your livelihood and financial security.)

Causes of resentment: concern for praise and blame

Criticism, harsh words, and humiliation do not cause us any physical pain. So why do we get so angry about them? We feel delighted when anyone praises us, and pained when anybody criticises us, which is simply the absurd behaviour of a child. In fact praise just makes us feel more comfortable with ourselves as we are, and destroys any urgency about our will to progress. Those who criticise us are in fact doing us a favour. [53, 97–9]

Question: How do you react to criticism? Could you be more equanimous about it?

Causes of resentment: concern for status and fame

Respect, fame and status don't give us merit or a long life, they don't make us healthy or immune to disease, and they don't bring any physical pleasure. Yet people deprive themselves of real benefits just for the sake of a big name and reputation, even driving themselves to an early death. [90, 92]

When our reputation or status is attacked our mind howls like a child whose sandcastle has been knocked down. But the chains of reputation and status have no place on someone who is looking for liberation. Why should we resent those who free us from this bondage? [93, 100]

When our qualities are praised we want everyone to be pleased, but when someone else's talents are praised we are jealous. We are supposed to have aroused the Bodhicitta, wanting happiness for every living being, yet we burn inside on seeing someone honoured! How can we be resentful at someone else's happiness? We should be wishing all people as much of every sort of happiness as is possible for them! [79, 80, 81, 83]

Question: How much do you care about status – including status in the Sangha or among your peer groups? Are you really as immune to this as many of us think?

Righteous indignation

We are not even justified in feeling anger or resentment towards those who damage rūpas and shrines, or who criticise the Dharma. After all, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas hardly get angry about such actions! Nor should we get angry when someone hinders our altruistic actions. There is no spiritual practice equal to kṣānti. [64,102]

When people harm our teachers, our relatives, or those dear to us, we should see that this has come about because of conditions, and rein in our anger. In fact we should treasure someone who gives us the opportunity to practise patience, because they help us along the path to Awakening. [65]

Righteous indignation is often the last refuge for our ill will, and we can be very unwilling to let go of it.

Question: Is it possible that we sometimes like feeling righteous indignation? What do we get out of it?

Question: Is anger sometimes positive, or necessary? If anger gives us energy to fight wrongs, what are the down-sides of this?

The devotional perspective

How can I be resentful or arrogant towards those beings who my masters, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, place above themselves, at whose happiness they are joyful, and at whose sufferings they grieve? To satisfy sentient beings is to satisfy the Lords of the Sages, and to offend them is to offend the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. [121, 122]

Right now, to worship the Tathāgatas, with my entire being I offer myself as a servant to the world. Let streams of beings put their feet on my head. Those whose very nature is compassion see this whole world as identical with themselves, so in fact they appear in the form of these good people! These very people around me are the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas! How can I be resentful towards them? [125, 126]

This attitude, and this alone, is the worship of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This alone is the fulfilment of my goal. This alone cures the suffering of the world. Let this alone be my practice. [127]

Here Śāntideva reminds us of Chapters 2 and 3, in which we offered ourselves to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and to all beings. If we meant what we said at that time we have no choice but to be ruthless in freeing ourselves from our tendency to ill will.

Conclusion

Never mind about serving other beings as the way to Buddhahood! Don't you see that it is also the way to good fortune, fame, and happiness right here and now? Serenity, health, joy, and long life, along with the happiness and riches of a king – the person who practises kṣānti gets all these even while they are still in Saṃsāra. [133, 134]

To finish off, Śāntideva returns to a theme from the beginning of the chapter – that kṣānti is not just an essential spiritual practice, it is also the key to ordinary worldly happiness.

Question: Do you agree that kṣānti would give us serenity, health benefits, better relationships, and so on?

Question: Which most disturbs your positive mental states: pain and discomfort, criticism and disapproval, financial loss or insecurity, or loss of status in the eyes of others?

Question: What might we need to beware of when we try to practise kṣānti?

Introduction

Now Śāntideva moves on to the fourth pāramitā, *vīrya*. The word *vīrya* comes from the same root as our words virtue, vigour, and virility, so it has connotations both of energy and of ethical excellence. Hence it is sometimes defined as ‘energy in pursuit of the good’, or ‘skilful effort’.

TEXT**Chapter 7: The Practice of Vīrya**

Why is vīrya important and what is it?

As well as cultivating kṣānti we should cultivate vīrya, because Awakening requires that too. We cannot gain merit without vīrya, any more than a boat can sail without wind. [1]

So what is vīrya? It is making an energetic effort to cultivate what is skilful. What are its enemies? Laziness, attachment to what is unskilful, discouragement, and low self-esteem. [2]

The enemies of vīrya: laziness and attachment to the unskilful

Laziness arises from idleness, indulgence in sensual pleasures, sleeping too much, lounging around, wanting to lean on others, and from apathy about the sufferings of saṃsāra. [3]

When death is sizing us up at every turn, why do we distract ourselves with food, sleep and sex? [6]

Hey you, expecting results without effort! So delicate! So sensitive! Caught in the clutches of death, and acting as though you were going to live for ever! Why are you creating so much future suffering for yourself? Why are you destroying yourself? Now that you have managed to get onto the ferry of human life, cross over the mighty river of suffering. You idiot! Don't go to sleep! You'll have to wait a long time to catch this ferry again. [13, 14]

The enemies of vīrya: discouragement and low self-esteem

We should be freeing ourselves from despair by practising the Dharma, not being defeatist, thinking, “How could I possibly become Awakened?” The Buddha, the Truth-speaker, has said that even those who in past lives were gnats, mosquitoes, wasps and worms, have reached Awakening by making the effort. So why shouldn't I, a human being who can tell the difference between the skilful and the unskilful? [17–19]

But we may still be held back by fearful thoughts, like, “I’ll have to make sacrifices, like giving up a hand or a foot, or something. I’ll suffer for aeons, and what will I get for it? Still no Awakening!” [21]

But the modest suffering caused by following the Path is like having a tooth out to get rid of toothache. We might have to put up with some slight suffering to put an end to suffering. [22, 23]

Sometimes a doctor has to give a cure that hurts. But it is not like that with the best doctor of all. For those with the greatest illness, he prescribes the sweet medicine of the Bodhisattva training. [24]

Our path of generosity starts in ways that don’t hurt at all – at first we just give away small things, like vegetables. Later, gradually, we might reach the point where we can happily give away our own flesh. [25]

With Insight this becomes easy. And we don’t suffer from giving up evil, or become mentally ill by becoming wise. In fact skilful actions give us physical pleasure, and wisdom delights the mind. What can possibly weary the compassionate being who stays in Saṃsāra for the good of others? Wiping out his past unskilfulness, gathering oceans of merit, proceeding from happiness to happiness, why would any intelligent person feel discouraged after boarding the vehicle of the Bodhicitta, which dispels all weariness and sadness? [26–30]

What promotes vīrya? The ‘Four Powers’

The powers of skilful desire, of self-confidence, of joy, and of letting go, all serve the needs of living beings. So, meditating on the benefits of following the path, we should summon up enthusiastic desire for what is wholesome. [31]

1. Skilful Desire (‘Dharmachanda’)

Because in the past I lacked dharmachanda – enthusiastic desire for the good – I find myself in Saṃsāra now. Śākyamuni has sung that dharmachanda is the root of all virtue, and the root of dharmachanda is reflecting on the results of karma. [39, 40]

Suffering, depression, fear and obstacles beset those who act unskilfully. But the heart of the man who does good brims over with joy, and he is welcomed wherever he goes. The man who does evil also craves appreciation, but wherever he goes his vices destroy his happiness. [41, 42]

The skilful man will dwell in the heart of an expansive, fragrant, cool Lotus, his vitality and splendour nourished by the sweet voice of the Buddha. His beautiful body, born with the other Bodhisattvas in the presence of the Sugata will unfold amid the light of the Sage. [44]

The unskilful man will scream in agony as his skin is torn away by the Lord of Death. His body is immersed in molten copper, chunks of his flesh are hacked away by blazing swords, and again and again he falls onto the red-hot pavement of iron. [45]

So meditate on this carefully, nurturing Dharmachanda, and cultivating it with reverence. Then one should develop skilful pride and self-confidence. [46]

2. *Self-confidence and skilful pride*

Before taking on any task, practice, or responsibility, we should first think carefully about the implications, then either commit firmly to it, or not take it on. Not starting is better than turning back. Otherwise the habit of giving up is established, and continues even into the next life, causing much suffering and failure. [47, 48]

A crow acts like an eagle when attacking a dead snake. If our mind is weak, even small difficulties bring it down. Defeatism makes us passive, and then it is easy for difficulties to overwhelm us. But if we are vigorous and energetic, even catastrophes can't bring us down. [52, 53]

So we should firm up our minds, and make it difficult for difficulties to beat us. As long as difficulties beat us, our wish to beat Saṃsāra is a joke. We must be the ones who conquer problems and defilements, not letting anything conquer us. This skilful pride should be embedded in our heart, because we are sons and daughters of the Buddha, the lion-like conqueror. [54, 55]

Those who are conquered by arrogance have no real pride at all. A person who has skilful pride is never enslaved, but arrogant folk are enslaved by their enemy, unskilful pride. [56]

Those who, though mocked and tortured by the arrogant, remain upright, sustained by skilful pride, they are the heroes, they win a victory over unskilful pride, and give away the fruits of victory to all beings. [58, 59]

Surrounded and mocked by the defilements, we should be a thousand times more hotly proud, like a lion in a herd of deer. [60]

3. *Joy*

We should be completely focused on the task in hand, intoxicated by it, thirsting for it, like someone making love, or trying to win a game. Ordinary folk can't get enough of sensual pleasures, which are like honey on a razor's edge. How can we get enough of honeyed acts of merit, which bring such a sweet result? So, as soon as we finish one task, we should plunge into the next, like an elephant, scorched by the midday sun, plunging into a pool. [62–5]

4. *Letting go, or rest*

When our energy begins to flag, we should put our task aside, in order to re-engage with it later. When the job is completely finished, we should leave it and look eagerly for the next, and then the next. [66]

Conclusion: vigorous mindfulness

We should always be on the lookout for attacks from the kleśas, and attack them back fiercely, as if we were in a duel with a well-trained enemy. If ever we drop our sword, we must pick it up again quickly. [67, 68]

Someone who has undertaken the Bodhisattva Vow should be like someone carrying a jar of oil, watched by a swordsman who will kill him if he spills a drop. If we feel ourselves getting lazy or lethargic, we should act at once to restore our alertness, as we would jump up if a snake slid into our lap. [70, 71]

As cotton is blown about by the wind, we should be blown along by our enthusiastic desire to practise the Dharma. In this way, our spiritual power will grow strong. [75]

Chapter 7: The Practice of Vīrya

Why is vīrya important, and what is it?

As well as cultivating kṣānti we should cultivate vīrya, because Awakening requires that too. We can't gain merit without vīrya, any more than a boat can sail without wind. [1]

Question: Do you agree that spiritual progress is impossible without effort, just as a sailboat cannot move without wind? Is there such a thing as the wrong sort of effort?

So what is vīrya? It is making an energetic effort to cultivate what is skilful. What are its enemies? Laziness, attachment to what is unskilful, discouragement, and low self-esteem. [2]

Question: What do you think is the far enemy of vīrya? What might be some of its near-enemies?

The enemies of vīrya: laziness and attachment to the unskilful

Laziness arises from idleness, indulgence in sensual pleasures, sleeping too much, lounging around, wanting to lean on others, and from apathy about the sufferings of Saṃsāra. [3]

Question: "...idleness, indulgence in sensual pleasures, sleeping too much, lounging around..." Does this sound like many people's idea of the proper use of leisure time?

Question: How do you spend your free time? Does this tend to promote vīrya, or undermine it? Could you make more constructive use of your leisure time? How?

Question: Does making good use of leisure time mean constant activity? Can we make a distinction between skilful and unskilful inactivity?

When death is sizing us up at every turn, why do we distract ourselves with food, sleep and sex? [6]

Hey you, expecting results without effort! So delicate! So sensitive! Caught in the clutches of death, and acting as though you were going to live for ever! Why are you creating so much future suffering for yourself? Why are you destroying yourself? Now that you have managed to get onto the ferry of human life, cross over the mighty river of suffering. You idiot! Don't go to sleep! You'll have to wait a long time to catch this ferry again. [13, 14]

Śāntideva's wake-up alarm call!

Question: Being honest, could it be true that you expect results from the spiritual life without making much effort? How much effort do you put into your practice compared to, say, that

which you put into worldly work, sexual relationships, pursuing various forms of distraction, and so on.

The enemies of vīrya: discouragement and low self-esteem

We should be freeing ourselves from despair by practising the Dharma, not being defeatist, thinking, “How could I possibly become Awakened?” The Buddha, whose words are truth, has said that even those who in past lives were gnats, mosquitoes, wasps and worms, have reached Awakening by making the effort. So why shouldn’t I, a human being who can tell the difference between the skilful and the unskilful, attain Awakening? [17–19]

One reason we don’t make much effort is because we don’t believe we can really make progress. Enlightenment can seem just too far away – so maybe we need some intermediate goals that we can see are achievable.

Question: Do you really believe that you can become enlightened?

Question: Do you have any achievable intermediate goals in your spiritual life, which you can imagine yourself attaining within a reasonable timescale? If so, what are they? If not, what achievable goals could you adopt?

But we may still be held back by fearful thoughts, like: “I’ll have to make sacrifices, like giving up a hand or a foot, or something. I’ll suffer for aeons, and what will I get for it? Still no Awakening!” [21]

But the modest suffering caused by following the Path is like having a tooth out to get rid of toothache. We might have to put up with some slight suffering to put an end to suffering. [22, 23]

Sometimes a doctor has to give a cure that hurts. But it is not like that with the best doctor of all. For those with the greatest illness, he prescribes the sweet medicine of the Bodhisattva training. [24]

Our path of generosity starts in ways that don’t hurt at all – at first we just give away small things, like vegetables! Later, gradually, we might reach the point where we can happily give away our own flesh. [25]

With Insight this becomes easy. And we don’t suffer from giving up unskilfulness, or become mentally ill by becoming wise. In fact skilful actions give us physical pleasure, and wisdom delights the mind. What can possibly weary the compassionate being who stays in Saṃsāra for the good of others? Wiping out his past unskilfulness, gathering oceans of merit, proceeding from happiness to happiness, why would any intelligent person feel discouraged after boarding the vehicle of the Bodhicitta, which dispels all weariness and sadness? [26–30]

From our present position, if we imagine what it might be like to be a more advanced practitioner who has gone forth from things we are still very attached to, then the spiritual life can seem daunting, and perhaps unconsciously we do not really want to make progress.

Question: Do you really want to be more Enlightened? Are there things you are still attached to that you fear you will have to give up in order to move forward?

Question: In your experience, does following the Buddhist path cause more happiness, or more suffering?

What promotes vīrya? (The Four Powers)

The powers of skilful desire, of self-confidence, of joy, and of letting go, all serve the needs of living beings. So, meditating on the benefits of following the path, we should summon up enthusiastic desire for what is wholesome. [31]

Śāntideva now looks at the factors that lead to vīrya, sometimes called the Four Powers:

1. Skilful desire (dharmachanda)
2. Self-confidence (sthāma)
3. Joy (rati)
4. Letting go, or rest (mukti)

The Four Powers: skilful desire, or dharmachanda

Because in the past I lacked dharmachanda – enthusiastic desire for the good – I find myself in Saṃsāra now. Śākyamuni has sung that dharmachanda is the root of all virtue, and the root of dharmachanda is reflecting on the results of karma. [39, 40]

To succeed at the spiritual life we have to want this as much as we might want a wonderful job, material success, a dream partner, exam success, or any of the other goals people pursue with all their vigour. So Śāntideva tells us we need to develop dharmachanda, desire for what is skilful, as a prerequisite to having vīrya, and to making the effort we need to succeed.

Suffering, depression, fear and obstacles beset those who act unskillfully. But the heart of the man who does good brims over with joy, and he is welcomed wherever he goes. The man who does evil also craves appreciation, but wherever he goes his vices destroy his happiness. [41, 42]

The skilful man will dwell in the heart of an expansive, fragrant, cool Lotus, his vitality and splendour nourished by the sweet voice of the Buddha. His beautiful body, born with the other Bodhisattvas in the presence of the Sugata, will unfold amid the light of the Sage. [44]

The unskillful man will scream in agony as his skin is torn away by the Lord of Death. His body is immersed in molten copper, chunks of his flesh are hacked away by blazing swords, and again and again he falls onto the red-hot pavement of iron. [45]

So meditate on this carefully, nurturing desire for the Dharma, and cultivating this desire with reverence. Then one should develop skilful pride and self-confidence. [46]

To nurture our dharmachanda, Śāntideva points out that a skilful life conduces to happiness, while an unskillful life is a life of suffering, and creates even more suffering for the future. To illustrate this he contrasts a traditional description of a Pure Land with that of a Hell, and asks us to reflect deeply on these points, so that they really sink in.

Question: Do you believe in the law of karma? If so, do you live in a way that reflects this?

Question: Disregarding the question of rebirth, in what ways does unskilfulness lead to unhappiness? In what ways does skilfulness lead to happiness?

Question: Can you imagine how good it would be to be Enlightened? Can you imagine how awful would it be to be trapped in seriously bad mental states, as some people are? (For the latter, you might imagine your own most unpleasant mental states, but amplified by years of reinforcing karma.)

The Four Powers: self-confidence and skilful pride

Before taking on any task, practice, or responsibility, we should first think carefully about the implications, then either commit firmly to it, or not take it on. Not starting is better than turning back. Otherwise the habit of giving up is established, and continues even into the next life, causing much suffering and failure. [47, 48]

This is Śāntideva's advice for developing self-confidence and the habit of success.

Question: Do you feel that you have the habit of success – or do you tend to doubt that you will accomplish what you set out to achieve, and perhaps sometimes not take things on because of this?

Question: How could you strengthen the habit of success? Are there practical, achievable things that you could take on to do this?

A crow acts like an eagle when attacking a dead snake. If our mind is weak, even small difficulties bring it down. Defeatism makes us passive, and then it is easy for difficulties to overwhelm us. But if we are vigorous and energetic, even catastrophes cannot bring us down. [52, 53]

So we should firm up our minds, and make it difficult for difficulties to beat us. As long as difficulties beat us, our wish to beat Saṃsāra is a joke. We must be the ones who conquer problems and defilements, not letting anything conquer us. This skilful pride should be embedded in our heart, because we are sons and daughters of the Buddha, the lion-like conqueror. [54, 55]

Those who are conquered by arrogance have no real pride at all. A person who has skilful pride is never enslaved, but arrogant folk are enslaved by their enemy, unskilful pride. [56]

Those who, though mocked and tortured by the arrogant, remain upright, sustained by skilful pride, they are the heroes, they win a victory over unskilful pride, and give away the fruits of victory to all beings. [58, 59]

Surrounded and mocked by the defilements, we should be a thousand times more hotly proud, like a lion in a herd of deer. [60]

Sthāma – here translated as self-confidence or skilful pride – means literally 'seat', or 'station'. It has implications of strength and self-respect, and chivalric connotations of nobility. We

could see it imaginatively as related to the chivalric idea of one's seat or throne in the hall among the nobles. It is a noble, upright quality, which also includes self-confidence.

Śāntideva is making the point that, while some forms of pride are unskilful, this sort of pride is a necessary quality for the spiritual life. We can be motivated to be skilful because we have too much positive self-esteem to be unskilful, as a medieval knight might be too proud to behave in a low, base way.

Here is another example of Śāntideva encouraging us to transform what could be negative qualities into positive energies that move us towards enlightenment.

Question: What is the difference between skilful and unskilful pride?

Question: Do you feel that you need to increase your sense of self-worth? If so, what could you do, practically, to improve your self-esteem?

The Four Powers: joy

We should be completely focused on the task in hand, intoxicated by it, thirsting for it, like someone making love, or trying to win a game. Ordinary folk can't get enough of sensual pleasures, which are like honey on a razor's edge. How can we get enough of honeyed acts of merit, which bring such a sweet result? So, as soon as we finish one task, we should plunge into the next, like an elephant, scorched by the midday sun, plunging into a pool. [62–5]

We have plenty of energy for what we enjoy, so one trick of the spiritual life is to enjoy our practice as much as we can, and to link the more 'worldly' things we enjoy with our practice of the Dharma.

Question: What aspects of your Dharma practice do you really enjoy? How could you get more of this enjoyment?

Question: Are there (reasonably skilful) things that you enjoy which are apparently unconnected with Buddhism? Could you bring these into your Dharma practice? Alternatively, could you identify what it is that you enjoy about them, and pursue aspects of the Dharma life that give something similar?

The Four Powers: letting go, or rest

When our energy begins to flag, we should put our task aside, in order to re-engage with it later. When the job is completely finished, we should leave it and look eagerly for the next, and then the next. [66]

This is just realistic – part of the secret of having energy is knowing when to rest.

Question: Do you tend to rest enough – or too much?

We should always be on the lookout for attacks from the kleśas, and attack them back fiercely, as if we were in a duel with a well-trained enemy. If ever we drop our sword, we must pick it up again quickly. [67, 68]

Someone who has undertaken the Bodhisattva Vow should be like someone carrying a jar of oil, watched by a swordsman who will kill him if he spills a drop. If we feel ourselves getting lazy or lethargic we should act at once to renew our alertness, as we would jump up if a snake slid into our lap. [70, 71]

As cotton is blown about by the wind, we should be blown along by our enthusiastic desire to practise the Dharma. In this way, our spiritual power will grow strong. [75]

A strong final image: if we can develop enough dharmachanda and joy in our practice, then it will seem as though we make progress without effort – as though we were being blown along by an external force – because we will be doing what we want most.

Introduction

Now Śāntideva moves on to the penultimate pāramitā – dhyāna, or meditation. The chapter is structured as follows:

I. Why practise meditation?

Firstly Śāntideva tells us that we need to learn to focus our mind in meditation because the distracted mind is at the mercy of the kleśas. Later in the chapter he gives an even more compelling reason to practise meditation - because śamathā leads to insight, which is the end of suffering.

II. The condition for successful meditation

Śāntideva tells us that the key to successful meditation is a quality called viveka.

Viveka is one of those untranslatable Sanskrit words that doesn't map onto any one English word. It means isolation, solitude, and non-attachment, with overtones of renunciation.

Traditionally there are said to be three types of viveka:

1. *Kāya-viveka*: Isolation of the body, or physical solitude
2. *Citta-viveka*: Isolation of the mind, or mental detachment
3. *Upādhi viveka*: Withdrawal or detachment from conditioned existence

In the text the word is used mainly to mean solitude and non-attachment. These two aspects are referred to as external viveka (solitude), and internal viveka (non- attachment).

TEXT**Chapter 8: The Practice of Meditation***Why practise meditation?*

While practising vīrya we should stabilise our mind in meditation, since if our mind is distracted we are constantly at the mercy of the kleśas. [1]

Conditions needed for success in meditation

We can be free from distraction if we practise external and internal viveka, keeping our body in solitude and our mind in detachment. [2]

Our attachments and our desire for possessions are what stop us experiencing viveka. So anyone with any sense will renounce these things by reflecting like this: "I know that śamathā leads to insight, and that insight destroys all mental suffering, so the first thing I need to do is to seek the conditions for śamathā, which are solitude and detachment." [3, 4]

Hindrances to viveka: attachment to people

(a) Attachment to loved ones

Does it make any sense for me, an impermanent being, to be attached to other impermanent people, knowing I may not see them again for thousands of lifetimes? When a loved one is away, we feel sad and can't concentrate in meditation. When they are with us this doesn't make us happy. Because of attachment to a transient loved one, our life swiftly passes in vain, and we lose our opportunity to practise the enduring Dharma. [5, 6, 8]

(b) Attachment to worldly company

If we act in the same way as foolish worldly people we will go to a bad re-becoming, and if we are different from them they hate us. One moment they are friends, the next they are enemies. They get angry when they are given good advice, and they get angry when we don't take their bad advice. There is no pleasing foolish worldly people. [9–11]

They are jealous of their superiors, competitive with their peers, and arrogant towards their inferiors. Praise makes them puffed up, and criticism makes them angry. They are always complaining, trying to make themselves look good, or trying to get their own way. A worldly fool can't be a friend to anyone, because he is only happy when he is getting what he wants for himself. [12, 13, 24]

Contact with worldly people is harmful, so we should be happy to spend time alone, with an untroubled mind. We should be pleasant and helpful to worldly folk, kind but detached, and not get too involved with them. [14, 15]

Hindrances to viveka: desire for wealth and possessions

We might think, "I am rich and respected, and people like me." But this won't do us any good when death arrives. Many have become wealthy and famous, but where have they gone with their wealth and fame? [20]

Wealth is a misfortune, because of the trouble it takes to earn it, the anxiety of protecting it, and the misery of losing it. Those whose minds are attached to wealth are always distracted, and they have no opportunity for liberation from Saṃsāra. [79]

Hindrances to viveka: Desire for sensory pleasures – especially sex

Whenever the mind is deluded about the source of happiness and looks for it in sensory pleasures, what we get is suffering. So a wise person does not desire sensory pleasure. Desire for pleasure creates fear and anxiety, but the sensations we crave pass in an instant and are gone. [18, 19]

She you schemed to meet up with over and over again, willing to be unskilful, to make a fool of yourself, and to waste your wealth, she whom you embrace with the utmost pleasure, her body is just a bundle of bones, tied together by sinews, and plastered with flesh like a statue plastered with clay. Why don't you cuddle up to some bones instead? [43, 52]

That face you longed so much to see when it was bashfully lowered or covered by a veil, why don't you want to see it when its real nature is unveiled by the vultures? But of course it's not surprising that you refuse to see the truth about her body, when you won't even face the truth about your own. In fact the only point of this body is the pure lotus that grows out of the muck to blossom in the cloudless sun. [44, 45, 56, 57]

Deluded by sensory desires, people sell themselves into slavery, spending their whole lives working for others, collapsing each evening exhausted by a hard day's work. They get much pain and little enjoyment, like a beast that gets to chew a bit of grass while pulling a wagon, and the enjoyment they do get is the sort even an animal can get easily. They spend their youth and prime earning money – and then what can an old man do with the pleasures of the flesh? In this way they waste this precious opportunity. They could gain Buddhahood with just a fraction of the effort. [72, 75, 80, 81, 83]

The fruits of viveka: śamathā meditation

So we should recoil from sensual desires, and cultivate delight in detachment and solitude. We should join the fortunate ones who pace slowly over pleasant flat rock surfaces, spacious as palaces, under the cool rays of the moon, caressed by gentle forest breezes, meditating for the well-being of others. Passing the time as they please, sleeping in an empty house, at the foot of a tree, or in a cave, free from the exhaustion of looking after a household, free of care, not tied down by anything, they taste a joy and contentment that is hard to find, even for a king. [85–7]

The fruits of viveka: Insight into non-selfhood

When we have calmed our distracted minds by detachment from worldly desires and the experience of solitude, we should then meditate to develop the Bodhicitta. First we should meditate intently on the equality of self and others, thinking, “We are all the same, we all feel the same suffering and happiness, so I should look after others as I look after myself. Just as I love and cherish my body, which is divided into many limbs, so I should love and cherish this whole world, which is divided into many beings.” [89–91]

“I should dispel the suffering of others, because it is suffering like my own suffering. I should help others because they are living beings, as I am a living being. When we all want happiness, and all fear suffering, what is so special about me, that I only look after myself?” [94–6]

“This stream of mental moments I call my mind, these ever-changing elements I call my body, are not some separate thing that exists in its own right. So who is this separate person, that someone's suffering belongs to? Suffering is just suffering, it has no owner. I should relieve it, just because it is suffering.” [101,102]

Those who have developed their mind in this way, who feel this joy in releasing others, they are the ones who are truly fulfilled. What is the point in some cold liberation, just for oneself alone? [107, 108]

Whoever longs to quickly save themselves and others should practise this supreme mystery: exchanging self and other. All the suffering in the world comes from obsession with ourselves. All the joy in the world comes from wanting others to be happy. Why say more? The fool looks out for his own benefit. The sage acts for the benefit of all. Just look at the difference between them! [120,129,130]

So, to cure my own suffering, as well as the suffering of others, I devote myself to others, and will see them as myself. From now onwards the welfare of all beings is my concern. These limbs and this body belong to all beings. It would be wrong to use them just for myself. [136–8]

Practical Insight: exchanging self and other

Having devoted ourselves to others in this way, we should meditate on putting ourselves in others' shoes. For example, we might imagine that we are someone who we think is inferior to us, seeing ourselves through their eyes, and experiencing the envy and pride they might experience. [139,140]

"He is respected; I'm not. He is wealthy; I'm not. He gets the praise, I get the criticism. He is happy; I suffer. I do the chores while he takes his ease. He, it seems, is an important person. I, it seems, am inferior. Maybe I have got some failings, but I didn't make myself the way I am. If he's so spiritual, he should be trying to help me to develop – I'm up for that, even if it is painful. Instead, see how he looks down his nose at me! He has no compassion for someone threatened with a bad rebirth. He cares more about competing with others like himself, trying to get even more wealth and honour." We should also extend this exercise of putting ourselves in others' shoes to people who are seen as our equals and our superiors. [141–54]

In this way we should practise exchanging ourselves with others, seeing ourselves through their eyes, involving ourselves in their suffering, feeling the pain we cause them through our unskilfulness. Pull yourself off your pedestal. Point to yourself and say: "Look at him! When does he actually do anything for others? He's a complete fraud!" [160,161,165]

Conclusion

So enough of worldly concerns! I shall follow the sages, concentrating my mind in meditation, tearing down the obscuring veil!

COMMENTARY AND QUESTIONS

Chapter 8: The Practice of Meditation

Why practise meditation?

While practising *vīrya* we should stabilise our mind in meditation, since if our mind is distracted we are constantly at the mercy of the *kleśas*. [1]

Question: Do you find that meditation makes you less 'at the mercy of the *kleśas*'? If so, do you give it enough priority – for example do you take regular meditation retreats and/or solitary retreats?

Conditions needed for success in meditation

We can be free from distraction if we practise external and internal *viveka*, keeping our body in solitude and our mind in detachment. [2]

Our attachments are what stop us experiencing *viveka*. So anyone with any sense will renounce what they are attached to by reflecting like this, "I know that someone who develops insight on the basis of *śamathā* destroys all mental suffering, so the first thing I need to do is to seek the conditions for *śamathā*, which are solitude and detachment." [3, 4]

Śāntideva is saying that we won't get far with meditation unless we are able to happily spend some reasonable periods in solitude, with a mind free from worldly distractions. So we need to think about what would stop us doing this.

Question: Do you agree that solitude and freedom from worldly concerns is necessary for a successful meditation practice?

Question: What does *śamathā* mean, and what is the relationship between it and *vipāśyanā*?

Question: What attachments would stop you going off for, say, a year, to one of our isolated retreat centres, for example in Spain, to really get into your meditation practice?

Hindrances to viveka: other people

(a) Attachment to loved ones

Does it make any sense for me, an impermanent being, to be attached to other impermanent people, knowing I may not see them again for thousands of lifetimes? When a loved one is away, we feel sad and cannot concentrate in meditation. When they are with us, this doesn't make us happy. Because of attachment to a transient loved one our life swiftly passes in vain, and we lose our opportunity to practise the enduring Dharma. [5, 6, 8]

Śāntideva is telling us that we need to free ourselves from *sneha* – sticky, egocentric attachment – not genuine *mettā*. Of course, for people with certain sorts of responsibility the opportunities for solitude may be limited. For those with children, long periods spent meditating in solitude might not be possible or responsible (which is why, traditionally, family life was often seen as ruling out a full spiritual life). Some people might also have responsibilities like looking after somebody old or infirm. But for those of us with no dependants, the reason we would be reluctant to leave our 'loved ones' to focus on meditation for, say, a year, might have more to do with *sneha* than with genuine concern for others.

Question: Would your sexual relationship or other close partnership stop you going off for a year's retreat? How would you feel at the prospect? Sad? Lonely? Jealous and insecure about what your 'loved one' might get up to?

Question: How do you imagine your partner would respond if you suggested going off for a long retreat? Would their likely response come from *maitrī* or *sneha*?

Question: Might your loved one actually benefit from your going – because you would come back a more developed person, and they would develop more resources and robustness in your absence?

Question: Śāntideva says that when we are away from our loved one we feel sad, but when we are with them this doesn't make us happy. Is this true in your experience?

(b) Attachment to worldly company

If we act in the same way as foolish worldly people we will go to a bad re-becoming, and if we are different from them they hate us. One moment they are friends, the next they are enemies. They get angry when they are given good advice, and they get angry when we don't take their bad advice. There is no pleasing foolish worldly people. [9–11]

They are jealous of their superiors, competitive with their peers, and arrogant towards their inferiors. Praise makes them puffed up, and criticism makes them angry. They are always complaining, trying to make themselves look good, or trying to get their own way. A worldly fool can't be a friend to anyone, because he is only happy when he is getting what he wants for himself. [12, 13, 24]

Contact with worldly people is harmful, so we should be happy to spend time alone, with an untroubled mind. We should be pleasant and helpful to worldly folk, kind but detached, and not get too involved with them. [14, 15]

Śāntideva sometimes seems to exaggerate for humorous effect, and this may be an example. These verses could sound arrogant and contemptuous, but we need to remember that we too are 'foolish worldly people', and share their faults. So he is advising us to separate ourselves from 'foolish worldly people' in order to become less foolish ourselves, and so to be able to help them to become less foolish in turn. The whole background to the text is the Bodhisattva ideal – the trainee is practising in order to be able to benefit these very people whose faults Śāntideva is pointing out.

Question: Is there any truth in this caricature of 'worldly people'?

Question: Do your friendships with non-Buddhists hold you back in any way? For example, do they perpetuate unhelpful habits like drinking or drug-taking, or does others' scepticism undermine your śraddhā?

Question: Would your liking for 'worldly company' be an obstacle to taking a long retreat? Would it be a problem for you to do without cafés, clubs, pubs, bars, festivals and parties for a significant period?

Question: Do you think Śāntideva is recommending a hermit's life of meditative solitude, spent completely away from other people?

Hindrances to viveka: desire for wealth and status

We might think, "I am rich and respected, and people like me." But this won't do us any good when death arrives. Many have become wealthy and famous, but where have they gone with their wealth and fame? [20]

Wealth is a misfortune, because of the trouble it takes to earn it, the anxiety of protecting it, and the misery of losing it. Those whose minds are attached to wealth are always distracted, and they have no opportunity for liberation from Saṃsāra. [79]

Question: "Wealth is a misfortune." Is there any truth in this? Does wealth bring happiness?

Question: If wealth does not bring happiness, do you live – and think – as though this were true? For example, do you use a lot of energy worrying about money, planning about money, and making more money than you really need to live a simple life?

Question: Would your job, career or business stop you from going on, say, a year-long retreat? Do you think you have got your priorities right in this area?

Hindrances to viveka: desire for sensory pleasures – especially sex

Whenever the mind is deluded about the source of happiness and looks for it in sensory pleasures, what we get is suffering. So a wise person does not desire sensory pleasure. Desire for pleasure creates fear and anxiety, but the sensations we crave pass in an instant and are gone. [18, 19]

Question: Śāntideva says that when we look for our happiness from passing sensory pleasures, what we in fact get is suffering. Is this true in your experience?

She you schemed to meet up with over and over again, willing to be unskilful, to make a fool of yourself, and to waste your wealth, she whom you embrace with the utmost pleasure, her body is just a bundle of bones, tied together by sinews, and plastered with flesh like a statue plastered with clay. Why don't you cuddle up to some bones instead? [43, 52]

That face you longed so much to see when it was bashfully lowered or covered by a veil, why don't you want to see it when its real nature is unveiled by the vultures? But of course it is not surprising that you refuse to see the truth about her body, when you won't even face the truth about your own. In fact the only point of this body is the pure lotus that grows out of the muck to blossom in the cloudless sun. [44, 45, 56, 57]

Śāntideva is not being misogynistic here – he is writing for male monks, so his text is slanted towards helping them deal with their desires for women and female bodies. The unshortened text contains a long contemplation on the loathsomeness of the body – of whichever sex – and what it looks like after death, which is a traditional meditation.

Question: '...the only point of this body is the pure lotus that grows out of the muck to blossom in the cloudless sun.' What does this mean? Do you agree?

Deluded by sensory desires, people sell themselves into slavery, spending their whole lives working for others, collapsing each evening exhausted by a hard day's work. They get much pain and little enjoyment, like a beast that gets to chew a bit of grass while pulling a wagon, and the enjoyment they do get is the sort that even an animal can get easily. They spend their youth and prime earning money – and then what can an old man do with the pleasures of the flesh? In this way they waste this precious opportunity. They could gain Buddhahood with just a fraction of the effort. [72, 75, 80, 81, 83]

Question: Is there any truth in this description of a normal 'worldly' life, spent seeking to make money to spend on various forms of enjoyment?

The fruits of viveka: śamathā meditation

So we should recoil from sensual desires, and cultivate delight in detachment and solitude. We should join the fortunate ones who pace slowly over pleasant flat rock surfaces, spacious as palaces, under the cool rays of the moon, caressed by gentle forest breezes, meditating for the well-being of others. Passing the time as they please, sleeping in an empty house, at the foot of a tree, or in a cave, free from the exhaustion of looking after a household, free of care, not tied down by anything, they taste a joy and contentment that is hard to find, even for a king. [85–7]

Having encouraged us to see through our attachments to worldly life, Śāntideva makes the point that the simple life he has been advocating is not a way of punishing ourselves – if we can develop śamathā and dhyāna we will experience a degree of real enjoyment that we could never get from ‘worldly’ pleasures.

Question: Have you experienced such positive, happy states while on retreat, or while meditating intensively?

The fruits of śamathā: insight into non-selfhood

When we have calmed our distracted minds by detachment from worldly desires and the experience of solitude, we should then meditate to develop the Bodhicitta. First we should meditate intently on the equality of self and others, thinking, “We are all the same, we all feel the same suffering and happiness, so I should look after others as I look after myself. Just as I love and cherish my body, which is divided into many limbs, so I should love and cherish this whole world, which is divided into many beings.”[89–91]

“I should dispel the suffering of others, because it is suffering like my own suffering. I should help others because they are living beings, as I am a living being. When we all want happiness, and all fear suffering, what is so special about me, that I only look after myself?”[94–6]

“This stream of mental moments I call my mind, these ever-changing elements I call my body, are not some separate thing that exists in its own right. So who is this separate person, that someone’s suffering belongs to? Suffering is just suffering, it has no owner. I should relieve it, just because it is suffering.”[101,102]

Those who have developed their mind in this way, who feel this joy in releasing others, they are the ones who are truly fulfilled. What is the point in some cold liberation, just for oneself alone? [107, 108]

Although śamathā meditation leads to very pleasant states of mind, its main purpose is to allow us to experience vipaśyanā, or Insight. One traditional way of doing this is to reflect on verbal, conceptual formulations of the Dharma while in a focused state, and this is what Śāntideva is recommending here. For Śāntideva the development of Insight and the arising of the Bodhicitta are two sides of the same coin, and he sees the realisation of selflessness as going hand-in-hand with the development of selfless concern for others. He makes the point that this is a joyful, fulfilling experience, not something we pursue to give ourselves a hard time. He seems to be contrasting this Mahāyāna attitude to what was unfairly perceived as the Hīnayāna goal – a ‘cold liberation, just for oneself alone’.

Question: Do you think it is possible to have a ‘cold liberation, just for yourself alone’?

Whoever longs to quickly save themselves and others should practise this supreme mystery: exchanging self and other. All the suffering in the world comes from obsession with ourselves. All the joy in the world comes from wanting others to be happy. Why say more? The fool looks out for his own benefit. The sage acts for the benefit of all. Just look at the difference between them! [120,129,130]

This is perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bodhicaryāvatāra, often quoted.

Question: Is it true that all the suffering in the world comes from our obsession with ourselves, and that the joy in the world comes from escaping from this obsession?

So, to cure my own suffering, as well as the suffering of others, I devote myself to others, and will see them as myself. From now onwards the welfare of all beings is my concern. These limbs and this body belong to all beings. It would be wrong to use them just for myself. [136–8]

Practical insight: exchanging self and other

Having devoted ourselves to others in this way, we should meditate on putting ourselves in others' shoes. For example, we might imagine that we are someone who we think is inferior to us, seeing ourselves through their eyes, and experiencing the envy and pride they might experience. [139, 140]

“He is respected; I'm not. He is wealthy; I'm not. He gets the praise, I get the criticism. He is happy; I suffer. I do the chores while he takes his ease. He, it seems, is really somebody. I, it seems, am inferior. Maybe I have got some failings, but I didn't make myself the way I am. If he's so spiritual, he should be trying to help me to develop – I'm up for that, even if it is painful. Instead, see how he looks down his nose at me! He has no compassion for someone threatened with a bad rebirth. He cares more about competing with others like himself, trying to get even more wealth and honour.” We should also extend this exercise of putting ourselves in others' shoes to people who are seen as our equals and our superiors. [141–54]

In this way we should practise exchanging ourselves with others, seeing ourselves through their eyes, involving ourselves in their suffering, feeling the pain we cause them through our unskillfulness. Pull yourself off your pedestal. Point to yourself and say, “Look at him! When does he actually do anything for others? He's a complete fraud!” [160, 161, 165]

Conclusion

So enough of worldly concerns! I shall follow the sages, concentrating my mind in meditation, tearing down the obscuring veil!

Having led us through some reflections aimed at cultivating insight into non- selfhood, Śāntideva now comes right down to earth – he asks us simply to practise seeing things through others' eyes. Much of our lack of wisdom comes from the fact that we see all situations through one pair of eyes, and through lenses formed by our particular ego-concerns, history, conditioning, and so on. We can become wiser by imaginatively expanding our perspective to include the point of view of other people.

Question: ‘There is no wisdom in a single point of view’. Is this true? Why, or why not?

Śāntideva takes us through a meditation designed to help us see the world through the eyes of someone who is our spiritual inferior, or at least our inferior in terms of their spiritual ‘status’. Śāntideva is writing in the context of a large monastery, where no doubt there were spiritual superstars, who were widely respected, and spiritual ‘nobodies’. In this context, what follows is

a way of putting oneself in the shoes of someone who is less respected – and maybe less developed – than oneself, and seeing the world through their eyes. Śāntideva also gives reflections on putting oneself in the shoes of a ‘superior’ and a competitive equal, but these are not included in this shortened text.

Question: Who do you tend to see as your spiritual inferior? Some examples might include:

- Non-Buddhists
- People who have been practising for less time than you
- People who are conventional in dress, lifestyle, and/or views.
- Street drinkers
- Successful worldly people
- Unsuccessful poor people
- Uneducated people
- Coarse uncultured people
- ‘Straight’ people
- People of the other gender?

Exercise: If you can identify someone who you think of as less developed than yourself, try the exercise of imagining yourself in their shoes as Śāntideva suggests, ideally as part of your mettā bhāvanā practice this week.

TEXT**Chapter 9: The Pāramitā of Wisdom***The fundamental importance of wisdom*

The Buddha taught this whole system of practice to help us develop wisdom. Wisdom is the only ultimate and permanent cure for suffering. [1]

Conventional and ultimate truth

There are two kinds of truth, conventional and ultimate. Ultimate reality is beyond the scope of the intellect. The concepts of the intellect belong to the realm of conventional truth. [2]

In the light of this we can see that there are two types of people: the spiritually developed, who have some direct insight into ultimate reality, and the spiritually undeveloped, whose opinions are entirely based on conventional truth. The opinions and worldview of the spiritually undeveloped are superseded by those of the spiritually developed. [3]

Even the views of the spiritually developed are superseded by the vision of those at a higher level. The only way that those at a higher spiritual level can communicate their vision of reality to someone at a lower level is by the use of analogies. [4]

Ordinary people imagine that the things they see around them have innate intrinsic existence, rather than seeing them as illusions. This is the fundamental difference between ordinary folk and the spiritually developed. [5]

Even the objects of direct perception, such as visible forms, are only held to exist as entities in their own right by popular consensus, and not by any valid means of knowing. In fact this popular consensus is wrong, like the popular consensus that sees many undesirable things as desirable. [6]

Lack of self-nature in beings

Just as the trunk of a banana tree is shown to be empty of real existence when it is broken down into its separate parts, in the same way we see that the “I” is not a real entity when we hunt for it by analysis. [74]

(a) The body

The teeth, hair or nails are not “I”, nor are the bones, blood, mucus, pus or lymph. Marrow is not “I”, nor are the sweat, fat, entrails, excrement or urine. The flesh is not “I”, nor the sinews, nor any of the changing elements that make up the body. Even these constituents can be analysed

down to atoms, then these atoms too can be broken down, until we are just left with empty space. [57–9, 86]

The body is not in its parts, nor does it exist separately from its parts. Who, analysing the body like this, would take delight in a form that is like a dream? [86, 87]

(b) The mind

The sense fields are not “I”, nor is the ego consciousness. Sense impressions are dependent on the objects that cause them, and the ego consciousness depends on sense impressions. [59–62]

The past mind and the future mind can’t be “I”, because they don’t exist. But if the present mind is “I”, then the so-called “self” vanishes as soon as the present moment of consciousness has passed. In fact the sense of a continuous self is an illusion caused by memory – what happened earlier in time is remembered by what arose later, but this does not mean that the earlier and later “selves” are the same. [73,100]

The mind is not located in the sense faculties, nor in the objects it perceives, nor in between them. It is not found inside the body, nor outside it, nor anywhere else.

The mind is nothing. Therefore sentient beings are by nature liberated. [102, 103]

Objections to lack of self-nature in beings

Some people might argue that if a sentient being is like an illusion, lacking self-nature, then the idea of rebirth does not make sense. But an illusion lasts for as long as the concurrence of conditions that keep it in existence. Just because the continuum of mental states that we call a person lasts a long time, this does not mean that this person has an independent, inherent existence. [9, 10]

Again, some people argue that if there is no self then the law of karma is invalidated, because the doer of an action and the experiencer of the result are not the same “self”. But the one who provides the cause and the one who experiences the results are linked by a continuity of consciousness – there is no need to assume some permanent, independently existing “self” for karma to operate. [70–2]

Śūnyatā

The existence of any phenomenon depends on a complex set of causes. Nothing exists separately from its causes, and the constantly changing phenomena of the conditioned world have no continuous identity – the past cause and the future effect are not the same “thing”, any more than rice and dung are the same thing! [135, 141, 142]

How can there be real existence in something that is just a temporary artificial construct, like a reflection, which is only seen in dependence on other things, and has no existence of its own? What fools take to be real is in fact an illusion. All the states of conditioned existence are like dreams, having as much reality as the trunk of a banana tree, and the beings who are born and die here are the same. [144, 150]

The benefits of a vision of śūnyatā

The concept of śūnyatā frees us from bondage to conditioned phenomena, and then we are liberated even from śūnyatā by realising that this itself does not really exist. When the mind grasps at no objects, neither as truly existing entities nor as non-entities, then it becomes tranquil. Without śūnyatā the mind is fettered and becomes trapped in cycles of continual re-arising. [32, 34, 48]

We are able to remain in Saṃsāra for the benefit of suffering beings by freeing ourselves from the two extremes of attachment and fear. This is the fruit of realising śūnyatā. Śūnyatā is the antidote to wrong views, and the antidote to the kleśas. As long as there is an “I”, fear is all around us. But when we see that there is no “I”, who is there to be afraid? In view of this, there can be no real objection to the vision of śūnyatā. We should meditate on it without doubts or fears. [52–4, 56]

Yet my fellow humans do not see that everything is empty and open like space. Mesmerised by conditioned phenomena, one minute they are angry and the next they are celebrating. They are tormented by grief, worry and despair. Constantly seeking their own happiness, they behave in unskilful ways, harming each other, and causing suffering to themselves and others. [154, 155]

Longing for the Unconditioned – for self and others

Reality could not be like this. Here, strength is meagre, and life is short. Here, because of concerns for livelihood and health, we pass our time in hunger, fatigue, and endless troubles. Here, life passes quickly and pointlessly, solitude is hard to find, and distraction is unavoidable. Here, there are many false paths, and doubt is hard to overcome. [157–61]

Oh the miserable condition of beings who stay in this ocean of suffering, but do not even see their own wretched state! Like someone who dowses himself with water over and over again, in order to enter a fire over and over again, they think they are happy, when really they are suffering. [163, 164]

How soon will I be able to give some relief to these beings? How soon will I be able to teach śūnyatā and the accumulation of merit, both by means of conventional truth and ultimate truth, to these beings whose views are based on illusions? [166, 167]

COMMENTARY AND QUESTIONS

Chapter 9: The Pāramitā of Wisdom

The fundamental importance of wisdom

The Buddha taught this whole system of practice to help us develop wisdom. Wisdom is the only ultimate and permanent cure for suffering. [1]

Question: How are the other pāramitās related to wisdom, and how might they lead towards wisdom?

Question: Do you agree that wisdom is the only ultimate cure for suffering? Why, or why not?

Conventional and ultimate truth

There are two kinds of truth, conventional and ultimate. Ultimate reality is beyond the scope of the intellect. The concepts of the intellect belong to the realm of conventional truth. [2]

Question: What is the difference between conventional and ultimate truth? Why is conventional truth important in the cultivation of wisdom?

In the light of this we can see that there are two types of people: the spiritually developed, who have some direct insight into ultimate reality, and the spiritually undeveloped, whose opinions are entirely based on conventional truth. The opinions and world-view of the spiritually undeveloped are superseded by those of the spiritually developed. [3]

Even the views of the spiritually developed are superseded by the vision of those at a higher level. The only way that those at a higher spiritual level can communicate their vision of reality to someone at a lower level is by the use of analogies. [4]

Question: This would imply that everyone's opinions should not carry equal weight. How do you respond to this idea?

Question: Is there anyone that you acknowledge as wiser than yourself? If not, what are the implications of this?

Ordinary people imagine that the things they see around them have innate intrinsic existence, rather than seeing them as illusions. This is the fundamental difference between ordinary folk and the spiritually developed. [5]

Even the objects of direct perception, such as visible forms, are only held to exist as entities in their own right by popular consensus, and not by any valid means of knowing. In fact this popular consensus is wrong, like the popular consensus that sees many undesirable things as desirable. [6]

Lack of self-nature in beings

Just as the trunk of a banana tree is shown to be empty of real existence when it is broken down into its separate parts, in the same way we see that the 'I' is not a real entity when we hunt for it by analysis. [74]

Banana trees have no real trunk; what looks like a trunk is just a bundle of separate leaf-sheaths, which vanishes when we break it down into its parts.

(a) The body

The teeth, hair or nails are not 'I', nor are the bones, blood, mucus, pus or lymph. Marrow is not 'I', not are the sweat, fat, entrails, excrement or urine. The flesh is not 'I', nor the sinews, nor any of the changing elements that make up in the body. Even these constituents can be analysed down to atoms, then these atoms too can be broken down, until we are just left with empty space. [57–9, 86]

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The mind is not located in the sense faculties, nor in the objects it perceives, nor in between them. It is not found inside the body, nor outside it, nor anywhere else. The mind is nothing. Therefore sentient beings are by nature liberated. [102, 103]

Question: Do you find these arguments for the lack of separate independent selfhood convincing, or not? Do any of these arguments or images seem particularly powerful to you, or make a particular impression?

Question: Is Śāntideva saying that nothing really exists?

Question: "Therefore sentient beings are by nature liberated." Why does lack of separate independent selfhood mean we are liberated?

Objections to lack of self-nature in beings

Some people might argue that if a sentient being is like an illusion, lacking self-nature, then the idea of rebirth does not make sense. But an illusion lasts for as long as the concurrence of conditions that keep it in existence. Just because the continuum of mental states that we call a person lasts a long time, this does not mean that this person has an independent, inherent existence. [9, 10]

Again, some people argue that if there is no 'self' then the law of karma is invalidated, because the doer of an action and the experiencer of the result are not the same 'self'. But the one who provides the cause and the one who experiences the results are linked by a continuity of consciousness – there is no need to assume some permanent, independently existing 'self' for karma to operate. [70–2]

Question: Have you ever been puzzled by how anātman fits with ideas of karma and rebirth? Do these verses help to clarify things?

Śūnyatā

The existence of any phenomenon depends on a complex set of causes. Nothing exists separately from its causes, and the constantly changing phenomena of the conditioned world have no continuous identity – the past cause and the future effect are not the same 'thing', any more than rice and dung are the same thing. [135, 141, 142]

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We are able to remain in Saṃsāra for the benefit of suffering beings by freeing ourselves from the two extremes of attachment and fear. This is the fruit of realising śūnyatā. Śūnyatā is the antidote to wrong views, and the antidote to the kleśas. As long as there is an 'I', fear is all around us. But when we see that there is no 'I', who is there to be afraid? In view of this, there can be no real objection to the vision of śūnyatā. We should meditate on it without doubts or fears. [52–4, 56]

Yet my fellow humans do not see that everything is empty and open like space. Mesmerised by conditioned phenomena, one minute they are angry and the next they are celebrating. They are tormented by grief, worry and despair. Constantly seeking their own happiness, they behave in unskilful ways, harming each other, and causing suffering to themselves and others. [154, 155]

Question: Do you think that the vision of śūnyatā would have positive effects on our mental states and behaviour? What negative tendencies would it free us from, and which positive qualities would it give us?

Question: Are there any dangers in this way of seeing things? How could we avoid these dangers?

Longing for the Unconditioned – for self and others

Reality could not be like this. Here, strength is meagre, and life is short. Here, because of concerns for livelihood and health, we pass our time in hunger, fatigue, and endless troubles. Here, life passes quickly and pointlessly, solitude is hard to find, and distraction is unavoidable. Here, there are many false paths, and doubt is hard to overcome. [157–161]

Oh the miserable condition of beings who stay in this ocean of suffering, but do not even see their own wretched state! Like someone who dowses himself with water over and over again, in order to enter a fire over and over again, they think they are happy, when really they are suffering. [163, 164]

How soon will I be able to give some relief to these beings? How soon will I be able to teach śūnyatā and the accumulation of merit, both by means of conventional truth and ultimate truth, to these beings whose views are based on illusions? [166, 167]

Chapter 10: Dedication

You may wish to end your study of the Bodhicaryāvatāra by chanting a shortened version of Śāntideva's final Dedication of Merits along with your mitra group, or incorporating this in a final pūjā.

Text

Chapter 10: Dedication

By the virtue I have gained through turning my mind to the Bodhicaryāvatāra, may all people set foot on the path to Awakening.

Through my merit may all beings who are suffering, in body or mind, all find happiness.

May the fearful find courage, may the anxious be calmed, and may those in sorrow find joy.
May the sick be well, and the weak be strong. May all beings have a tender mind towards each other.

May gods protect the young and the old, the intoxicated, the foolish, and all those in danger.

May the rains come at the proper time, and the crops flourish. May the people prosper, and may the rulers be virtuous.

May the monasteries be well appointed, humming with mantras and study. May the Sangha stay united, and succeed in its purpose. May practitioners find solitude for meditation, and take pleasure in their precepts. May their minds be undistracted, and may they experience the bliss of the dhyānas.

May the ethics of the Sangha be unbroken. May those who are unskilful see the need to change. May they delight in ending their evil actions, and may they achieve a good rebirth.

May the Sangha be learned and cultured, and may they receive support and donations.

May the Buddha's dispensation long endure, this only cure for the illness of the world, this jewel mine of happiness and success, and may it be supported and honoured.

Through my connection with Mañjughoṣa, in all my lives may I enter the Sangha, may I find the conditions for meditation, and may I be taught and advised by Mañjughoṣa himself.

May I emulate Mañjuśrī, who works for the welfare of all beings. As long as space abides and as long as the world abides, so long may I abide, destroying the sufferings of the world.

By the merit I have gained, may all beings desist from evil deeds, and all act skilfully. May they always be possessed by the Bodhicitta, treading the path to awakening. May they be adopted by the Buddhas, may they find the Sangha, and may they be immune to Mara's tricks.

May all beings have infinite life. May every place become a place of delight, made of jewels and light, with gardens of magical trees, teeming with Buddhas. May the enthralling sound of the Dharma be sung by the birds in the air, by every tree, by every ray of light, and by the blue dome of the sky. May the world be a great mandala of Bodhisattvas, each illuminating the world with their own radiant colour.

May the universe attain Buddhahood in a single, divine body.

I bow down to Mañjughoṣa, the supreme spiritual friend, through whose inspiration my mind turns to the good and becomes strong.

The Bodhicaryavatara: A Guide to the Buddhist Path of Awakening, translated Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton. The text used in this module

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-bodhicaryavatara-a-guide-to-the-buddhist-path-of-awakening/>

A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, translated Stephan Bachelor. An alternative translation of the Bodhicaryāvatāra. Available in PDF.

<http://www.abuddhistlibrary.com/Buddhism/A%20-%20Tibetan%20Buddhism/Authors/Shantideva/A%20Guide%20to%20the%20Bodhisattva's%20Way%20of%20Life%20-%20Stephen%20Bachelor%20tra/A%20Guide%20to%20the%20Bodhisattva's%20Way%20of%20Life.pdf>

The Endlessly Fascinating Cry, Sangharakshita, Seminar on the Bodhicaryāvatāra.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/read?num=SEM063>

A Talk on the Bodhicaryāvatāra, Vadanya.

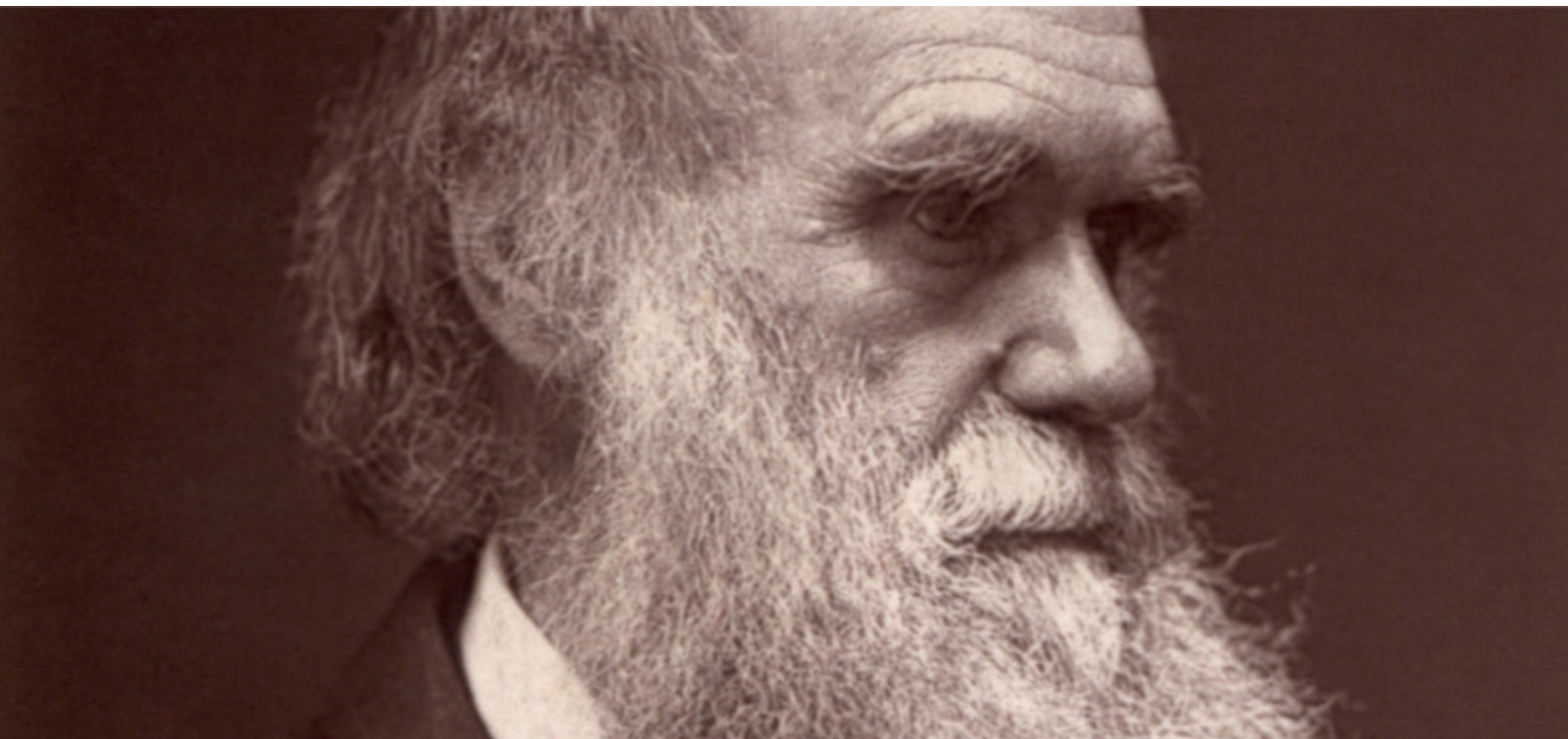
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC492>

A series of six talks by Padmavajra on the Bodhicaryāvatāra:

- *Living From The Brightness.*
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1099>
- *The Highly Potent Elixir.*
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1100>
- *Seizing Hold of The Jewel of The Bodhicitta*
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1101>
- *Finding a Precious Jewel In A Heap of Refuse.*
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1102>
- *The Mystery of Exchanging Self and Other.*
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1103>
- *Living From The Essence of Voidness and Compassion.*
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/audio/details?num=LOC1104>

4.8

Evolutionary Buddhism



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Introduction

Compiled and written by Ratnaprabha in Spring 2009 based partly on a first draft prepared by Padmakara

Any kind of life which is making no effort to evolve is escapism.¹

Introduction to the module

If you want to find a Western concept that conveys the spirit of the whole Buddhist project, then ‘evolution’ seems to be the best on offer. The spiritual path of expanding the scope of human consciousness has been called a ‘higher evolution’, and when Sangharakshita started teaching in the West, he enthusiastically took up this usage.

This Dharma Training Course module ‘Evolutionary Buddhism’ shows how Buddhism can be seen as a path of higher evolution. Exploring the evolution of consciousness, as well as related issues in biology and history, it considers the differences and continuities between lower and higher evolution. It also presents the stages of the Buddhist path in a traditional way, but with the image of evolving as a sort of background presence.

I’ll be arguing that evolution is a Western idea that accords well with Buddhist understandings of human life and the development of consciousness. See whether you agree.

I want to bring out the crucial place of self-awareness in one’s spiritual cultivation. Only self-awareness enables one to evolve further. How did it arise in human evolution? What effect has it had collectively? How can it be cultivated as mindfulness in the individual? How can true altruism and higher levels of consciousness emerge from it?

Uddiyotani, one of the reviewers of this module, writes: “For me the key message is that we recognise that we can make a conscious choice to evolve, deepen, or develop as an individual. We can develop further in linking our own evolution to that of other beings through the Bodhisattva path. And also that if we do not make that choice in some way, we won’t evolve – it is an active choice, not something that just happens to us.”

Structure of the module

Unit 1: Buddhism as An Evolutionary Path is introductory, using a concise presentation of higher evolution that Sangharakshita wrote in the 1970s in a letter to a scholar. The letter argues for seeing Buddhism as evolutionary, and gives an account of Sangharakshita’s gradual realisation of the connection.

¹ *Peace Is a Fire*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, page 19.

Unit 2: Lower Evolution and the Emergence of Mind concentrates on Darwin's theory of how living species evolved. Does lower evolution have a direction, and can the emergence of minds push evolution towards self-awareness?

Unit 3: The Impact of Self-awareness on Human History and Art describes the special human level of consciousness, how it flowered in the Axial Age, and how it is necessary for the production and appreciation of art.

Unit 4: Consciousness Evolves in the Individual explains the mounting levels of consciousness, and how self-reflective consciousness (self-awareness) allows one to decide to evolve further.

Unit 5: Evolving Using the Buddhist Path focuses on the seven factors of enlightenment as a path for evolving your consciousness, concentrating especially on mindfulness.

Unit 6: The Bodhisattva and the Principle of Evolution links the process of self-transcendence with evolution, and shows how both can be represented by the strongly other-regarding figure of the Bodhisattva. It also introduces the possibility of collective consciousness in a spiritual community, and briefly indicates other thinkers who have espoused similar notions of an evolutionary spirituality.

You may find yourself enthusiastically supporting some of the suggestions in this module. Other ideas you may dislike or feel suspicious of. There is no need for you to agree. See if you can engage with the material, and when you disagree, find clear arguments to support your conclusions, as well as listening carefully to the angles offered by others in your group.

The evolutionary perspective

It's not that there is some modern variety of Buddhism which is 'evolutionary'. The Buddha's vision itself is evolutionary. To put it in a different way, traditional Buddhist ways of looking at life have a lot in common with evolutionary world-views in the West. Comparing evolution and Buddhism illuminate both of them.

The word 'evolution' (etymologically 'unrolling') means 'Any gradual directional change'.² First used in English to refer to the development of a foetus, it was later applied particularly to changes in living organisms over the generations, notably by Charles Darwin. How did things come to be the way they are, whether in one's own life, or in the outside world? One view answers, "By divine decree" or "They've always been like this". Another view says, "It is completely haphazard and incomprehensible". A third says, "They *evolved*, in ways we can come to understand, and so perhaps we can come to influence what they evolve into." This evolutionary perspective is a very prominent one in western thinking, and is also the Buddhist perspective.

Sangharakshita emphasises the evolutionary nature of Buddhism in his teaching. In 1971, he read RC Zaehner's book *Evolution in Religion*, and wrote the following letter to its author. This is a good concise summary of the arguments for seeing Buddhism as evolutionary, and it explains Sangharakshita's distinction between lower and higher evolution. See what you think:³

Dear Dr Zaehner,

Having just read your *Evolution in Religion*, I am writing to say how greatly it has interested me and how much I find myself, as a Buddhist, in general agreement with the spirit of your approach. Interpretations of religion in 'evolutionary' terms nowadays seem to be rather 'in the air' and a comparative study such as yours, which compares two such prominent representatives of the evolutionary approach as the Hindu Aurobindo and the Catholic Teilhard, is undoubtedly to be welcomed. I would like, however, to make a few comments on your references to Buddhism, as well as to suggest that Buddhism, too, can be approached from the point of view of evolution.

² *Dictionary of Ecology, Evolution and Systematics*, Lincoln, Boxshall and Clark, p.87 (Cambridge University Press 1980). There is more on direction in evolution in Unit II.

³ I have shortened the letter here, and added subheadings. The full text is in *The FWBO and Protestant Buddhism*, pp.179 ff.

...I would argue that Buddhism occupies, in a sense, a middle position between Marxism on the one hand and Christianity and Islam on the other. Like Marxism, Buddhism is non-theistic, and like Christianity and Islam it is a spiritual teaching as distinct from a form of materialism. It is this union of the non-theistic and the spiritual which, I believe, constitutes one of the great strengths of Buddhism, especially at the present time, giving it, for opposite reasons, a decided advantage over both the atheist-materialist and the theistic-spiritual alternatives.

Four reasons to see Buddhism as evolutionary

Besides occupying a middle position between the atheist-materialist and the theistic-spiritual alternatives, Buddhism is more open to an approach in terms of evolution than either Christianity or Hinduism. In the case of Buddhism, however, an approach from the point of view of evolution would seem to be very much in accordance with the genius of the tradition itself. Four considerations could be cited, among others, in support of this contention. You are, I am sure, familiar with them, though you may never have seen them quite in this light.

1. In one form or another, the concept of the Path has always been central to Buddhism. The Path consists of steps or stages. These steps or stages represent, essentially, states of consciousness, or of being, which are progressive, leading the individual from ignorance to Enlightenment, from the condition of *prthagjana* [ordinary person] to that of Arhant or Buddha. One could therefore say that the conception of spiritual development, or spiritual evolution (what I call the 'Higher Evolution of Man') is central to Buddhism.
2. It is well known that there grew up round the Buddha a Sangha which continued after his death and still exists today. Ideally this Sangha is a purely spiritual sodality [fellowship], an 'Assembly of the Elect,' whether monk or lay, who have attained the higher spiritual stages of the Path, and who, being incapable of regression, are assured of Nirvana. This Sangha is the nucleus of an ideal community and it stands in the same relation to society at large as the individual *ārya* [person with Insight] stands to the individual *prthagjana*. Thus spiritual evolution is clearly seen not only as individual but also as collective.
3. As already stated, the central tradition of Buddhism, the Mahāyāna, finds practical expression in terms of the Bodhisattva Ideal. This represents much more than a personal ideal for ethical and spiritual behaviour. The figure of the Bodhisattva is the concrete embodiment of the principle of spiritual evolution, both individual and cosmic. The Bodhisattva Ideal being ubiquitous in the Mahāyāna, this principle is by implication ubiquitous too.
4. The Buddhist Scriptures, especially those of the Mahāyāna, quite clearly envisage a universe (in the fullest sense of the term) in which, under the guidance of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas innumerable, all sentient beings are ultimately destined to Enlightenment, even the Devadattas⁴ of the world not being excluded. In this sense one may therefore speak of Buddhism as the religion of evolution, of spiritual evolution, on a cosmic scale. Indeed, in texts such as the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka* this is exactly how the Mahāyāna sees itself. No tour de force of interpretation is necessary.

4 Devadatta plotted to take over the Sangha and later to kill the Buddha, his cousin. The *Lotus Sutra* (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*) predicts that he will eventually, in future lives, overcome his negative karma and gain enlightenment.

Realising that Buddhism is higher evolution

Though I have been preoccupied with Buddhism for thirty years, the fact that it was possible to approach Buddhism from the point of view of evolution, – that Buddhism, more than any other religion, indeed was the leading historical embodiment of the principle of spiritual evolution, was far from being immediately apparent to me. For many years I was much more concerned with the practical problem of striving actually to follow the Path in the traditional manner than with any attempt to reinterpret it in contemporary terms. The realization that Buddhism *was the Higher Evolution* dawned on me only gradually, and my approach to it was oblique. Three main stages can perhaps be distinguished:

1. According to tradition, the Buddha's Enlightenment consisted of an insight into the truth of universal conditionality. This insight found conceptual expression in the fundamental teaching of the chain of 'Dependent Origination' (*pratitya-samutpāda*). With the help of Dr Beni Madhab Barua and Mrs C.A.R Rhys Davids I discovered that this chain was not limited to an explanation of the process of repeated existence in the world, particularly of the phenomenon of human suffering, as was generally supposed, but also included the Path leading from the world to Nirvāṇa. In its entirety it in fact consisted not of one series of twelve links but of two, the first series being cyclical in character, the second progressive. This meant, in effect, that the Path to Enlightenment could not be reduced to the gradual cessation of the mundane but possessed a definite nature of its own. In other words, Buddhism was not just negative asceticism. Nirvāṇa was not annihilation. All this I have explained in full detail in *A Survey of Buddhism* (1957) Chapter One, XIV.
2. Contemplating the twelve links that made up the missing half of the chain of Dependent Origination, the true nature of the Path became clear to me. It was not a thing of artificial steps and stages. Neither was it a succession of observances. Essentially, it consisted of a sequence of psychological and spiritual experiences. These experiences were not only progressive but cumulative. Between them they constituted a process of continuous growth and development by which the individual advanced from lower to higher states of being and consciousness. This process could well be termed not only a development but even an evolution. The twelve positive nidānas, as I term them, are explained at length in Part 11, 13, 'The Stages of the Path', of my book *The Three Jewels* (1967).
3. So far my realization that Buddhism was the Path of the Higher Evolution had remained within a strictly traditional framework. In 1964, however, having spent twenty years in the East, I returned to England, and soon felt the need, purely as a 'skilful means' (*upāya-kausalya*), of a principle sufficiently familiar to the modern mind not to require much explanation and capable, at the same time, of being generalized in such a way as to provide a medium for the exposition of Buddhism. One day, while preparing a lecture, it flashed on me that the concept of Evolution was such a principle.⁵ At once everything fell into place. Science revealed how far man had come. This was the Lower Evolution. Buddhism, as the Path, showed how far he still had to go. This was the Higher Evolution. Though not strictly continuous, the two phases between them constituted the halves of a single process. Science and religion, the Lower and the Higher Evolution, were

⁵ Sangharakshita later discovered that he had already talked of Buddhism in evolutionary terms in a lecture in India in 1950.

comprehended in one gigantic sweep. In the course of the last few years I have developed these ideas in detail, thus working out an approach to Buddhism in terms of Evolution. So far I have not written any book on the subject, though I have dealt with it in several courses of lectures, the most important such course being the eight lectures on 'The Higher Evolution of Man' (Autumn 1969).

To what extent these words will be able to convey to you the nature of my evolutionary vision of Buddhism I do not know. They may well be too obscure to convey anything at all. Nevertheless, I venture to hope that they will at least serve to indicate the existence of an attempt to approach Buddhism, too, from the point of view of evolution, and that as such – as well as evidence of the interest your book has excited – you will welcome them.

Yours sincerely,
Sangharakshita (9th August 1971)

Summary

Sangharakshita's letter gives four ways in which Buddhism can be described as evolutionary, and then explains how he came to this conclusion.

1. Buddhism is a path in which human consciousness 'evolves' in incremental stages from ignorance to Enlightenment – higher evolution. See Units 4 and 5.
2. Society too can evolve, says Buddhism, into an ideal community, a Sangha, in which eventually everyone could be irreversible from Enlightenment. See Unit 3.
3. The bodhisattva *embodies* higher evolution (Unit 6).
4. Buddhism sees all beings in the universe as heading for Enlightenment (don't take the word 'destined' literally) – spiritual evolution on a cosmic scale (Unit 6).

Sangharakshita made the connection between Buddhism and evolution, he says, through seeing that the chain of dependent origination includes the path, a cumulative, "Sequence of psychological and spiritual experiences," an evolution. (See Unit 4.) Later he saw that evolution was a familiar idea that could help in explaining Buddhism to Westerners. Science shows how we evolved to the normal human state of consciousness; Buddhism continues the process by showing how each person can choose to evolve further.

Many fine thinkers have adopted an evolutionary viewpoint on existence, from sages of ancient Greece and China right up to Ken Wilber and his allies in present day America. Darwin's theory of the evolution of living organisms by natural selection is one of the key explanatory frameworks in modern science, and often the term 'evolution' is taken to refer only to that theory.

Darwinian evolution tends to be presented as a faltering and blind process, with no direction to it. Whether or not that is the case (see Unit 2), living creatures with self-awareness, humans, have emerged as part of Darwinian evolution. The minds associated with the evolving organic forms have evolved as well, from simpler forms of consciousness to more and more inclusive degrees of awareness. Why not call the *deliberate* cultivation of awareness to higher and higher levels an evolution, a higher evolution? This, as Sangharakshita puts it, achieves a 'synthesis of knowledge', bringing together science and religion, linking them 'with the help of this concept of evolution'.⁶

6 Noble Eightfold Path Seminar, Tuscany 1982.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What does the term 'evolution' convey to you? Try to describe an evolutionary vision of existence – firstly for living beings on this planet, and secondly for yourself.
2. How do you respond to the terms 'lower' and 'higher' applied to evolution?
3. Seeing Buddhism as 'Higher Evolution' hasn't yet caught on, even in Triratna. What are the advantages of using the term 'spiritual evolution' or 'higher evolution' for how we see ourselves on the Buddhist path? What might be the disadvantages of using these terms?
4. Not long after Darwin provided a scientific basis for evolutionary ideas, some groups of people made use of them for oppressive ends, such as insisting that their own racial group was more highly evolved, or that 'lower' groups should be eradicated. Could a view of a similar kind infect the idea of higher evolution? How could it be guarded against?
5. How does Sangharakshita support his claim that Buddhism is the 'religion' most open to an evolutionary approach? Can you think of any other features of Buddhism that would support this idea? Are there any aspects of Buddhism that don't fit in well with the metaphor of evolution, or that would be better described in other ways?



Taking it further

Evolution, Lower and Higher, Sangharakshita, 1969. Altogether there are about six lectures and a whole lecture series on this theme by Sangharakshita, all available from *Free Buddhist Audio*.
<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=75>

Robin Cooper (Ratnaprabha), *The Evolving Mind: Buddhism, Biology and Consciousness* (Windhorse Publications, 1996), especially pages 3-31. As well as the crucial image of the spiritual path, evolutionary images and stories are common in traditional Buddhism. See *The Evolving Mind*, pages 212-221.
<https://books.google.ie/books?id=A49mAAAACAAJ>

Wes Nisker, *Buddha's Nature* (Rider, 1988), pages 3-4, 60-1.
<http://www.wesnisker.com/>

- How lower (biological) evolution works.
- Following the thread of evolving mind indicates a direction in evolution.
- How minds and animal behaviour may affect evolution even before it focuses on the individual.

Darwinism

The idea of evolution is particularly associated with the British biologist Charles Darwin (1809-82). He accumulated evidence and arguments that showed that animals and plants have undergone a gradual process of evolution, one species giving rise to different descendant species, culminating in the types alive today. This idea was already current when he published his great (and surprisingly readable) *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. But he went further and proposed how they had evolved – by natural selection. Here is Sangharakshita's tribute to Darwin from his lecture *Evolution, Lower and Higher* (abridged):

I think it is no exaggeration to say that this concept of evolution is probably the most important general concept of modern thought. I say 'modern thought' advisedly because even though the idea of evolution, of organic development, was known in earlier times, it was known only in a very vague, almost dreamy, poetic sort of way. If there was any understanding of this idea of evolution at all in earlier ages, it was more a matter of inspired guesswork rather than of any real, scientific, objective, grounded knowledge. As a scientifically demonstrable principle, the concept of evolution is forever associated with the name of Charles Darwin because it was he who first traced its operation in detail within one particular field of human knowledge: biology. And he showed quite definitely, in the face of a great deal of dogmatic Christian opposition, how one form of organic life developed into another; the more simple forms developing into the more complex, and the more complex developing into the more complex still. And since those days the principle of evolution has been discovered to be at work in every field of knowledge and every department of life. Wherever you find life, there you find evolution, there you find development. In fact, we find Sir Julian Huxley writing these words:

"The different branches of science combine to demonstrate that the universe in its entirety must be regarded as one gigantic process, a process of becoming, of attaining new levels of existence and organisation, which can properly be called a genesis or an evolution."⁷

⁷ Julian Huxley (1887 -1975) was a British biologist. The quote is from his introduction to Teilhard, *The Phenomenon of Man* p.13 (Collins, 1959).

Natural selection

Evolution may be general, but Darwin's natural selection applies specifically to the physical forms of living organisms. In brief, here's how it works. Even within a species, organisms vary from each other in their physical makeup. Some types will have characteristics that make them more successful than others in leaving offspring, so their offspring will be more numerous in the next generation than those of less successful rivals. But offspring tend to resemble their parents, and so they are likely also to have the successful characteristics, and in turn pass them to their offspring, until the advantageous characteristics have become the norm in the whole population. This is natural selection.

For example, pigeons preyed on by hawks will tend to become faster flyers down the generations, as long as each generation has some speedy individuals, more of which survive to breed because they escape the hawks. Eventually, the streamlined pigeons may be sufficiently different from their plump ancestors to represent a new species. The old, plump species may still survive, however, in areas where hawks are scarce and winters are cold.

So, for evolution by natural selection, you need organisms to vary a bit from their contemporaries, for some variations to be beneficial in leaving descendants, and for descendants to tend to inherit their parents' beneficial traits. All living beings have been shown to display these three features, so much so that they can be used to define life:

Life... [consists of] entities with the properties that enable them to evolve by natural selection;... multiplication, variation and heredity.... the apparently purposive or adaptive features which characterise living as opposed to dead matter can be evolved in entities with these properties, but not in their absence.⁸

Randomness and direction in lower evolution

Two questions would be of particular interest to Buddhists. Are the variations random, and does evolution have a direction towards higher levels of consciousness? Most biologists would reply, "Yes, it's random, and no, there is no direction."

Randomness is of concern to Buddhists because of the supposedly universal law of conditioned co-arising, *pratitya samutpāda*. Thus the Dalai Lama says:

The Darwinian theory of evolution, at least with the additional insights of modern genetics, gives a fairly coherent account of the evolution of human life on earth. ... [But] from the Buddhist perspective, the idea of these mutations being purely random events is deeply unsatisfying.⁹

Tibetan Buddhists generally see all misfortunes of birth as being due to past unskilful karma, and to say that a damaging mutation was purely haphazard in origin would sidestep karma. But other Buddhist traditions do accept that not everything is due to karma, because there are other forms of conditionality. In fact, animals, with little power to make conscious choices, are probably little affected by karma, which refers to intentional actions. And that's not all: genetics explains why it is that members of a species are so similar to each other, and yet it allows for variations to be constantly popping up, giving natural selection something to work

8 John Maynard Smith on Evolution, p.96 (Edinburgh University Press, 1972).

9 *The Universe in a Single Atom*, Dalai Lama, pp.118-119 (Little Brown, 2005). Despite such misgivings, the Dalai Lama is very supportive of Buddhism and Science learning from one another, and this book is a good summary of his conclusions. It also contains references to the series of books reporting the 'Mind-Life' conferences, where Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists have engaged in constructive debates.

on. The selection itself is very far from being random, and it weeds out the traits that are not well adapted to the animal's (or plant's) life within its environment.

What of direction? Darwin tried to remind himself, "Never use the words higher and lower".¹⁰ but he couldn't help but regard some types, of more recent appearance in evolution, as more advanced than others. In fact, as more and more possible adaptations are 'explored' by evolving and competing organisms, the successful ones are bound sometimes to come up with increasingly complex and sophisticated structures with which to respond to the trials of life. From our point of view, the most interesting of these was the brain and nervous system, and the inner life of the mind that is associated with them.

Is there a direction to evolution? Here is Sangharakshita's discussion of the issue, from *What is the Sangha?*

The model of evolution we know best is that of a blind, accidental, and ruthless groping towards ever more successful adaptations to ever-changing environmental circumstances. If one species develops a new genetic configuration which gives it an edge over its environment, then other species have to develop adaptations of their own to meet that challenge. Even what we know as the self can be explained as a more or less successful way in which a certain group of organisms have adapted themselves to their environment. It is, one might say, a development driven from underneath.

This model is an essentially mechanistic one, and it leaves all sorts of important questions unanswered. Some would even say that it is wisest to leave them unanswered, arguing that no such explanation can begin to dispel the essential mystery of things, particularly the mystery of consciousness and the self. It is to engage with this mystery that another, quite different model is sometimes invoked. According to this way of thinking, evolution is not so much driven from underneath as drawn up from above. Of course, generally speaking such ideas are the province of religion, which usually has a vitalist or teleological¹¹ perspective on the whole principle of evolution. The very fact of evolution beginning to reflect upon its own workings is seen as indicating that the process is also a progress, and that it must be in some sense directed from above or beyond itself. That is, if progress is observed occurring within the process of evolution, it is assumed that this progress happens in relation to some identifiable goal, value, or principle above or beyond that whole process.

Neither of these models works altogether satisfactorily on its own, but they do not have to be set in opposition to each other. If one is not rigidly literalistic about either model, they may each be said to be relevant to particular aspects of our situation. Thus, in the faltering, unforeseeable steps of Darwinian evolution we could also read the progressive manifestation through time of an absolute, transcendent reality whose very presence makes possible the emergence of one new quality and

10 Quoted Anthony Flew, *Darwinian Evolution* p.123 (Granada, 1984).

11 'Vitalism' is the view that the functions of a living organism, including perhaps the way it evolves, can't be accounted for by physical and chemical processes alone (the mechanistic standpoint); a 'life force' is driving them. Sangharakshita sees his Buddhist approach as being a modified form of vitalism: life displays an inherent urge to evolve, which pops up again in Unit 6 as the cosmic level of going for refuge. 'Teleology' asserts that something is drawn forward by the goal towards which it is moving, as if the final goal already exists in some sense.

characteristic after another in that evolutionary process. There is not, obviously – from a Buddhist perspective, anyway – some preordained ground plan behind the whole process of evolution, but we can say perhaps that this absolute reality is a kind of reservoir on which evolution, especially human evolution, continually draws.¹²

Mind in lower evolution

There seems to be nothing intrinsic to the genes that push an animal species to evolve in any particular direction, except to become better adapted. But mind is different. Animals that can notice things, recall past experiences, even perhaps plan, can modify their responses. Within limits, they can learn new behaviours that help the survival and success of them and their kin. Animals that can respond flexibly can survive environmental challenges that would kill relatives with fixed behaviour patterns. New behaviours can take animals into new environments, where they may face fewer dangers and more opportunities, and natural selection in the new environment will change the form of the animal. So what the animal does opens up new avenues for its descendants' evolution. Minds allow at least a rudimentary form of choice, which can direct evolution. In favourable circumstances, the best minds will take their possessors into new ways of life that allow for the brain and senses to improve further.

Emphasising the gradual expansion of consciousness, culminating in human beings, picks out only one thread through the tangled web of evolution, but it does represent a definite direction, of huge significance to us. There is more on this in *The Evolving Mind* (chapters 3 and 4), where I give an example:

The only mammals that survived the dominance of the dinosaurs were little shrew-like creatures, probably living in the undergrowth of woods and forests, and feeding by night on small animals such as insects. They had smallish brains and used their noses rather than their eyes to sense their surroundings. By 80 million years ago, some of these insectivores had taken to the trees, giving rise to the order of primates, mammals such as monkeys, apes, and humans. Some of the earliest fossil primates were rather like bushbabies with buck-teeth, having big, forward-facing eyes, and large brains. How did the change in habitat and structure come about?

Imagine a particularly fearless early mammal running up a low branch one night. Perhaps it is being pursued by a predator; perhaps it is in pursuit of a large and juicy beetle; or perhaps it feels a vague stirring of curiosity. It finds up the branch a snug hole, and spends the dangerous daylight hours asleep there. It is safer from predators, flooding, and other dangers than its relatives, who still hide by day in burrows, under rocks, or in piles of leaves. So it teaches its own young to sleep a little above ground level. Perhaps other members of the same species imitate it, or discover the new behaviour for themselves.

Because of the extra safety, individuals with the new behaviour survive better and leave more offspring (which follow the new tradition) than conservative individuals, and scrambling into low branches every morning becomes the norm throughout the population, probably within a few dozen generations. What is more, the pioneering behaviour has opened up a new ecological niche for the species – the trees. Trees offer

¹² *What is the Sangha?*, Sangharakshita, Pp. 96-97, Windhorse Publications. Subsequent to the lectures on which this extract is based, Sangharakshita said he might prefer to talk of life manifesting more and more fully in evolution, rather than using terms like 'absolute reality'. (*Women Study Leaders' Q&A on the 'Higher Evolution of Man'*.) There is a thorough discussion of direction in evolution in *The Evolving Mind*, pp. 45-8.]

safer nesting holes, and also a new range of insect foods; perhaps berries and fruits, too. Our pioneering insectivore may be tempted to spend the whole time in the new habitat.

A change of environment, a new ecological niche, means new selection pressures, and this is where the conventional evolutionary mechanisms come into play. The animals are spending time in trees. However, they are not adapted for climbing but for scampering about in the leaf litter. Any mutations will be strongly selected for if they tend to develop hands that can grasp the branches, a bushy tail for balance when jumping, good binocular vision for safe climbing and finding food, and so on. So first we had a behavioural change which introduced the animal into a new environment, and then naturally selected inherited variations changed the animal's structure.¹³

Evolving consciousness and culture

So Darwin's 'lower evolution' explains how the structure of living things changed, from the first tiny single cells of perhaps 3.8 billion years ago, to the first independently moving animals, to larger soft-bodied creatures, to a huge variety of successful animals with all sorts of lifestyles in the present day, including those primates we call humans.¹⁴ There are two other threads in lower evolution as well as physical structure: the developing minds or consciousnesses of those animals, and something closely related to mind, cultural traditions among the social animals. 'Culture' in animal groups refers to things that they do which they can learn from each other, such as the songs of some birds, or tool using among apes.

Both minds and cultures needed to support the breeding success of their bearers, as structural form did, but because both are flexible and can innovate during a single lifetime, they are not wholly constrained by the natural selection of the genes. Further, most Buddhists would probably reject the idea that mind (and thus culture) is completely determined by material brain processes.

Many very influential modern thinkers see 'mind' as being purely a manifestation of electrical and chemical processes in the brain. Others see it as not entirely material, but as a new feature that has 'emerged' from a basis in physical form. The traditional Buddhist view, however, is that there is no beginning to consciousness, which, always changing, associates with a succession of physical bodies through rebirth. We live in a fascinating era, as the Buddhist insights into our minds, and scientific discoveries about our brain and senses and how they evolved, are meeting for the first time. Will the Buddhist view of mind prevail, or the scientific view? Or will some new picture emerge?

Here, we are turning a Buddhist spotlight on evolution. According to Buddhism, mind has its own laws, its own conditionality. And at some point in the 'lower' evolution of minds, animals or people appeared that had the capacity for self-awareness. When that self-awareness was active, they could, one at a time, make deliberate decisions, including deciding to be ethical, and deciding to evolve further – higher evolution.

What happened when the first people appeared in history who were able to make their own independent decisions? It seems that they had a huge impact, and changed the nature not just of their own experience, but of their societies, and beyond. These were the men and women of

¹³ *The Evolving Mind*, Robin Cooper, p.77 (Windhorse 1996).

¹⁴ Plants also evolved, but I am ignoring them here because I do not think they have any degree of consciousness.

the axial age, the topic of the next unit: artists, poets, philosophers and mystics, true individuals who did their best to convey to others the benefits of self-awareness.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. You might think “we are supposed to be studying Buddhism, but this is science!” Do you think that an appreciation of the process of lower evolution helps in understanding higher evolution?
2. Do you feel you have understood the gist of how natural selection works, and how living species evolve? Think of a real or hypothetical example. Do you think of evolution as principally a biological phenomenon?
3. Why might claims of randomness in lower evolution go against conditioned co-arising? Does it matter?
4. Do you feel comfortable with the idea of a direction in lower evolution, somehow leading up to higher evolution by giving rise to minds capable of self-reflective consciousness?
5. In what ways might mind(s) influence lower evolution? Explain the process if you can (see the text above).
6. Consider the idea of, “Mind as being purely a manifestation of electrical and chemical processes in the brain (physicalism).” Why might people hold this view? Why might some people disagree with it or find it unsatisfactory?
7. Similarly for the “Buddhist view... that there is no beginning to consciousness, which, always changing, associates with a succession of physical bodies through rebirth.” Why might people hold this view? Why might some people disagree with it or find it unsatisfactory?



Further reading

The Evolving Mind, Robin Cooper, Windhorse, 1996, chapters 2-4.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=A49mAAAACAAJ>

Embracing Mind, B. Alan Wallace, Shambhala, chapter 10.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=AYLOGVnKHtMC>

The Embodied Mind, Francesco Varela, E Thompson and E Rosch, MIT Press, 1991.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=QY4RoH2z5DoC>

Evolution Lower and Higher, Sangharakshita, sections 2-4.

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=75>

- How the appearance of self-reflective consciousness represents the juncture between lower and higher evolution.
- Connecting that level of consciousness with Buddhist mindfulness.
- The signs of strengthening self-reflection in human history, up to the appearance of great innovators in thought, art and religion during the Axial Age.
- Those innovators can be seen as artists, and artists continue to be crucial explorers of the possibilities of self-reflective consciousness.
- Could our own artistic creativity be an expression of higher evolution?

Self-reflective consciousness and mindfulness

In the long millennia of the evolutionary process, everything radically changed once the minds of certain ‘animals’ were able to turn back and look at themselves. This was the emergence of self-reflective consciousness, probably only in human beings. Self-reflective consciousness is approaching what Buddhists call mindfulness. I wrote in *The Evolving Mind*:

Something quite novel, a mysterious new faculty, was necessary for [higher] evolution to begin. Animals with minds, interacting culturally with others, had to become aware of their distinctness from those others, and deliberately turn their attention to their own mental life. So the prerequisite for individual or higher evolution was the arising of self-reflective consciousness, the truly human level.

The human level of consciousness is a condition of mind that we all experience, but at times we also experience degrees of consciousness which are lower than this self-reflective level. They are lower in the sense that our awareness is more limited in its scope. For example, in deep dreamless sleep we are breathing, our heart is pumping, we are definitely alive. Alive, but not aware, not conscious. We remember nothing of deep sleep when we wake up: no experiences have been illumined around us during that period. As I write these words, however, I can see the pencil in my hand, feel my fingers on my cheek, and follow the thoughts as they jell into words on the page. Accompanying these processes is a general experience of the mental ‘illumination’ itself that reveals them to me – I am aware that I am aware. The distinction between unconsciousness and self-awareness is quite plain, a matter of common experience. We all know what self-reflective consciousness is, but it’s an extraordinarily slippery concept to try to define.

...[Consciousness of some sort] is present whenever an animal has appropriate responsiveness to the world it perceives, and so it correlates with being awake and alert. There is an evolutionary sequence of levels of consciousness, as well as a parallel scale of levels accessible to the human individual. Reviewing our experience,

surely consciousness in general, and not just self-reflective consciousness, displays a full spectrum of degrees or intensities, right from the deepest sleep to the brilliant clarity of our most joyfully – or painfully – aware moments.

...As self-reflective consciousness developed gradually in the human species, so each individual today achieves it only after long and gradual development (and also in a pattern strongly conditioned by cultural factors). And self-reflective consciousness in the full sense can still be a mental level in which one feels awkward, precarious, and over-stretched, so that for most of one's life one gratefully sinks back into some variation of a dimmer, less conscious state. However, being self-aware is a necessary precondition for developing one's own consciousness any further, for higher evolution. This is why the Buddhist programme of self-development stresses the practice of mindfulness so strongly.

Mindfulness is the Buddhist term for sustained self-reflective consciousness. Fully developed self-awareness is more than the ability to follow one's own mental experience. It also incorporates qualities like sympathy with others, a sense of purpose in one's actions, and a creative imagination.¹⁵

From prehistory to history

In Unit 5, we'll look at the impact of mindfulness in our own higher evolution, and how to cultivate it. But what impact did self-reflective consciousness have when it first arose in our ancestors? It made it possible for people to shape their own lives, to work on their own mental states. It also split the preconscious harmony into a subject – being aware, and objects – what one is aware of. That split has been a source of a lot of pain, since it allowed longings and cruelties galore. In society, self-reflective consciousness turned prehistory into human history. Sangharakshita writes (in a section that you may have read for the module on the Sangha) that in prehistoric times:

The emergence of specifically human consciousness produced for the first time a species that could not be defined in purely biological terms. Gathering roots, fruits, and seeds, and later hunting game, scattered family groups or tribes roamed through a world which was very much smaller than our own. Their views of the past and the future were narrow, and their view of the world around them was restricted to their immediate locality. What they were conscious of was immediate experience, here and now. What they knew, they knew directly and intimately. They were ignorant of more or less everything except how to survive, though this they knew very well indeed. At the same time, because their numbers were so few, the natural world through which they roamed must have seemed to them terrifying in its vastness.

They wandered through forest or savannah, lodging in caves, or holes in the ground, or among the roots of trees. They had the use of nothing inherited from the past – no houses, villages, bridges, roads, or even huts or paths. There were no laws, nor was there any authority beyond that of the head of the family. There was no mechanical sense of the flow of time against which to measure your experience: you simply saw the sun rise and set, and watched the procession of the seasons. The bare trees budded and opened their fresh leaves to the light, and then you would see the same leaves turning yellow and fluttering to the ground. These changes went with changes of temperature, and changes in the way you went about getting food. But you knew

¹⁵ *The Evolving Mind*, pp 96-8 and 104-5.

nothing of the past, nothing of history. You knew your parents and grandparents, your children and grandchildren, but beyond that there was just a mist. You knew nothing about other human beings, living in other times or other places. There was no 'knowledge' in our sense of the term at all. Primitive man was ignorant and, as far as we know, happily ignorant. We can hardly imagine such a state of affairs; to us this age can only seem very remote.

However, in a sense it is not remote at all. The period of prehistory is virtually coterminous with the history of humankind itself. The ten to twenty thousand years of modern or historical humanity is no more than a full stop to the long, meandering Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods of our development. In fact, we are still living on the fringes of the Stone Age. Almost everything we value – higher culture, civilization, literature, science and technology, work, and leisure – has been completely unknown to our species for virtually its entire history. Our roots go very deep indeed. For almost our entire existence as a species we have been primitive and ignorant; and, under the surface, very largely we still are. Indeed, a great deal of our unconscious conditioning derives from the exigencies of primitive life.

...As well as making use of fire, primitive human beings made stone tools and developed the beginnings of language and religion. The great cosmic or nature myths originated towards the end of this period, and along with religion came art, which until very recent times was not separate from religion.

Then suddenly – and it was, comparatively speaking, quite sudden – around [ten] thousand years ago this erstwhile hunter-gatherer species started to till the ground, to sow seeds and reap crops. With the development of agriculture, nomadic life gave way in some places to village settlements, and eventually towns and even cities, especially in the great river valleys of Asia and North Africa: the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates, the Indus and Ganges, the Huang Ho and Yangtze Kiang. Agriculture promoted the development of forethought; tilling the ground for the sake of a future harvest was a considered activity, not a spontaneous impulse, and it was thus the first step towards civilization.

The rate of development increased exponentially, and the Stone Age was followed in quick succession by the Bronze and Iron ages. Alphabets were invented; literature and history of a kind began to be written; basic geometry and astronomy were mastered; government, administration, and law took shape; and commerce, war, and conquest spread these developments further afield. Fertility myths replaced the old cosmic or nature myths.

The Axial Age

...Then, about 2,500 years ago, there was another major shift in consciousness, termed by Karl Jaspers the Axial Age, when the great religions came into being, together with a succession of great empires...

Jaspers finds this decisive turning point in a spiritual upheaval that he identifies as having taken place between 800 and 200 BCE. All over the world – or at least the more developed parts of the world – humanity seems suddenly to have awakened from the sleep of ages. At this time, individuals were born whose achievements and ways of looking at the world have profoundly influenced, directly or indirectly, almost the

entire human race. Even after 2,500 years, many of these individuals are still revered household names, and their work is still appreciated, consulted, and discussed.

The Analects of Confucius (551-479BCE) are probably still the greatest single influence on the Chinese character, while the Tao-te Ching, composed by the altogether more mysterious figure of Lao-tzu (?604-?531¹⁶), is a perennial worldwide best-seller. These two are only the best known of a host of Chinese sages, including Mencius (c391-c308BCE) and Chuang Tzu (c370-286BCE). India can boast a galaxy of sages responsible for the wisdom teachings of the Upanishads, as well as the founder of Jainism, Mahavira, and of course Gautama the Buddha. More or less contemporaneously, Persia was graced by the figure of Zoroaster or Zarathustra (?628-?551¹⁷), whom we know as the founder or refounder of Zoroastrianism, the faith of the Parsees. This was the religion of the Persian Empire, and it heavily influenced all the Semitic monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The tiny country of Palestine produced the great Jewish prophets: Amos and Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Second Isaiah, and a number of others, whose sublime moral insights were much later developed by Jesus of Nazareth, and indeed still resound throughout the Western world today.

Finally, in Greece there was an outburst of philosophical, spiritual, and artistic creativity unequalled anywhere else, before or since. A.N. Whitehead remarked famously, if a little boldly, that Western philosophy is little more than a series of footnotes to Plato. Plato was the pupil of Socrates and the teacher of Aristotle, whose works dominated medieval Muslim and Christian thought. But these three represent only the highest point of a complex philosophical tradition.

The epic poetry of Homer, the lyric poetry of Pindar, the fables of Aesop, the poetic drama of Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus, the comedies of Aristophanes, and the sculptures of Phidias and Praxiteles, represent the most sublime works of art still extant from within a culture of unimaginable richness, which also produced the first modern historians, Herodotus and Thucydides, and the physician Hippocrates, whose oath of medical ethics still has relevance for doctors of medicine in the West today. Finally, Thales, Anaximander, Pythagoras, Archimedes, and Euclid were just a few of the Greek thinkers who between them established the principles of mathematics and scientific method that two thousand years later would set off another intellectual explosion, giving us the modern world as we know it.

Simply reciting such a litany of names makes it clear that, as Jaspers observes, “In this age were born the fundamental categories within which we still think today, and the beginnings of the world religions, by which human beings still live, were created. “Jaspers goes on: “Myths were remoulded, were understood at a new depth during this transition, which was myth-creating after a new fashion, at the very moment when the myth as a whole was destroyed... Man is no longer enclosed within himself. He becomes uncertain of himself and thereby open to new and boundless

16 I have revised the dates Sangharakshita gives in *What is the Sangha?* from more up-to-date sources, but have kept his spellings of the names of the axial sages. Lao-tzu, incidentally, may have been legendary.

17 However, Zoroaster is now thought by most scholars to predate the axial age, and his teachings do seem comparatively primitive.

possibilities... For the first time philosophers appeared. Human beings dared to rely on themselves as individuals.”

When we ask what such a diverse array of individuals have in common, this is the obvious answer. It is not simply that they were seminal figures – founders of religions or of schools of thought or of forms of artistic expression. They certainly did not think of themselves in such terms, even though, when we look back on what happened as a result of their lives, we can see that many of them did become founders in one way or another. No – what they all have in common is that they are all true individuals. They stand out from the mass of humanity, not because of whom they dominated, ruled over, or conquered, but because of who they were in themselves. Even across the gulf of millennia we recognize them as sharply defined individuals, and thus we can, in a way, enter into a personal relationship with them. They represent a new strain of human being that was simply not evident before this period. They thought independently. They were not psychologically dependent on the group. They were able to stand, if necessary, alone.¹⁸

The axial sages demonstrated to their followers new ways of looking at human life. They showed that anyone can independently choose a path through life. Anyone can decide to be ethical. And genuine ethics emerges from another legacy of the axial sages, the realisation that all human beings have the potential to be self-aware individuals in the way that the sages themselves were; everyone is worthy of compassion for the predicament they are in, and worthy of respect for the wise beings they can become. So the axial teachings tend to be universal, not to be restricted only to one ethnic group, nor to a privileged priesthood. Out of these axial age insights, the great universal spiritual traditions of the world emerged. Buddhism, the monotheistic religions of the Middle East, and several smaller universal religions all have their roots in the axial age.

Art and higher evolution

Despite some of them being associated with established religions, I think that the axial sages such as the Buddha stand out particularly for their individual spiritual penetration. Any religious tradition founded or reformed by them came from their compassionate wish to share their discoveries, rather than from any wish to carve some ideology or creed in tablets of stone. They were more like artists than priests, and Sangharakshita suggests that ‘true individuals’ from the axial age to the present can be most reliably found among writers, composers, painters and so on. One way we can understand the evolutionary level of consciousness that the axial sages pioneered is to try to understand what it is like to be an artist, and what their work conveys to us. Sangharakshita writes:

If we agree that the artist experiences a higher level – that is, a more comprehensive, more powerful degree – of awareness than ordinary people, then the work of art expresses that degree of awareness – not only expresses it but communicates it, in the sense that when the communication succeeds, we experience for the time being, to a lesser degree, the state of consciousness in which the artist produced it. This is the communication of the artist. Temporarily at least, we are raised to his or her level; we become a true individual. Temporarily, we share his or her sense of values and insight, and this can transform our lives.

18 *What is the Sangha?*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, pp.42-46.

This is ultimately what the evolution of our humanity is about. Transformation is evolution. It is not an outward change but a change of level. Artists, therefore, are not only more highly evolved themselves but, through the art by which they communicate their experience of themselves, they contribute to the higher evolution of other people.

Enjoyment of great works of art broadens and deepens our own consciousness. When we listen to a great piece of music, see a great painting, read a great poem – when we really experience it, allow it to soak into us – we go beyond our ordinary consciousness. We become more generous in our sympathies; our whole life is subtly but deeply modified. If we persist in pursuing an interest in the arts, our whole mode of being may be affected, and our lives may even be transformed.

Today, traditional religion – in the form of Christianity, at least – has lost its unquestioned hold on the minds of people in the West. The astonishing architectural monuments to Christianity are still around us, but however glorious some of them may be, for most people they are empty shells. For the vast majority of people, orthodox religion is no longer a means of grace. We don't get anything from it. It means nothing to us. It no longer uplifts us, or moves us, or transforms us, much less still transfigures us. People aren't even against it any more.

As the title of my own book on art¹⁹ is meant to suggest, for many people the place and function of religion has been taken over by art. This is one of the reasons, I think, for the immense popularity today of all the fine arts – for despite all the grumbling one hears about the decay of culture, the fine arts are hugely popular as they have never been before. Formerly the enjoyment of works of art was the privilege of a few. Five hundred years ago in England, most of us would have been living in miserable hovels. We would never have seen any paintings except perhaps one or two in the local church, and we would have heard little music of any quality. As for reading, hardly anyone read for pleasure, or even at all. Enjoyment of high culture was the privilege of no more than a few wealthy ecclesiastics and noblemen. Even as late as the eighteenth century, how many people heard the works of Bach, Haydn, or Mozart performed? A few tens of thousands at the very most – and sometimes only a few hundred bored aristocrats.

But nowadays the artistic heritage of the ages is within the reach of practically everyone. The music of the great composers may be heard and enjoyed over and over again, by millions of people throughout the world. High culture is being disseminated on an unprecedented scale. What results this is likely to have we can only guess, but there must be some possibility that the sudden mass availability of high culture will start to exert a slow and steady refining influence on a considerable and influential section of the population.

If it is true that the arts have taken the place of religion, this is because they form an integral part, not of religion in the narrow sense, but of the spiritual life. And if I am right in this analysis, we should encourage all the fine arts, as an integral part of the spiritual life and the evolution of our humanity.

19 *The Religion of Art*, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications.

Realising potentials through artistic creation

One final question remains to be addressed, and it concerns the psychology of artistic creation. How and why is it that, for the artist, the production of works of art should be a means – even the means – of higher evolution? What happens when the artist creates?

In brief, when artists create, they objectify. And when you objectify, you can assimilate. This is not unlike what happens in the process of traditional Buddhist visualization exercises. When, for instance, in meditation, we visualize the Buddha, we close our eyes and we see – we try actually to see rather than just think about – first, an expanse of green, with an expanse of blue sky above it, and in between, a Bodhi tree. Then at the foot of the Bodhi tree, we see the figure of the Buddha in orange robes. We see the supremely peaceful features, the golden complexion, the gentle smile, the curly black hair, the colours of his aura. We see all this as vividly as if the Buddha himself was sitting before us. And in what we visualize we recognize the spiritual qualities of the Buddha; in his face we see wisdom, compassion, tranquillity, fearlessness, and so on. Drawing gradually nearer to the visualized image, and thus to those qualities, we feel as if the visualized image was drawing nearer to us. We feel that we are absorbing within ourselves the Buddha's own qualities.

If we persevere in this exercise, if we keep it up not just for a few days, but for months, even years, eventually a time will come when we fully assimilate all these qualities of the Buddha, and become one with him in that meditation experience. When that happens, the unenlightened being is transformed into the Enlightened Being, and we realize our own Buddha nature. But in the course of this practice, in the process of this exercise, what has really happened?

What has happened is that our own potential – that is to say Buddhahood – which was there all the time, unknown and unrecognized, in the heart of our own being, the depths of our own nature, has become actual; it has been realized. But it has been realized by being objectified, by being seen 'out there' (even though it is 'in here'). Having been objectified in this way, it has been gradually assimilated, more and more, until we become one with it.

The same sort of thing happens in the case of artistic creation. When we say that the artist creates out of his or her experience of some higher level of being, it is not quite as simple and straightforward as that makes it sound. It is not that the artist has the experience itself fully and perfectly and completely before creating anything. Someone who did that would not be an artist at all, but a mystic, which is something else and, at least potentially, something higher. The artist's starting point is a vague sense of something that he or she clarifies and intensifies in the process of creating the work of art. The original creative experience of the artist is like a seed which is bursting with life but whose nature is fully revealed only when the flower blooms, when the work of art itself stands complete and perfect. But however fine the objects one creates, whatever their transforming power, the highest aim of any artist must be the same as that of any human being. Each of us must aim to be ourselves our own finest work of art, to, "Give style to our character." in Nietzsche's phrase – to become, that is, a true individual.²⁰

20 *What is the Sangha?*, Sangharakshita, pp. 136-9.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How and why might self-reflective consciousness have first arisen in the early humans? Did it confer any evolutionary advantage in the Darwinian sense of the word? (Note that this is a topic much debated among the so-called 'evolutionary psychologists').
2. Consider a 'sage' from the axial age of whom you have some knowledge – e.g. the Buddha. What do the records we have of their life and work tell us about their level of consciousness?
3. What makes a religious tradition universal?
4. Which conditions tend to support the emergence of true individuals? Consider their social, political, religious and economic environment, their education, parenting and so on.
5. Choose a favourite highly creative person (an 'artist'). What effect does his or her work have on you? Can you guess at his or her degree of awareness when they produced it? Were they always in an elevated state of consciousness?
6. Have you ever tried any sort of artistic creation? If so, could you see it as helping your higher evolution?
7. Could other endeavours "create a higher level of being" in the way that art is here said to? Consider engagement in sport or a craft, or in scientific or philosophical enquiry, in psychological analysis or in meditation.



Further reading

The Great Transformation: the World in the Time of Buddha, Socrates, Confucius and Jeremiah, Karen Armstrong, Atlantic, 2006. A very detailed account of the axial age.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=JCWDTTudNEgC>

The Prehistory of the Mind: The Cognitive Origins of Art, Religion and Science, Steven Mithen, Thames and Hudson, 1996.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=jT2QQgAACAAJ>

The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature, Bruno Snell, Dover, 1982.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=9wagIUQ81EkC>

Sangharakshita, *The Religion of Art* (Windhorse Publications, 1988).

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-religion-of-art-sangharakshita-classics/>

- Developing one's mind.
- Simple consciousness, self-reflective consciousness, transcendental consciousness, and absolute consciousness.
- Choosing to evolve further once self-reflective consciousness has arisen.
- The formidable task of higher evolution.
- A table of levels of consciousness.

Introductory

Higher evolution being a matter for the individual, we have to think of it not in general, but in particular, even personal terms. Having looked at the vast processes of evolution as if through a telescope, we must take a microscope to the subject and examine how the individual evolves or develops. Under the microscope we shall be putting, in effect, ourselves.

The development of both our physical and our mental powers is severely limited by our evolutionary genetic inheritance. But in the mind there lies the possibility of a continued development, of what I am calling a higher evolution. In a sense, we are mind rather than body, and if our future lies anywhere, it lies in the mind. In other words, the future evolution of humanity will be mainly, if not exclusively, psychological and spiritual.²¹

Evolving further, then, means working on our own minds, which is the basic project of Buddhism. We are joining the adventure which was pioneered by the axial sages, and is presented in the work and lives of the great artists.

Evolving further means recognising our capacity for self-reflective consciousness (Sangharakshita just writes 'self consciousness') and strengthening it through the practice of mindfulness, as explored in Unit V. It also means recognising the possibility of higher levels of consciousness; that is, states in which one's awareness becomes wider and wider, and one's sense of a tightly bounded self is loosened more and more. Sangharakshita continues:

Four levels of consciousness

What are the successive stages in the development of consciousness? If we distinguish them on the basis of their respective objects, we can make out four degrees or levels of consciousness: simple consciousness, self-consciousness,

21 *What is the Sangha?*, Sangharakshita, pp. 98-9, abridged.

transcendental consciousness, and absolute consciousness. These terms are provisional – others might conceivably do just as well. Alternatively, for example, these levels could be called sense consciousness, subjective consciousness, objective consciousness, and universal consciousness.

The first level – simple consciousness – is synonymous with sense-based perception. It consists, that is to say, in awareness of sensations arising from contact between the sense organs and the external world. This is the level of consciousness we share with animals; it connects us with the vast process of biological evolution, a process of almost unimaginable extent, stretching from the simplest unicellular organism to the miraculous intricacies of our biological functions as primates.

The second level – self-consciousness – is not merely perceiving, or even conceiving (through the cognitive sense). You perceive that you perceive. You are aware that you are aware. Not only do you experience sensations, feelings, emotions, thoughts, and volitions, and so on; you experience yourself as experiencing them. Not only are you aware of what comes to you through your senses; you are able to stand aside, as it were, and be aware of yourself as being aware of the things you are sensing, rather than being, as it were, immersed in them, identified with them.

It is in this reflexive form of consciousness – consciousness bending back, as it were, on itself – that our humanity most characteristically resides. It connects us with the tens of thousands of years in which self-reflective consciousness has gradually allowed us to distinguish ourselves from the rest of the animal world. Here we find ourselves in the human realm proper, the realm explored in the cognitive and social sciences. This is the culmination of the lower evolution and the inauguration of the higher evolution. It stands as a watershed between the two, and is thus of crucial importance. However, this is not all we are capable of: we can go further still.

With the development of full self-consciousness we see ourselves as we truly are. With the development of the third level, transcendental consciousness, we see the world as it really is. This is where philosophy and religion come into their own. It is where we make some kind of connection with the nature of reality, culminating in an experience of transcendental awareness. This awareness is of the higher spiritual reality that embraces both oneself and all conditioned existence – the whole evolutionary process. It is described as transcendental because it transcends the distinction between subject and object.

At least, up to a point. At this stage an object is still perceived as an object, but it is as though the 'line' where subject and object meet and divide off from each other is replaced by a crack – which may widen into a clear gap – through which shines the light of absolute or universal consciousness. Starting off as a narrow flickering shaft of light, this is the flash of insight in the light of which we see the transcendental. And this light in which we see the transcendental is also the light in which the transcendental sees us. In other words, the awareness or consciousness by which we know the transcendental is identical with the awareness or consciousness by which the transcendental knows us. Awareness is no longer wholly identified with the self and its subjective, psychological conditionings. It is for this reason that transcendental consciousness may also be spoken of as objective consciousness.

The fourth level, absolute or universal consciousness, is the gradual flowering of Buddhahood itself out of that experience of transcendental consciousness. It frees us from the whole cycle of human life and death, and may therefore be termed the supra-human level. The crack widens to become an aperture, and the aperture goes on opening out, expanding, as it were, to infinity. In this way consciousness becomes one with its object, which is infinite. Subject and object entirely disappear. Hence here there is nothing to be said.

The practical reality of how consciousness evolves – at least beyond the stages of the lower evolution – is obviously more various and uncertain than this account can suggest. There are all sorts of intermediate stages in the evolution of consciousness; I have delineated these four principal ones in order to give a clear, broad, and simple outline of the subject.

Choosing to evolve further

It has been suggested that the process of human gestation recapitulates in nine months the hundreds of millions of years of evolution that underlie the human species as a whole.²² The child also recapitulates in his or her early years the evolution of consciousness from simple consciousness to self-consciousness, from animal to primitive humanity. At the time of birth the child is an animal with merely animal needs; but within about three years he or she develops reason, memory, and language, and the rudimentary self-consciousness that these accomplishments reflect and nurture.

However, progress slows down dramatically during those first three years. From traversing the equivalent of hundreds of millions of years in the womb we go on to cover just a few million years of evolution during our first three years outside it. And after that point there is practically no development at all, in comparison with the staggering development that takes place in those early years. In the remaining years allotted to us, we learn to read and write, we acquire knowledge – even a great deal of it; we perhaps learn to paint or play the piano, and we almost certainly learn to drive a car. In other words we recapitulate, more or less sketchily, the history of civilization. But in terms of consciousness we remain throughout life more or less where we were at the age of three.

Why is this? Why do we stop at this point of rudimentary self-consciousness? The reason is to be found in the distinction between the lower evolution, which is a collective process, and the higher evolution, which is an individual achievement. The higher evolution cannot be recapitulated in the way the lower evolution is recapitulated in the development of the foetus. You can inherit simple consciousness from your parents, but not self-consciousness – much less transcendental consciousness. Even if you were lucky enough to have parents endowed with transcendental consciousness, you yourself would still have to start again from the beginning. The good news is that the path of the higher evolution can be traversed within the limits of a single human life.

²² It was once claimed that the human foetus in the womb literally traversed the forms of a single-celled creature, a worm, a fish, a reptile and so through all our evolutionary ancestors. This is not the case, but embryonic development does broadly pass through stages that resemble forms of life which get less and less primitive - Ratnaprabha.

The lower evolution carries us up to the point of rudimentary self-consciousness, and then it leaves us there. From then on, our progress depends on our own conscious effort. Without that, no further progress is possible. This predicament is somewhat reminiscent of another crucial episode in evolution, when life was leaving the sea in which it had been engendered and beginning to invade the dry land. The tide washes on to the shore sea-creatures that are developing a capacity to make some very limited use of conditions on land. ...Then, when the tide retreats, it leaves these creatures stranded on the shore, to make their own way. The sea cannot do any more for their development. Our predicament, we may say, is a little like theirs. Life has swept us on to the shores of self-consciousness and left us there to fend for ourselves. The general surge and flow of evolution can do no more for us. From here onwards it is all up to us individually.

We are therefore confronted with a choice – not a collective choice, not a choice facing us as a species, but an individual one. It confronts you and me. We – that is, you and I – can either stop where we now are, or continue the process of evolution. And if we do decide to continue, the evolution we embark on will mean one thing – the development of consciousness.

Moreover, if we continue the process of evolution, we can do so only by virtue of our individual determination and effort. Nature – Mother Nature, even – will not help us do it. A human existence is – and by definition must be – a struggle, even a fight. Life can seem just to drift along, and no doubt we can drift along with it. But if some aspects of life involve passively riding a prevailing current, the higher evolution is not one of them. Self-development – the development of consciousness to a higher level – is a struggle with some very recalcitrant material indeed.

This is because most of us, most of the time, think of self-development, if we think of it at all, in terms of physical or intellectual development. We may wake up in the morning and think, “I’m going to get fitter today” or, “I’m going to read something about Buddhism today.” But how often do our aspirations include the objective of developing our consciousness – self-development in the fully and distinctively human sense of the expression? If the answer is, “Not very often, if at all,” we have to face the fact that we are failing to lead truly human lives.

There is no compulsion to follow the path of the higher evolution. In fact, most people are not even aware of the possibility of doing so, and most of those who are don’t bother to take advantage of that awareness. Even being prepared to entertain such a question therefore puts one in a small minority. Any minority finds itself in a difficult position, and the minority who set out on the path of the higher evolution have the particular difficulty that it is a path from which it is very easy to be diverted.

The higher evolution is traditionally the concern of the universal religions – that is, the religions of the individual, the religions that speak not just to one particular ethnic group but, in principle, to all people. But today there is little to be gained from going to ministers, priests, and mullahs for guidance in how to develop one’s levels of consciousness. In most parts of the world – including Buddhist ones – the universal religions have become essentially ethnic in their concerns. They are part of the establishment, offering themselves as forms of community service and no more. There is probably more concern for the development of consciousness to be found

within the sphere of the arts and some branches of psychology than in more conventional attempts to live a spiritual life.

The challenge of higher evolution

...In the Dhammapada, the Buddha says, “It is difficult to attain the human state. It is difficult to hear the real truth. The arising of an Enlightened one is difficult.” To paraphrase, we can say that it is difficult really to be a human being – it is easier to withdraw from that challenge into a more or less animalistic state. It is difficult to develop self-consciousness, and more difficult still to develop transcendental consciousness. It is difficult to be an individual, to go on making an effort to be aware.

The difficulty has to be emphasized, not to discourage us, but to give us some hope of success. So long as we realize that the process is difficult and take that difficulty seriously, we shall be able to overcome it. But if we don’t allow ourselves to realize how difficult it is going to be, if we think it can’t be as difficult as all that, then we won’t be able to do so.

Although the odds are stacked against us, and the goal seems remote, our immediate task is clear. It is to develop our rudimentary self-consciousness into full self-consciousness, as well as to begin to develop the third level of consciousness, transcendental or objective consciousness. Though the third level cannot be perfected before the second is fully developed, the two are nonetheless developed together. The full development of self-consciousness perfects one’s humanity; and with the full development of transcendental consciousness, this makes one a Stream-entrant, someone in whom the influence of the higher evolution outweighs that of the lower evolution.

The higher evolution is a formidable proposition and it will take all our energy. If we are going to concern ourselves with it, we will have to concern ourselves with it – with the development of consciousness – always and everywhere. We cannot dedicate half our time and energy to it. It is all or nothing. Whatever situation confronts us, whatever experience befalls us, whatever opportunity presents itself to us, we always have to ask ourselves: “What bearing does this have – directly or indirectly – on the higher purpose I have set myself?” We have to raise this question in relation to our work, our personal relationships, our social, cultural, and sporting activities, our interests – the books we read, the music we listen to, the films we watch. The question is always the same: what effect is this going to have on my development as a human being?

Making the living of a religious or even spiritual life in a conventional sense our main consideration will not necessarily have any kind of positive impact on our development. But if we make the development of consciousness the primary motivation in everything we do, we will make sure progress. And if we don’t – well, we won’t.²³

More levels of consciousness

Sangharakshita here takes us from self-reflective consciousness to the Insight that transcends subject and object, and forms the ground for fully enlightened consciousness. Importantly, it is

23 *What is the Sangha?*, Sangharakshita, pp. 99-105, abridged, subheadings added.

not that one abandons lower evolutionary levels in order to clamber up to the higher ones. The lower are enfolded in the higher²⁴; we still have our animal needs and drives, and basic self awareness remains as transcendental consciousness strengthens. Basic instincts and drives can easily be expressed in destructive or self-centred ways, but patient awareness practice makes available the vital energies they represent. We don't want to walk away from our animal nature or rise above our instincts and drives through will or training; we want to integrate them in awareness.

Buddhism also describes higher levels of consciousness that build on self-reflection, but fall short of transcendental Insight. These are the meditative states which you probably encountered in earlier modules, and which we will revisit in the next Unit. Meanwhile, here is a table based on The Evolving Mind to add detail to Sangharakshita's hierarchy of levels of consciousness. His 'simple consciousness' covers levels 2-5; 'self-consciousness' covers levels 6-8; 'transcendental consciousness' level 9, and 'absolute consciousness' level 10. If you are interested in the levels below self-reflection, you can find explanations and references in *The Evolving Mind*.

24 Ken Wilber talks about transcending *and* including.

Levels in the evolution of consciousness²⁵

Level of consciousness	Characteristics	Animals possessing it
10. Enlightenment	All aspects of the personality transformed in the light of transcendental wisdom, all actions springing from compassion. Sangharakshita's 'absolute' or 'universal' consciousness.	Some humans
9. Non-dual insight	Some experience of insight, incorporating transcendental wisdom and compassion. Third training: wisdom. Sangharakshita's 'transcendental' or 'objective' consciousness'.	Some humans
8. Absorption, level of pure form	Highly concentrated, integrated, unified and blissful consciousness. Not sense-based. Absorption in object of awareness, so subject-object split attenuated. Negative emotions in temporary abeyance. Increasing calmness and balance. Enlightenment-factors (4)-(7). Second training: meditation.	Some humans
7. Full self-reflection or mindfulness	Fully rational thinking, awareness of unity of life and possibility of directed transformation, independent individuality, highly creative awareness. Unselfishness. Mindfulness. First training: ethics.	Some humans (first in the axial age)
6. Beginnings of self-reflection	Speech, verbal concepts, abstraction, deliberate altruism, deceit, conscious emotions, alienation from experience, systematic invention and planning. Deliberate transmission of culture - strongly group-based. Conformism. Sangharakshita's 'self-consciousness' or 'subjective consciousness' begins.	Humans only
5. Centred experience	Simple consciousness. Dream experience. Associative 'thinking' with non-verbal concepts. Planning, problem-solving, complex communication. Flexible cultural traditions.	The most intelligent mammals
4. Representation	Images combined in ideas and mental representations; memory, anticipation, likes and dislikes. Communication and imitation learning, exploratory and innovative behaviour. Beginnings of cultural transmission.	Birds and mammals
3. Perception and association	Recognition of complex stimuli by comparison with innate 'images', goal-directed behaviour, association-learning, training.	Animals with central nervous systems
2. Recognition	Recognition of simple classes of sensations, fully stereotyped responses. Sensitization and habituation 'learning'. Sangharakshita's 'simple' or 'sense' consciousness begins.	Animals with nerve-nets
1. No consciousness		Non-living matter, living things without nervous systems

²⁵ Table from *The Evolving Mind*, p.187. Look in the index to *The Evolving Mind* for an explanation of some of the terms used.



Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What are the advantages in experiencing higher levels of consciousness? Could an understanding of higher levels of consciousness inspire you to practice? Are there any disadvantages to experiencing higher levels of consciousness?
2. *"The development of consciousness to a higher level is a struggle with some very recalcitrant material indeed."*
Do you aspire to do this? Do you find spiritual development difficult? What gets in the way of higher levels of consciousness?
3. *"We always have to ask ourselves... what effect is this going to have on my development as a human being?"*
Is it realistic to apply this to every situation? Do you give yourself holidays from developing your consciousness?
4. Sangharakshita suggests that conventional religion (even conventional eastern Buddhism) is unlikely to help much in developing one's consciousness, and suggests the arts or psychology as alternatives. What has helped you in maturing your consciousness?
5. *"The awareness or consciousness by which we know the transcendental is identical with the awareness or consciousness by which the transcendental knows us. Awareness is no longer wholly identified with the self."*
Can you get a sense of an awareness that transcends subject and object? Sangharakshita's language here sounds a bit like the theistic idea of a powerful being (God) watching us. What is the difference?
6. Can you recall how your mind developed through childhood? Is it true that there was little progress in your level of consciousness after the age of three?
7. Further evolution, says Sangharakshita, needs to be undertaken by each person individually. Some people believe that the whole human species will enter a new age in which all human consciousness finds itself at a higher level. What do you think of this theory? Is there any way in which higher evolution could enhance society in general?
8. *"Lower evolutionary levels... are enfolded in the higher."*
Do you sometimes wish that your 'animal' drives would just go away? How might you see them being gradually integrated and serving a spiritual purpose?

Further reading

The Evolving Mind, Chapters 5 and 10.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=A49mAAAACAAJ>

The Spectrum of Consciousness, Ken Wilber, Quest, 1993.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=Wvw9pzzp1C0C>

- What does a higher evolutionary path look like?
- Buddhist paths of practices and paths of mental states.
- The seven factors of enlightenment.
- How to cultivate mindfulness.
- How self-awareness can give rise to a defensive ego, or to true mindfulness.

The path in principle

How can you decide upon a particular path to follow? In a way, you have no choice. Higher evolution goes by many names, but it is one process, one path: whatever leads from 'here' to enlightenment. Segments, at least, of that path can be found in other belief systems. To the extent that those truly take one forward, they are in principle the same as the equivalent parts of the Buddhist path.

Although there is only one path of higher evolution, everybody's experience is unique: each person's life is made up of a flow of mental states which are unique to that individual. The possibilities of human life are endless, and both the succession of experiences and the details of the particular states must be different for each person. What is more, not all belief systems are equally effective in aiding one on the path, some indeed advocating goals which seem to fall far short of enlightenment and some not clearly teaching a path of transformation at all. However, one is faced each moment by a choice: either one seeks satisfaction on one's current level, hoping for happiness from habitual ego-strengthening techniques, or one creates out of present experience something unknown and new, of a more exalted nature. The latter ever-present potential for self-transcendence is something that everyone has in common, and in that sense there is only one path.

There is only one path in a more specific sense, too. The path of higher evolution is unique in that it always involves passing through a particular series of levels of consciousness, in a particular order. In essence, the path is an evolutionary succession of states of consciousness, leading on from lower evolution. How do you practise the levels that build on self-reflective consciousness?

The path of higher evolution is an 'inner' journey, a sequence of levels of consciousness, of types of experience, if you like. It can also be described in terms of actions, the practices appropriate at each level, which lead one up to the next level. Yet the two merge. Each practice represents a certain experienced state of mind; each state is reflected in appropriate action. So some versions of the Buddhist path mainly tell you what practices to work on. Think of the Three Trainings (ethics, meditation and wisdom), or the Noble Eightfold Path. Others tell you what sequence of mental states to cultivate. They include the Twelve Positive Nidānas, studied in earlier modules, and the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*Bodhyāṅgas*), which we shall

consider here.²⁶ The Dharma provides a framework or model for understanding life and experience, and it also provides a programme of action. The model particularly focuses on the scale of consciousness from ignorance to enlightenment; the programme describes how to make the transition. In the last unit we looked at a model of levels of consciousness, here let's also have a look at how to move up the levels, and then return to concentrate on the base level of spiritual practice, mindfulness.

The Seven Bodhyaṅgas in general

This list is taught frequently in almost all branches of Buddhism, being very prominent in the Pāli Canon and also in the scriptures of the Mahayana. The starting point is self-awareness, mindfulness, because you can clearly only deliberately cultivate your mind if you can make conscious choices and decisions, which you cannot do without self-awareness. The 'factors' are literally the seven limbs or branches (*aṅgas*) of Bodhi, and they are described as follows in one Pāli source.

Ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome covetousness and grief concerning the world, then unremitting mindfulness is established in him. ... on that occasion the mindfulness enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to perfection in him.

Abiding thus mindful, he investigates and examines that state with understanding and embarks on a scrutiny (of it). ... on that occasion the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to perfection in him.

In him who investigates and examines that state with understanding and embarks upon a scrutiny of it, tireless energy is aroused. ... on that occasion the energy enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to perfection in him.

In him who has aroused energy, unworldly rapture arises. ... on that occasion the rapture enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to perfection in him.

The body and mind of one whose mind is held in rapture become tranquillised. ... on that occasion the tranquillity enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to perfection in him.

The mind of one who is tranquillised in body and blissful becomes concentrated. ... On that occasion the concentration (*samādhi*) enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to perfection in him.

He becomes one who looks with complete equanimity on the mind thus concentrated. ... On that occasion the equanimity enlightenment factor is aroused in him, and he develops it, and by development it comes to perfection in him.

²⁶ Adapted from *The Evolving Mind*, 162-4.

...Thus developed, thus repeatedly practised, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment perfect clear vision and deliverance [i.e. enlightenment].²⁷

Using the system of the Seven Bodhyaṅgas, we can discern the following process:

1. **Recollection or mindfulness.** Full self-reflective consciousness – is the starting point for the spiral path, and it is repeatedly stressed that mindfulness is vital for any spiritual practice.
2. **Investigation of mental states.** In a state of clear self-awareness, one is in a position to investigate what is going on in the mind, to get the flavour of different thoughts and emotions, recognizing which ones are unskilful and which ones are skilful.
3. **Energy.** Having sorted out one's stream of mental states, one then applies attention and energy to the skilful ones, and withdraws it from the unskilful ones. This process of mental spring-cleaning liberates large amounts of psychic energy previously locked up in anxiety and mental conflict, and the free flow of energy is experienced as rapture.
4. **Rapture.** This is an intense thrill or happiness of body and mind, which may be felt in meditation, human communication, artistic pursuits, or in daily activities intensely experienced.
5. **Tension release.** Once the mind has been purified for the time being of negative, unskilful mental states, and the tensions and conflicts thus released have ceased gushing up in rapture, one emerges into a state of tranquillity or tension release, a state usually only accessible during deep meditation. Sangharakshita writes: "the excitement... of the [rapture] has died away and you are left with a calm, steady feeling of pure happiness. To use a homely image, it is like what happens when a bee collects nectar from flowers. First it locates the flower, then it alights on it with a loud buzzing sound and crawls within the petals. So long as the bee has not found the nectar the buzzing sound continues, but as soon as it finds it, the sound stops."²⁸
6. **Samadhi.** The clear tranquil mind is able to be fully one-pointed, with no distractions or disturbances, and it can expand and float gently up into successively higher or deeper states of meditative absorption or *samādhi*. By *samādhi* here is meant a temporary state of very powerful, lucid awareness, in which there may be no conceptual thinking going on at all. You can see it as the next major evolutionary level of consciousness, following mindfulness.
7. **Balance or Equanimity.** The still transparency of *samādhi* encourages any mental processes not previously accessible to awareness (the subconscious and unconscious 'mind') to emerge into full consciousness. Any disharmonies within consciousness can consequently be gradually resolved, and one's attitude to others can become perfectly unprejudiced and even-minded. This is balance or equanimity. Balance begins as a state of mind present in deep meditation, but by influencing other aspects of experience, mindfully contemplated, it permits biases and obscurations of vision to be eradicated, leading to a growing non-dual awareness or insight. Once meditative balance has helped to transform one's fundamental view of existence, it becomes a complete equilibrium of being, a state of poise characterising enlightenment itself.²⁹ Sangharakshita describes it like this:

If you have [balance] you are like a mountain: solid, massive, and unshakable, even if the winds blow from all the corners of the earth. Whichever of the eight worldly winds – happiness or sorrow, praise or blame, loss or gain, fame or infamy

27 *The Ānāpānasati Sutta of the Majjhima Nikāya*, Translated by Nanamoli, Mindfulness of Breathing (Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1964) pp.10-13.

28 *What Is the Dharma?*, Sangharakshita, p.135.

29 Adapted from *The Evolving Mind*, pp.168-9,

– is buffeting us, we needn't let it affect us. We can be just like the mountain. With the development of [balance] in its fullest sense, the last of the seven factors of Enlightenment is present; and we become as unshakable as the Buddha himself.³⁰

The Kindred Sayings (Saṃyutta Nikāya) has a whole section on the bodhyaṅgas in which spiritual friendship is described as the forerunner and harbinger of the seven bodhyaṅgas as dawn is of the sun. One disciple is very excited when he is told of the bodhyaṅgas by the Buddha, and he exclaims: "Lord, the fatigue of body and mind that I had in climbing up the hill Vulture's Peak is all allayed, and I have fully grasped the Dharma."³¹

Personally, I find the scheme of the bodhyaṅgas very useful, because they provide a clear picture of how to work with one's self-awareness, how to build on mindfulness. Their fault is that the other-regarding angle is only implicit. (It is implied by the teachings on investigation and energy, in which the skilful includes compassion, loving-kindness, generosity etc.) They don't tell us much about awakening, in the sense of full enlightenment. But they do provide an approach to waking up. They recommend taking advantage of being mindful, by investigating mental habits, and they transform the mind in a systematic way.

We don't have space here to consider all the bodhyaṅgas in detail. However, consolidating self-reflective consciousness, i.e. mindfulness practice, is always the bedrock of the higher evolutionary path, so the rest of this unit looks at how to do it. Mindfulness is always within reach. Mindfulness meditation can familiarise us with it, but it is well worth looking for ways to be more mindful at work, at home, in transitions such as finishing a meal and starting to wash up, and even when prepare for sleep and rousing ourselves in the morning.

Cultivating mindfulness or recollection

Full self-reflective consciousness is necessary as a starting point for the spiral path of higher evolution. In higher evolution, we are deliberately choosing to work to transform our own mind, raising its level of consciousness step by step. So a reflective awareness of our own mind cannot be dispensed with. In Buddhism the level of full self-reflective consciousness is called the state of 'recollection', more commonly but less literally translated as 'mindfulness'.

As man-like apes became ape-like human beings, self-reflective consciousness was foreshadowed as experience started to focus around a centre. Then awareness turned to this centre itself, and the observed centre became fixed by concepts and words: I, mine, and so on. Full self-reflection – mindfulness – was never a persistent feature of human experience. It has to be discovered anew by every child, and thereafter it comes and goes, illuminating the self fitfully, like lightning in a midnight downpour.

The arising of mindfulness is a mysterious process. For much of the time we are in a drifting or mechanical state, chasing dreamy thoughts or images, or performing familiar actions without being fully 'there'. Yet as soon as we notice this unmindfulness, it has gone, like darkness, which cannot be seen by switching on the light. The process of drifting out of and snapping back into mindfulness is particularly noticeable during meditation, but it happens all the time.

The first task in spiritual practice is to improve the continuity of your mindfulness. Mindfulness of your surroundings, of your actions and bodily sensations, of your feeling-responses and emotional states, of your thoughts, and of other people – all these are

³⁰ *What Is the Dharma?*, Sangharakshita, pp. 135-6.

³¹ *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, V, pp. 60, 65-6 and 109.

emphasised again and again by Buddhist meditation teachers. 'Being here now' and not daydreaming of what was or ought to be is crucially important, yet this does not preclude a strong sense of your continuity in time. Both memory and a clear awareness of purpose are aspects of mindfulness. Unmindfulness can imply not being present, but it can also refer to forgetfulness, where we may be fully in the flow of present experience, but lose our sense of purpose to the extent of, say, completely forgetting we'd agreed to meet a friend for lunch.

If you suspect that all is not right with yourself and the world, and that matters could be improved, that suspicion will have arisen when you were in a mindful state. In particular, you may become aware of just how unaware you usually are, and want to improve on that. Paradoxically, while self-reflective consciousness can be seen as 'not merely to know, but to know that one knows', as the Jesuit evolutionist Teilhard de Chardin defines it, it also brings with it a painful consciousness of how much remains unknown. So mindfulness includes a sober assessment of unsatisfactoriness, and a growing faith in the potential for transformation, even an intuitive response to the possibility of a non-dual form of awareness.

The mysterious nature of the arising of mindfulness means that you cannot promote it unless you already have it (though you can help others regain their mindfulness if you notice that they are being unmindful). Whenever you are in a mindful state, that is the time for strengthening mindfulness, and for working on the higher factors of Enlightenment. Mindfulness is particularly strengthened by avoiding distractions and by practising meditation exercises that bring about one-pointedness of mind. One is advised to shun, for the time being, those situations which scatter one's attention or disquiet one's mind, and to, "Guard the doors of the senses" carefully noticing all the stimuli that enter one's senses and what effect they have, and acting accordingly.

Some Buddhist practices demand careful preparation and special circumstances, but mindfulness is possible in every situation. There is no time at which mindfulness is not appropriate, and a positive, skilful state of mind must invariably be a mindful one. This is why mindfulness (self-reflective consciousness) is the base and starting point of all higher evolution: it provides the necessary spark for every progressive act.

Integrated awareness and the Ego

The kind of genuine mindfulness which Buddhist practices intend to bring about is not a distanced watcher monitoring the mind (alienated awareness). It is a state in which one is completely involved in experience, without being swept away by negative emotions. Consider talking to an acquaintance as an example. Without mindfulness, you are thinking of other things, easily distracted from the other person, perhaps quick to get bored or become annoyed or dismissive. The conversation is unsatisfying and probably unproductive. With an alienated observer attitude, you are not distracted, but detached from the actual experience of communicating, watching yourself speak as if from a distance. There is no sense of flow in it, just a coldly evaluating commentary; no real feeling is involved (more likely, feelings are repressed). With true mindfulness, you are undistractedly with the other person, fully emotionally engaged and aware of your feelings, responsive to the other. So practising mindfulness, you try to become less entangled in habitual emotional reactions, without losing touch with your actual feelings, whatever they are, cultivating a fully integrated awareness.

When you are aware of your own awareness, you have a partial control over your mind. As well as being the only foundation for a positive development of the mind, this partial control can also result in emotional alienation if misapplied. The danger lies in the maintenance of a defensive ego.

Clinging to the conception of I, to a lump-of-concrete view of the self, does not accord with the fluidity of real life. The imagined self seems fragile, vulnerable, and incomplete. One is tempted all the time either to defend the ego against perceived threats, or to buttress it by accumulating 'possessions' from which it can derive a more solid identity. Such possessions range from a strong identification with the physical body, through material objects and social and sexual recognition, to the subtlest of views and attitudes. Defending the ego produces the emotions of aversion or hatred, and fear. Buttressing it with possessions produces the emotion of craving. Clearly, aversion and craving are our sophisticated, self-aware outgrowths of animal aversion and attraction.

With self-reflective consciousness, understanding dawns that one is indeed an autonomous self, capable of forming independent judgements and of choosing between courses of action. So far, this is an evolutionary advance; it is an expansion in awareness. Without self-reflective consciousness, the evolutionary advance would be completely stalled, and we would languish in the world of dumb animals. Yet without self-reflective consciousness, ego's obsessive constructions would not be possible. Treading the middle path between unawareness and self-obsession means consciously choosing an unflinching awareness of unpleasant realities as well as pleasant ones, and of uncomfortable emotions as well as clear observation.

Although the beginnings of self-reflective awareness are accompanied by these negative side effects, in its fully developed form as mindfulness or integrated awareness it has consequences which are entirely positive in the long run. By exercising mindfulness, one may dispel the darkness of ignorance. Integrated awareness effects further integration. The centre of experience, now fully aware of itself as a centre, can bring more and more elements of the mind constructively into its orbit. This integrating process is very noticeable if one takes up the systematic cultivation of mindfulness. The centred experience need not now be a fixed ego; nevertheless one recognises a distinct but ever-changing 'self', growing in strength and continuity.

One can only change and transform oneself if one's self-experience is made more vivid through practising mindfulness. Then one swings less between contradictory moods, one feels more solid, definite, and contented. Without mindfulness practice, one's personality can seem fragmented into what can amount to several competing 'selves', coming to the fore in different circumstances. Because mindfulness provides a strengthened sense of continuity, knitting the various selves together, it can be associated with the true individuality which has been a characteristic of the great pioneers of individualised consciousness in the axial age and since. Full self-reflective consciousness must have been required for their independence of thought, explorations in awareness, creativity, and concern for others. The appearance of these qualities provides evidence of the first clear appearance of mindfulness in human history.³²

With mindfulness, you can work directly on your mind, using investigation and energy. It's not only in meditation that you can become sensitive to the ethical flavour of your thoughts and impulses (the second bodhyaṅga), and then feed the expansive, skilful ones (the third bodhyaṅga). Then, chiefly in meditation, you can develop the purified consciousness of the higher factors of enlightenment. Using mindfulness, you can also reflect deeply on the real nature of your experience, cultivating insight, seeing through the fixed defended self, and softening the barrier between self and other.

³² *The Evolving Mind*, pp.170-5, abridged.



Suggestions for reflection, research, and discussion

1. Choose a teaching of a spiritual path, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, other than the seven bodhyaṅgas. Does it lead from 'here' to enlightenment? Does it describe successively higher levels of consciousness, a sequence of practices, or what?
2. Describe which of the seven bodhyaṅgas you can recognise in your own life and practice.
3. Why are other-regarding actions and mental states important in the path of higher evolution?
4. What has helped you to cultivate mindfulness? How has mindfulness supported your practice?
5. What is meant by alienated awareness? What does this feel like in your own experience?



Further Reading

Living with Awareness, Sangharakshita, Windhorse Publications, pp. 136-149. The Seven Factors of Enlightenment.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/living-with-awareness-a-guide-to-the-satipatthana-sutta/>

The Bodhisattva and the Principle of Evolution

- Fellow-feeling from awareness of our evolutionary interconnectedness.
- The bodhisattva as uniting wisdom and compassion.
- The evolutionary heroes of the Jātaka stories.
- A self-transcending urge in living things.
- The bodhisattva revealing the secret of evolution.
- Collective consciousness and the Sangha.
- Modern ideas of evolutionary spirituality.

Wisdom and solidarity

The Buddhist path, higher evolution, is an extension of awareness. You try to become conscious of more and more – that is what is meant by ‘higher’ levels of consciousness. Your perspective opens, your wisdom develops, towards the enlightened consciousness of a Buddha, free both of the veil of unskilful reactions, and of the veil of mistaken views of reality. But your increasing perspective does not only look ahead in the evolutionary process, to awakening. It also, in a sense, gazes back down the pathways of evolution. We’ve all reached this point of self-reflective consciousness by following the same evolutionary process, and in lower evolution we all, all living things on the planet, are related. If we look far enough back, we find common ancestors. This means that seeing Buddhism as a part of a great evolutionary adventure offers more than a way of envisaging a higher evolution into increasing wisdom, it also promotes compassion, as we feel a sense of solidarity with our relatives – all human beings, all animals, all that lives. Focussing on ourselves, we look ahead at our individual evolutionary future. Focussing on others, we look back at our common evolutionary past. The more basic kinds of suffering and lack that we experience are similar to what other animals encounter, and our empathy with them can engender compassion.

In Buddhism, the figure embodying wisdom and compassion most clearly is the bodhisattva, and the bodhisattva reconciles competing focuses on self and other. In a paper written for a conference of ‘mystics and scientists’ in the mid 1980s, Sangharakshita proposes the bodhisattva as embodying an urge to enlightenment that evolution indicates to be potential in every living creature. Therefore he suggests that the bodhisattva is the key to both lower and higher evolution. This passage also includes a useful recapitulation of the differences between lower and higher evolution.

The bodhisattva

For Buddhism the idea of there being a parallel, or even a partial coincidence, between... The process of spiritual development as depicted in traditional Buddhist teaching and the course of human evolution as described by modern science is not a wholly fantastic one, as we can see by briefly referring to what modern scholarship

regards as the historical origins of the Bodhisattva Ideal. In the great autobiographical discourses of the Pāli Canon the Buddha often describes experiences as belonging to the period before his Enlightenment, and whenever he does this it is as a Bodhisattva, in the sense of a seeker after bodhi or Enlightenment, that he invariably refers to himself. Thus the term 'Bodhisattva' originally referred to the historical Buddha in his pre-Enlightenment days. But of course the Buddha or Buddha-to-be had lived even before being born as the son of Suddhodhana and Mayadevi, and had been a seeker after Bodhi or Enlightenment even then...

Gradually the use of the term Bodhisattva was extended, and came to refer to the Buddha in these previous existences of his, existences in which he had practised the Ten [Bodhisattva] Perfections, and his life as a Bodhisattva came to be regarded, for historical and doctrinal reasons into which I cannot enter now, as representing the ultimate spiritual ideal for all Buddhists. Details of these previous existences are given in a class of works known as *Jātakas* or 'Birth Stories'. [...In one class of] *Jātakas* the Buddha-to-be is invariably depicted as a famous sage or teacher of ancient times, or as a righteous king. That is to say, he is depicted as taking the lead, whether in the sphere of ethical and religious life or in the sphere of political activity. In [other] *Jātakas* he is depicted in a number of different ways, for instance as a caravan leader, a master mariner, a family priest, a tree spirit, a god, an ascetic, an elephant trainer, a thief, and a gambler. He is even depicted as an animal. In whatever way he is depicted, here too he is always the most outstanding member of his group or class, and besides practising the Ten Perfections displays, in human and non-human existences alike, exceptional qualities of responsibility, initiative, and enterprise. Here too the Buddha-to-be is always depicted as taking the lead.

The bodhisattva as the growing-point of evolution

Thus although there was 'no Darwinian rise from lower to higher forms' in the repeated births of Gautama Buddha there was certainly not, "A mere jumble of metamorphoses," as an eminent Victorian orientalist believed. A parallel, even a partial coincidence, between the process of spiritual development and the course of human evolution, can indeed be seen. ...There is an ascent, Darwinian or otherwise, from lower to higher, and this process is continuous with that of the Buddha's search for Enlightenment. [This does not mean] that the stories of the Buddha's previous existences form one continuous, progressive series analogous to the biological series of organic forms, or even that they could be arranged so as to form one. What it really means is that, despite their immense variety, all the [more fabulous] *Jātakas* follow the same pattern and exemplify the same principle.

A *Jātaka* is a Birth Story. In every story there is a hero. This hero is always the most outstanding member of his circle, and always takes the lead. Moreover this hero is none other than the Bodhisattva, i.e. the Buddha himself in a previous existence, and a Bodhisattva by definition is one who seeks after Bodhi or Enlightenment and practises the Ten Perfections. Thus the hero, or the being who represents the growing point of evolution within each group or class of beings, is at the same time the being who follows the Path. The course of human – and animal – evolution and the process of spiritual development are parts of one and the same upward movement of life and consciousness. We are therefore justified in speaking in terms of a Bodhisattva principle at work in every form of existence, from the lowest to the most lofty. As I have commented elsewhere, "The urge to Enlightenment is immanent in all forms

and spheres of life, from the humblest to the highest, and manifests whenever a kind and intelligent action is performed.”³³

Lower and higher evolution

This upward movement of life and consciousness, of which the course of evolution and the process of spiritual development both form part, is one that on planet Earth alone has continued for hundreds of millions of years. From the human point of view the most important point in the entire vast and complex movement is that at which sense consciousness evolved into reflexive consciousness or, in Buddhist terms, at which in dependence on sense consciousness reflexive consciousness arose. At that point man became man, i.e. an animal who in some respects resembled a man was succeeded by a man who in some respects resembled an animal. Reflexive consciousness means individuality. Individuality means spiritual development. (When I speak of individuality I am not, of course, speaking of individualism, a very different thing. I am speaking of the possibility of taking responsibility for one’s own life.) Spiritual development means the development of consciousness, that is to say, it is essentially an ascent through mental factors and mental states.

Evolution from amoeba³⁴ up to man-like animal is sometimes spoken of as the Lower Evolution. Similarly, evolution from animal-like man up to Buddha or Enlightened man is sometimes spoken of as the Higher Evolution. The Lower Evolution is a collective process, the Higher Evolution is an individual process. The one takes place unconsciously rather than consciously, and its course is erratic and uncertain; the other takes place consciously rather than unconsciously, and its course is more direct and definite. While one is measured in aeons, the other can be telescoped within a single human lifetime. Since the Bodhisattva principle, as I have called it, is at work in every form of existence, Lower Evolution and Higher Evolution are in reality continuous. The Buddha-to-be is identical with the human or animal hero of the Jātakas, and the human or animal hero of the Jātakas is identical with the Buddha-to-be.³⁵

Self-transcending

The message of the animal Jātakas is to point to a self-transcending ‘urge’ even in the lower evolution. In a seminar, Sangharakshita expresses the view that:

Life is essentially upward-moving. It isn’t just life, so to speak. That there is a sort of evolutionary urge, in the sense that life by its very nature, through its various upward expressions, is seeking ever higher and higher levels of expression.

So then this raises a sort of question: what is this vital urge, what is this evolutionary urge? One can only think of it in this sort of way: one can only as it were posit two elements or two forces, if you like, in interaction. You can call, if you like, the one the reactive and the other creative; you can call, if you like, the one matter, the other spirit. You can call, if you like, the one the conditioned and the other the unconditioned. It doesn’t really matter. But what you are really saying is that the creative, or spirit, or the unconditioned, is so to speak acting upon the reactive, acting

33 *The Three Jewels*, Sangharakshita, p. 8.

34 The amoeba, though smallish and single-celled, is not in fact very close to early forms of life.

35 *The Priceless Jewel*, Sangharakshita, pp.151-3, abridged and headings added.

upon the material, acting upon the conditioned, and acting upon it in such a way that should draw it upwards. You could speak of it as acting on it from within. You could speak of it as acting on it from without. The spatial imagery doesn't really matter, and can give rise to quite artificial difficulties and questions...

[Sangharakshita has termed this evolutionary urge the 'Cosmic Going for Refuge, and continues:] The Cosmic Going for Refuge merely means that every form of life has a tendency, one might say an innate tendency, to transcend itself; to move on to another, higher phase or mode of being. It would seem that this urge is innate in existence itself. Or, if one likes to put it in [philosophical] terms – being is essentially self-transcendent. Being is self-transcendence; self-transcendence is being.

But the question arises: even with regard to the process of the lower evolution, if you see it in as it were vitalistic terms, that also involves a process of genuine self-transcendence, because presumably man is a more developed being than the rat, and the rat than the amoeba. So even the lower evolution, it would seem, even in the process of the lower evolution, there is a movement of genuine self-transcendence, [not] to speak of in the process of the Higher Evolution. So perhaps one could say that the basic, the essential trend of existence as such... on this earth is towards self-transcendence, and that this finds its culmination and its fulfilment in the spiritual life. This is what I was trying to say, albeit in somewhat different terms, in the course of those lectures [on 'Evolution, Lower and Higher']. I find the highest fulfilment of that in the Bodhicitta.³⁶

The bodhisattva principle

...We might even say that in the Higher Evolution the Lower Evolution attains self-consciousness, and that this self-consciousness is the Bodhisattva and the Bodhisattva this self-consciousness. ...Buddhism sees in the figure of the Bodhisattva the highest embodiment of that urge to Enlightenment which is immanent in all forms and spheres of life. That urge becomes conscious, so to speak, in the process of the Higher Evolution, which in turn finds its fullest and clearest expression in the Path, particularly in that part of it which consists of the development or evolution of consciousness. Except in the light of the Bodhisattva, who embodies the common principle of them all in its clearest and most concentrated form, expressions such as Higher Evolution, Path, and development of consciousness remain unintelligible, or at best only partially intelligible. In the Bodhisattva, Buddhism finds its highest expression and its ultimate meaning. The Bodhisattva is indeed the meaning of human life, even the meaning of existence. Hence it is not surprising that the Bodhisattva principle should be regarded as the key to the evolution of consciousness, in fact the key to every manifestation of the progressive order of conditionality. By 'key' is not meant a scientific explanation of the evolution of consciousness, or of anything else, but a concept, or an image, in the light of which the whole process can not only be rendered intelligible but brought within a wider, more 'cosmic' context.

In terms of Western thought, the Bodhisattva principle is the principle of perpetual self-transcendence. Self-transcendence is the ultimate nature of Higher Evolution and Lower Evolution alike. Self-transcendence is the ultimate nature of existence. Above

36 Seminar on *The Noble Eightfold Path*, Sangharakshita, 1982.

all, it is the true meaning of everything that goes by the name of religion, spiritual life, development of consciousness, and so on.

Consciousness, individual and collective

Individual consciousness, which is broadly equivalent to reflexive consciousness, is the consciousness appropriate to the truly human, i.e. consciously evolving, individual. Such an individual is characterized by awareness, emotional positivity, responsibility, intelligence, creativity, spontaneity, imagination, and insight, and his consciousness is of the corresponding type.

...‘Collective consciousness’, in the present context, is [not mere group consciousness, but more like the Russian *sobornost*. It is] a special kind of consciousness common to, in a sense even shared by, a number of truly human individuals who follow the same spiritual disciplines and have the same spiritual ideals, or who are engaged in the same creative activities. Collective consciousness in this sense is as much above individual consciousness, taken separately, as group consciousness is below it. The Bodhisattva principle is the key to collective consciousness in this higher sense in that the Bodhisattva, even though appearing as an objectively existing personality, in reality transcends the distinction between subject and object, self and others.

‘Collective consciousness’ is the consciousness appropriate to... the Spiritual Community. By the Spiritual Community we mean [an association] of truly human individuals who have Enlightenment, the Path, and the Spiritual Community itself as their ideals or who, in traditional Buddhist language, go for Refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Of this Spiritual Community the Bodhisattva is the spirit, even as the Spiritual Community is the expression, at least to some extent, of the Bodhisattva principle in the world. It is the Bodhisattva who, from the Beyond which is within as well as from the Beyond which is without, leads the Spiritual Community, on the Path, to Enlightenment.³⁷

How does one become a Bodhisattva? How does one embark upon the actual realization of this sublime, spiritual ideal, the Bodhisattva Ideal? ... The Bodhicitta is not something which I will. Just as it is not my thought, it’s not my will. The Bodhicitta is no more an act of anybody’s individual will than it is anybody’s individual thought. We might, in fact – though here we have rather to grope for words – think of the Bodhicitta as a sort of ‘Cosmic will’. (I don’t quite like to use this word ‘will’, but there’s really no other.) A sort of cosmic will. If you like a will at work in the world, at work in the universe, in the direction of what we can only think of as 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 higher and ever higher degrees of spiritual perfection. So, this being the case, it is clear that individuals do not possess the Bodhicitta. (If you possess it, it’s not the Bodhicitta, you’ve got hold of something else.) We may say that it is the Bodhicitta that possesses individuals. And those of whom the Bodhicitta ‘takes possession’, as it were, in whom this Bodhicitta arises, or within whom it manifests, become what we call ‘Bodhisattvas’. They live for the sake of

³⁷ *The Priceless Jewel*, Sangharakshita, pp.153-5, abridged and headings added.

Enlightenment; they strive to actualize, for the benefit of all, the highest potentialities that the universe contains.³⁸

Modern evolutionary spirituality

Since the time of Darwin, Sangharakshita is by no means the only commentator who has seen evolution as a key concept in understanding all existence, nor in portraying humanity's evolutionary future in spiritual terms. He recalls picking up the notion from the literary critic J Middleton Murry.³⁹ But western Buddhist writers before Sangharakshita also saw Buddhism as offering an essentially evolutionary vision, notably Evans Wentz and Alan Bennett, the first British-born Bhikkhu. They in turn were influenced by the theosophists.⁴⁰ More recently, 'evolutionary spirituality' has gained many proponents, especially in the US, where it is sometimes labelled 'integral evolution'.⁴¹

The most influential is probably Ken Wilber, whose monumental writings draw all sections of human knowledge into an evolution-based framework. He believes that the development of the consciousness of mystics down the ages anticipates evolutionary developments in the whole human species, which in turn provide a basis for new mystics to evolve their consciousnesses still further anticipating further advances by the species. It seems to me that this view implies that *en mass* our consciousness is now at a higher level than it was in, say, the Buddha's day, and that recent mystics such as the Hindu Sri Aurobindo are more evolved than the awakened sages of the Buddha's time. Buddhism would not, however, see someone enlightened recently as being at a higher level of consciousness than (say) the Buddha. So though Wilber's work is fascinating and stimulating, it may not be trustworthy in all respects; or (at least) it dissents from a traditional Buddhist view.

Conclusion: the bodhisattva and higher evolution

The bodhisattva is the ideal Buddhist, representing an uncompromising determination to transform his or her own life and to transform the world in the direction of universal freedom and happiness. To the extent that the bodhisattva's consciousness courses on the non dual level, no distinction is made between self and other, and every action is fitted for the highest benefit of everybody. The 'wound' that keeps self and other apart has been seen by the bodhisattva's wisdom for what it is: an unnecessary result of ignorance. The wound has been healed in the warm balm of developing compassion, by the bodhisattva taking every opportunity to identify with others. Now whole and spiritually healthy, the bodhisattva is not tempted to relax into the spurious balance of a personal peace. Since others' welfare is no less a matter of vital concern than his or her own, the distinction does not arise. So the bodhisattvas are always active, trying to heal the wound in the world, motivated by compassion and illuminated by wisdom.

Such people, living and working in today's world, do not advertise themselves, but use whatever talents they have for the benefit of others, and are always prepared to learn and change. The message of the bodhisattva ideal is not, "Find these heroes and adore them," but, "Become one yourself."

38 *What is the Dharma?*, Sangharakshita, pp. 213-4

39 *God, being an introduction to the science of metabiology*, John Middleton Murry (Cape, 1929).

40 *The Evolving Mind*, p. 227.

41 *Modern Evolutionary Spirituality*. Padmakara, who wrote the first draft of this module, has made a thorough study of it, and he originally included a lengthy treatment here. I felt it was fascinating, but diverged too far from the topic of Buddhism and evolution. If you'd like to explore it further, see 'Further reading' below.

It is one's own deliberate effort to transform oneself on the path of higher evolution that ensures that the will to enlightenment will continue to arise in the world: nothing else can do it. According to Buddhism, every action, even every thought, counts. It is either creative and ultimately conducive to the welfare of all, or else it is wasted, and thus retrogressive. During every creative, generous, and fearless act and thought, including the smallest, one is momentarily a bodhisattva – the will to enlightenment has half awakened within one. I find this a message of great optimism: we each have the power to transform the world radically, if only we can start here and now to act from our noblest impulses.

Every phase of evolution has its active 'bodhisattvas'. On our own level, that of self reflective consciousness, we can act creatively, and begin a wave of self transcendence that rolls on towards the meditative and transcendental levels. Even lower evolution displays its heroic deeds of self transcendence. Every animal that pioneered a new environmental niche ensured for itself and its descendants a place in a main stream of the evolution of consciousness. It transcended the legacy of static 'self' which had been passed on in its genes and behavioural traditions, and so in a rudimentary sense it manifested that same bodhisattva principle. In some of the (non canonical) stories of his former lives as a bodhisattva, the Buddha-to-be is actually portrayed as an animal, who gives a lead to his fellows.

Every phase of evolution has its growing tip, and, symbolically at least, every group or class of beings can likewise be seen as having a particularly enterprising member, who takes the lead and opens up a way to new and more fulfilling areas of experience. Lower evolution and spiritual development are sections of the same upward movement in life and consciousness, and if the bodhisattva is the pioneer of spiritual development (higher evolution), the bodhisattva spirit can be regarded as the pioneering principle in all evolution.

In the axial age, the bodhisattva principle was embodied in the sages who demonstrated advances in consciousness and proclaimed the unity of life or the common potential for self transcendence of every human being. Today, the bodhisattva principle manifests in the heart of each person, every time one takes a step which overpasses the limits of one's current state. "What saves a man is to take a step," writes the French author, Antoine de St Exupery, "Then another step. It is always the same step, but you have to take it."

The Buddhist vision of existence sees the inadequacies of life, sees that they can be transformed, and sees the bodhisattva principle operating to transform them at all levels and in all that lives. The image of the bodhisattva clarifies the whole process of the evolution of consciousness by bringing it into an all embracing, even cosmic, context. It portrays an urge to enlightenment in all spheres of life, urging individual human beings to help create a dynamic world characterized by compassion, beauty, and openness.⁴²



42 *The Evolving Mind*, pp.197-8, abridged.

Suggestions for reflection, research, and discussion

1. Do you agree that looking back at our evolutionary connections promotes solidarity and compassion, while looking forward links with the development of wisdom? How would you explain this idea to somebody?
2. Look for a Jātaka story. Is the Buddha-to-be the hero? Does he take the lead? In what way could he be seen as the growing point of evolution?
3. Sangharakshita says, using vitalist language: *“Life is essentially upward-moving. It isn’t just life, so to speak. ...There is a sort of evolutionary urge, in the sense that life by its very nature, through its various upward expressions, is seeking ever higher and higher levels of expression.”*

He describes the bodhisattva spirit as a universal *“Upward movement of life and consciousness”*; and, *“In the bodhisattva, Buddhism finds its highest expression and its ultimate meaning.”* Can you see the bodhisattva spirit in the evolution of animals? Would you recognise it in all human beings, or in yourself?

4. Sangharakshita writes: *“The bodhisattva... from the Beyond which is within as well as from the Beyond which is without, leads the Spiritual Community, on the Path, to Enlightenment”*. Can you unpack the meaning of this statement?
5. What have you experienced that seems to approach ‘collective consciousness’? How does collective consciousness differ from the group consciousness of political or religious fundamentalist groups?
6. Have a look at some writings on evolutionary spirituality. For example, one of: Madame Blavatsky, A A G Bennett, Ken Wilber, Brian Swimme. What do you think? Do their approaches correspond to the Buddhist vision and path?
7. Having studied this module, explain whether you think that the Buddhist project fits well with the Western idea of evolution.



Further reading

Sangharakshita, *The Bodhisattva Principle*, in *The Priceless Jewel*.

http://www.sangharakshita.org/images/Priceless_jewel.jpg

The Evolving Mind, chapter 10 and appendix.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=A49mAAAACAAJ>

Ken Wilber, *The Integral Vision* (Shambhala, 2007). Padmakara writes that this is the most accessible introductory book on Wilber’s work.

http://www.mcs-international.org/downloads/085_the_integral_vision.pdf

4.9

Transcending Views



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Module compiled by Jnanaketu

Introduction

Welcome to this module. In it, we will be studying views, particularly Wrong View, Right View and Perfect View. The aim of the module is to familiarise you with these terms, to enable you to become clearer about their meaning and their implications, and to use them skilfully in Dharma practice. This first session aims to answer the question: why study views or View at all? The next five sessions will look at five types of wrong view and the five corresponding right views. The last two sessions will look at the ways views were thought about in the two great Mahāyāna schools of thought; the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra. So the module as a whole provides a substantial introduction to View. Ways of taking the study further will be pointed out as the module progresses.

You'll probably notice that the module offers more study material than is usually provided in the mitra training course. I have done this for two reasons: firstly, it offers choice; each study leader and study group can decide how much and which bits of the material are appropriate for their group. Secondly, it may enable the module to be offered in any year of the mitra training course, and even at post-ordination level. You'll see that I've provided quite a lot of notes for the study. The study leader will also be able to consult the 'Teachers' notes' which are also available on the free buddhist audio site. I hope that both kinds of notes will enrich the study.

A useful introduction to the terrain is the following extract from Sangharakshita's lecture, *A Vision of Human Existence*:

Wrong View, Right View, Perfect View

In Buddhism there is no such thing as philosophy. In fact, in the Indian languages, including Sanskrit and Pāli (the languages of the Indian Buddhist scriptures), there is no word corresponding to 'philosophy', either literally or metaphorically. There is a word which is used often to be translated as 'philosophy', but it does not mean that at all. That word is *darśana* (Pāli *dassana*). *Darśana* comes from a word meaning 'to see' and means 'that which is seen', or 'a sight', 'a view', 'a perspective', even 'a vision'.

This is clearly not the same thing as philosophy. The word philosophy literally means 'love of wisdom', but is more generally understood to mean 'a system of abstract ideas'. It suggests something thought rather than seen. *Darśana*, on the other hand, is very much a matter of direct perception and direct experience - *darśana* does not represent something mediated by concepts.

In Buddhism the term is not *darśana*, but *dr̥ṣṭi*. *Dr̥ṣṭi* also comes from a root meaning simply 'to see', and *dr̥ṣṭi* also means 'a sight', 'a view', 'a perspective', 'a vision'. Buddhism traditionally distinguishes two kinds of view: wrong view and right view. This is an important distinction. In order to understand the difference between the two let us look at the question of sight in the literal sense, because a view, whether wrong or right, is, metaphorically speaking, a kind of seeing.

We may say that there are two kinds of sight: bad and good. Bad sight is sight which is, in the first place, weak. Our sight is said to be weak if we do not see very far or very distinctly. In the second place, bad sight is blinkered. It is restricted to a very narrow field. We see only what is straight in front of our nose. We do not see what is to this side or that side - much less still do we see all the way round. Thirdly, bad sight is distorted, as when we look through a distorting medium - a piece of bottle glass, or a stained-glass window which makes everything look multi-coloured, or a thick fog. Sight which is weak, blinkered, and distorted is bad sight.

Good sight is the opposite of all this. Good sight is sight which is strong, as when we see for a great distance and see clearly. It is sight which is unblinkered, as when we have a wide field of vision. It is sight which is undistorted. We do not see things through a distorting or refracting medium, but see them directly.

The factors of Wrong View

With the help of this distinction between bad sight and good sight, in the quite ordinary sense, we can perhaps see something of the difference between wrong view and right view. Wrong view is, in the first place, weak. We mean by this that it does not have any energy behind it. If there is no energy behind our vision, then our 'insight' into things is weak; we do not see clearly into the true nature of things; we do not see things as they are. The energy that we need comes from meditation - meditation in the sense of *dhyāna* experience. This concentrated energy, which we derive from meditation experience, transforms a purely conceptual understanding of the truth into a matter of direct experience.

Secondly, wrong view is blinkered. It is limited to a narrow range of experience. This range is what we experience through the five physical senses and the rational mind. Someone whose experience is confined within this narrow range nevertheless often generalizes and draws conclusions from it, unaware of other possibilities of perception and experience. There is, for instance, the example of the man who is interested only in his job, his family, the football pools, and so on. That exhausts his interests. He has no interest in world affairs, or in the arts, or in personal development. So his experience is limited, yet he sees existence itself, life itself, simply in terms of his limited existence.

Thirdly, wrong view is distorted. Our view of things can be distorted in all sorts of ways. It can be distorted by emotion. When we are in a happy mood we see things in quite a different way to the way we see them when we are in a gloomy mood. If we dislike someone, we see all sorts of faults; whereas if we like someone, then we see in them all sorts of perfections, which perhaps they do not in fact possess. Our vision is also distorted by prejudice of various kinds - on account of race or class or religion or nationality.

Wrong view is therefore view which is weak (it does not have the force of meditation behind it), blinkered (it is limited to a narrow range of experience), and distorted (by one-sided emotions and by prejudices).

The factors of Right View

Right view is the opposite of wrong view. Right view is view which is strong and powerful. It has behind it the concentrated energy of meditation, so it gives rise not just to a conceptual understanding of things, but to a direct experience of the truth. It does not remain on the surface, but penetrates deep into the heart of things. It sees everything clearly and distinctly. Right view is unblinkered and unlimited. It ranges over the whole field of human experience. It is not confined to what can be experienced through the physical senses or the rational mind. If it generalizes at all, it generalizes from the entire range of human experience in all fields, on all levels. Lastly, right view is undistorted. It is not distorted by emotion or prejudice, but sees things as they are.

So far I have spoken in terms of views, but views do not exist in the abstract: views are always *somebody's* view. Inasmuch as there are two kinds of view - wrong view and right view - there are two kinds of people. There are people who have wrong view and there are people who have right view. There are people whose view of existence is limited, restricted, and distorted. There are people whose view of existence is unlimited in extent, unrestricted in scope, and without any distortion whatsoever.

People who have wrong view are known technically in Buddhism as *prthagjanas*, or 'ordinary folk'; those who have right view are known as the *āryas*, or 'spiritually noble'. We could say that the first are those who are without any degree of personal development, who have not worked at all on themselves, who are, as it were, just as nature made them. The second are those who have attained some degree of personal development, who have worked on themselves, and are not as nature made them: they have remade, recreated, remodelled themselves, at least to some extent.

The 'ordinary folk' are, of course, in the majority; the 'spiritually noble' are in the minority. However, it is possible to change from one category to the other. The *prthagjanas* can become the *āryas*. The ordinary person can become one of the 'spiritually noble'. One does this by developing awareness, by cultivating positive emotions, by raising one's level of consciousness, and, above all, by discarding wrong view and developing right view.

Perfect Vision

I have only spoken so far of two kinds of view - wrong and right. Really there are three kinds. The third is Perfect View, or rather, Perfect Vision. Perfect Vision is right view developed to the fullest possible extent. It is the total vision of the total man, at the highest conceivable level of his development. Perfect Vision is vision without limits; it is the unconditioned Vision of the unconditioned Reality; it is vision that transcends space and time; it is vision that transcends the ordinary framework of perception, the subject-object relation itself. Perfect Vision is the vision of the Enlightened One - the one who sees with Wisdom and Compassion. Perfect Vision, thus, is the vision of the Buddha.

Our view is wrong view. Only occasionally do we have a flash of right view. We see things, for the most part, wrongly. Not only that, we rationalize our wrong views. We

present them in systematic conceptual form. These are all our so-called worldly philosophies, our various -isms and -ologies. If, however, we can have a glimpse of how the Buddha sees, we shall be momentarily raised to that level, at least in imagination, and we shall be able to see exactly where we ourselves stand. We shall have a true philosophy, which will give purpose to our lives and enable us to understand the general principles that underlie the whole process of personal individual development.

- From *A Guide to the Buddhist Path*, p.74.

Why are we looking at View at all?

In the Pāli Canon, The Buddha presents view as a keystone of his teaching:

- Right View is the first *aṅga* of the mundane eight-fold path, and Perfect Vision (which can be understood as perfected view) is the first *aṅga* of the super-mundane (or transcendental) eight-fold path.
- Self-view (Pāli: *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, Sanskrit: *sakkāya-dṛṣṭi*) is the first of the 10 fetters (*samyojana*) to be overcome.
- Abstaining from Wrong View and cultivating wisdom (i.e. Right View and Perfect Vision) is the 10th precept.
- View or opinionatedness is one of the four taints (*āsava*, Sanskrit: *āsrava*) which are said to shackle us to *samsāra*.
- Views are said to be one of the 4 modes of grasping (*diṭṭhupādāna*).
- Views are one of the 5 (or 10) defilements (Pāli: *kilesa*, Skt: *kleśa*).
- View is also said to be one of the *anusayas* (underlying tendencies).

Here is Sangharakshita's answer to the question: he begins by exhorting his audience to:

...think clearly... Framed in rather more traditional terms, it is not so much 'think clearly', but 'cherish Right View'. You notice that I do not say 'cherish Perfect Vision'. That would be rather premature, because there is no Perfect Vision without Right View. Right View is the mundane form of Perfect Vision, and Perfect Vision is the transcendental form or counterpart of Right View. Unless you have Right View, you have very little chance of achieving Perfect Vision. That is why Right View is so very important. The Buddha has all sorts of things to say about Right View...

Right View is important because wrong view leads downward. There is a Pāli term 'niraya', which means 'downward', or 'downward path'. If you entertain, and especially if you cling to and insist upon Wrong View, you are very definitely on the downward path, you are in decline. So Right View is of very great importance. As I have said: no Right View, no Perfect Vision. If there is no Perfect Vision, there is no liberation, no Enlightenment, no Nirvana, no real spiritual progress.'

- From Sangharakshita's *Fifteen Points for Old (and New) Order Members* delivered in 1993, p.4.)

View represents a thick and persistent thread through both the Buddha's teaching and Sangharakshita's exposition. According to the Buddha and according to Sangharakshita, it is crucial to root out Wrong View and to develop Right View.

Everyone has a view

So how do we sort out right views from wrong views? We all have many views, some of which we are aware of and probably some of which we are only half-aware or not aware of at all. The first step is to become more aware of what they are.

Subhuti begins his book *The Buddhist Vision* with a chapter called *Everyone has a View*. This chapter is the main text for study in this first session of the module. Please make sure that you study this chapter thoroughly, which means reading it through two or three times and thinking about the issues that Subhuti raises, noting any questions that you may have about what he says.

Everyone has a view, a perspective on existence. These views govern the direction of our lives; they are often almost entirely unconscious, forming a substructure to our minds, made up of unthinking assumptions about ourselves and our world. Though we may be unaware of our views and may never give them articulate expression, nevertheless, in everything we do and say, we betray our basic perspectives. It might even be said that we are our views. Our views may be self contradictory, unfounded, untrue, but because we are so closely identified with them we may never see them for what they are.

Views range from the most casual opinions about everyday matters to theories about ultimate metaphysical issues. At bottom, everyone's system of values is founded upon some view about the purpose of life, however vague, inarticulate, or inconsistent; for example, we consider life to be the survival of the fittest, or a test for a higher life to come, or simply without any point at all. Usually, our views remain a more or less loosely associated jumble of assumptions, prejudices, opinions, and beliefs; occasionally they may be elaborated into complex and dazzling philosophies.

Even when built up in this way into finely spun structures of thought, the basis of our views is deeper than thought. Our most fundamental views are not so much concepts - though they may find conceptual expression - as powerful myths that give form to our desires and passions: myths such as Aryan supremacy, or of the historical process inevitably leading to the perfect society, or of the redemption of man by a saviour god. 'Myth' here does not mean a mere legend or fiction but an archetypal patterning of the psyche that shapes reason and emotion into a whole, thrusting in a single direction. It is these myths, which may be in contradiction to each other, together with the whole mass of our views, that move us.

Broadly, views are acquired in two ways: either we generate them for ourselves or we inherit them from the culture that surrounds us. The acquisition is usually unconscious and we exercise little discrimination in what we allow to structure our minds and lives. The views we develop for ourselves are often but rationalizations by which we provide ourselves with reasons for following our desires. Those we inherit from others are often picked up, partly from a felt need to conform to the views of our families, friends, and the social groups within which we live, and partly because they suit our wants. We are being fed with views all the time: by our educational institutions, mass media, and our everyday contacts. The very shapes of our houses and manner of our dress affect the way we see the world.

We may pick up views indiscriminately; however, once adopted, they can have a very strong influence upon the whole course of our lives and be hard to shake off. Having

given shape to our emotions and thoughts, they mould our actions. We order the world in conformity with our longings, and then we live in the world that we have ourselves created. Clearly, the views we hold have consequences for us, either good or bad. They may lead us into ever recurring cycles of confusion and pain, or they may give rise to greater freedom and happiness. It is of the greatest importance that we clarify our minds and distinguish those views that are wholesome and helpful from those that are diseased and harmful, since our very lives depend upon it.

Such a clarification of our mental states requires intensive self-examination. We need to learn to be aware of our thoughts and motives; to see what it is that influences us and to what end. We then must begin to take responsibility for our own views, to see what emotions underlie them and where they tend to lead us. Thus far, the work is negative and consists largely in clearing away confusion. But how shall we see the world? - that is the question that now confronts us.

Choosing a view

Again we have basically two choices. We can either try to develop for ourselves a more comprehensive and satisfying view of things, or we can open ourselves to the influence of one that is already developed. Both options have their attendant dangers and difficulties. We may be deceived by ourselves in the first case and by others in the second. Both may have either a successful or a disastrous outcome. It is, however, to the guidance of others that we must, almost inevitably, turn. Unless we cut ourselves off from human society altogether (which is almost impossible to do today, even were it desirable), we must always be under some cultural influence from which it will be hard to disentangle ourselves. Besides, if others have, with great effort perhaps, and even suffering, managed to achieve a breadth of view far greater than our own, we would be foolish not to allow ourselves to be taught by them. Our own efforts would be greatly accelerated if we, wisely and with circumspection, let ourselves be influenced by the most enriching views in our human culture.

Our own times are probably unprecedented in the diversity of views of life available to us. In the West, our traditional Christian based culture is still extant, though now much on the defensive, and there is the new 'consumer culture', with its instant material satisfactions, which finds more and more adherents the world over. Besides these, a vast range of 'alternative' views is developing, drawn from Eastern religion and Western science, psychology and philosophy; or various combinations of these. Among all these views we must choose what influences we want. But how can we evaluate? Would not our evaluation itself be based upon a view? Are we not simply predisposed to select what most suits our own immediate desires, for better or worse?

How then can we evaluate values? We will find we are thrown back on our own experience - but our own experience carefully and critically examined. To begin with, we must be sure that we have correctly understood the view we are investigating and that we are not prematurely judging it in the light of our preconceptions about it. That done, we can ask ourselves whether or not it makes reasoned sense; whether the view is self consistent; and whether it conforms to experience. Then we can try to see what the likely consequences of that view might be if put into practice. We can examine the lives of those of its adherents we might encounter. We can even experiment to see what its effects are within our own lives.

Not only can we make a very cool and reasoned examination, but we must also take into account our own immediate responses to the view. Here we must, of course, be

self critical, distinguishing our own superficial partialities from a genuine intuition. If we are healthy and straightforward, we will find that some views seem to constrict and confine us, as if we cannot think and feel at our fullest within them. Such views are too narrow to do justice to our potential as human beings. Other views, we will find, seem dark and twisted, distorting our natures into bizarre and unnatural shapes. Others again seem to lighten our hearts, open up our minds, and give us room to expand and breathe new air. They reveal vistas of limitless horizons and undreamt of possibilities towards which we feel irresistibly drawn.

The evaluative criterion is therefore within our own experience. If we know ourselves well enough and are sincere in our enquiry, we will find that we recognize an increase in genuine happiness, friendliness, and mental clarity from some views, and of suffering, alienation, and confusion from others. We can see what views tend to the former and what to the latter. Those that tend to produce more positive and wholesome states are, in Buddhist terms, 'right views', and those that engender negative states are 'wrong views'.

The Buddhist view

The view that is to be presented in this book is a Buddhist view of life, and it is upon the above criterion that it asks to be evaluated. It offers itself as a way of viewing life that will help the individual to become happier, to experience greater harmony with others, and to see things with a purer understanding. In essence, this is Buddhism: a view of the infinite possibilities of human development. No ceiling confines us; there is, for Buddhism, no God for ever above and beyond man's reach. We may, if we choose to make the effort, break through barrier after barrier in our lives, in an unending spiral of intensifying happiness, wisdom, and love.

The founder of the Buddhist tradition - known by the title 'Buddha', meaning 'Awakened One' - required no blind belief from his disciples but expressly urged them to 'test my words as the goldsmith tests gold in the fire'. In the Buddhist texts we are again and again called upon to weigh up what we hear before we place any reliance upon it. We will then approach this Buddhist view wide awake, responsibly, separating our own thoughts and feelings from the mass of our inherited assumptions. We should be careful neither to accept blindly and uncritically nor to reject through prejudice. After listening to the view carefully and sympathetically, we can evaluate it in the light of our own reason, intuition, and experience.

Essential as this initial appraisal is, it is only the first step. Critical evaluation and intellectual assent are not enough, for Buddhism demands action of its followers. They must put it into practice, act upon it, and make it their own. Yet even this is not enough. The Buddhist view may enable one to cultivate higher and nobler states of mind and to function more and more beneficially, but still, at this stage, it is not something one sees directly for oneself. It is reasonable, intuitively one responds to it, and all experience bears it out, but it is still, as it were, an influence from outside. The ultimate aim of the Buddhist view is to produce in those who respond to it a corresponding vision so that they see for themselves, by direct experience, the truth of that view. In a sense, then, one no longer has a view at all, for view has been replaced by direct vision.

For Buddhism, therefore, the final criterion for evaluating views is whether or not they lead to the transcendence of views, that is, to vision. Wrong views distort and

stunt the lives of those who hold them, right views promote the cultivation of more and more positive mental states, but, above all, followed to their conclusion they lead to that direct experience of the nature of things which is vision. Vision lies at the heart of Buddhism. For Buddhists, it was first seen by a historical individual, Siddhartha Gautama, some 2,500 years ago, in northern India. In attaining that vision he became the Buddha. He saw that every human being has the potential to become a Buddha, and he spent the remainder of his life trying to help others to realize his vision. The tradition we know as Buddhism is the continuing attempt of the Buddha's successors to attain that vision of reality themselves, and to communicate it to others.

The Buddha's vision is beyond particular time and place. It is as relevant today as at any point in the long history of the tradition that he founded. In accordance with the changing cultures and ages within which it has been conveyed, it has been constantly renewed and re expressed. The tradition is a rich treasury of the many forms that its communication has taken. Each of these forms has had its own power to move us to make profound changes in ourselves and our world.

Our own times are characterized by a disintegration of common values. We are faced with a melting pot of views about which there is no general agreement. An increasingly prevalent view is the materialist one. The supernatural and the other worldly, heaven and hell, or other possible dimensions of being, play little part in the conscious attitude of most people today. No doubt much superstition and unreason has been cleared away, but we are left with drastically limited horizons. It is a flat, one dimensional world in which we live out our brief span between birth and death. Much of our time is taken up with elaborate housekeeping and the business of physical survival, albeit in ever increasing comfort and convenience, at least in the West. Whatever time is left we devote to entertainment. To those who feel that such a view of life leaves something in them unanswered, this Buddhist vision is offered.

- Pages 9-14 of *The Buddhist Vision*, Subhuti Windhorse, 2001.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. If our views are 'almost entirely unconscious', how can we know what they are?
2. What 'myths' are around in our own time?
3. What views have we inherited?
4. How have we inherited them?
5. Can you think of a view which is a rationalisation for a desire?
6. Can you think of an example of a view which has or could have consequences for you or someone else?
7. How can we evaluate views in order to decide whether to adopt them or not?

The second to sixth sessions of this module will each begin with a section taken from chapter 8 of Sangharakshita's book *Know Your Mind*. The chapter is called *Forces of Disintegration*. In section 6 of the chapter, headed *Dr̥ṣṭi or Opinionatedness*, Sangharakshita comments briefly on five kinds of wrong view referred to in the Yogācāra tradition (pp. 181-182).

Note

The original numbers for notes in *Know Your Mind* are retained in these extracts – you can follow them in the book where the corresponding notes are not reprinted here. Notes specific to this study module will be done as footnotes.

Please read the following section before the second session and try to answer and reflect on the questions that appear below.

Opinionatedness (*Dr̥ṣṭi*)

Opinionatedness is Guenther's translation of *dr̥ṣṭi* [Sanskrit], which literally means a sight, a view, a vision, a perspective. It means seeing things in a particular way, from a particular point of view – the implication being that this view or perspective, whatever it may be, is a limited, narrow one. It is, in fact, *mithyādr̥ṣṭi* (*micchādiṭṭhi* in Pāli) or 'wrong view', that view which is under the influence of kleśa – as opposed to *samyagdr̥ṣṭi*, right or perfect view.

In some of the earliest Pāli texts the Buddha is reported to have said that, "The Tathāgata is free from all views"¹⁷⁸ – including even right view. The term 'right view' is a contradiction in terms, from that absolute, so to speak, point of view. But from our own point of view, we need right view in order to displace wrong view. Only then will we be able to go beyond views altogether.

So *samyagdr̥ṣṭi* is not a closed system of ideas to which one permanently adheres, but a skilful attitude provisionally adopted in order to get rid of unskilful states of mind. It is a wrong view, therefore, to believe that one must give up all views in order to attain to right or perfect view. One cannot realize absolute truth without taking one's stand upon relative truth. To be paradoxical, one could say that all views are wrong views, and one of them is that one should give up all views.

One does encounter people with this kind of wrong view from time to time, people who profess a sort of intellectual and even spiritual hospitality or open-mindedness. They don't want to confine themselves to any particular philosophy or religion. They aspire to a universal vision – which is, practically speaking, beyond them. Without right views, there is no basis for right action, no basis for ethics. And without right action there is no possibility of attaining to universal vision. Only a Tathāgata has no views; while this should certainly be one's aim, one can realize it only by taking one's stand upon right views and practising on that basis.

According to Yeshe Gyaltsen's commentary [on which *Know Your Mind* is a commentary] there are five kinds of *dr̥ṣṭi*: they are – and here I am giving my own translations rather than Guenther's – fixed self-view, extreme views, attachment to ideologies, attachment to moral codes and religious observances, and wrong views regarding actions and their consequences. (p. 181)

Textual note

178 The footnote on page 270 of *Know Your Mind* gives the *Chapter of the Eighty of the Sutta Nipāta* as an example. This chapter, which is one of the oldest sections of the Pāli Canon, teaches that the wise man relinquishes all views. What exactly that means will become clearer as the module proceeds.

Here is a summary of the main points made in this short extract:

- Only the Tathāgatha is free from views.
- Right view is in a sense a contradiction, but we need it.
- It's a wrong view to think that we must give up all views in order to attain right or perfect view. All views are wrong views, but one of them is to think that one should give up all views.
- It's a wrong view to think that you have no view.
- We need to take our stand upon right views.
- There are five sorts of views: fixed self-view, extreme views, attachment to ideologies, attachment to moral codes and religious observances, and wrong views regarding actions and their consequences.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Why do you think *dṛṣṭi* is translated as 'opinionatedness' here?
2. So, according to Sangharakshita, what is meant by a 'view'?
3. Can you give some examples of Right View?
4. Why does Sangharakshita say that Right View is in a sense a contradiction?
5. Why is it a wrong view to think that we must give up all views in order to attain right or perfect view?
6. What do you think would be the consequences of you trying to give up all views?
7. What would be the consequences of thinking that you have no view?
8. Why is it important to take our stand on Right View?

Some basic definitions

The English word 'view' translates the Pāli word *diṭṭhi* and the Sanskrit word *dṛṣṭi*. This is how Nyānatiloka defines *diṭṭhi* in his Buddhist Dictionary:

Diṭṭhi: (lit. 'sight'; root *dis*, to see): view, belief, speculative opinion, insight. If not qualified by *sammā*, 'right', it mostly refers to wrong and evil view or opinion, and in only a few instances to right view, understanding or insight.

- Page 61.

View as it is used here has a particular meaning, which the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary's* entry on 'view' clarifies:

A particular manner of considering or regarding something; a mental attitude; an opinion, idea, or belief concerning a particular subject or thing... An aspect or light in which something is regarded or considered.

More definitions from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

These definitions may help you to become clearer about some of the key words used in Subhuti's chapter and in extracts that you'll meet later in the module:

Value: The principles or moral standards of a person or a social group; the generally accepted or personally held judgement of what is valuable and important in life.

Perspective: A mental view of the relative importance of the relationships or aspects of a subject or matter; a point of view, a way of regarding a matter.

Ideology: A system of ideas or way of thinking pertaining to a class or individual, especially as a basis of some economic or political theory or system, regarded as justifying actions and especially to be maintained irrespective of events.

Speculative: Of the nature, based on, or characterised by speculation or theory rather than practical or positive knowledge.

Speculate: Engage in reflection or conjecture from a theory, meditate, especially without a firm factual basis [i.e. no evidence].

Concept: An idea of a class of objects, a general notion.

Metaphysical: Not empirically verifiable; based on abstract general reasoning.

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From ‘Know Your Mind’

This session begins with an extract from chapter 8 of *Know Your Mind* in which Sangharakshita addresses the wrong view of (fixed) self-view or personality view (pp.182-186).

Self-view is the fundamental wrong view underlying all the others. It is the view that the five skandhas add up to, or contain, or form an aspect of, or can be identified with, the idea of a self or ego. [See below for an explanation of this.] The wrong view arises because one posits an absolutely substantial self on the basis of one's psycho-physical experience.

We fondly embrace the assumption that we are absolutely real: that the self we experience has some ultimate validity. This misunderstanding constitutes the frame of reference within which all our other views are held. It is not just the content of our thinking; it is, as it were, the ‘continent’ of our thinking. It is as if as human beings we are entranced or mesmerized by this misunderstanding, even sometimes proceeding to rationalize it into the basis of a philosophy or religion.

All this is despite the evidence of the Buddha's experience and teaching, and in fact the evidence of our own reason and observation. It doesn't appear to us to be evidence, of course, because we have adopted an interpretation of our experience which is not in accord with the experience of Enlightenment, and which does not allow us to appreciate the evidence available to the Enlightened mind.

We present our views in rational terms even though they are based on an essentially irrational premise – that is, on our emotional need to believe in our own secure and unchanging ego-identity. On an ordinary day-to-day level we rationalize in this way all the time. To justify our viewpoints or actions we provide reasoned explanations which serve to disguise the true reasons for them. We like to dress up our gut reactions as rational responses to make them respectable. Then we amass more and more evidence and argument on top of the original purely personal feeling. It is possible eventually to elaborate a whole philosophy out of certain basic personal human weaknesses. One begins with a certain experience of oneself and refuses to consider any evidence that challenges this experience. On the basis of this false idea of oneself one becomes involved with objects, and this whole position is presented as a philosophy or religion. One then proceeds to become attached to this view, even enamoured of it, and eventually it becomes consolidated into certain assumptions which one never subsequently questions.

Any philosophy that is not the product of an Enlightened mind is inevitably constructed in basically this way. The rationalizations are all too easily observable, even though they may be shot through with profound insights. It is sobering to reflect that all the systematic philosophies we have, and perhaps even all the religions as well, are pseudo-rational presentations, at least on a certain level, of experiences that are essentially limited. One could even go as far as to say that any systematically worked-out view must be suspected of being a rationalization in some sense.

This is why Nietzsche wrote in the form of strings of aphorisms, especially toward the end of his life. Each aphorism represents an intuition, an insight, but he doesn't attempt to string all the insights together and work them into a comprehensive system of thought. It is significant that his *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is presented as poetry rather than philosophy. If one really wants to get to the truth of things, to the heart of the matter, the imagination is arguably a more reliable faculty than the intellect alone, and the poet a more reliable guide than the philosopher.

There are said to be twenty possible forms of self-view¹⁸¹. This figure is arrived at by distinguishing four different ways of projecting the idea of a self on to each of the five *skandhas* (form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness), making twenty in all. If one takes form or body (*rūpa*), for example, one could say:

1. I am my body and nothing beyond that. My body is my self; my self is my body. Body and self are identical.
2. The body is possessed by the self as something apart from and beyond the body. This is a common idea of the nature of the soul, that there is a psychic element, identified as the self, to which the body belongs.
3. The self is located within the body.
4. The body is located within the self – that is, the self is a wider non-material entity within which the body is contained.

One may apply this series of possibilities to each of the *skandhas* individually, or indeed to all five *skandhas* collectively. None of these views is consonant with the reality that whatever we think of as a self is no self. This is an aspect of the insight one gains when one becomes Enlightened. A statement about the Buddha's own experience of himself is to be found among what are called the 'fourteen inexpressibles' (Sanskrit *avyākṛtavastūni*). Well, the 'statement' is really a non-statement. There is nothing to be said about the Buddha's experience; it is literally ineffable.

These fourteen inexpressibles emerge from a conversation between the Buddha and the wanderer Vacchagotta [MN 72]. Vacchagotta asked the Buddha four questions, each presented as four (two in the case of the last question) alternative views, according to the conventions of Indian logic. The first two questions concerned whether or not the universe is eternal and whether or not it is infinite. The third question was whether or not the Buddha – and by extension any other fully Enlightened being – can be said to exist after death; or whether he simultaneously exists in one sense and does not exist in another sense; or whether he neither exists nor does not exist. The Buddha rejected all these alternative views as to his status after death. None of them fits the case, he said, and to hold any one of them would be to hold a wrong view. Even during his lifetime, so the Buddha said, he is inconceivable. How can one even consider the nature of his existence after his death?

Vacchagotta's fourth question – consisting of the last two 'inexpressibles' – is the one we are concerned with here. Can it be said that the *jīvitindriya*, the life principle or life faculty of the Buddha, is identical with this physical body? This is a question of a kind that still exercises thinkers today: whether life, or mind, or whatever you like to call it, is identical with the physical body or not. The Buddha rejects both views. It's as though he is refusing to accept the assumption that the relation between body and life can be discussed in terms of their being either one thing or two.

In fact, it is impossible to think in terms of absolute dualities of any kind. Once one has a duality one is faced with the problem of reconciling it, which in the case of an absolute duality is impossible. So it's not a question of reducing what we think of as body to what we think of as life, or vice versa. The Buddha is suggesting that we shouldn't think in these terms at all. Perhaps we should follow Blake and say, "the body is that portion of the soul which is perceptible by the senses in this age".

The Buddhist position would appear to be that one always has a body of some kind; it isn't always a *physical* body. If you encounter a dead body, you don't get the impression that the person himself or herself is actually there in the body. Even though it looks just like them, you don't feel that you are in the presence of that person. But put it the other way round: supposing you have the experience of encountering someone who is dead – by which I mean a purely mental experience of them, not seeing a ghost – do you experience them as a sort of disembodied intelligence or spirit? Well, no – if you've ever had that sort of experience you will know that you experience them as having a body. It isn't a physical body, but they have a body, just as they had during their lifetime⁴³.

Or take the case of so-called out-of-the-body experiences: even though one has the experience of withdrawing from the body, one still feels complete – one still has subtle sense-experience. That is, one is in possession of what in the Pāli texts is termed the *manomayakāya* or 'body made of mind' – through which one has supersensory experience: telepathy, clairaudience, and so on. So the body does not necessarily have to have a material medium. 'Body' is more like a principle of configuration, a unitive principle.

In short, whether or not the body one experiences at any one time can be said to be identical with one's 'life principle' is impossible to say. The whole question of the nature of the body is philosophically quite abstruse. It is not essentially the physical body, even though that may be the way one experiences it at the moment, because clearly one can leave the physical body, whether through death or an out-of-the-body experience; but equally clearly, one doesn't get away from having a body completely. In the bardo of death one could say that one has a body, albeit of a different kind from that one had while alive. Furthermore, one is always connected to a physical body, if only potentially, in terms of one's karma generating a future material existence.

But a Buddha is said to have gone beyond birth and death – and yet he still has a body. How is this? Well, one's own physical body, the experience one has in

43 Sangharakshita tells of two experiences that he has had of seeing a person as if they were alive after they had died. See the seminar *Endlessly Fascinating Cry* (p. 170). You can follow up the other footnotes indicated in small numbers in the text in *Know Your Mind*.

dependence upon the body and its organs, is a vipāka; it comes to each of us as a result of our past karma. Our bodies are, in a sense, our past catching up with us. This is true also of the Buddha. One could say – although any statement about this matter is necessarily cryptic – that in realizing the non-duality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, one no more ceases to have a body than one continues to have a body. In short, once one is Enlightened, no statement as to the relationship between one's Enlightened being and one's physical body is appropriate.

And, as the entire Abhidharma tradition goes to considerable lengths to show, our own physical existence is more mysterious than we usually think. “Who am I?” is a question most of us leave behind with our adolescence, but it continues to be relevant. There is no ‘me’ apart from the flow of physical and mental events, apart from the five skandhas, which continually change. Deep down we don't really believe this; and yet, as I say, the evidence is there for us to experience.

The meditation practice called the contemplation of the six elements has as its specific purpose the overcoming of the wrong view that one has a fixed, permanent self. In the course of the practice one reflects that each of the elements of which one's body is composed – earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness – is not really one's own. When one dies, one will have to give back these elements to the universe; they have only been ‘borrowed’ for the duration of one's life. Even one's consciousness, once it is no longer bound up with the body, cannot really be said to be one's own.

- *Know Your Mind*, pp.182-186.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How do you experience the *skandhas* (Pāli: *khanda*)?
2. Why is self view the fundamental wrong view underlying all the others?
3. Sangharakshita writes that the misunderstanding, “...that the self we experience has some ultimate validity,” has sometimes been rationalised into the basis of a philosophy or religion. Can you think of an example of one way in which this has happened?
4. Do you think that you “are absolutely real”? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. What does the phrase “the ‘continent’ of our thinking” mean?
6. What is Sangharakshita trying to convey when he refers to the fourteen inexpressibles?
7. What is Sangharakshita saying about the relationship between body and karma?
8. What does it mean to say that there is no ‘me’ apart from the flow of physical and mental events?

What is it that makes a view ‘wrong’?

Broadly speaking we can say that a view can be wrong in one or both of two ways:

1. That it is not in line with *paṭiccasamuppāda* (Pāli for ‘dependent origination’ – or ‘conditioned co-production’ as Sangharakshita prefers to call it).

2. That it is held tenaciously and relinquished with difficulty (i.e. clung to).

So what does it mean for a view to be not aligned with dependent origination?

This whole module aims to explore that question. We'll be looking at the tenacious holding of views in a later session.

What does the Pāli Canon say about wrong views?

Here again is an excerpt from Nyānatiloka's useful entry on *diṭṭhi* in his Buddhist Dictionary; I begin by recapitulating his first paragraph (p.61), and I add his short entry on *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*:

Diṭṭhi: (lit. 'sight'; root *dis*, to see): view, belief, speculative opinion, insight. If not qualified by *sammā*, 'right', it mostly refers to wrong and evil view or opinion, and only a few instances to right view, understanding or insight.' (e.g. *diṭṭhi-ppatta*, ['vision-attainer', one of the seven *ārya-puggala* (p.63)]; *diṭṭhi-visuddhi*, purification of insight; *diṭṭhi-sampaññā*, 'possessed of insight'). (p.61).

Wrong or evil views *diṭṭhi* (or *micchā-diṭṭhi*) are declared as utterly rejectable [i.e. must be rejected] for being a source of wrong and evil aspirations and conduct, and liable at times to lead a being to the deepest abysses of depravity.

Numerous speculative opinions and theories, which at all times have influenced and still are influencing humankind, are quoted in the sutta-texts. Amongst them, however, the wrong view which everywhere, and at all times, has most misled and deluded humankind is the personality belief, the ego-illusion. This personality belief (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*), or ego-illusion (*atta-diṭṭhi*), is of two kinds: eternity-belief and annihilation belief.

Eternity belief (*sassata-diṭṭhi*) [eternalism] is the belief in the existence of a persisting ego-identity, soul or personality, existing independently of those physical and mental processes that constitute life and continuing even after death.

Annihilation-belief (*uccheda-diṭṭhi*) [nihilism], on the other hand, is the belief in the existence of an ego-identity or personality as being more or less identical with those physical and mental processes, and which, therefore, at the dissolution at death, will come to be annihilated.

Now, the Buddha neither teaches a personality which will continue after death, nor does he teach a personality which will be annihilated at death, but he shows us that 'personality', 'ego', 'individual', 'man', etc., are nothing but mere conventional designations (*voḥāra-vacana*) and that in the ultimate sense (see *paramattha-sacca*) there is only this self-consuming process of physical and mental phenomena which continually arise and again disappear immediately. (See [entries on] *anattā*, *khandha*, *paṭiccasamuppāda*). (pp.61-62).

Sakkāya-diṭṭhi: the 'personality belief', is the first of the ten fetters (*samyojana*). It is entirely abandoned only on reaching the path of Stream-winning (*sotāpatti-magga*). There are twenty kinds of personality belief, which are obtained by applying four types of that belief to each of the five groups of existence (*khandha*): (1-5) the belief to be identical with corporeality, feeling, perceptions, mental formations, or consciousness; (6-10) to be contained in them; (11-15) to be independent of them; (16-

20) to be the owner of them (p.182). [M N 44.7 – see Bhikkhu Bodhi p.397 and note 462 on p. 1239 for some helpful similes.]

From the *Brahmajāla Sutta*: extracts from Bhikkhu Bodhi's introduction to his translation of the Sutta and its commentaries

One of the most important sources for the Buddha's teaching on views is the *Brahmajāla Sutta* which is significantly the first sutta of what was apparently the first compilation of suttas (the *Dīgha Nikāya*). However, it is too long and too technical for the purposes of this module, so in order to give a flavour of the sutta, I am reproducing (by kind permission of the Buddhist Publication Society) some extracts from Bhikkhu Bodhi's interesting and helpful introduction, which is well worth reading in its entirety. The extracts come from pages 4 and 6-8. You may like to know that the *Pañcattaya Sutta* is a middle length version of this in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (number 102).

Speculative views include all metaphysical theories, religious creeds, and philosophical tenets concerning issues that lie beyond the reach of possible experiential verification. These views are not necessarily an obstacle to rebirth in the higher worlds, but in every case act as impediments to the path to liberation. All such views arise out of personality view, the fundamental belief in a self or ego-entity, [...]. (p.4)

The question might arise why the Buddha is so concerned to discourage man from his inclination to speculate. Answers are to be found in many suttas where the Buddha details the adversities into which the indulgence in speculative views can lead. Views proceed from ignorance and blindness rather than knowledge. They involve misinterpretations of experience stemming from subjective distortions of the actual experiential data. They proclaim a part of the truth to be the whole, as in the tale of the blind men who take their own limited conceptions of the elephant to represent the animal in its fullness. Views lead to conceit, to extolling oneself and disparaging others who hold different views. They result in dogmatic clinging, when one takes what one believes to be the only truth and declares everything else to be false. Differences in views become a ground for quarrels and disputes, not only between thinkers but also (as is especially the case today) between nations and groups who accept contrary ideologies. And finally, the adherence to views maintains the forward movement of the round of becoming, by obstructing the acceptance of right view which leads to the cessation of the round, and by conditioning kammic accumulations that precipitate renewed existence. It is this last-mentioned danger which is especially emphasised in the *Brahmajāla Sutta*.

All the views dealt with in the *Brahmajāla* originate from one of two sources, reasoning and meditative experience. The fact that a great number, perhaps the majority, have their source in the experience of meditative attainments has significant implications for our understanding of the genetic process behind the fabrication of views. It suffices to caution us against the hasty generalisation that speculative views take rise through a preference for theorisation over the more arduous practice. As our sutta shows, many of these views make their appearance only at the end of a prolonged course of meditation involving firm renunciation, intense devotion, and keen contemplative zeal. For these views the very basis of their formulation is a higher experience rather than an absence of one. That views of a metaphysical nature result from such endeavours indicates that they spring from a source more deeply grounded in the human mind even than the disposition to

theorisation. This source is clinging to being, the fundamental need to establish and maintain, within the empirical personality, some permanent basis of self-hood or individualised existence.

The clinging to being issues in a 'personality view' (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) affirming the presence of an abiding self in the psychophysical organism in one of twenty ways: as either identical with, possessing, contained within or containing one or other of the five aggregates [*skandhas*] that constitute the individual personality – material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Arisen already at the pre-reflective level, this view in turn becomes the basis for later reflective interpretations of existence, crystallising into the sixty-two views of the sutta. As it is explained: “Now, householder, as to those divers views that arise in the world... and as to those sixty-two views set forth in the *Brahmajāla*, it is owing to the personality view that- they arise, and if the personality view exists not, they do not exist”. (S.IV.7.3). [see B Bodhi *Samyutta Nikāya* p.1317 (vol. 2)]

Since the notion of self-hood is accepted uncritically at the level of ordinary experience, higher attainments in meditation, as the *Brahmajāla* shows, will not suffice to eliminate the notion but will only reinforce it by providing apparent verification of the self originally pre-supposed at the outset of the practice. It is as if one were to lead a man wearing red-tinted glasses from a small room to an open field. The change of scene will not alter the colour of his vision, for as long as he is wearing red glasses everything he sees will be coloured red. The change will only give him a larger area to see as red, but will not help him to see things in their true colour. Analogously, if one begins a practice with a view of self, and persists without changing this view, then whatever develops in the course of practice will go to confirm the initial thesis. The attainments will not themselves alter the view, while the deeper states of consciousness that unfold will be misconstrued in terms of the erroneous notion. Taking the idea of self at its face value, as indicating a real entity, the theorist will proceed to weave around it a web of speculations apparently confirmed by his attainments: as to whether the self is eternal or non-eternal, everlasting or perishable, finite or infinite, universal or individual, etc.

What is essential, therefore, from the Buddhist standpoint, is not simply to practice rather than to theorise, but to practice on the basis of right understanding. Thence in contrast to the speculative systems, the Buddhist system of meditation takes as its foundation the doctrine of egolessness or non-self (*anattā*). Any states of experience arising in the course of practice, whether of the ordinary or exalted level, are to be scrutinised in the light of the 3 characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self [the *lakṣhaṇa* (Pāli), *lakṣaṇa* (Skt.)]. In his way, the tendency to identify with these experiences or to appropriate them in terms of the self-concept is deprived of its ground, and all binding notions of subjectivity are dislodged from their inner haunt with final certainty. (pp.6-8)

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Can you think of examples of a metaphysical theory, or a religious creed, or a philosophical tenet that can't be experientially verified?
2. Why would a person cling to an eternalist view, and what would be the consequences?

3. Why would a person cling to a nihilist view, and what would be the consequences?
4. Can you think of a view which is neither eternalist nor nihilist?
5. What do you think is wrong with '*dogmatic clinging*'?
6. How can meditative experience mislead us on the path and how can we prevent this from happening?
7. Does the red glasses analogy work for you? And if so, how?
8. Can you think of an example of differences of views becoming a ground for quarrel between nations?

Pāli extracts

Here are some extracts from the Pāli Canon which contain teachings on fixed self-view. First, a passage from the *Cūḷavedalla Sutta* (MN 44); this passage appears in several other suttas in the same or similar form. In this sutta, Dhammadinna teaches Visākha, a lay-follower who was her husband before she became a nun. Dhammadinna was said by the Buddha to be the foremost bhikkhuni disciple when it came to expounding the Dhamma. Here Visākha asks about personality or fixed self view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*). Dhammadinna explains that a person can mistakenly take each of the aggregates (*kandha*) to be the self.

“But, lady, how does self-identification [*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*] come about?”

“There is the case, friend Visākha, where an uninstructed, run-of-the-mill person — who has no regard for noble ones, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma; who has no regard for men of integrity, is not well-versed or disciplined in their Dhamma — assumes form (the body) [*rūpa*] to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He assumes feeling to be the self...

“He assumes perception to be the self...

“He assumes (mental) fabrications [*sankhara*, karma formations, volition] to be the self...

“He assumes consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identification comes about.”

“But, lady, how does self-identification not come about?”

“There is the case where a well-instructed disciple of the noble ones — who has regard for noble ones, is well-versed and disciplined in their Dhamma; who has regard for men of integrity, is well-versed & disciplined in their Dhamma — does not assume form to be the self, or the self as possessing form, or form as in the self, or the self as in form.

“He does not assume feeling to be the self...

“He does not assume perception to be the self...

“He does not assume fabrications to be the self...

“He does not assume consciousness to be the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as in the self, or the self as in consciousness. This is how self-identification does not come about.”

For a good example of a variant, see MN 22 15f.

The Buddha teaching about self-view

When he attends unwisely in this way, one of six views arises in him. The view, “self exists for me.” arises in him as true and established “...this self of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity.” This speculative view, bhikkhus, is called the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the contortion of views, the vacillation of views, the fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not freed from birth, ageing, and death, from sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair; he is not freed from suffering, I say.

This quote is a slightly truncated version of the passage in Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation p. 92-3, *Majjhima Nikāya* 2.7-8.

A short verse from the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*

As if smitten by a sword,
As if his head were on fire,
A bhikkhu should wander mindfully
To abandon self-view.

- SN I v302, Bodhi p. 149.

A positive note from Sangharakshita

When I spoke of being creative, I was speaking in terms of bringing into existence something new. So you break the fetter, the first fetter of fixed self-view, when you bring into existence a new self, or by bringing into existence a new self which is essentially creative. If you want to put breaking the fetter of fixed self-view into positive terms, you could express it as being the creation of a new self.

- Women’s Pre-ordination Retreat on Going for Refuge, 1986.

Question for reflection and discussion

1. Now that you have at least an initial grasp of what personality view is, can you explain what right view would be in relation to 'self'?

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Extreme View in ‘*Know Your Mind*’

This week we plunge straight into Sangharakshita’s discussion of the second type of wrong view.

To some extent we have already dealt with extreme views. There are the two extreme views we may hold with regard to views themselves. On the one hand we may adopt a dogmatic, possessive attitude towards views, clinging to them as though they did fully express ultimate truth. The opposite extreme view is to consider it unnecessary to have any views at all, even skilful views, right views.

The fourteen inexpressibles also represent extreme views, to which the only appropriate reply was for the Buddha to stay silent. His silence was not the silence of ignorance, or of suspension of judgement; nor was it even simply the āryan silence, the noble silence of the second dhyāna, when the thought processes of vitarka and vicāra are suspended. All the alternative views he was offered were inapplicable, and he knew no explanation could be articulated in words, so he remained in the silence of the Enlightened mind.

Traditionally, the extreme views which are held to be representative are eternalism and nihilism: the view that the self is eternally existent, and the view that the self is totally non-existent. In ancient India these two views concerned whether or not the self survived death in some form. The eternalist view was that the self persisted unchanged from life to life; this is akin to the Christian view of the soul, that it survives death intact and goes on to heaven, hell, or limbo. The nihilistic view was that the whole psycho-physical organism was totally annihilated at the moment of death – which is of course the common, modern, secular view.

Such is, we may say, the psychological aspect of these two extreme views. They may also be put in a more metaphysical context. This version offers the view that mundane existence, in terms of the five skandhas, is ultimately real in some way, and at the other extreme the view that it is completely unreal and illusory at every level.

Thirdly, in ethical terms, eternalism and nihilism may be interpreted as the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-torture. It is possible to see self-indulgence – in the philosophy of ‘*eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die*’ – as a form of nihilism. And it is possible to see self-torture – for the purpose of releasing the eternal soul from its prison – as a form of eternalism. However, this is just from the viewpoint of the traditional idea of the two extremes as representing attitudes to the possibility of life after death. It is probably more true to the psychological reality to say that self-

indulgence expresses a belief in the absolute reality of mundane existence, while self-torture expresses self-hatred, and thus a desire for self-destruction and, by extension, for the destruction of mundane existence.

The Buddhist doctrine of *anātman*, no-self, is unfortunately sometimes interpreted in such terms as to appeal to this tendency towards self-destruction. If this teaching is interpreted as a total negation of the self, it will be very attractive to people who want to express their own self-hatred. Quite a few people seem to have this sort of attitude, a fascination with the *anātman* doctrine as an essentially life-denying principle. But the idea that the doctrine of no-self declares life to be worthless, meaningless, and in fact non-existent, is simply not Buddhist.

The *anātman* doctrine can also be used as a way of avoiding personal responsibility, or of sitting on one's natural energies. Anything one decides to do, particularly in an energetic or wholehearted way, becomes an expression of ego and thus doctrinally suspect. Again, this is a wrong view. The goal of Buddhahood is to go beyond the individual self, not to regress from the achievement of individual selfhood.

The ego is no more than the tendency to absolutize one's present state of being. It is not a thing, but a faulty interpretation. One is seeing something that just isn't there. The individual is there in a process of continuous change and therefore of ever-present potential development; delusion may also be there, in the form of a belief in a fixed, unchanging self or essence or soul. But that fixed, unchanging self or essence or soul or ego is not there; it never was, and it never will be. And because it isn't there, one can't do anything with it – get rid of it, go beyond it, or whatever. The best thing to do as far as the ego is concerned is just to forget about it.

We are not just an absence of self; we are an absence of *fixed* self, a flow of ever-changing components, physical and mental. The Buddha himself was evidently a powerfully distinct individual, with a very clear idea of who or what he was. To have a self-view means to identify oneself with a sort of cross-section of the flow of skandhas and imagine that one can arrest the flow at that point. It is just a state of arrested development, like being a child who says, 'When I grow up I'm going to fill my house with toys and eat sweets all day,' unable to imagine the transformation involved in growing up.

The five skandhas – the world which we experience as both subject and object – is neither the ultimate reality (because according to the Buddha's Enlightened experience things are not as we perceive them) nor completely illusory (because our experience, unenlightened though it may be, has its own validity on its own level). It is in response to our tendency to embrace one or another of such extreme views – which are of course reflected in various philosophies and dogmas, both Western and Eastern – that the Middle Way was formulated.

The Middle Way is to see the five skandhas as having a conventional or relative existence – that is, to see them as having arisen in dependence upon causes and conditions. If the extreme views are to see conditioned existence as either unconditioned or totally illusory, the Middle Way is to see the conditioned as what it is, simply conditioned. We tend to treat concepts like existence and non-existence, reality and non-reality, as absolutes, whereas so far as conditioned or relative

existence is concerned (and conditioned existence is where we are when we make these distinctions) there are no absolutes.

Everything conditioned, everything phenomenal, everything mundane, arises in dependence on conditions and ceases in the absence of those conditions. The world is not completely real, but neither is it absolutely unreal. It is there to be experienced, we are involved in it, but it is not to be mistaken for absolute reality, for something that exists in an ultimate sense. It's as simple as that. It's the Middle Way, the way in which Buddhism sees the world. Really, it is just common-sense.

But, of course, we want absolutes. The Buddhist approach is to get us to think for ourselves, to see into the complexity of the situation we find ourselves in, all the different factors involved, trying to understand it truly and honestly, not sliding off that Middle Way into easy answers. To think about something objectively in this way can be very frustrating. It also takes courage, because it means taking responsibility for one's conclusions.

Most people put their faith and trust in someone who makes a strong impression, someone who is very emphatic and certain and self-confident. If you try to be careful about what you are saying, introducing qualifications where appropriate and suggesting that yours is only a certain way of looking at things, that there are other ways, and that one will have to make up one's own mind, you will make a comparatively feeble impression. On the whole, people want to know what to think, which means something black and white. They want certainty. What they are certain about is less important to them than the certainty itself. They will believe any farrago of nonsense as long as they have permission to believe in it absolutely. It is not clarity but certainty they are looking for. Certainty is security; and being exposed to the difficulties and confusions of having to think seriously is to be thrown into insecurity.

Many people seem to want to rush to take up views where, one may say, angels fear to tread. I have noticed this in, for example, Hindus with a smattering of religious knowledge. I remember on one occasion when I took the public jeep from Kalimpong to Siliguri. I was sitting in the front next to the driver when there was a hold-up of some sort, and the Bihari policeman who was controlling things, seeing there was a sadhu in yellow robes – i.e. myself – waiting there, and having nothing better to do for the moment, strolled up and started asking the usual questions: "Are you a holy man?" and so on. Then he began to tell me all about how the universe had evolved from Brahman, and how it was all unreal, and how the soul was the same as God. He held forth in this way for about fifteen minutes and then strolled off again. There was a Tibetan Buddhist sitting behind me who had observed all this with mounting horror: "That man was talking about the Dharma," he said at last, as if he couldn't believe his ears. That someone with a few undigested religious notions rattling around in his head should shoot his mouth off about them, in public, to a total stranger, had left him almost speechless.

As a Buddhist one finds that one has to resist a tendency in people to look for absolutist views. They might ask about a certain gifted but wayward Buddhist teacher, "Is so-and-so a Bodhisattva or is he a total fake?" Of course, the fact is that such a person is a complex human being and worthy of more than a snap judgement either way – or even somewhere precisely in between. Or someone might say,

“What’s the Buddhist view on such and such: hanging, abortion, astrology, extra-marital sex?” What they want is a definite, simple answer to take away with them.

But there is no ‘Buddhist view’ as such; there is no hierarchy of authority from which to draw one’s views. One can have one’s own view as a Buddhist, but it will not have the stamp of authority that Christians have from God or the Bible or the Pope. And people generally want the kind of security one gets from a source of authoritative judgements. As a Buddhist, the best one can do sometimes is to say, “Here are the Four Noble Truths. Do what you can with these.”

By looking for ready-made ‘Buddhist’ answers – the party line – people also want to be able to categorize one as a Buddhist. Just as people say “He’s an Aries,” or “She’s a greed type,” or “He’s an accountant,” and think they’ve got that person dealt with, classified, docketed. Likewise, if they can categorize Buddhism, then they can put one in the Buddhist category. Again, one needs to resist this tendency. It’s a way of dismissing you, disposing of you, not being concerned with you as an individual. What to think of you has been settled by the fact that you are a Buddhist. This is not to say that one should be afraid of saying that one is a Buddhist – or an accountant, for that matter – but that one should not imagine (or hope) that being a Buddhist puts one as an individual in a category.

- Pages 186-191.

The *Brahmajāla Sutta* of the Pāli Canon (for example) deals with sixty-two wrong views. This is the first sutta of the collection known as the *Dīgha Nikāya*, which is the first nikāya of the *Sutta Piṭaka* (the whole body of suttas), which in turn is the first *Piṭaka* of the Pāli Canon. This may be coincidental – after all, the Pāli Canon had to start with something – but one would like to suppose that the compilers of the oral tradition knew what they were about in this as in other matters. The suggestion is that one has to get these wrong views out of the way before one can have access to the rest of the Dharma – before, that is, one can commence the spiritual life at all. The *Brahmajāla Sutta* is the ‘great net’ in which all wrong views are caught – that is, all the wrong views that were current in India at that time among both Buddhist and non-Buddhist spiritual practitioners. No doubt we could fish up a lot more that we have to contend with today.

One of these sixty-two wrong views is the notion that the universe is the creation of Īśvara, or God. To us, this rejection of the idea of a creator god is one of the defining ideas of Buddhism as a world religion, but in fact the Buddha at no point goes into it in any great detail, simply because it does not seem to have been a very popular view in his time. In a sense, the question is dealt with in the first two of the fourteen inexpressibles: the view that the world is eternal and the view that the world is not eternal. The belief that the universe was created by God – or indeed the belief that it started by chance or necessity – represents one extreme view; the other is the view that the universe is eternal. One might think that one of these views has to be right, but Buddhism rejects all of them.

The reason for this is that – according, at least, to the Yogācāra perspective – wherever there is the perceiving mind, there must be an object. Every attempt to account for the beginning of the universe, for example, is based on the assumption that one can rewind the spool of the universe in one’s mind and eventually come to a point where the mind is not confronted by an object. But this is not possible; it is a wrong view to

think so. The Yogācārin might say that the question of whether the universe is eternal or not eternal is unanswerable precisely because the question assumes (incorrectly) that there is a mind-independent universe to which the attributes 'eternal' or 'not eternal' might be attached.

To use a traditional analogy, one could take the question, '*Is the horn of a rabbit big or small?*'¹⁹⁷ The horn of a rabbit cannot be big or small because there is no horn of a rabbit to have such attributes. A non-existent entity cannot have attributes! Likewise with the question 'Is the (mind-independent) universe eternal or not eternal?' The (mind-independent) universe cannot be eternal or not-eternal because there is no (mind-independent) universe to have the attributes 'eternal' or 'not-eternal'. Thus, the question is 'unanswerable', because it involves an unwarranted assumption. In modern logical terms, this is an example of the informal fallacy called the 'complex question'.

- Pages 202-203.

Definitions

Absolute: (Philosophical meaning) Existing or able to be thought of without relation to other things. (*Shorter Oxford*)

Complex question: also rejoices in the Latin name *plurium interrogationum*. It is one of the many recognised fallacies. When a question is asked in such a way as to presuppose the truth of an assumption buried in it, the fallacy of the complex question has been committed. (That definition comes from *Introduction to Logic* by Copi and Cohen, 2002).

One example of it is, "*When did you stop taking drugs?*" Such a question has an assumption buried in it, namely, that you at some point began taking drugs, or that you have stopped, neither of which might be true. It is extremely difficult to answer complex questions in a straightforward way without seeming to accept the questioner's assumption(s). It is a favourite move of some barristers.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Why do humans have a tendency to hold two extreme views about views i.e. on the one hand, to be possessive or dogmatic about views, and on the other, to think it is unnecessary to have views at all?
2. How are the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism manifested at psychological, metaphysical and ethical levels?
3. How can the anātman doctrine be mistaken and become a wrong view?
4. How can one misperceive the five skandhas?
5. What is the Middle Way?
6. Why do people have a tendency to rush to take up views and to categorise people?
7. What does Sangharakshita mean by 'the conditioned'?
8. Why is there no 'Buddhist view' as such?

Extreme view in the Pāli Canon

Two of the best places to read about extreme view in the Pāli Canon are MN 63 and 72. I give here Bhikkhu Thanissaro's translation of 63, the *Cūḷamālunkya Sutta*, which Thanissaro calls the *Cūḷamālunkyaṇṇasutta* or *The Shorter Instructions to Mālunkya*. You can also read Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of the same sutta. The sutta is famous for the poisoned arrow simile.

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvattṭhi at Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. Then, as Ven. Mālunkyaṇṇaputta was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in his awareness: "These positions that are undeclared, set aside, discarded by the Blessed One – 'The cosmos is eternal,' 'The cosmos is not eternal,' 'The cosmos is finite,' 'The cosmos is infinite,' 'The soul and the body are the same,' 'The soul is one thing and the body another,' 'After death a Tathāgata exists,' 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,' 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,' 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist' – I don't approve, I don't accept that the Blessed One has not declared them to me. I'll go ask the Blessed One about this matter. If he declares to me that 'The cosmos is eternal,' that 'The cosmos is not eternal,' that 'The cosmos is finite,' that 'The cosmos is infinite,' that 'The soul and the body are the same,' that 'The soul is one thing and the body another,' that 'After death a Tathāgata exists,' that 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,' that 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,' or that 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' then I will live the holy life under him. If he does not declare to me that 'The cosmos is eternal,'... or that 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' then I will renounce the training and return to the lower life."

Then, when it was evening, Ven. Mālunkyaṇṇaputta arose from seclusion and went to the Blessed One. On arrival, having bowed down, he sat to one side. As he was sitting there he said to the Blessed One, "Lord, just now, as I was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in my awareness: 'These positions that are undeclared, set aside, discarded by the Blessed One... I don't approve, I don't accept that the Blessed One has not declared them to me. I'll go ask the Blessed One about this matter. If he declares to me that "The cosmos is eternal,"... or that "After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist," then I will live the holy life under him. If he does not declare to me that "The cosmos is eternal,"... or that "After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist," then I will renounce the training and return to the lower life.'

"Lord, if the Blessed One knows that 'The cosmos is eternal,' then may he declare to me that 'The cosmos is eternal.' If he knows that 'The cosmos is not eternal,' then may he declare to me that 'The cosmos is not eternal.' But if he doesn't know or see whether the cosmos is eternal or not eternal, then, in one who is unknowing and unseeing, the straightforward thing is to admit, 'I don't know. I don't see.'... If he doesn't know or see whether after death a Tathāgata exists... does not exist... both exists and does not exist... neither exists nor does not exist,' then, in one who is unknowing and unseeing, the straightforward thing is to admit, 'I don't know. I don't see.'"

"Mālunkyaṇṇaputta, did I ever say to you, 'Come, Mālunkyaṇṇaputta, live the holy life under me, and I will declare to you that 'The cosmos is eternal,' or 'The cosmos is not

eternal,' or 'The cosmos is finite,' or 'The cosmos is infinite,' or 'The soul and the body are the same,' or 'The soul is one thing and the body another,' or 'After death a Tathāgata exists,' or 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist'?"

"No, lord."

"And did you ever say to me, 'Lord, I will live the holy life under the Blessed One and [in return] he will declare to me that 'The cosmos is eternal,' or 'The cosmos is not eternal,' or 'The cosmos is finite,' or 'The cosmos is infinite,' or 'The soul and the body are the same,' or 'The soul is one thing and the body another,' or 'After death a Tathāgata exists,' or 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,' or 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist'?"

"No, lord."

"Then that being the case, foolish man, who are you to be claiming grievances/making demands of anyone?"

"Mālunkyaṇputta, if anyone were to say, 'I won't live the holy life under the Blessed One as long as he does not declare to me that "The cosmos is eternal," ... or that "After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,"' the man would die and those things would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata.

"It's just as if a man were wounded with an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends and companions, kinsmen and relatives would provide him with a surgeon, and the man would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble warrior, a priest, a merchant, or a worker.' He would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know the given name and clan name of the man who wounded me... until I know whether he was tall, medium, or short... until I know whether he was dark, ruddy-brown, or golden-coloured... until I know his home village, town, or city... until I know whether the bow with which I was wounded was a long bow or a crossbow... until I know whether the bowstring with which I was wounded was fiber, bamboo threads, sinew, hemp, or bark... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was wild or cultivated... until I know whether the feathers of the shaft with which I was wounded were those of a vulture, a stork, a hawk, a peacock, or another bird... until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was bound with the sinew of an ox, a water buffalo, a langur, or a monkey.' He would say, 'I won't have this arrow removed until I know whether the shaft with which I was wounded was that of a common arrow, a curved arrow, a barbed, a calf-toothed, or an oleander arrow.' The man would die and those things would still remain unknown to him.

"In the same way, if anyone were to say, 'I won't live the holy life under the Blessed One as long as he does not declare to me that 'The cosmos is eternal,' ... or that 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,' the man would die and those things would still remain undeclared by the Tathāgata.

“Mālunkyāputta, it’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘The cosmos is eternal,’ there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘The cosmos is not eternal,’ there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, ‘The cosmos is eternal,’ and when there is the view, ‘The cosmos is not eternal,’ there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, and distress whose destruction I make known right in the here & now.

“It’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘The cosmos is finite,’ there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘The cosmos is infinite,’ there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, ‘The cosmos is finite,’ and when there is the view, ‘The cosmos is infinite,’ there is still the birth, there is the ageing, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, and distress whose destruction I make known right in the here and now.

“It’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘The soul and the body are the same,’ there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘The soul is one thing and the body another,’ there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, ‘The soul and the body are the same,’ and when there is the view, ‘The soul is one thing and the body another,’ there is still the birth, there is the aging, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, and distress whose destruction I make known right in the here & now.

“It’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘After death a Tathāgata exists,’ there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘After death a Tathāgata does not exist,’ there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist,’ there is the living of the holy life. And it’s not the case that when there is the view, ‘After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist’ there is the living of the holy life. When there is the view, ‘After death a Tathāgata exists’... ‘After death a Tathāgata does not exist’... ‘After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist’... ‘After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,’ there is still the birth, there is the ageing, there is the death, there is the sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, & distress whose destruction I make known right in the here & now.

“So, Mālunkyāputta, remember what is undeclared by me as undeclared, and what is declared by me as declared. And what is undeclared by me? ‘The cosmos is eternal,’ is undeclared by me. ‘The cosmos is not eternal,’ is undeclared by me. ‘The cosmos is finite’... ‘The cosmos is infinite’... ‘The soul and the body are the same’... ‘The soul is one thing and the body another’... ‘After death a Tathāgata exists’... ‘After death a Tathāgata does not exist’... ‘After death a Tathāgata both exists & does not exist’... ‘After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist,’ is undeclared by me.

“And why are they undeclared by me? Because they are not connected with the goal, are not fundamental to the holy life. They do not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, Unbinding. That’s why they are undeclared by me.

“And what is declared by me? ‘This is stress [dukkha],’ is declared by me. ‘This is the origination of stress,’ is declared by me. ‘This is the cessation of stress,’ is declared by me. ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress,’ is declared by me. And why are they declared by me? Because they are connected with the goal, are

fundamental to the holy life. They lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, calming, direct knowledge, self-awakening, Unbinding. That's why they are declared by me.

"So, Mālunkyāputta, remember what is undeclared by me as undeclared, and what is declared by me as declared."

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Mālunkyāputta delighted in the Blessed One's words.

Further reading

Introduction to Brahmajāla Sutta, Bhikkhu Bodhi, p.27ff.

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=6ym-vC4nTsAC&printsec=frontcover>

A Survey of Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Section 16 of chapter 1, 9th edition, Windhorse, 2001.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-survey-of-buddhism-ebook/>

This session begins with the fourth section of Sangharakshita's discussion of *dr̥ṣṭi* or views. It continues with a discussion of the *Honey Ball Sutta* (MN18), and of a key term used in that sutta.

Attachment to ideologies

We have seen how an ideology is established. First of all one has a *dr̥ṣṭi*, a view, representing a certain limited and emotionally negative perspective. One rationalizes this into a philosophical position or ideology, and then one proceeds to become attached to that position, to cling to that ideology. To take a simple example, someone who felt very unsure of himself, inadequate, insecure, might perhaps be drawn to some form of, say, fascist ideology. Embracing that ideology would make him feel more sure of himself, so he would then become more and more attached to it, and more and more certain in his adherence to it.

Not all ideologies are as unskilful as this, of course, but an element of wrong view is always going to be there somewhere. Clinging to ideologies means fixing our attitudes so that we won't have to think or feel or see for ourselves. Faced with the fundamental issues of life and finding there are no obvious easy answers to them, we find security in a certain limited perspective, which we formulate into a set of views. Almost all of us do this to some degree: our personal desires, whims, and perhaps neuroses bring all kinds of views or rationalizations in their wake. Some of these we are aware of, others not. But usually our wrong views underpin the emotional basis for the way we look at the world. In a sense we *exude* our wrong views – they aren't just there as a little intellectual tangle we've got into in a little corner of the brain.

We will probably find that even our involvement with the Dharma is at least partly based upon these views, these ideologies. It is almost inevitable that we start off with impure motives. We probably have some cherished notions that we associate with Buddhism, that we feel Buddhism ought to endorse, but into which we do not enquire too deeply, for fear of being disappointed. This is where the trouble starts. If we have embraced Buddhism for the wrong reasons – which is quite common – we need to make sure that we don't cling to it in such a way as to reinforce the original weakness on account of which we embraced it in the first place. Otherwise we will be embracing not Buddhism but our own preconceived views, which we can hold even more tightly because we imagine that they are sanctioned by the Dharma.

Take the example of the person who comes to the Dharma with a mistaken view of the doctrine of *anātman*, interpreting it as a total negation of the self, unconsciously

finding it attractive because it seems to reflect their own self-hatred. They might then study this subject that they find so fascinating, research it, even write books on it. Finally they might become a well-known expert on the *anātmavāda*. In this way their whole life would have revolved around their basic neurosis and the rationalization built upon it.

Right view with regard to the self is that in truth or in reality it is a non-self [i.e. not a fixed self]. However, one can hold this view in one of two ways. One can adopt it as a skilful attitude by which one will be able to progress towards eventually transcending all views whatsoever, or else one can adhere to it as a dogma. It is possible to adopt the *anātmavāda* (the doctrine of no-self) in an unskilful, egoistic way.

This is certainly a criticism that might be levelled at some Theravādins, that they have had a tendency to advocate the *anātmavāda* in an aggressive, even belligerent manner, violently criticizing anyone who professed the opposite view. Not that these Theravādins always understood quite what they were talking about, but they were still very attached to their doctrine as a key element in their cultural and intellectual heritage, something which clearly marked them off from Hindus. One of my own teachers, Jagdish Kashyap, once remarked in the course of a lecture he was giving in Sri Lanka that one could not understand what *anātman* meant without first understanding what *ātman* or self meant. He was shouted down by the monks in the audience, who said that they didn't want him, "Bringing his Hindu philosophy here."

Such is clinging to ideology in a Buddhist context. This kind of unskilful attitude towards that which is specifically meant to help one to be skilful is a serious matter. As Candrakīrti says, "If the medicine itself becomes poisonous, where will you turn for the treatment you need?"¹⁸⁷ It is clear that sometimes what is technically a wrong view may temporarily serve a skilful purpose. For example, on the basis of a belief in an essential self or soul one may perform certain skilful actions; and on the basis of the skilful mental states arising from those actions one may realize that the idea of a self or soul could not be in accordance with reality. Up to this point that wrong view has served a useful purpose. The fact of the matter is that, until such time as we are Enlightened, we need a self; in fact, most of us actually need to strengthen and define our individuality. In the Pāli scriptures the Buddha himself speaks of, "Making the self strong"¹⁸⁸ – because a weak self is simply not capable of sustaining the shattering experience of transcendental insight.

The crucial issue is not so much whether the view held is right or wrong, but the manner in which it is held. If one holds it sufficiently lightly, so that one is able eventually to see its limitations and discard it, then at the very least one will be able to move forward. Right view that is treated as dogma is being taken as an end in itself. It is then no longer useful and therefore no longer right view. Right view must always be held as what Guenther calls an operational concept. It is all right to believe that as a Buddhist one's operational concepts are reliable, effective, and long-lasting, but only if one keeps bearing in mind that they are still only operational concepts.

A dogmatic attitude towards right views turns them, practically speaking, into wrong views. If you try to hit someone over the head with Buddhist truth, it effectively ceases to be Buddhist truth. In any case, we have no idea at all at present what the

Enlightened state – the state of realized non-ego – is like. Even to describe it as a state of non-selfhood gives us so little idea of it as to be conceivably quite misleading.

The followers of an ancient Hīnayāna school called the *Pudgalavāda* provide an interesting slant on this issue. They posited the existence of a *pudgala* or person which is distinct from the concept of ātman or self, supporting this view by referring to texts such as the *Ti Ratana Vandana* which speak of the eight noble pudgalas (*aṭṭha-āriya-puggalās* in Pāli), and pointing out that the Buddha refers to himself as a pudgala: “*There is a pudgala who has arisen for the benefit of the world.*”¹⁸⁹ So they advanced the idea of a pudgalavāda which is not an atmavāda – a position which can be defended rationally. Their opponents, of course, interpreted the key texts which the Pudgalavādins cited in support of their views differently, holding that the pudgalavāda was in fact a form of atmavāda. However, the other Hīnayāna schools admitted that Pudgalavādins could gain Enlightenment.

So the view advanced by Edward Conze in his important account of Buddhist philosophy, *Buddhist Thought in India*, that the Pudgalavādins were not really Buddhists, does not ring true.¹⁹¹ This view – that early converts to Buddhism, unable to give up their Brahminical belief in the ultimate reality of the atman, tried to smuggle in their heresy in the guise of *pudgala* or *ālaya* or *bhavanga* – rather misses the point. In India at this time the discussion was not conducted in terms of whether or not the Pudgalavādins were really Buddhists. The term ‘Buddhist’ itself hardly existed. The important point, which all parties recognized, was that they were all trying to gain Enlightenment.

The more fruitful line of inquiry is to ask: “Why did they introduce this doctrine?” If we reflect that the Buddha himself continued, even after his Enlightenment, to experience himself as himself, the answer seems clear enough. If the Theravādins reject the pudgala doctrine out of hand, this is perhaps because it is a purely metaphysical position, and they are sometimes quite unsophisticated, even naïve, when it comes to metaphysics.

The fact is that although the Pudgalavāda School and its own recension of the scriptures have not survived, it was one of the most important schools of early Buddhism. As it happens, one of the most respected Pāli scholars of modern times, A.P. Buddhadatta, came to the conclusion that they were right. Nobody bothered him about it; it was just considered a mild eccentricity on his part to be a Pudgalavadin.¹⁹¹ In the end we should have the attitude of the true Mādhyamika – the follower of the Middle Way – which is to find the truth and be receptive to it, whatever it might turn out to be, even if it threatens everything that up till now we have based our life upon. To some extent, it is bound to do this – if it is really the truth – and we should be prepared for that. (pp.191-194).

Textual notes

187 See *Wisdom Beyond Words*, Sangharakshita, p. 128

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/wisdom-beyond-words-the-buddhist-vision-of-ultimate-reality/>

188 See *Itivuttaka*, 111:

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=klllG8k-OmIC&printsec=frontcover>

190 See *Buddhist Thought in India*, Edward Conze, 1967:

<https://books.google.ie/books?id=xLPxSwGkMMC>

Definitions

Ālaya: see *Know Your Mind*, Sangharakshita, p. 55ff.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/know-your-mind-the-psychological-dimension-of-ethics-in-buddhism/>

Bhavanga: see *Nyanatiloka* p. 38.

http://www.palikanon.com/english/wtb/dic3_b.htm

Anusaya: see *ibid.*

<http://www.palikanon.com/english/wtb/a/anusaya.htm>

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is meant by ideology?
2. What other examples of ideology can you think of besides fascism?
3. How do, “*Our wrong views underpin the emotional basis for the way we look at the world*”? (You may find it useful to read the whole of the second paragraph as you try to answer this question).
4. For what wrong reasons do people commonly embrace Buddhism? Do you think you have done this or are doing it?
5. How can one adopt the doctrine of no-self in an unskillful, egoistic way?
6. Why do you think the Buddha spoke of the value of, “*Making the self strong*”? (*Itivuttaka*, 111). Does this advice negate the doctrine of no fixed self?
7. Why if you try, “*To hit someone over the head with Buddhist truth*,” does it “*Effectively cease to be Buddhist truth*”?
8. How does it feel to be practising in a tradition in which we are encouraged, “*To find the truth and be receptive to it, whatever it might turn out to be, even if it threatens everything that up till now we have based our life upon*”?

Views and obsessions in the *Honey Ball Sutta*

The *Honey Ball Sutta* (*Madhupīṇḍika Sutta*, 18 in the *Majjhima Nikāya*) offers a very useful way of thinking about how views, including obsessive views and ideologies, are generated. It also offers an interesting variation on the familiar *nidāna* chain, showing how conditionality works in the field of thinking. It’s worth remembering as we study this variant, that the ‘wheel’ is driven by the *kleśas*, craving, aversion, and ignorance, just as it is in the more familiar version.

The starting point of the sutta is a conversation between the Buddha and Daṇḍapāṇi, a rather pretentious young Śākya whose name means ‘stick-in-hand’. In answer to Daṇḍapāṇi’s seemingly rather aggressive question as to what he teaches, the Buddha replies [A]:

The sort of doctrine, friend, where one does not keep quarrelling with anyone in the cosmos with its devas, Maras, and Brahmas, with its contemplatives and priests, its royalty and common-folk; the sort [of doctrine] where perceptions no longer obsess the brahman who remains dissociated from sensual pleasures, free from perplexity, his uncertainty cut away, devoid of craving for becoming and non-becoming. Such is my doctrine, such is what I proclaim.

Apparently Daṇḍapāṇi does not know quite what to make of this; he shakes his head, wags his tongue, raises his eyebrows until his forehead is puckered in three furrows, and goes away.

Later, the Buddha is asked by a bhikkhu what he meant by this. The Buddha tells him and other bhikkhus present that what he meant was [B]:

If, monk, with regard to the cause whereby the perceptions and categories of complication [papañca] assail a person, there is nothing there to relish, welcome, or remain fastened to, then that is the end of the obsessions of passion, the obsessions of resistance, the obsessions of views, the obsessions of uncertainty, the obsessions of conceit, the obsessions of passion for becoming, and the obsessions of ignorance. That is the end of taking up rods and bladed weapons, of arguments, quarrels, disputes, accusations, divisive tale-bearing, and false speech. That is where these evil, unskilful things cease without remainder.

The bhikkhus, thinking that they need further details of this teaching, resort to Mahā Kaccāna, one of the senior disciples. Kaccāna modestly protests that they should have asked the Buddha for clarification,

For knowing, the Blessed One knows; seeing, he sees. He is the Eye, he is Knowledge, he is Dhamma, he is Brahma. He is the speaker, the proclaimer, the elucidator of meaning, the giver of the Deathless, the lord of the Dhamma, the Tathāgata. That was the time when you should have questioned him about this matter. However he answered, that was how you should have remembered it.

Then he agrees to tell them what the Buddha meant by his teaching.

After repeating the Buddha's summary [B], he continues [C]:

Dependent on eye and forms, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives (labels in the mind). What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates [papañca]. Based on what a person complicates ['papañcates'], the perceptions and categories of complication [papañca] assail him/her with regard to past, present, and future forms cognizable via the eye.

He then goes on to repeat this with reference to each of the senses, ending with the mind-sense:

Dependent on nose and aromas, nose-consciousness arises...

Dependent on tongue and flavours, tongue-consciousness arises...

Dependent on body and tactile sensations, body-consciousness arises...

Dependent on intellect and ideas, intellect-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With contact as a requisite condition, there is feeling. What one feels, one perceives (labels in the mind). What one perceives, one thinks about. What one thinks about, one complicates [papañca]. Based on what a person complicates [‘papañc-ates’], the perceptions and categories of complication [papañca] assail him/her with regard to past, present, and future ideas cognizable via the intellect.

That is the core of this sutta’s teaching; Mahā Kaccāna says a bit more, and the bhikkhus seek endorsement for what he has said from the Buddha himself, which the Buddha gives.

A highly significant term in this sutta is ‘papañca’, which Bhikkhu Bodhi translates as ‘mental proliferation’. Papañca is well-worth going into, since it refers to obsessively held views – and indeed ideologies.

The meaning of papañca

The Pāli Text Society Dictionary’s definition of papañca is rather tentative. In his booklet, Bhikkhu Nananda defines it with more confidence as ‘conceptual proliferation’, and it is Nananda that Bhikkhu Bodhi (in his MN 1995) follows in describing it like this: “*It seems that the primary problem to which the term prapañca [Skt] points is... the propensity of the worldling’s imagination to erupt in an effusion of mental commentary that obscures the bare data of recognition.*” (MN pp 1203)

The significance of papañca

The problem indicated by the word papañca lies at the core of the Buddha’s teaching. In the Honey Ball Sutta, Kaccāna teaches a chain of nidānas which highlights the disastrous consequences (of becoming the victim) of prapañca.

The central part of Kaccāna’s exposition [C] can be summarised like this:

He begins by saying that in dependence on the eye and the (visual) forms available to the eye arises eye-consciousness. On the basis of these three, there is contact (*phassa*; Skt. *sparsa*). On the basis of phassa arises *vedanā* (feeling). On the basis of vedanā, arises *sañña* (perception). On the basis of sañña arises *vitakka* (thinking or applied thought). On the basis of vitakka arises *papañca* (conceptual proliferation), and on the basis of papañca arises *papañca-sañña-sankha* (which Bhikkhu Bodhi says might well mean ‘the perceptual notions [arisen from] proliferation.’) Kaccāna then goes through the same routine beginning with each of the other five sense-consciousnesses, including the mind.

The arising of eye consciousness (*cakkhuvinnana*) as a result of the meeting of eye (*cakkhu*) and form (*rūpa*), is an explanation of what happens at phassa, the 6th nidāna in the familiar twelve nidāna chain. Upon contact arises feeling (*vedanā*) the seventh nidāna, which, according to Nananda, brings us to the end of the result phase of the wheel.

According to this way of thinking, the causal phase begins here not with *taṇhā*, but with perception (*sañña*), which has arisen on the basis of feeling. Perception gives rise to thought (*vitakka* – which can also include applied thought since in early Buddhism *vitakka* and *vicāra* weren’t distinguished). On the basis of vitakka arises papañca. So sañña, vitakka, and papañca stand in the places usually occupied by *taṇhā*, *upādāna* and *bhava*. This is not to suggest that there is a one-for-one equivalence here, but to bear a comparison in mind might be helpful.

It seems that we then enter the next result phase with *papañca-sañña-sankha*; this *nidāna* of this particular chain is taking us round to the resultant phase which normally begins with the eleventh *nidāna*, *jāti*.

Nanananda helpfully suggests that a good reason for assigning the *Honey Ball* *nidānas* in this way is the grammar used. (*Cakkhuvinnam*) *upajjati*, *phassa* and *vedanā* are used impersonally which signifies a process which is happening to a person. *Sanjanati* (from *sañña*), *vitakketi* and *papañceti* are all used here in the third person singular, which stresses that the person is acting in the process. He or she perceives, he or she thinks, he or she then involves him or herself in conceptual proliferation. The next link is again impersonal, which gives the impression that again the hapless subject has become the hapless object of an overwhelming force.

So what this all means is that a 'person's' eye consciousness becomes involved in the *upajjati* of sense consciousness, and the *phassa*, from which perception arises; from perception arises thinking, and the thinking leads to a kind of thinking which occurs when one's imagination runs riot. This in turn leads to a mindset which is obsessed with perceptions and notions that have arisen on the basis of grasping, conceit and views which gives support to the idea that one is a separate subject in the midst of objects which are available to be grasped or turned away from. So the term *prapañca-sañña-sankha*, whose exact meaning may never be established, seems to refer to a kind of obsessive mental set which from then on prejudices the way one sees, hears, and picks up on whatever one's senses latch onto. In other words, it shapes the way one interprets (and handles) one's experiences.

It is easy to get the impression that *prapañca* has only vivid manifestations; in fact, most people '*prapañc-ate*' most of the time. Every time that we get distracted into a train of thought or a chaos of thought as a result of yielding to the assumptions 'I am' etc., we are '*prapañc-ating*'.

The Buddha presented *prapañca* as a serious problem for beings. It was so serious, he seemed to be saying, that if they could get rid of this conceptual proliferation, they would become Awakened. In fact, one synonym for the Awakened state is *nisprapañco*.

How can we eliminate *prapañca*?

As we have seen, Bhikkhu Nananda helpfully explains the link between grammar and conceptual proliferation, pointing out that the link is clearly demonstrated in the syntax of the *Honey Ball Sutta*. The conclusion must be that it is our habits of thought and the way we habitually express ourselves through concepts which are grammatically ordered as objects that sustain *prapañca*. So do we have to stop thinking? Do we have to stop talking?

The answer to these questions seems to be that most of us need to choose to think to such effect that we can see through the grasping inherent in our habits of thinking. Most of us probably need to talk less and more carefully, and as we are talking we should be as aware as we can be that we are giving voice to symbols which can involve us in *prapañca*.

Of course, the Three-fold way itself addresses the problem of *prapañca*. *Sīla* offers us a chance to experience the dualistic tendency of our desires and aversions, and by degrees to adopt different habits. Meditation not only offers us the same opportunity, but also the chance to become less reactive and more creative in our responding. The *mettā bhāvanā* both supports and extends the practice of *sīla*, but also helps us to develop the highest asceticism (patience) and contentment. See the second sentence of this session's extract from *Know Your Mind*.

The more truly contented we are, the less likely we will be to fix upon and hold onto people and things to try to satisfy our desires. A contented person is generally a less reactive person, and at least potentially, a more creative person. A contented person is more likely to use their senses without giving energy to the process which leads to papañca, and is more likely to be able to follow the Buddha's teaching to Bahiya, "*In the seen only the seen, in the heard, only the heard,*" etc. (*Udāna 1.x*). Moreover, a contented person will see the point of guarding the gates of the senses. The Buddha's teaching on guarding the gates of the senses (found e.g. in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* at *Dīgha Nikāya* I.70) is an ethical version of his teaching on papañca.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What do you understand by the term 'papañca' (Sanskrit: *prapañca*)?
2. How does it arise?
3. What is the significance of papañca for wrong view?
4. What is the underlying tendency to views (*ditthi-anusaya*)?
5. What does 'sañña' really mean and what role does sañña play in the generation of papañca?
6. How can we avoid 'papañc-ating'?
7. How do you think the teaching on '*guarding the gates of the senses*' relates to wrong view?
8. What kinds of thoughts and feelings do you have when your '*imagination runs riot*'?

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<http://www.wisdom-books.com/product/concept-and-reality/299/>

Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha: Dīgha Nikāya, Maurice Walshe (trans), Wisdom, 1987.
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<https://books.google.ie/books?id=klllG8k-OmIC&printsec=frontcover>

This session begins with the fifth section of Sangharakshita's discussion of *dṛṣṭi* in *Know Your Mind*, and continues with an extract from *The Bodhisattva Ideal*, and from four of Sangharakshita's seminars.

Attachment to moral codes and religious observances

It is said that there are 'ten fetters' which hold us back from the ultimate freedom which is Enlightenment, and the breaking of the first three, according to tradition, is synonymous with the dawning of transcendental insight. The first two fetters are 'fixed self view' and 'doubt with regard to the Three Jewels'. *Śīlavrataparāmarśa* is the third. *Śīla* means 'ethics', and in this context it refers to a formulation of rules or precepts, while *vrata*, which literally means 'vow', is a pre-Buddhist, Vedic term for a certain kind of brahminical observance. And *parāmarśa* means 'being attached to, hanging on, being under the influence of'. A good interpretive translation of this term would therefore be 'clinging to ethical formalism and conventional religion as ends in themselves'. To be bound by this fetter is to think that observing the outward forms of religious observance purely mechanically or compulsively will suffice to bring about deliverance from compounded existence. It is a superstitious belief in the inherent spiritual or salvific efficacy of, say, bathing in the River Ganges, going on pilgrimage to Mecca, receiving absolution from a priest, and so on.

It being so crucial to one's spiritual progress that one should break these three fetters, it is a good idea to approach them from every angle. I have sometimes described them in psychological terms as habit, vagueness, and superficiality,¹⁹³ while in social terms they could be described as attachment to psychology, philosophy, and religion. So here we are concerned with an essentially superficial approach to spiritual practice – that is, religion.

Samsāra is essentially an expression of compulsiveness. The fixed sense of self, the ego, is essentially compulsive, inasmuch as it has continually to reinforce its fixation by going over the same ground again and again. Such practices as bathing in the Ganges and so on are inherently egoistic acts, inasmuch as their rationale is based on the idea of a separate, unchanging self to be liberated or admitted to heaven or paradise. Such attachment to conventional religious or ethical observances simply binds us more securely to *samsāra*.

Buddhism itself, of course, has its own tendency towards this form of attachment. In Theravada Buddhism, for example, many people are strongly convinced that things like shaving one's head, wearing yellow robes, and not eating after twelve o'clock

make one a monk – and that these things are the most fundamental prerequisites to being a monk. But this is simply ethical formalism in the guise of Buddhism. In fact it is worse than that, because although the Theravada itself recognizes that these observances are matters of conventional rather than natural morality, if you try flouting these conventions in a Theravādin country, you will find you have committed a major offence.

There was an Indian bhikkhu I knew who spent a number of years in Sri Lanka, and it happened once that he picked up a severe cold in the head. He was staying up in the hills where it can get quite cold and – being an Indian – he put on a small woollen cap. This provoked a tremendous hullabaloo: there were pictures of him in the paper under such headlines as ‘the shameless monk who wears a woollen cap’ and people hooted after him in the street. For years afterwards he was nicknamed ‘the cap-wearing bhikkhu’. Of course, this happened over forty years ago; no doubt the Theravada is more relaxed about adherence to its conventional observances than it used to be.

When I returned to England after spending many years living as a bhikkhu in India, I myself provoked an astonishing reaction when I started letting my hair grow – this was while I was still wearing robes. This caused disquiet not just in Theravādin circles; Mahayanists and even Zen Buddhists all seemed to find it quite upsetting. It seemed that ethical formalism was creeping into British Buddhism although it had only been going for a few decades. So I let my hair grow longer and longer. After a lecture one evening several people came up to speak to me about the length of my hair, which by now amounted to a couple of inches, and one of them said, *“I don’t know why you are growing your hair so long – it is really upsetting everybody. We don’t know what it means.”*

I found it very interesting that the length of my hair should be a subject of such deep concern to so many people. Even Christmas Humphreys, who was supposed to be very broad-minded, was not, I came to understand, altogether happy about this deviation from the religious proprieties by one whom he had personally admonished to regard himself [i.e. Sangharakshita] as the Buddhist equivalent of the Vicar of Hampstead⁴⁴. When I eventually gave up wearing robes, there were some people who were rather pleased – and as with the issue of the hair, their approbation was not always for the right reasons – but there were others who were deeply upset, feeling that this was tantamount to giving up Buddhism.

This whole episode was something of an eye-opener for me, and when I set up the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order I tried to discourage any creeping paralysis of the forms and institutions through which we practise and spread the Dharma. It still happens, of course – people are heard to say, *“Well, this is the way we do things in the Triratna Buddhist Community.”* But in fact, things in the Buddhist movement I started are generally the way they are because I once thought, *“That’s how we’ll do things for now.”* Within Triratna, nothing apart from the centrality of Going for Refuge to the Three Jewels is set in stone. There isn’t one right way of doing things – there never has been.

44 Hampstead is a part of north London. Sangharakshita led activities at a vihāra there after his return from India.

Of course in communicating the Dharma one should be responsible about this; one should draw on past experience, and not encourage mere self-expression. And we have already discussed the value of discipline, of rules, in the spiritual life. However, a certain margin of creative variation is not only permissible, but desirable. Every once in a while one needs to re-examine everything with a completely open mind. Maybe one could even go right back to the Buddha's way of doing things – just going from place to place, and talking to people.

The idea that one has to break away from religion and morality as ordinarily understood before one can really start to make any progress on the path is a radical one, even for Buddhists. But it is quite literally what one has to do. One is wasting one's time otherwise. The third fetter is really about fear of breaking the rules. But why is one afraid of breaking the rules? Basically, it is because one doesn't trust oneself. One thinks, "*Well, if I don't observe the rules, who knows what will happen? All hell may break loose.*" Yes, perhaps it will.

- Pages 194-197.

Textual notes

193 See *Taste of Freedom*, Sangharakshita, pp.19-22 in 1997 edition and pp. 28ff in 1990 edition.

http://www.sangharakshita.org/_books/taste-freedom.pdf

Definitions

Formalism: strict or excessive adherence to prescribed forms; the use or observance of prescribed forms without regard to their inner significance. (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.)

Compounded existence: *samsāra*.

Salvific: causing or able to cause salvation. (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.)

Conventional morality: social norms, e.g. monogamy.

Natural morality: skilful action, i.e. action expressive of skilful mental states, states that are free of the kleśas. See *What is the Dharma?*, Sangharakshita, p. 217.

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/what-is-the-dharma/>

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Why does Sangharakshita define the third fetter as '*superficiality*'?
2. Why does Sangharakshita say that, "*Samsāra is essentially an expression of compulsiveness*"?
3. What is ethical formalism and can you give other examples than the ones Sangharakshita gives?
4. Why do you think some people were pleased, "*Not always for the right reasons*" when Sangharakshita gave up wearing robes?
5. What's wrong with having, "*...a way we do things in Triratna*"?

6. Why might a “*Certain margin of creative variation [be] not only permissible, but desirable*”? And why should, “*Mere self-expression,*” not be encouraged?
7. What does Sangharakshita mean when he says that, “*To break away from religion and morality... is a radical one, even for Buddhists*”?
8. What does he mean when he says that, “*...all hell may break loose,*” and how do you feel about that?

A summary by Subhuti

This is where you become attached to particular rituals and rules as ends in themselves. So it is a bit as if you said, “Look, the Sevenfold Pūjā is the best way, and it has to be done in English, and you have to get every word right, and if you get every word right of the Sevenfold Pūjā in English, well, you will be Enlightened.”

So that would be śīlavrataparāmarśa. Of course you can do the Pūjā in any language... So this illustrates what śīlavrataparmārśa is. We do certain things, we follow certain ways of life and so on, to help us to develop a state of mind. But what can happen is that we get attached to the way of doing things and we think that that in itself is bringing us spiritual results.

- From a talk given in India, reproduced in Lokabandhu, p 126.

From *The Bodhisattva Hierarchy*, chapter 7 of *The Bodhisattva Ideal*

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 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 – nothing – miserable sinners, 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 for a long time there was a 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. So 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 being able to follow them wholeheartedly and 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 pūjā 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.

- Pages 188-9 on the 1999 edition⁴⁵

Question for reflection and discussion

1. How can one be *too moral* to get Enlightened?

From *The Three Jewels* (chapters 10, 13 and 15) seminar

Or to put it perhaps more clearly and more straightforwardly, this fetter consists in the belief that it's enough if the change or the religiosity or the spiritual life is relatively external. And that doesn't just mean external practices and observances but even attitudes which don't go right deep down to the very centre of one's being. It's really more like that. In other words it's an absence of wholeheartedness. You don't sort of do things right from the very depths of your being, you do them on the periphery of your being without being really involved deep down and without doing them right from the heart as it were. This is what it really means. In other words you are just not wholehearted. You are satisfied with something relatively superficial and external. Your commitment doesn't reach right down to the depths of your being. You keep something in reserve. You go through the motions as it were, even go through the motions mentally, but deep down there's something in you that is not doing it, which is not participating.

Psychology of Buddhist Ritual seminar

One might even say that what the Buddha had in mind, when he spoke of this third fetter, was irrational dependence on ritual or irrational ritual in general. In other words that which, in psychological terms, is obsessional and compulsive.

Dimensions of Going for Refuge (revised) seminar

The third fetter is that of 'Dependence on Moral Rules and Religious Observances' (*śīlavrataparāmarśa*). It could be paraphrased, I think, as the belief that 'going through the motions' will do. You go through the motions when your heart is not really in what you are doing. You think that if you keep up appearances externally, i.e. if you observe the moral rules because that is what society requires, and maintain the

⁴⁵ <http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/the-bodhisattva-ideal-wisdom-and-compassion-in-buddhism/> or <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=71>

religious observances because that is what your co-religionists require, then everything will be all right. This kind of attitude is what is called 'dependence on moral rules and religious observances'. Here there is a split between the external observances and your inward state of being. Though the things you are doing may be good in themselves, your heart is not in them and your performance of them is therefore empty, mechanical, rigid, artificial. Hence they don't really help you to develop: they don't get you anywhere spiritually.

From *The Nature of Existence* seminar (2nd final edition)

[For Tibetans] a recitation of the *Om Mani Padme Hum* was enough. A recitation of the Bodhisattva Vow was enough. This is also literalism. Just to say something is enough. But you know you get this in every sphere of life, one might say. This is the essence of the Third Fetter, that you just go through the motions of something. You either just don't do it, which is bad enough, or you just go through the motions of doing it. You say you believe, but you don't live up to that. Or perhaps it just doesn't even occur to you that you ought to be living up to what you profess. I think it is very easy to get into that sort of mental state of professing but not practising, very, very easy, and again, this is the essence in a way of the *śīlavrataparāmarśa*, whether you profess verbally or you profess by purely mechanical actions.

All these are available at <https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/texts/seminars>

Question for reflection and discussion

1. For each of the above extracts, spell out the main point or points that Sangharakshita is making.

The Raft Simile

The Buddha used similes a lot in his teaching. This is one of his more famous ones.

"Monks, I will teach you the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Listen and pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, lord," the monks responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said: "Suppose a man were travelling along a path. He would see a great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious and risky, the further shore secure and free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. The thought would occur to him, 'Here is this great expanse of water, with the near shore dubious and risky, the further shore secure and free from risk, but with neither a ferryboat nor a bridge going from this shore to the other. What if I were to gather grass, twigs, branches, and leaves and, having bound them together to make a raft, were to cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with my hands and feet?' Then the man, having gathered grass, twigs, branches, and leaves, having bound them together to make a raft, would cross over to safety on the other shore in dependence on the raft, making an effort with his hands and feet. Having crossed over to the further shore, he might think, 'How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands and feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don't I, having hoisted it on my head or carrying on my back, go wherever I like?' What do

you think, monks: Would the man, in doing that, be doing what should be done with the raft?”

“No, lord.”

“And what should the man do in order to be doing what should be done with the raft? There is the case where the man, having crossed over, would think, ‘How useful this raft has been to me! For it was in dependence on this raft that, making an effort with my hands and feet, I have crossed over to safety on the further shore. Why don’t I, having dragged it on dry land or sinking it in the water, go wherever I like?’ In doing this, he would be doing what should be done with the raft. In the same way, monks, I have taught the Dhamma compared to a raft, for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding onto. Understanding the Dhamma as taught compared to a raft, you should let go even of Dhammas, to say nothing of non-Dhammas.”

This is translated from the *Alagaddūpama Sutta – Majjhima Nikāya 22* – by Bhikkhu Thanissaro, and is found on the *Access to Insight* website.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.022.than.html>

Question for reflection and discussion

1. What does the raft represent?
2. What do the near and further shores represent?
3. What would be one’s motivation in wanting to carry the raft after one has reached the other side?
4. What is the Buddha suggesting that one does instead, and why?
5. What light does this parable cast on the matter of views?
6. What are the implications for your practice of this parable?

This session begins with the sixth and last extract from Sangharakshita's discussion of *dr̥ṣṭi* in *Know Your Mind* and continues with a short summary by Subhuti.

Wrong views

This category concerns wrong views regarding actions and their consequences. They are given a category of their own because wrong views of this kind will undermine the spiritual life completely, making any kind of development on the path impossible. In this respect they are, so to speak, the cardinal wrong views. Traditionally there are four: denial of cause, denial of effect, denial of oneself as an ethical agent, and denial of the attainments of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The first of these, denial of cause, is the wilful refusal to acknowledge any meaningful distinction between good and bad actions – that is, the wilful refusal to recognize the ethical content of actions. This is a wrong view that used to have some currency in some 'beat' Zen circles ('square' Zen being the other extreme of insisting on all the rules, paraphernalia, and rituals of traditional Zen Buddhism). One would assume what one imagined to be the viewpoint of the Enlightened mind which has gone beyond mundane distinctions, including that between good and evil, or skilful and unskilful.

In fact, the Enlightened mind unquestionably perceives the difference between good and evil. If you are Enlightened you will look at compounded existence and perceive what is appropriate to or pertains to it, and this will include the necessary distinction between what is skilful and what is unskilful. Or rather, you will at least seem to others to be recommending skilful courses of action and deprecating unskilful ones. Whether you yourself see things in that way is another matter. What we may be sure of is that an Enlightened one will perceive the ethical implications of our actions far more clearly than we do.

The second of these wrong views, denial of effect, is the wilful refusal to acknowledge any meaningful distinction between good and bad actions in terms of their consequences – specifically karmic ones. This may be a straightforward conclusion arising from the first wrong view, or it may be that no effectual ethical connection between action and experience, *karma* and *vipāka*, is recognized at all.

Of course, causation is not a straightforward matter, which is why it is better to think in terms of conditionality. In the Indian philosophical tradition, there are two opposing viewpoints with regard to the relationship between cause and effect. The

followers of the *Sātkāryavāda* school of thought, which brought together the *Sāṃkhya*s and the *Advaita-Vedāntins*, believe that there is essentially no difference between cause and effect, that effect is a transformation of cause, cause in another form. Various illustrations are given in support of this thesis. For instance, one can say that when water freezes, water is the cause, and ice is the effect; that when clay is formed and baked, the clay is the cause, and the pot is the effect; and that when gold ornaments are made, again, the effect is a transformation of the cause. That is the view of the *Sātkāryavādins*. The opposite viewpoint, the view of the *Asatkāryavādins*, is that cause and effect are totally distinct. When there is an acorn and then much later there is an oak tree, it seems clear that the tree is not simply a transformation of the acorn, even though the acorn is the cause of the tree. Cause and effect are, according to this view, quite different.¹⁹⁵

The Buddhist view is that the whole question is artificial, because from a practical point of view it is not necessary to assert either of these positions. Ice arises in dependence upon water; the oak arises in dependence upon the acorn. There is no need to say more than this. Besides, as Nāgārjuna points out, if cause and effect are identical there can be no causation. Similarly, if cause and effect are different, no causation is possible.

The idea of conditionality is effectively the idea of causation employed in modern science. When we use the term cause it should be understood to mean the condition in dependence on which an event is observed to occur. But although there is an event, in the sense of a happening, there is no 'thing' to which something has happened. There is only a process.

From an ethical perspective, the point is that actions have consequences. Unskilful actions of body, speech, and mind do not come from nowhere and do not disappear without leaving a trace. We cannot say that suffering is caused by the *kleśas*, but we can certainly observe that we suffer when we are subject to the *kleśas*.

The third wrong view with respect to actions and their consequences is denial of oneself as an ethical agent: the wilful refusal to recognize that one's relationship with others, as well as with oneself, has an ethical dimension. Our actions affect others, and they affect us too, not only in the immediate future, but with respect to future lives as well. Our past and our future are the product to some degree of our ethical decisions.

The crucial relationship from an ethical point of view is traditionally the relationship with one's mother and father. If one doesn't recognize a special duty or moral responsibility towards them, one may well have lost one's moral bearings altogether (assuming that one's early ethical training did come from one's mother and father). The family in which one grows up, in other words, is said to be the training ground for the maintenance and cultivation of ethical relationships in later life.

The socialization of a child takes time and skill. When it is done well, it produces an ethically aware individual, someone who has a positive attitude towards other human beings, who actually wants to be kind and generous, and who has a positive attitude towards society generally, and can find their place in it. When it is done badly it produces someone who would sell their own grandmother for sixpence, and who has a negative and destructive attitude towards society as a whole – an attitude

sometimes quite consciously and irresponsibly instilled in children, with very dangerous long-term results.

Another way of denying that one is an ethical agent is to take the view – perhaps a particularly modern one – that life, even spiritual life, is simply about doing what we feel like doing. Sooner or later, this viewpoint is more or less bound to lead to an over-valuation of the sexual relationship. This is not to say that sexual activity is necessarily unskilful on its own basic level. At the most unrefined mundane level, it is good not to be sexually blocked. There are those whose emotional development is held back by their being sexually repressed, who are unable to free up their emotions at any more subtle level than that of their sexuality. Unless some exceptional spontaneous spiritual experience arises to break through this emotional blockage, straightforward sexual experience may be the answer (which is not to say one cannot be both sexually liberated and thoroughly blocked emotionally – one can, very easily).

The idea that there is nothing to feel guilty about in one's sexuality is for many of us quite new. Because of the atmosphere of guilt that, even subconsciously, still surrounds the issue of sex, Western people sometimes find it difficult to accept sex simply for what it is – just sex. It has to be dignified, it has to be awarded some kind of spiritual validation. If one feels that there is something wrong with sex, one wants it sprinkled with religious rose-water, so to speak, to make it all right. This is perhaps one reason why even quite secular people like to have a church wedding, for example. And it is why some people who would like to be Buddhists refer to their sexual relationship in terms of the Tantra – girlfriends becoming dakinis, coupling becoming the union of wisdom and compassion, and so on. They don't want to face the fact that a purely mundane preoccupation occupies a large, perhaps central place in their life, and that a truly spiritual commitment would require a shift in their priorities.

No doubt a sexual experience can reach such a pitch of intensity that one is tempted to make some spiritual claims for it. But there is a simple test to apply here: does faith in the Three Jewels come into it anywhere? Is that intense experience compatible with a simultaneous experience of faith? Is the overall orientation of the emotion involved in that experience in the direction of what the Three Jewels represents – that is, faith in the transcendental? I would suggest that the actual experience of faith is incompatible with any quite defined sexual experience, that it will inhibit and even dissolve the sexual experience. The two cannot occur simultaneously.

The danger is twofold. Firstly, it lies in not recognizing an experience for what it is. That is, as well as not distinguishing the skilful from the unskilful, it involves not distinguishing clearly between lower and higher orders of skilfulness. The danger is that one tries to invest something occupying a lower order of skilfulness with the prestige and mystique of something that belongs to a higher order, in order to justify one's attachment to that less skilful experience.

The fourth of these wrong views, denial of the attainments of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, is the wilful refusal to recognize the possibility of liberation from compounded existence – and not just in the abstract. It is the wilful refusal to recognize the concrete reality of the Buddhist ideal as embodied in historical and even contemporary figures. It is to disbelieve that anyone has in the past or the present achieved a level of development that is qualitatively different from ordinary human existence, such as to represent an irreversible shift in their being towards an ever

clearer and more compassionate realization of the true nature of existence. With this wrong view one immediately limits the range of one's own vision. This attitude is probably more prevalent among ex-Protestants than among ex-Catholics because Catholics have at least been brought up with the concrete possibility of the attainment of sainthood embodied in the lives of historical individuals right up to the present day. Protestants, however, through their objection to the worship of saints, lost the notion of sanctity as representing a different and higher level of human development. The whole idea of attaining a particular level of sanctity that is recognized as marking one off from ordinary human goodness is regarded as rather suspect in a Protestant society.

Ex-Protestants tend to think in terms of '*Believe and you will be saved.*' If they do accept the possibility of some kind of transformation they tend to think of it as a dramatic, even sensational group experience (mediated, perhaps, by an evangelical preacher). They don't tend to think in terms of spiritual evolution. If they take up meditation, they think of it as a way of being at peace with oneself, of being happy and comfortable with oneself on one's own level, not as a way of moving towards the permanent attainment of a state far beyond that level. Those who resist the possibility of radical change are really looking to reinforce their existing attitude, their existing way of life. If they take up meditation it is for the same reason that most people go to church – to partake of whatever consolation and emotional positivity they can find there, to enable them to carry on with mundane life.

The whole idea that one may develop into a substantially better kind of human being can be undermined by the assumption, widely current today, that no one is better than anyone else. The fact that you are more aware, more positive, more kind, more thoughtful, more energetic than other people, is not supposed actually to make you a better person than others. After all, it may be argued, other people have not had your advantages. You are not more developed; you are differently developed. One of the reasons that festivals celebrating the attainment of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas like Śākyamuni or Padmasambhava are so important is that they overturn this wrong view by drawing our attention not only to the path to Enlightenment but also to actual exemplars of the attainment of its goal.

At this point appear the four paragraphs which I reproduced in the third session. If you want to read them you will find them there; they are the last four paragraphs. (pp. 197-202)

Subhuti's summary

These are wrong views about the nature of karma. This is supposed to be the worst possible wrong view. And basically it consists in denying that there is such a thing as karma. There are four aspects. First of all you believe that there is no cause of good fruits. So you believe that actions do not have consequences. Whatever you do the result of that action is completely random. You can see that this completely undermines spiritual life. Then you look out from the other point of view and you deny that there are fruits, that there is some positive outcome from your meritorious action. Then you deny that there is a moral agent. You are effectively saying, "*I am not responsible for my actions*" Then finally, you assert that there is no spiritual attainment. So in other words you deny the possibility of spiritual life.

- From a talk in India, Lokabandhu p. 126.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How does it happen that, *“Our past and our future are the product to some degree of our ethical decisions”*?
2. Do you think it’s true that, *“...if one doesn’t recognise a special duty or moral responsibility towards them [one’s mother and father], one may well have lost one’s moral bearings altogether”*?
3. What does Sangharakshita mean when he says that, *“The danger [relating to any defined sexual experience] is that one tries to invest something occupying a lower order of skilfulness with the prestige and mystique of something that belongs to a higher order, in order to justify one’s attachment to that less skilful experience”*?
4. Why is it a wrong view to, *“Disbelieve that anyone has in the past or the present achieved a level of development that is qualitatively different from ordinary human existence”*?
5. Do you think there is anything wrong with people taking up meditation, *“To enable them to carry on with mundane life”*?
6. Is there anything wrong with the idea that, *“No one is better than anyone else”*?
7. What effect has our previous religious conditioning had on our views?
8. What is the right view corresponding to each of these four wrong views?

Further Questions for reflection and discussion

Now that you have come to the end of the six extracts on the five kinds of wrong views from *Know Your Mind*, you may like to ask yourself these questions.

1. Do you think that any of the five kinds of views reviewed in this module has held you back on the path more than others?
2. If you have identified any view(s) which is/are holding you back, what first step do you intend to take to deal with it/them?
3. If you don’t hold any of these wrong views, why aren’t you Awakened?

In the first six sessions of the module, we looked at extracts from Sangharakshita's commentary on *dr̥ṣṭi* in *Know Your Mind*. We also looked at other material, including several extracts from the Pāli Canon, which claims to record the teaching of the Buddha. The Buddha's first proclamation of his teaching in the Deer Park at Sarnath was called 'the first turning of the wheel' (For an account of that first teaching, see the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, *Saṃyutta Nikāya* V 420, Bhikkhu Bodhi p. 1843).

Although *Know Your Mind* is not presented as a commentary on the Buddha's teaching on views in the Pāli Canon, there is nothing in Sangharakshita's commentary which is not consistent with what we can read in the Canon. It's all what he calls '*Basic Buddhism*', that is, the core of the Dharma. It's also what Paul Williams means when he refers to '*Mainstream Buddhism*'. So thus far in the module, you have been becoming familiar with the '*Basic Buddhist*' take on views.

Since Mahāyāna Buddhism was very interested in views, it's been decided that a module which purports to deal with views in Buddhism would be incomplete without a discussion of the contribution of the Mahāyāna.

So in the last two sessions, we'll be looking at the two great philosophical traditions of the Mahāyāna, the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra. The Madhyamaka has generally been seen as such a significant renewal of the Buddhadharma that it has been called 'the second turning of the wheel'. Views were very much an issue for the Madhyamaka.

In this session, we will begin by reading or chanting the *Heart Sutra*, either in Edward Conze's translation below, or the version which appears in the *Triratna Pūjā Book*:

https://thebuddhistcentre.com/system/files/groups/files/heart_sutra.pdf

The Heart Sūtra

HOMAGE TO THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM, THE LOVELY, THE HOLY!

Avalokita, the Holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of the Wisdom which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high, he beheld but five heaps, and he saw that in their own-being they were empty.

Here, O Śāriputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness.

Here, O Śāriputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete.

Therefore, O Śāriputra, in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to: No mind-consciousness element; There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment.

Therefore, O Śāriputra, it is because of his indifference to any kind of personal attainment, and through his reliance on the Perfection of Wisdom, that a Bodhisattva dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana.

All those who appear as Buddhas in the three periods of time fully awake to the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment because they have relied on the perfection of wisdom.

Therefore one should know the prajñāpāramitā as the great spell, the spell of great knowledge, the utmost spell, the unequalled spell, allayer of all suffering, in truth – for what could go wrong? By the prajñāpāramitā has this spell been delivered. It runs like this: Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, O what an awakening, all-hail! This completes the Heart of perfect wisdom.

Sangharakshita's Commentary

Now follows Sangharakshita's commentary (taken verbatim from *Wisdom Beyond Words*) on the first four great statements of Avalokiteśvara. The excerpts from the *Heart Sutra* appear in bold.

"Here, O Śāriputra, form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness; whatever is form, that is emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form, the same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses and consciousness."

The first statement made by Avalokiteśvara is that the five skandhas are empty. This statement represents common ground between himself and Śāriputra; both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna start from this point. According to this fundamental Buddhist teaching, the entire range of existent phenomena can be reduced to five groups or aggregates: material form, feelings (pleasant, painful, and neutral), perceptions, impulses, and consciousness. Whether one is dealing with things or persons, one can discuss them completely, exhaustively, in terms of these five categories. It isn't necessary to bring in any such separate, independent category as a self or a soul. What we call 'the self' is not anything independent of the skandhas; it is not something separate from form, feeling, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness. The 'self' is only a label for the skandhas in their collective aspect. This first great statement is that the five skandhas exhaust the whole of existence, and that there is nothing beyond them. At the same time, they are empty of any self or soul.

"Here, O Śāriputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete."

Avalokiteśvara's second great statement goes a bit further. All dharmas, he now says, are empty. Here we begin to get into deep water. The early Buddhist classification of the whole of existence under the headings of the five skandhas was rejected by the Abhidharma tradition of which Śāriputra was said to be the founder. It was not – you might say – quite scientific enough for the Abhidharma. So they replaced the original five skandha classification with a fourfold one - into form, thought, mental concomitants, and miscellaneous, each of which was sub-divided again and again. The ultimate sub-divisions of these four categories, the irreducible elements beyond which analysis cannot go, they called the dharmas.

The Sarvāstivāda, perhaps the most important school of the Hīnayāna, made out that there were seventy-two of these dharmas, the ultimate irreducible elements into which the whole of phenomenal, conditioned existence can be reduced. These are known as the 'conditioned dharmas', to distinguish them from a much shorter list of just three 'Unconditioned dharmas', consisting of space and the two kinds of nirvana. (These Unconditioned dharmas were seen as eternal, and as not arising by way of cause and effect as did the conditioned dharmas.) Altogether these make up the famous seventy-five dharmas of the Sarvāstivāda. The philosophy is a form of pluralistic realism.

The early Abhidharma philosophers had a great deal of fun classifying and cataloguing their dharmas in all sorts of different ways. They sorted out conditioned dharmas from Unconditioned ones. They distinguished dharmas that were 'defiled' by greed, hatred, and delusion from 'undefiled dharmas'; and dharmas which were

limited or incomplete from those which were infinite or complete. They noted how every conditioned dharma was produced and then stopped, whereas Unconditioned dharmas were characterized solely by nirodha, stopping. Scores upon scores of different types of relationship between dharmas were worked out, giving tens of thousands of permutations, and forming an enormously elaborate structure. It is hard to conceive just how elaborate this structure was, but the results fill volume after volume after volume of analysis and co-ordination of dharmas.

Avalokiteśvara asserts that all these dharmas are empty. They are not ultimately real. With this statement he dismisses the whole scholastic apparatus of the Abhidharma. The entire edifice is empty. It's all right as far as it goes – it takes us beyond the gross delusion that things are things and persons are persons – but as a system of analysis and classification it is a product of the subtle activity of the mind, and as such it represents a subtle delusion which must ultimately be transcended.

Perfect Wisdom, represented by Avalokiteśvara, destroys not only the Abhidharma, but all attempts, both philosophical and scientific, to give a systematic intellectual account of reality. The only way you can get to reality is by destroying your ideas about reality, however subtle, however sophisticated, however convincing they may be. Their validity can only ever be provisional. So all dharmas are empty.

“Therefore, O Śāriputra, in emptiness there is no form, nor feeling, nor perception, nor impulse, nor consciousness; No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind; No sight-organ element, and so forth, until we come to: No mind-consciousness element...”

Third statement: in śūnyatā no dharmas exist. This is the corollary – the more positive counterpart, if you like – of the previous statement. It suggests that reality is quite bare, quite pure, devoid of all our intellectual constructions, all our philosophies, all our concepts. These ideas are ours. They do not belong to reality, for reality knows nothing about them. Reality rejects – to anthropomorphize a little – all our thoughts. In śūnyatā there is no distinguishing whatsoever between conditioned dharmas and Unconditioned dharmas, or defiled dharmas and pure dharmas. All such dualisms are transcended. It is like - to use a favourite image of the Mahāyāna - the unclouded sky. Clouds may be very beautiful, but they obscure the naked brilliance of the sky itself. Reality in its true state, above and beyond all our systems of thought about it, is like the clear, cloudless sky. In śūnyatā no dharmas exist.

“There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so forth, until we come to: there is no decay and death, no extinction of decay and death. There is no suffering, no origination, no stopping, no path. There is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment.”

Philosophy, even Buddhist philosophy, has been disposed of. Do we imagine, then, that religion – even Buddhism itself - is going to escape? Avalokiteśvara's fourth great statement is to the effect that there is no such thing as Buddhism. I'm paraphrasing a little – and this fourth statement is really a broader or more universal version of the third one - but this is what it comes to. He eliminates religion considered as an end in itself. There is nothing absolute or ultimate about religion. So in this part of the sutra various well-known categories of Buddhist thought are enumerated: the five skandhas, the six sense organs, the eighteen elements, the twelve links of the chain of

dependent origination, the Four Noble Truths, knowledge itself, attainment, and even non-attainment. The last two items, prapti and aprapti, differ from the rest in that they are terms that do not occur in the Pāli Canon. They were introduced by the Sarvāstivādins as a category of the saṃskāras, and as such they represent an extreme example of abstract concepts being reified.

Avalokiteśvara declares all these philosophical and even practical religious categories, all the operative bases of our religious life, including the idea of Conditioned Co-production and even the idea of Enlightenment itself, to be śūnya, void, without ultimate validity. He is saying that if you want to develop – if your goal is Perfect Wisdom – well, you have to go beyond Buddhism. In reality, you have to realize, there is no such thing as Buddhism. Buddhism is only a raft to take you to the other shore; then it must be abandoned. It is only a finger pointing to the moon.

At this point the Zen connection with the Heart Sutra – or rather, the way the Heart Sutra works itself out practically in terms of Zen – is unmistakable. The Zen Master who replied to the question, “Suppose I met the Buddha on the road, what should I do?” with the terse instruction, “Kill him.” was telling his pupil that he had to leave Buddhism behind. If you are really set on Enlightenment, don’t let the concept of the Buddha get in the way. There is nothing that hinders you in your search for reality so much as that which is there to help you, namely religion. What should be a means to an end is so easily taken for an end in itself.

Buddhism is probably unique in seeing this so lucidly. It sweeps the path to Enlightenment clear even of Buddhism itself. No doubt you need Buddhism for a long time. You need your mantras and your meditations, your chanting and your scriptures, your lectures and retreats and seminars, and you need to use Buddhist terms and ideas. But in the end you have to go beyond the limits of their guidance, sweeping it all aside to encounter reality alone.

- Wisdom Beyond Words, pp.23-30

A definition

Pluralist Realism: The meaning of pluralism that helps here is a view that the world we experience is made up of many, many things that interact with each other. Realism is the view that universals have an objective or absolute existence (paraphrased from the *Shorter Oxford*). We can take ‘universal’ here to mean universally shared components – bits which everything is made of. So what Sangharakshita means by using this term is that the adherents of a sub-school of the Sarvāstivādins seem to have held that the knowable universe is made up of many universal components (dharmas) which have absolute existence and which interact with each other.

What is ‘The Madhyamaka’?

As mentioned earlier, the Madhyamaka was one of the two great philosophical traditions of the Mahāyāna, the other being the Yogācāra. It could be called a school of thought, but it was not a school of the sort that is meant when one speaks of a division of the monastic Sangha, like the Theravada, Sarvāstivāda, etc. As a school of thought, it would have crossed the various ordination boundaries of the Sangha. The project of the Madhyamaka was to explicate the meaning of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* (or *Perfection of Wisdom*), which include the *Heart Sūtra*, the *Diamond Sūtra*, and the *Ratnagūṇa-Saṃcayagāthā*. Nāgārjuna is the father of this philosophical tradition; he is a very important figure, and the works attributed to him have had an enormous effect on later Buddhist thinking, particularly in Tibet and China.

The name Madhyamaka comes from Nāgārjuna's main work the *Mūla-Madhyamaka-Kārikā* (MK), or *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*. Many scholars now refer to the school as 'Madhyamika', with an "i" in the penultimate syllable.

What was or is 'The Abhidharma'?

After the Buddha's death, his disciples had been concerned not only to collect his teachings, which they did in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, but also to explore its implications. That gave rise to Buddhist philosophy, or what is known as the *Abhidhamma*. The Abhidhamma can best be seen as a project of enquiry and investigation which began soon after the Buddha's death and continued over many centuries. Its product was huge, and much of it was very sophisticated. Sangharakshita's *Know Your Mind* is a commentary on a commentary of a work based on an Abhidharma work of exposition written by Asaṅga, the *Abidharmasamuccaya*. In fact, one could see *Know Your Mind* as part of the Abhidharma tradition.

The Abhidharma project was carried out within the different schools of Buddhism that arose over time. The largest school was the *Sarvāstivādins*. Sarvāstivādin scholars developed their Abhidharma on the basis of analysis. The idea was that if one analysed something and saw that it could be analysed into parts, then that thing could not be said to have inherent existence or irreducible essence. Reflecting on such an analysis would help a practitioner to realise the truth of anattā. A sub-school of the Sarvāstivādins, the *Sarvāstivādin-Vaibhāṣikas*, arrived at the conclusion that there were phenomena beyond which one could not analyse any further, and which therefore could be understood as irreducible. These irreducible particles were dharmas. They were thought to have a momentary existence; they came and went, and combined with and split off from other dharmas very, very quickly.

In adopting this analytical approach, the Abhidharma enquirers were taking their cue from the Buddha himself, who had recommended such analysing in, for example, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, where he suggests that one analyses the body into its anatomical parts, to develop non-clinging, and likens this process to that of a skilled butcher dissecting a cow by the roadside. The six element meditation practice mentioned in the second session is recommended for similar reasons.

A good place to read more about the Abhidharma is chapter 10 of Andrew Skilton's book, *A Concise History of Buddhism*:

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/a-concise-history-of-buddhism/>

There is also a helpful and readable account in chapter 8 of Rupert Gethin's book, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (see also his index):

https://books.google.ie/books?id=al_Wlh2mwWIC&printsec=frontcover

The Madhyamaka can be seen as part of the long Abhidharma tradition.

What did the Madhyamakas want to say?

Nāgārjuna in fact claimed to have no thesis that he wished to prove. One could understand him to be claiming that he was not expounding a view and that his purpose was only to refute the wrong views of those who had misinterpreted the Buddha's teaching since the Parinirvana. Later thinkers, like Tsongkhapa, argued that Nāgārjuna had in fact had a thesis since he had taught that all phenomena are empty (*śūnya*).

In the MK, Nāgārjuna presents emptiness as equivalent to that fundamental teaching of the Buddha *pratitya samutpāda*, which Sangharakshita calls ‘*conditioned co-production*’, and others call ‘*dependent arising*’ or ‘*dependent origination*’. (As we shall see, Nāgārjuna uses the term ‘*emptiness*’ (*śūnyatā*) to indicate the ‘*middle*’ between the extremes of eternalism and nihilism).

Nāgārjuna wants to know, if it’s the case that a dharma arises in dependence upon some other thing, as the Buddha taught, then how can it be defined in a manner which the Sarvāstivādin-Vaibhāṣika Abhidharmists want to define it, as something which exists of itself and in itself, as that which possesses an irreducible essence (*svabhāva/sabhāva* – also translated as inherent existence)?⁴⁶ To say that this is true undermines the whole of the Buddhadharma, which teaches that everything is empty of *svabhāva*. And that is the truth, says Nāgārjuna; everything is *śūnya*, in the sense that there is no thing which has an irreducible essence (or inherent existence).

Nāgārjuna is careful to spell out that he is not saying that nothing exists. In fact, those who see the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as entailing a nihilist view, are in serious danger:

By a misperception of emptiness
A person of little intelligence is destroyed.
Like a snake incorrectly seized
Or like a spell incorrectly cast.
- Mulamadhyamakakarika, 24.11.

The victorious ones have said
That emptiness is the relinquishing of all views.
For whomsoever emptiness is a view,
That one will accomplish nothing.
- Mulamadhyamakakarika, 13:8.

It isn’t that nothing exists, but that nothing exists as an individual, irreducible essence possessed of its own inherent existence. What is more, to see the teaching of emptiness as negating the teaching of the Buddha is to ignore the basic Abhidharma distinction between conventional and ultimate truth. The ultimate truth about the way things are is ‘emptiness’, but conventional truth is still truth, and without it one cannot practise.

The Buddha’s teaching of the Dharma
Is based on two truths:
A truth of worldly convention
And an ultimate truth.

Those who do not understand
The distinction between these two truths
Do not understand
The Buddha’s profound truth.

46 The Sanskrit word *svabhāva* is not easy to translate. I have used the term ‘*irreducible essence*’ when the term refers to something permanent that investigators were trying to find, or not find. *Svabhāva* is also translated as inherent existence, or intrinsic existence, having self-existence, or self-nature. These terms are trying to convey the idea of something which has a permanent and self-sufficient existence. I have opted in this week’s material to use the term inherent existence.

Without a foundation in the conventional truth,
The significance of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the significance of the ultimate,
Liberation is not achieved.

- Mulamadhyamakakarika, 24: 8-10.

It is very important to understand what Nāgārjuna is saying about conventional and ultimate truth. He is saying, as the Buddha said, that all phenomena arise in dependence on the basis of conditions, and pass away similarly. Everything that we see or can identify is like this – involved in *pratītya samutpāda*. That means that it is *śūnya*, empty of any inherent existence whatsoever. That is the ultimate truth about all phenomena, and, this includes the concepts we use. The fact that this is the ultimate truth about things and concepts does not mean that they do not have a relative or conventional value.

A bus, like all other phenomena, is ultimately empty, but it is still very useful to get us to the Buddhist Centre. It's conventionally true to say about the bus that it is an object which is useful to us in that way. Exactly the same applies to concepts like *pratītya samutpāda*, nirvana, the Four Truths, the Eightfold Path. They are ultimately empty too, but they are very useful concepts for us who are trying to develop. In fact, Nāgārjuna is saying, we could not develop without them. But ultimately they are empty, and so we know that there is nothing there for us to fix onto and become attached to. We need to get off the bus when we've completed our journey and leave it to take the other passengers somewhere else. In just the same way, we need to use the concepts that help us to develop, and not become attached to them as ends in themselves. You may at this point be realising that very much the same point was being made by the Buddha in the parable of the raft.

This will probably clarify a famous couple of verses of the MK which have often confused the unwary:

There is not the slightest difference
Between cyclic existence and nirvana.
There is not the slightest difference
Between nirvana and cyclic existence.

Whatever is the limit of nirvana
That is the limit of cyclic existence.
There is not even the slightest difference between them,
Or even the subtlest thing.

- Mulamadhyamakakarika, 25:19-20.

So is Nāgārjuna saying that nirvana, which is characterised by skilful mental states, is exactly the same as *saṃsāra*, which is characterised by unskilful mental states? Not at all. He is saying that they are both concepts which are relatively useful and are ultimately empty. It is not helpful to beings to treat either as ends in themselves. Both concepts are relatively useful as means to an end, and are not to become the object of attachment. That is their similarity.

By using the concept of emptiness, Nāgārjuna is trying to clarify the Buddha's teaching of dependent arising, and how it works as the middle way between nihilism and eternalism. And both *pratītya samutpāda* and *śūnyatā* are concepts, both pointing to the middle way between eternalism and nihilism. *Pratītya samutpāda* is not 'nothing', nor is *śūnyatā* 'nothing'. Neither

point towards nihilism. Nor is either *pratītya samutpāda* or *śūnyatā* ‘something’, let alone an absolute reality. Both, though, point towards the ultimate truth about the ways things are.

To sum up, what Nāgārjuna is really saying is: “*Don’t take concepts or conceptual categories literally, and don’t fix onto them. As the Buddha taught, they are a raft, which one uses for the purpose of getting to the other side. Nirvana and saṃsāra are both concepts, and neither is in some way ‘outside’ pratītya samutpāda. Both are śūnya.*”

Views and the Madhyamaka

The term ‘view’ is a very important one for both the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras and for Nāgārjuna. They both want to make clear that there is a level on which views in general, including right views, need to be seen as a form of mental rigidity, of opinionatedness. What they are trying to get across here is that whereas we unawakened beings grasp at and become fixed on particular conceptual understandings or verbal expressions and become attached to our right understanding, the Awakened mind is free of all views – even right views; it simply sees that all dharmas are empty. It just knows and sees things in the ways that they really are. This doesn’t of course mean that right views are in some way wrong, only that conceptual understanding should not be confused with real seeing. Right views are ultimately only a device to bring about perfect understanding. The theory is to help us understand. The map is to help us navigate across the terrain.

One can’t really say that a Buddha holds the view that all dharmas are empty. He doesn’t actually hold any views or opinions at all – he simply sees things the way they really are. The mind that sees emptiness is free of any tendency to impose some sort of conceptual construct on the way things are, whereas the mind that merely has a theoretical grasp is not free in that way. We may come to believe that Nāgārjuna is right to say that all phenomena are empty, but until we actually see it for ourselves, we’ll just go on behaving in the same old way.

Nāgārjuna is not trying to say that the whole Abhidharma is wrong, just as he is not trying to show that any of the other categories of Buddhist teachings e.g. the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the skandhas are wrong. He is concerned with a particular Dharma issue, that is the ontology of a ‘dharma’⁴⁷. Put in another way, he is concerned to examine the nature of a dharma by asking such questions as: “Can a dharma be said to exist? If so, in what sense can it be said to exist? In what way does it exist?” As mentioned above, a sub-school of the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma tended to define dharmas as the irreducible divisions in the analysis of experience, as those things which have inherent existence. What Nāgārjuna says is that, according to Buddhist principles, such ultimate divisions of analysis are just made up, and must not be taken as referring to ultimate realities in themselves. For Nāgārjuna, an account of the world in Abhidharma terms is fine, provided that we don’t view it as an exact and final description of how things are. Like the Buddha’s teachings generally, the Abhidharma must ultimately be seen as ‘conventional’, taught for the purpose of the uprooting of the kleśas, and becoming Awakened.

It’s worth noting that in seeking to establish his understanding of emptiness, Nāgārjuna appeals not to the authority of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras, but to that of the discourses of the Buddha on dependent arising in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* of the Pāli Canon. The emptiness of dharmas is not a further teaching, but something that follows inevitably from the logic of the emptiness of the self. Self ‘atman’ and ‘inherent existence’ (*svabhāva*) are equivalents. The doctrine that there is no essential self underlying persons entails the doctrine that there is no

47 Ontology means the study of the nature of being or of the essence of existence.

essential self underlying dharmas. Just as there is no ultimate, irreducible, unchanging ‘thing’ behind the labels ‘person’ and ‘self’, so there is no unchanging ‘thing’ behind the labels ‘greed’, ‘hatred’, and ‘delusion’, or behind the labels of non-attachment, mettā, or prajñā, or for that matter behind the labels of saṃsāra and nirvana. And this is what the Awakened ones have seen.

To sum up the Madhyamaka teaching on views, or rather the Madhyamaka critique of others’ views:

There are no phenomena whatsoever that have svabhāva. Everything is *nisvabhāva* (without svabhāva). What appears to us is real – but only up to a point. Actually nothing is as we think it is. So there is nothing permanent to grasp onto. There is no fixed self to grasp onto anything. All there is, is an ever-changing process. There is no permanent substance whatsoever anywhere. We are part of that ever-changing process. We are changing all the time, however much we might try to resist that fact. We can maximise our chances of developing into wiser and more compassionate beings if we can see that there is no point in grasping or fixing upon anything, including views and labels. But we should also use intelligently, without clinging onto them, the teachings (and the concepts in which he couched those teachings) that the Buddha has given to us. In that way, we’ll be able to direct the change that is inevitable in a positive direction.

Note

I have drawn heavily in this section on a helpful summary of views and the Madhyamaka to be found in Rupert Gethin’s book *The Foundations of Buddhism*.

https://books.google.ie/books?id=al_Wlh2mwWIC&printsec=frontcover

Regarding the five kinds of wrong views that we have looked at in previous sessions

The self exists, but not in the way we think it does. Another way of putting this is that the self that we experience has a conventional reality, but is not ultimately real. Ultimately, it has no irreducible essence whatsoever. It is empty of intrinsic existence.

The extreme views of nihilism and eternalism are concepts which cannot be seen as pointing to something ultimately true; as concepts, they are contradicted by the concepts of pratitya samutpāda and śūnyatā, which do point to the ultimate truth of things, i.e. do point to ‘how things really are’.

An ideology is simply a concept or a congeries of concepts to which people have become attached. Those concepts are themselves empty of irreducible essence (nisvabhāva).

Moral codes and religious observances are also couched in conceptual expressions which, used correctly, are helpful, but which, when grasped or fixed upon, lead us to a mental rigidity which can lead us to confuse means and ends.

The teaching that intentional actions have consequences is made up of concepts; the conceptual formulation gives Dharma practitioners indispensable ethical guidance, but it is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What, essentially, was the Madhyamaka critique, and why was it thought necessary?

2. To what extent was Nāgārjuna saying anything different from what the Buddha had said?
3. How exactly does śūnyatā contradict eternalism and nihilism?
4. How might one misunderstand śūnyatā?
5. What does Nāgārjuna mean when he says that, “*There is not the slightest difference between saṃsāra and nirvana*”?
6. When you think about śūnyatā, how do you feel?

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Visions of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Nagapriya, Windhorse, 2009 (forthcoming):

<http://www.windhorsepublications.com/product/visions-of-mahayana-buddhism/>

Now we come to the Yogācāra, which was – or rather is – the second of the big schools of thought in the Mahāyāna. It seems to have had more influence inside India than the Madhyamaka did, and is widely seen as representing the culmination of Indian Buddhist philosophy. It is also credited with making important contributions to Buddhist psychology. It became very important outside India too, especially in Tibet and China. It seems that at least some Yogācārins saw themselves as participating in the ‘Third Turning of the Wheel [of the Dharma]’⁴⁸.

Background to the Yogācāra

Why did it come into being?

Yogācāra probably arose as a result of a concern that the Madhyamaka’s teaching of śūnyatā could be misunderstood as nihilistic, although, as we have seen, all that the Madhyamaka was concerned to do was to make very clear that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence (svabhāva). This message can be seen as an emphatic reiteration of the doctrine of dependent origination. The Madhyamaka was not saying that phenomena do not exist at all, but that they do not exist in the way we think they do. But it seems that for some, the Madhyamaka’s apparent contention that emptiness is the final statement on the ultimate nature of things was too strong a negation; if one cannot ultimately say anything at all about things, doesn’t that mean that there can be no path of practice? Or at least isn’t it likely that some people would take it that way?

Some modern scholars think that it is more accurate to emphasise the continuities rather than the discontinuities between the Madhyamaka teaching and that of the Yogācāra. In fact it is nowadays widely thought that they had a lot in common. For example, the Yogācāra claimed to be making explicit the implications of the term śūnyatā that they thought had not been fully brought out by the Madhyamaka.

It is probable that one of the origins of the Yogācāra (which means ‘Yoga Practice’) was to be found among the yogis of the area which is now Kashmir. It’s easy to imagine how some of them might respond on being told that the vivid visions they experienced in meditation were empty, even though what was really being said was that the visions were empty of svabhāva.

Who were the Yogācārins?

The founder of the Yogācāra school was the great scholar Asaṅga (c. 310-390 CE), who, according to legend, received a number of key treatises of the school direct from Maitreya, the

48 This claim appears in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra. The Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines* claimed to be the ‘Second Turning of the Wheel’.

future Buddha. Nowadays it is thought more likely that he received them from a teacher called Maitreya or Maitreya-nātha. Several other works are ascribed to him personally. (For more about Asaṅga see Skilton p. 123.) The other great commentator associated with the origins of the Yogācāra was Vasubandhu (c.320-400), Asaṅga's brother or half-brother, who also wrote a number of influential texts – (see Skilton p. 123). Both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu are on the Triratna refuge tree.

What Yogācārin texts are there?

The Yogācāra output, if one takes the commentaries into account, extended over many centuries. The earliest text that is identifiably Yogācāra is the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, which will make its appearance in this session.⁴⁹ Asaṅga's summary of classical Indian Yogācāra is the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*. Vasubandhu wrote some important works – the *Trisvabhāva-nirdeśa*, the *Vimśakā-kārikā* (*The Twenty Verses*) and the *Trimśikā* (*The Thirty Verses*). A full list of significant Yogācāra works could be a long one, but these references are enough for this session. (See Skilton p. 121 for more).

As noted earlier, *Know Your Mind* is a commentary on an 18th century Tibetan text which is a faithful interpretation of the early Yogācāra tradition as expounded in one of Asaṅga's works – the *Abhidharma-samuccaya*. This may give you some idea of the time-span of the Yogācāra project. And if one accepts that the Abhidharma is really a name for the whole enterprise of Buddhist philosophy and the business of teasing out the implications of the Buddha's teaching, then the Yogācāra can be understood as a continuation of that enterprise.

What did the Yogācārins teach?

There were two basic teachings of the Yogācāra. One, the teaching of the seven or eight consciousnesses, will have to be dealt with quite briefly. The other, the teaching of the Three Natures, will be described a bit more fully.

The Eight Consciousnesses

You'll be familiar with the term *viññāna* from having studied the 'Wheel of Life and Death'. There the word appears as the third *nidāna* meaning 're-linking consciousness'. It is also one of the five aggregates (*skandhas*, Pāli: *khandha*), and as such, is regarded as a flux. The Buddha taught that consciousness is, like the four other aggregates, empty, insubstantial, and, "*Empty of a self and anything belonging to a self.*" (*suñña*).

Early Buddhist thinkers had analysed consciousness into six basic kinds which corresponded to the five senses and the mind as the sixth sense. Yogācārin thinkers built on these earlier investigations, elaborated a richer account of the sixth consciousness, the mind consciousness, and began to explicate a theory of the unconscious. The first five consciousnesses correspond to the five senses, sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. The mind sense has two sorts of experience: the first sort results from processing by the mind of data relayed by the other sense consciousnesses, as when one smells some milk and decides that it is still fresh enough to drink, or when one sees a car approaching a pedestrian crossing too fast to stop; the second sort consists of experiences which originate in the mind itself like dreams, memories, and visions in meditation.

Then, according to Asaṅga, there are two other kinds of consciousness which underpin those six. These are the seventh consciousness, the 'defiled mind', the *kliṣṭa-manas*, which is called that because it is infected by the four basic afflictions or *kleśas* (the view of a fixed self, the

49 There is a text – the *Yogācārabhūmi* – which is thought to be older and which contains bits of Yogācāra.

conceit ‘*I am*’, clinging to self, and delusion)⁵⁰. ‘Below’, as it were, this seventh consciousness is the eighth, ‘the store consciousness’ or *ālaya-vijñāna*, which lies at a level that is normally below the threshold of awareness. This ‘store’ is where all the ‘seeds’ which result from karmic action are deposited. The idea here is that when someone does a kind action, a good seed is deposited in the *ālaya*. A mean action has the effect of depositing a bad seed. The depositing of a seed is a metaphorical way of describing the process whereby a *vipāka* resulting from intentional actions affects our mental states and future actions. So the *ālaya* is the result of a being’s past karma, the accumulation of all past tendencies, strong or weak, to greed, hatred and delusion. The kind of seeds that are stored in the *ālaya* inform our actions and perceptions in future. But it is important to see that there is a continual interaction between the ‘input’ to the *ālaya* from the six senses and the *kliṣṭa-manas*, and the ‘output’ from the *ālaya* to the other senses or consciousnesses. It’s a two-way street. The *ālaya* is not a self or a thing, but the *kliṣṭa-manas* takes it to be a self, rather than what it is – an underlying process of ever-changing conditions, arising and passing away, which, as it flows on, gives a certain sense of coherence to a person’s identity. So the *ālaya* is the underlying basis of our conscious lives. It’s mostly hidden, and the Yogācārins thought that it was what makes us tick.

The value of the Yogācāra theory of the “store consciousness” was that it explained in some detail how the karmic process worked. Moreover, by referring the continuity of character traits and habitual tendencies to a continuously present (but always changing) underlying state of mind, they went at least some way towards showing how the doctrine of no fixed self could be compatible with a sense of personal and moral continuity.

The Doctrine of the Three Natures (The *Trisvabhāva* or *Trilakṣaṇa* Doctrine)⁵¹

The second Yogācāra teaching that we will be looking at is the *trisvabhāva* doctrine, or the doctrine of the three *svabhāvas*. In the course material relating to views and the *Madhyamaka*, I used the phrase ‘*inherent existence*’ to translate *svabhāva*. The Yogācāra’s ‘*Trisvabhāva*’ is usually translated as ‘The Three Natures’. For the *Madhyamaka*, *svabhāva* meant something like *atman*, or soul, or permanent, self-sufficient essence. For the Yogācāra it means characteristic, or nature, or way of being. So what is meant here is three ways of being. The Yogācāra didn’t mean that there were three *svabhāvas* in the *Madhyamaka* sense.

The *trisvabhāva* doctrine changed over time and as it was adopted in different countries. To provide an introduction to the doctrine, so that we can see how the Yogācāra understood views, I have stuck as far as possible to one version of the Yogācāra, the early classical Indian account. If you read further about the Yogācāra, you will almost certainly quickly come across different versions of it. It may be as well to know that writers do not always tell you that the version they are presenting is not the only one.

The three-natures model given here is to be found in chapter 6 of the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* as well as in the works of Asaṅga, Vasubhandu and others.

I shall introduce the version of the model which is often called the ‘pivotal model’. The three natures are:

50 The *kliṣṭa-manas* is not mentioned in the *Samdhinirmocana*, but Asaṅga mentions it in the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*. The *kleśas* referred to here are said to be not karmic. We are born with them, but they are not the result of past actions.

51 The *Samdhinirmocana* usually refers to *Trilakṣaṇa* (three characteristics or natures), not *Trisvabhāva*, which is the term used elsewhere in the Yogācāra. The *Samdhinirmocana* makes the point that the ‘Three Natures’ have no inherent existence (*svabhāva*).

1. The *Paratantra-svabhāva* (hereafter *PT*) – the other-dependent nature.
2. The *Parikalpita-svabhāva* (*PK*) – the imagined or imputed nature.
3. The *Pariniṣpanna-svabhāva* (*PN*) – the perfected nature.

(‘Imputed’ means ‘to ascribe to’, ‘to attribute to’, or ‘to assign to’, as when one imputes a characteristic to someone. One should not impute sinister motives to someone simply because they have a squint.)

Let’s take them in turn:

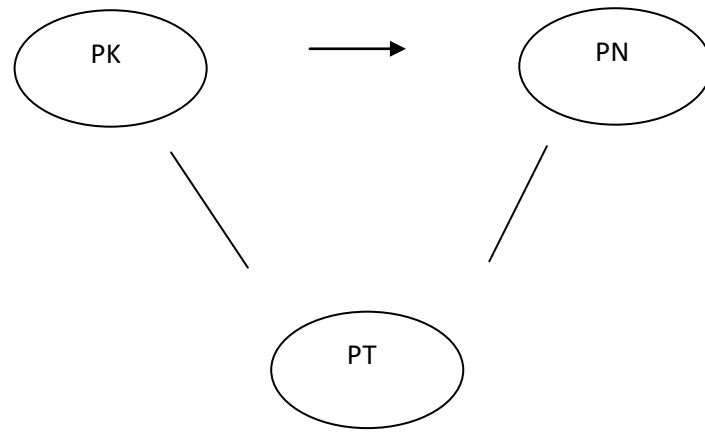
The *PT*, the ‘other-dependent nature’, according to the *Samdhinirmocana* – is, in effect, ‘The dependent origination of phenomena’. The concept of dependent origination is basic Buddhist doctrine. As we are told by the Pāli Suttas, this is the way things are whether we understand it or not. Things arise in dependence upon conditions, and cease when conditions cease. That is what *PT* ‘is’.

The *PK*, or the ‘imagined’ nature refers to the world as seen and interpreted by unawakened beings who are under the influence of the *kleśas* (afflictions). In other words they are infected by the four basic afflictions (the view of a fixed self, the conceit ‘*I am*’, clinging to self, and delusion). What happens is that in dependence on these *kleśas*, we imagine a world. We imagine a view (of the world) which pays only selective attention to dependent origination and its implications. An example would be gold. Gold is simply a material/mineral substance like any other material substance. But we impute something to it. We not only impute value to it, but some people seek to gather it, to hoard it, and will even kill other human beings to get it and keep it. The value of gold is simply a human creation, yet ‘it’ creates in people all sorts of feelings, anxieties, attachments, views, and so on which have no actual basis in reality. All these experiences are based upon a mere metal that can be used to make wedding rings, and may be useful for capping teeth, but not much else. The Yogācāra contention is that this is just one example of something we do all the time. We do it with the things that we possess, with our relationships, our plans, and our views i.e. the way we see life and the world.⁵² The Yogācārins would say that all these are aspects of the *PK*.

It is interesting to note that in Ch 6 of the *Samdhinirmocana*, the *PK* is linked to the way we use language and concepts – the labels we put on things, something, you may recall, which very much interested the Madhyamaka.

The *PN* is simply the *PT* not seen as *PK*. Both the *PK* and the *PN* arise on the basis of conditions. The *PK* arises in dependence on the *kleśas*. The *PN* arises in dependence on conditions which have been purified by ethical and meditation practice, and these conditions are the basis for ‘seeing things as they really are’ i.e. for transformative insight. From the point of view of the *PN*, we see the *PT* as it really is, i.e. without imputing anything onto it. That is the *PN* or perfected nature. This transformation or shift from the *PK* to the *PN* represents the fundamental shift in the cognitive basis of our knowledge (i.e. of our View), and the Yogācāra calls it the *asraya-parāvṛtti*, which Sangharakshita translates as “*The turning around in the deepest seat of consciousness*”. Literally, it means ‘the turning about in the basis’, basis (*asraya*) indicating the *ālaya*.

⁵² The *PK* is an imagined world which is a dependently arisen world, and the conditions on which it arises are the *kleśas* (unskillful mental states).



The three natures are often arranged as in the accompanying diagram, with the *PT* at the bottom, the *PK* to the left above, and the *PN* to the right. In this way the *PT* can be seen as a kind of pivot. The task of the practitioner is to make the shift from the *PK* to the *PN*. This is usually called the pivotal model of the three natures. The *Samdhinirmocana* refers to the *PN* as the ‘suchness of phenomena’, or *tathatā*.

The Sūtra gives two similes, one of which may be particularly helpful in making all this clearer.

The simile goes like this:

The *PT* is a clear crystal. When it is put beside a blue object, it appears blue, and can be mistaken for a sapphire. When put beside a green object, it can appear green, and be mistaken for an emerald. When put beside a red object, it can appear as a ruby, and so on. These mistaken appearances and the attachment to them that ensues are the *PK*. When the appearances are seen through and the clear crystal is seen as it is for what it is, that is the *PN*.

To explain this simile a little more, the clear crystal is the *PT*. It stands for the process on the basis of which an observer, noticing the colour (that has been borrowed from a neighbouring object), imputes the quality of ‘precious gem-ness’ to the clear crystal, and becomes attached to it because of its apparent preciousness. The actual process of mistaking and continuing to mistake is the *PK*. The ethical and meditative practice of the Dharma practitioner has the effect of removing the crystal from the neighbourhood of the coloured object or vice versa, and enables the clear crystal to be seen as it is for what it is: a clear crystal. This is like saying that the crystal has been purified of the afflictions (the colours), and is now seen clearly. The clear seeing is the *PN*. At this point, it is important to understand that the clear crystal is not signifying a thing. Rather, it signifies dependent origination, which is not a thing but a complex process.

Sagaramati has pointed out similarities between the Doctrine of Three Natures and the Buddha’s teaching on the three levels of views in the *Great Forty* (the *Mahācattārisaka Sutta* – MN117.4-9). There, the Buddha talks about:

1. Wrong views
2. Right views with ‘biases’ or ‘taints’ (*āsavas*).⁵³
3. Right views without taints.

⁵³ The *āsavas* (Sanskrit: *āsravas*) were mentioned on p. 4 of this module, where view (*diṭṭhi-āsava*) was referred to as one of the four *āsavas* (or ‘biases’ or ‘taints’), which shackle us to *saṃsāra*.

Wrong views here would correspond to the *PK*, in that views such as *sakkāya-diṭṭhi* and *svabhāva*⁵⁴ are simply imagined. They are the product of a deluded mind, and arise in dependence on unskilful mental states.

Right views with biases is the Buddhist path of practice. It represents the movement indicated by the arrow in the diagram above. We are still affected by the biases, but we are developing more skilful mental states and deepening our understanding of the Dharma, in dependence on which we make more progress towards the *PN*. So one could say that the path of the arrow represents the mundane eight-fold path.

Right views without biases represents the *PN*, from the perspective of which we see things as they really are. The total lack of biases suggests a state either very close to complete Awakening or Awakening itself. The *PN* could be seen as the transcendental eightfold path, which might help us to see the *PN* as not so much a state, but a continuing process.

The short section in The Great Forty is well worth looking at, and more could be said by way of comparing the three levels of views with the Yogācāra account. But we will have to leave it there for now.

At this point, you may find it useful to review 1.2 and 1.3.2 in re first week of the module, where Sangharakshita talks about Wrong View, Right View, and Perfect View or Perfect Vision. Tracing the similarities between the Yogācāra's Doctrine of the Three Natures, The Great Forty's treatment of views and the path, and Sangharakshita's account could help you get a sense of the continuity of the Buddhist tradition.

A brief note on Śūnyatā

In the Pāli Canon, the Buddha is reported to have used the term *suññata* to indicate the insubstantiality of all phenomena. It almost always refers to the anattā doctrine: “*Empty is the world... because it is empty of a self and anything belonging to a self*”. (*Samyutta* IV 85, Bodhi, p.1163).

In a second sense, it also refers to an advanced mental state, as it does at MN 121 and 122. As we have seen, the Madhyamakas took up the term and used it in a way which is similar to the first sense I've just mentioned, although they made clear that concepts were just as empty as all other phenomena. There was nothing permanent or irreducible in concepts, so what was the point in clinging to them as if they were permanent or irreducible? The Yogācāra in its turn also took up the term *śūnyatā*. If we look at the trisvabhāva model, we see that from the perspective of the ‘imagined nature’, the other-dependent is not seen for what it is, but as providing ‘things’ including concepts for grasping and fixing onto. From the perspective of the perfected nature, the other-dependent nature is seen for what ‘it’ is, a flux, a process by which phenomena arise and pass away, as empty (*śūnya*). There is nothing permanent or irreducible to be grasped or fixed on to, nor anyone permanent or irreducible to do the grasping and fixing onto.

In chapter 8 of the *Samdhinirmocana*, the Buddha explains the character of emptiness to Maitreya, the Buddha-to-come:

⁵⁴ Svabhāva itself is a good example of what we imagine. It has never ever existed outside of our wrong views.

Maitreya, the other-dependent nature and the perfected nature are seen in every way to be a nature free from the imagined (or imputed) nature which is either afflicted or purified. This nature is “...that which has been taught in the Mahāyāna as the nature of emptiness.”

So it seems clear that for the *Samdhinirmocana* Yogācārins at least, emptiness means dependent origination seen from the perspective of the perfected nature, which is what Nāgārjuna is saying in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Interestingly, this helps to make a link between the two meanings of emptiness found in the Pāli Canon, the emptiness of all phenomena with regard to substantiality, and the advanced mental state which the Buddha calls emptiness.

What did the Yogācārins teach about the five kinds of wrong views?

- The view of fixed self: the Yogācāra thought that the view of a separate, fixed self had come about when the consciousness infected by the kleśas had mistakenly distinguished the self from the rest of the process of dependent origination. This was the *PK* at work, misreading the *PT*.
- Nihilism and eternalism. There is not nothing. That is to say that nothing does not exist. There was the *PT* (dependent origination), and the ways we pick up on dependent origination through our six senses. So there is the flux of mental activity which arises in beings. There was no irreducible essence, no atman, only the flux of dependent origination.
- What we think of as ideologies, that is to say ideas and collections of ideas that we cling to, are very good examples of the way we misinterpret *PT*. That is not to say that we don't need ideas. In fact, we badly need the ideas that the Buddha taught – as a raft. Those ideas are at least some of the necessary conditions that we need to gain insight (*prajñā*). But as soon as we begin to cling to them as ends in themselves, they can be described as ideologies. The thoughts that arise as we try to see what's happening are simply part of a mental flow, which we can work with skilfully or unskilfully. We can either grab onto those ideas and cling to them, or we can tune into the flow and do our best to work with the useful ideas and let go of the harmful ones.
- The Yogācāra view on treating moral codes and religious observances as ends in themselves is similar. To fix onto a moral code and cling to it as an end in itself is to misinterpret the nature of the *PT*. Instead we need to tune into the flow and use what opportunities we can see to act and perceive skilfully. In short, we need to treat moral codes and religious observances as a raft.
- The karmic process involves the interaction between the ālaya in which the 'seeds' are deposited as a result of past actions, and outer consciousnesses. What we do and dwell upon affects the ālaya, and the ālaya affects what we do and how we make sense of phenomena. The Yogācārins were saying that this is what happens, and in so doing, they were refuting the four kinds of wrong views described in week six, e.g. the wilful refusal to recognize that one's relationship with others, as well as with oneself, has an ethical dimension.

Views on the Middle Way

The history of Buddhist philosophical enquiry could be seen to go like this:

- The Buddha offered a large number of teachings. His teaching included positive formulations (e.g. the positive *nidānas*) and negative ones (e.g. cessation and nirvana as extinction). Some people misinterpreted the negative formulations to mean that the

Buddhadharma was nihilistic or annihilationist, which either hindered their practice or turned them off completely.

- As the Abhidharma project proceeded, some investigators, particularly among the Sarvāstivādin Vaibhāṣikas, came to think of dharmas as irreducible essences, for which they were criticised on the grounds that their position implied an eternalist view of reality.
- The Madhyamaka were prominent among those critics, and taught, since surely they did have a message, that all phenomena were *nisvabhāva*, completely without irreducible essence (or 'inherent existence').
- The Yogācāra saw that some people misunderstood the Madhyamaka teaching on *sūnyatā* as nihilistic, and taught that there was in fact something that was real, and that was the mental dimension of dependent origination (the *PT*).

And the story does not stop there, although we have to for the time being.

So perhaps you can see that there was a kind of dance or a kind of antiphon over the centuries as teachers tried to find ways of helping people to tread a path between nihilism and eternalism, the two extreme views that the Buddha taught that we beings are prone to falling into and which lead us away from a proper understanding of dependent origination. Probably the best compliment we can pay to all those enquirers who devoted their lives to explicating the Buddhadharma is to do our best to see what they were trying to do, to reflect on what they have to say, and to learn what we can from them. And above all, to take what they taught seriously but not literalistically.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How do you find yourself responding to the Yogācāra's metaphor of the *ālaya*?
2. What do we need to do to make the shift from the *PK* to the *PN*?
3. Does the *Samdhinirmocana*'s clear crystal simile work for you? If it does, why does it? If not, why not?
4. Do you find the Yogācāra's approach to views convincing? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. What evidence is there that either the Madhyamaka or the Yogācāra contradicted the Buddha's teachings as reported in the Pāli Canon?

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Postscript

I hope that you have found studying this module worthwhile, and that you will think that it has presented topics and issues that are worth returning to in this lifetime. We can't meditate really effectively without Right View. Right View, Right Action, and Right Emotion, and Right Awareness all support each other. And remember that, as Sangharakshita said in the extract quoted in the first session: "*No Right View, No Perfect Vision. If there is no Perfect Vision, there is no liberation, no Enlightenment, No Nirvana, no real spiritual progress.*"

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I am indebted to Sagaramati for what I have learned about the Madhyamaka and the Yogācāra through studying with him over the course of many years. In 2007 and 2008, I have had the opportunity to study both schools of thought with Sagaramati and with Saramati during seminars and communities of enquiry held at Dharmapala College. I have benefitted from conversations about both schools with each of them. Subhuti's *Rambles around the Yogācāra* have been helpful too:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/series/details?ser=X30>

Sangharakshita's lively account in his lecture no 42 was probably my first introduction to the Yogācāra:

<https://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/talks/details?num=42>

...and his *Wisdom Beyond Words* has been an inspiration for many years. In preparing the material for sections 7 and 8 of this module, I have had the advantage of being able to consult him and draw substantially from the recently published works referenced in the mitras' study material.

Nagapriya very kindly read late drafts of the material for the two final weeks, and made many useful suggestions. Sagaramati was kind enough to read the Yogācāra material and found time to send me some useful comments while he was busy leading a seminar in San Francisco. Saramati kindly interrupted his sabbatical to check the material on the Madhyamaka and made several helpful suggestions. Any mistakes that appear in this module are of course entirely my responsibility.

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Jnanaketu
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